

PSALM CII.

SUBJECT.—*This is a patriot's lament over his country's distress. He arrays himself in the griefs of his nation as in a garment of sackcloth, and casts her dust and ashes upon his head as the ensigns and causes of his sorrow. He has his own private woes and personal enemies, he is moreover sore afflicted in body by sickness, but the miseries of his people cause him a far more bitter anguish, and this he pours out in an earnest, pathetic lamentation. Not, however, without hope does the patriot mourn; he has faith in God, and looks for the resurrection of the nation through the omnipotent favour of the Lord; this causes him to walk among the ruins of Jerusalem, and to say with hopeful spirit, "No, Zion, thou shalt never perish. Thy sun is not set for ever; brighter days are in store for thee." It is in vain to enquire into the precise point of Israel's history which thus stirred a patriot's soul, for many a time was the land oppressed, and at any of her sad seasons this song and prayer would have been a most natural and appropriate utterance.*

TITLE.—*A prayer of the afflicted, when he is overwhelmed, and poureth out his complaint before the LORD. This Psalm is a prayer far more in spirit than in words. The formal petitions are few, but a strong stream of supplication runs from beginning to end, and like an under-current, finds its way heavenward through the moanings of grief and confessions of faith which make up the major part of the Psalm. It is a prayer of the afflicted, or of "a sufferer," and it bears the marks of its parentage; as it is recorded of Jabez, that "his mother bore him with sorrow," so may we say of this Psalm; yet as Rachel's Benoni, or child of sorrow, was also her Benjamin, or son of her right hand, so is this Psalm as eminently expressive of consolation as of desolation. It is scarcely correct to call it a penitential Psalm, for the sorrow of it is rather of one suffering than sinning. It has its own bitterness, and it is not the same as that of the Fifty-first. The sufferer is afflicted more for others than for himself, more for Zion and the house of the Lord, than for his own house. When he is overwhelmed, or sorely troubled, and depressed. The best of men are not always able to stem the torrent of sorrow. Even when Jesus is on board, the vessel may fill with water and begin to sink. And poureth out his complaint before the LORD. When a cup is overwhelmed or turned bottom over, all that is in it is naturally poured out; great trouble removes the heart from all reserve, and causes the soul to flow out without restraint; it is well when that which is in the soul is such as may be poured out in the presence of God, and this is only the case where the heart has been renewed by divine grace. The word rendered "complaint" has in it none of the idea of fault-finding or repining, but should rather be rendered "moaning,"—the expression of pain, not of rebellion.*

To help the memory we will call this Psalm THE PATRIOT'S PLAINT.

DIVISION.—*In the first part of the Psalm, from 1—11, the moaning monopolizes every verse, the lamentation is unceasing, sorrow rules the hour. The second portion, from 12—28, has a vision of better things, a view of the gracious Lord, and his eternal existence and care for his people, and therefore it is interspersed with sunlight as well as shaded by the cloud, and it ends up right gloriously with calm confidence for the future, and sweet restfulness in the Lord. The whole composition may be compared to a day which, opening with wind and rain, clears up at noon and is warm with the sun, continues fine, with intervening showers, and finally closes with a brilliant sunset.*

EXPOSITION.

HEAR my prayer, O LORD, and let my cry come unto thee.

2 Hide not thy face from me in the day *when* I am in trouble;
incline thine ear unto me: in the day *when* I call answer me speedily.

3 For my days are consumed like smoke, and my bones are burned as an hearth.

4 My heart is smitten, and withered like grass; so that I forget to eat my bread.

5 By reason of the voice of my groaning my bones cleave to my skin.

- 6 I am like a pelican of the wilderness : I am like an owl of the desert.
 7 I watch, and am as a sparrow alone upon the house top.
 8 Mine enemies reproach me all the day : *and* they that are mad against me are sworn against me.
 9 For I have eaten ashes like bread, and mingled my drink with weeping.
 10 Because of thine indignation and thy wrath : for thou hast lifted me up, and cast me down.
 11 My days *are* like a shadow that declineth ; and I am withered like grass.

1. "*Hear my prayer, O Lord.*" Or O JEHOVAH. Sincere suppliants are not content with praying for praying's sake, they desire really to reach the ear and heart of the great God. It is a great relief in time of distress to acquaint others with our trouble, we are eased by their hearing our lamentations, but it is the sweetest solace of all to have God himself as a sympathizing listener to our plaint. That he is such is no dream or fiction, but an assured fact. It would be the direst of all our woes if we could be indisputably convinced that with God there is neither hearing nor answering ; he who could argue us into so dreary a belief would do us no better service than if he had read us our death-warrants. Better die than be denied the mercy-seat. As well be atheists at once as believe in an unhearing, unfeeling God. "*And let my cry come unto thee.*" When sorrow rises to such a height that words become too weak a medium of expression, and prayer is intensified into a cry, then the heart is even more urgent to have audience with the Lord. If our cries do not enter within the veil, and reach to the living God, we may as well cease from prayer at once, for it is idle to cry to the winds ; but, blessed be God, the philosophy which suggests such a hideous idea is disproved by the facts of everyday experience, since thousands of the saints can declare, "Verily, God hath heard us."

2. "*Hide not thy face from me in the day when I am in trouble.*" Do not seem as if thou didst not see me, or wouldst not own me. Smile now at any rate. Reserve thy frowns for other times when I can bear them better, if, indeed, I can ever bear them ; but now in my heavy distress, favour me with looks of compassion. "*Incline thine ear unto me.*" Bow thy greatness to my weakness. If because of sin thy face is turned away, at least let me have a side view of thee, lend me thine ear if I may not see thine eye. Turn thyself to me again if my sin has turned thee away, give to thine ear an inclination to my prayers. "*In the day when I call answer me speedily.*" Because the case is urgent, and my soul little able to wait. We may ask to have answers to prayer as soon as possible, but we may not complain of the Lord if he should think it more wise to delay. We have permission to request and to use importunity, but no right to dictate or to be petulant. If it be important that the deliverance should arrive at once, we are quite right in making an early time a point of our entreaty, for God is as willing to grant us a favour now as to-morrow, and he is not slack concerning his promise. It is a proverb concerning favours from human hands, that "he gives twice who gives quickly," because a gift is enhanced in value by arriving in a time of urgent necessity ; and we may be sure that our heavenly Patron will grant us the best gifts in the best manner, granting us grace to help in time of need. When answers come upon the heels of our prayers they are all the more striking, more consoling, and more encouraging.

In these two verses the Psalmist has gathered up a variety of expressions all to the same effect ; in them all he entreats an audience and answer of the Lord, and the whole may be regarded as a sort of preface to the prayer which follows.

3. "*For my days are consumed like smoke.*" My grief has made life unsubstantial to me, I seem to be but a puff of vapour which has nothing in it, and is soon dissipated. The metaphor is very admirably chosen, for, to the unhappy, life seems not merely to be frail, but to be surrounded by so much that is darkening, defiling, blinding, and depressing, that, sitting down in despair, they compare themselves to men wandering in a dense fog, and themselves so dried up thereby that they are little better than pillars of smoke. When our days have neither light of joy nor fire of energy in them, but become as a smoking flax which dies out ignobly in darkness, then have we cause enough to appeal to the Lord that he would not utterly quench us. "*And my bones are burned as an hearth.*" He became as dry as the hearth on which a wood fire has burned out, or as spent ashes in which scarcely a trace of fire can be found. His soul was ready to be blown away as smoke, and his body seemed likely to remain as the bare hearth when the last comforting ember is

quenched. How often has our piety appeared to us to be in this condition! We have had to question its reality, and fear that it never was anything more than a smoke; we have had the most convincing evidence of its weakness, for we could not derive even the smallest comfort from it, any more than a chilled traveller can derive from the cold hearth on which a fire had burned long ago. Soul-trouble experienced in our own heart will help us to interpret the language here employed; and church-troubles may help us also, if unhappily we have been called to endure them. The Psalmist was moved to grief by a view of national calamities, and these so wrought upon his patriotic soul that he was wasted with anxiety, his spirits were dried up, and his very life was ready to expire. There is hope for any country which owns such a son; no nation can die while true hearts are ready to die for it.

4. "*My heart is smitten,*" like a plant parched by the fierce heat of a tropical sun, "*and withered like grass,*" which dries up when once the scythe has laid it low. The Psalmist's heart was as a wilted, withered flower, a burned up mass of what once was verdure. His energy, beauty, freshness, and joy, were utterly gone, through the wasting influence of his anguish. "*So that I forget to eat my bread,*" or "*because I forget to eat my bread.*" Grief often destroys the appetite, and the neglect of food tends further to injure the constitution and create a yet deeper sinking of spirit. As the smitten flower no longer drinks in the dew, or draws up nutriment from the soil, so a heart parched with intense grief often refuses consolation for itself and nourishment for the bodily frame, and descends at a doubly rapid rate into weakness, despondency, and dismay. The case here described is by no means rare, we have frequently met with individuals so disordered by sorrow that their memory has failed them even upon such pressing matters as their meals, and we must confess that we have passed through the same condition ourselves. One sharp pang has filled the soul, monopolized the mind, and driven everything else into the background, so that such common matters as eating and drinking have been utterly despised, and the appointed hours of refreshment have gone by unheeded, leaving no manifest faintness of body, but an increased weariness of heart.

5. "*By reason of the voice of my groaning my bones cleave to my skin.*" He became emaciated with sorrow. He had groaned himself down to a living skeleton, and so in his bodily appearance was the more like the smoke-dried, withered, burnt-up things to which he had previously compared himself. It will be a very long time before the distresses of the church of God make some Christians shrivel into anatomies, but this good man was so moved with sympathy for Zion's ills that he was wasted down to skin and bone.

6. "*I am like a pelican of the wilderness,*" a mournful and even hideous object, the very image of desolation. "*I am like an owl of the desert;*" loving solitude, moping among ruins, hooting discordantly. The Psalmist likens himself to two birds which were commonly used as emblems of gloom and wretchedness; on other occasions he had been as the eagle, but the griefs of his people had pulled him down, the brightness was gone from his eye, and the beauty from his person; he seemed to himself to be as a melancholy bird sitting among the fallen palaces and prostrate temples of his native land. Should not we also lament when the ways of Zion mourn and her strength languishes? Were there more of this holy sorrow we should soon see the Lord returning to build up his church. It is ill for men to be playing the peacock with worldly pride when the ills of the times should make them as mournful as the pelican; and it is a terrible thing to see men flocking like vultures to devour the prey of a decaying church, when they ought rather to be lamenting among her ruins like the owl.

7. "*I watch, and am like a sparrow alone upon the house top:*" I keep a solitary vigil as the lone sentry of my nation; my fellows are too selfish, too careless to care for the beloved land, and so like a bird which sits alone on the house top, I keep up a sad watch over my country. The Psalmist compared himself to a bird,—a bird when it has lost its mate or its young, or is for some other reason made to mope alone in a solitary place. Probably he did not refer to the cheerful sparrow of our own land, but if he did, the illustration would not be out of place, for the sparrow is happy in company, and if it were alone, the sole one of its species in the neighbourhood, there can be little doubt that it would become very miserable, and sit and pine away. He who has felt himself to be so weak and inconsiderable as to have no more power over his times than a sparrow over a city, has also, when bowed down with despondency concerning the evils of the age, sat himself down in utter wretchedness to lament the ills which he could not heal. Christians of an earnest, watchful kind often find

themselves among those who have no sympathy with them ; even in the church they look in vain for kindred spirits ; then do they persevere in their prayers and labours, but feel themselves to be as lonely as the poor bird which looks from the ridge of the roof, and meets with no friendly greeting from any of its kind.

8. "*Mine enemies reproach me all the day.*" Their rage was unrelenting and unceasing, and vented itself in taunts and insults, the Psalmist's patriotism and his griefs were both made the subjects of their sport. Pointing to the sad estate of his people they would ask him, "Where is your God?" and exult over him because their false gods were in the ascendant. Reproach cuts like a razor, and when it is continued from hour to hour, and repeated all the day and every day, it makes life itself undesirable. "*And they that are mad against me are sworn against me.*" They were so furious that they bound themselves by oath to destroy him, and used his name as their usual execration, a word to curse by, the synonym of abhorrence and contempt. What with inward sorrows and outward persecutions he was in as ill a plight as may well be conceived.

9. "*For I have eaten ashes like bread.*" He had so frequently cast ashes upon his head in token of mourning, that they had mixed with his ordinary food, and grated between his teeth when he ate his daily bread. One while he forgot to eat, and then the fit changed, and he ate with such a hunger that even ashes were devoured. Grief has strange moods and tenses. "*And mingled my drink with weeping.*" His drink became as nauseous as his meat, for copious showers of tears had made it brackish. This is a telling description of all-saturating, all-embittering sadness,— and this 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. If we, too, are called to mourn, let us not be amazed by the fiery trial as though some strange thing had happened unto us. Both in meat and drink we have sinned ; it is not therefore wonderful if in both we are made to mourn.

10. "*Because of thine indignation and thy wrath : for thou hast lifted me up and cast me down.*" A sense of the divine wrath which had been manifested in the overthrow of the chosen nation and their sad captivity led the Psalmist into the greatest distress. He felt like a sere leaf caught up by a hurricane and carried right away, or the spray of the sea which is dashed upwards that it may be scattered and dissolved. Our translation gives the idea of a vessel uplifted in order that it may be dashed to the earth with all the greater violence and the more completely broken in pieces ; or to change the figure, it reminds us of a wrestler whom his opponent catches up that he may give him a more desperate fall. The first interpretation which we have given is, however, more fully in accordance with the original, and sets forth the utter helplessness which the writer felt, and the sense of overpowering terror which bore him along in a rush of tumultuous grief which he could not withstand.

11. "*My days are like a shadow that declineth.*" His days were but a shadow at best, but now they seem to be like a shadow which was passing away. A shadow is unsubstantial enough, how feeble a thing must a declining shadow be? No expression could more forcibly set forth his extreme feebleness. "*And I am withered like grass.*" He was like grass, blasted by a parching wind, or cut down with a scythe, and then left to be dried up by the burning heat of the sun. There are times when through depression of spirit a man feels as if all life were gone from him, and existence had become merely a breathing death. Heart-break has a marvellously withering influence over our entire system ; our flesh at its best is but as grass, and when it is wounded with sharp sorrows, its beauty fades, and it becomes a shrivelled, dried, uncomely thing.

12 But thou, O LORD, shalt endure for ever ; and thy remembrance unto all generations.

13 Thou shalt arise, and have mercy upon Zion : for the time to favour her, yea, the set time, is come.

14 For thy servants take pleasure in her stones, and favour the dust thereof.

15 So the heathen shall fear the name of the LORD, and all the kings of the earth thy glory.

16 When the LORD shall build up Zion, he shall appear in his glory.

17 He will regard the prayer of the destitute, and not despise their prayer.

18 This shall be written for the generation to come : and the people which shall be created shall praise the LORD.

19 For he hath looked down from the height of his sanctuary ; from heaven did the LORD behold the earth ;

20 To hear the groaning of the prisoner ; to loose those that are appointed to death ;

21 To declare the name of the LORD in Zion, and his praise in Jerusalem ;

22 When the people are gathered together, and the kingdoms, to serve the LORD.

23 He weakened my strength in the way ; he shortened my days.

24 I said, O my God, take me not away in the midst of my days : thy years *are* throughout all generations.

25 Of old hast thou laid the foundation of the earth : and the heavens *are* the work of thy hands.

26 They shall perish, but thou shalt endure : yea, all of them shall wax old like a garment ; as a vesture shalt thou change them, and they shall be changed :

27 But thou *art* the same, and thy years shall have no end.

28 The children of thy servants shall continue, and their seed shall be established before thee.

12. Now the writer's mind is turned away from his personal and relative troubles to the true source of all consolation, namely, the Lord himself, and his gracious purposes towards his own people. "*But thou, O Lord, shalt endure for ever.*" I perish, but thou wilt not, my nation has become almost extinct, but thou art altogether unchanged. The original has the word "sit,"—"thou, Jehovah, to eternity shalt sit : " that is to say, thou reignest on, thy throne is still secure even when thy chosen city lies in ruins, and thy peculiar people are carried into captivity. The sovereignty of God in all things is an unfailing ground for consolation ; he rules and reigns whatever happens, and therefore all is well.

Firm as his throne his promise stands,
And he can well secure,
What I've committed to his hands,
Till the decisive hour.

"*And thy remembrance unto all generations.*" Men will forget me, but as for thee, O God, the constant tokens of thy presence will keep the race of man in mind of thee from age to age. What God is now he always will be, that which our forefathers told us of the Lord we find to be true at this present time, and what our experience enables us to record will be confirmed by our children and their children's children. All things else are vanishing like smoke, and withering like grass, but over all the one eternal, immutable light shines on, and will shine on when all these shadows have declined into nothingness.

13. "*Thou shalt arise, and have mercy upon Zion.*" He firmly believed and boldly prophesied that apparent inaction on God's part would turn to effective working. Others might remain sluggish in the matter, but the Lord would most surely bestir himself. Zion had been chosen of old, highly favoured, gloriously inhabited, and wondrously preserved, and therefore by the memory of her past mercies it was certain that mercy would again be showed to her. God will not always leave his church in a low condition ; he may for a while hide himself from her in chastisement, to make her see her nakedness and poverty apart from himself, but in love he must return to her, and stand up in her defence, to work her welfare. "*For the time to favour her, yea, the set time, is come.*" Divine decree has appointed a season for blessing the church, and when that period has arrived, blessed she shall be. There was an appointed time for the Jews in Babylon, and when the weeks were fulfilled, no bolts nor bars could longer imprison the ransomed of the Lord. When the time came for the walls to rise stone by stone, no Tobiah or Sanballat could stay the

work, for the Lord himself had arisen, and who can restrain the hand of the Almighty? When God's own time is come, neither Rome, nor the devil, nor persecutors, nor atheists, can prevent the kingdom of Christ from extending its bounds. It is God's work to do it,— he must "*arise*"; he will do it, but he has his own appointed season; and meanwhile we must, with holy anxiety and believing expectation, wait upon him.

14. "*For thy servants take pleasure in her stones, and favour the dust thereof.*" 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 home-sickness, and began to sigh after her. We may expect the modern Jews to be restored to their own land when the love of their country begins to sway them, and casts out the love of gain. To the church of God no token can be more full of hope than to see the members thereof deeply interested in all that concerns her; no prosperity is likely to rest upon a church when carelessness about ordinances, enterprises, and services is manifest; but when even the least and lowest matter connected with the Lord's work is carefully attended to, we may be sure that the set time to favour Zion is come. The poorest church member, the most grievous backslider, the most ignorant convert, should be precious in our sight, because forming a part, although possibly a very feeble part, of the new Jerusalem. If we do not care about the prosperity of the church to which we belong, need we wonder if the blessing of the Lord is withheld?

15. "*So the heathen shall fear the name of the Lord.*" Mercy within the church is soon perceived by those without. When a candle is lit in the house, it shines through the window. When Zion rejoices in her God, the heathen begin to reverence his name, for they hear of the wonders of his power, and are impressed thereby. "*And all the kings of the earth thy glory.*" The restoration of Jerusalem was a marvel among the princes who heard of it, and its ultimate resurrection in days yet to come will be one of the prodigies of history. A church quickened by divine power is so striking an object in current history that it cannot escape notice, rulers cannot ignore it, it affects the Legislature, and forces from the great ones of the earth a recognition of the divine working. Oh that we might see in our day such a revival of religion that our senators and princes might be compelled to pay homage to the Lord, and own his glorious grace. This cannot be till the saints are better edified, and more fully builded together for an habitation of God through the Spirit. Internal prosperity is the true source of the church's external influence.

16. "*When the Lord shall build up Zion, he shall appear in his glory.*" As kings display their skill and power and wealth in the erection of their capitals, so would the Lord reveal the splendour of his attributes in the restoration of Zion, and so will he now glorify himself in the edification of his church. Never is the Lord more honourable in the eyes of his saints than when he prospers the church. To add converts to her, to train these for holy service, to instruct, illuminate, and sanctify the brotherhood, to bind all together in the bonds of Christian love, and to fill the whole body with the energy of the Holy Spirit—this is to build up Zion. Other builders do but puff her up, and their wood, hay, and stubble come to an end almost as rapidly as it was heaped together; but what the Lord builds is surely and well done, and redounds to his glory. Truly, when we see the church in a low state, and mark the folly, helplessness, and indifference of those who profess to be her builders; and, on the other hand, the energy, craft, and influence of those opposed to her, we are fully prepared to own that it will be a glorious work of omnipotent grace should she ever rise to her pristine grandeur and purity.

17. "*He will regard the prayer of the destitute.*" Only the poorest of the people were left to sigh and cry among the ruins of the beloved city; as for the rest, they were strangers in a strange land, and far away from the holy place, yet the prayers of the captives and the forlorn offscourings of the land would be heard of the Lord, who does not hear men because of the amount of money they possess, or the breadth of the acres which they call their own, but in mercy listens most readily to the cry of the greatest need. "*And not despise their prayer.*" When great kings are building their palaces it is not reasonable to expect them to turn aside and listen to every beggar who pleads with them, yet when the Lord builds up Zion, and appears in his robes of glory, he makes a point of listening to every petition of the poor and needy. He will not treat their pleas with contempt; he will incline his ear to hear, his heart to consider, and his hand to help. What comfort is here for those who account themselves to be utterly destitute; their abject want is here met with a most condescending promise. It is worth while to be destitute to be thus assured of the divine regard.

18. "*This shall be written for the generation to come.*" 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. Registers of divine kindness ought to be made and preserved: we write down in history the calamities of nations,—wars, famines, pestilences, and earthquakes are recorded; how much rather then should we set up memorials of the Lord’s lovingkindnesses! Those who have in their own souls endured spiritual destitution, and have been delivered out of it, cannot forget it; they are bound to tell others of it, and especially to instruct their children in the goodness of the Lord. “*And the people which shall be created shall praise the Lord.*” The Psalmist here intends to say that the rebuilding of Jerusalem would be a fact in history for which the Lord would be praised from age to age. Revivals of religion not only cause great joy to those who are immediately concerned in them, but they give encouragement and delight to the people of God long after, and are indeed perpetual incentives to adoration throughout the church of God. This verse teaches us that we ought to have an eye to posterity, and especially should we endeavour to perpetuate the memory of God’s love to his church and to his poor people, so that young people as they grow up may know that the Lord God of their fathers is good and full of compassion. Sad as the Psalmist was when he wrote the dreary portions of this complaint, he was not so absorbed in his own sorrow, or so distracted by the national calamity, as to forget the claims of coming generations; this, indeed, is a clear proof that he was not without hope for his people, for he who is making arrangements for the good of a future generation has not yet despaired of his nation. The praise of God should be the great object of all that we do, and to secure him a revenue of glory both from the present and the future is the noblest aim of intelligent beings.

19, 20. “*For he hath looked down from the height of his sanctuary,*” or “*leaned from the high place of his holiness,*” “*from heaven did the Lord behold the earth,*” looking out like a watcher from his tower. What was the object of this leaning from the battlements of heaven? Why this intent gaze upon the race of men? The answer is full of astounding mercy: the Lord does not look upon mankind to note their grandees, and observe the doings of their nobles, but “*to hear the groaning of the prisoner; to loose those that are appointed to death.*” Now the groans of those in prison so far from being musical are very horrible to hear, yet God bends to hear them: those who are bound for death are usually ill company, yet Jehovah deigns to stoop from his greatness to relieve their extreme distress and break their chains. This he does by providential rescues, by restoring health to the dying, and by finding food for the famishing; and spiritually this need of grace is accomplished by sovereign grace, which delivers us by pardon from the sentence of sin, and by the sweetness of the promise from the deadly despair which a sense of sin had created within us. Well may those of us praise the Lord who were once the children of death, but are now brought into the glorious liberty of the children of God. The Jews in captivity were in Haman’s time appointed to death, but their God found a way of escape for them, and they joyfully kept the feast of Purim in memorial thereof; let all souls that have been set free from the crafty malice of the old dragon with even greater gratitude magnify the Lord of infinite compassion.

21. “*To declare the name of the Lord in Zion, and his praise in Jerusalem.*” Great mercy displayed to those greatly in need of it, is the plainest method of revealing the attributes of the Most High. Actions speak more loudly than words; deeds of grace are a revelation even more impressive than the most tender promises. Jerusalem restored, the church re-edified, desponding souls encouraged, and all other manifestations of Jehovah’s power to bless, are so many manifestoes and proclamations put up upon the walls of Zion to publish the character and glory of the great God. Every day’s experience should be to us a new gazette of love, a court circular from heaven, a daily despatch from the headquarters of grace. We are bound to inform our fellow Christians of all this, making them helpers in our praise, as they hear of the goodness which we have experienced. While God’s mercies speak so eloquently, we ought not to be dumb. To communicate to others what God has done for us personally and for the church at large is so evidently our duty, that we ought not to need urging to fulfil it. God has ever an eye to the glory of his grace in all that he does, and we ought not wilfully to defraud him of the revenue of his praise.

22. “*When the people are gathered together, and the kingdoms, to serve the Lord.*” The great work of restoring ruined Zion is to be spoken of in those golden ages when the heathen nations shall be converted unto God; even those glorious times will not be able to despise that grand event, which, like the passage of Israel through the

Red Sea, will never be eclipsed and never cease to awaken the enthusiasm of the chosen people. Happy will the day be when all nations shall unite in the sole worship of Jehovah, then shall the histories of the olden times be read with adoring wonder, and the hand of the Lord shall be seen as having ever rested upon the sacramental host of his elect : then shall shouts of exulting praise ascend to heaven in honour of him who loosed the captives, delivered the condemned, raised up the desolations of ages, and made out of stones and rubbish a temple for his worship.

23. "*He weakened my strength in the way.*" Here the Psalmist comes down again to the mournful string, and pours forth his personal complaint. His sorrow had cast down his spirit, and even caused weakness in his bodily frame, so that he was like a pilgrim who limped along the road, and was ready to lie down and die. "*He shortened my days.*" Though he had bright hopes for Jerusalem, he feared that he should have departed this life long before those visions had become realities ; he felt that he was pining away and would be a shortlived man. Perhaps this may be our lot, and it will materially help us to be content with it, if we are persuaded that the grandest of all interests is safe, and the good old cause secure in the hands of the Lord.

24. "*I said, O my God, take me not away in the midst of my days.*" He betook himself to prayer. What better remedy is there for heart-sickness and depression ? We may lawfully ask for recovery from sickness and may hope to be heard. Good men should not dread death, but they are not forbidden to love life : for many reasons the man who has the best hope of heaven, may nevertheless think it desirable to continue here a little longer, for the sake of his family, his work, the church of God, and even the glory of God itself. Some read the passage, "Take me not up," let me not ascend like disappearing smoke, do not whirl me away like Elijah in a chariot of fire, for as yet I have only seen half my days, and that a sorrowful half ; give me to live till the blustering morning shall have softened into a bright afternoon of happier existence. "*Thy years are throughout all generations.*" Thou livest, Lord ; let me live also. A fulness of existence is with thee, let me partake therein. Note the contrast between himself pining and ready to expire, and his God living on in the fulness of strength for ever and ever ; this contrast is full of consolatory power to the man whose heart is stayed upon the Lord. Blessed be his name, he faileth not, and, therefore, our hope shall not fail us, neither will we despair for ourselves or for his church.

25. "*Of old hast thou laid the foundation of the earth.*" Creation is no new work with God, and therefore to "create Jerusalem a praise in the earth" will not be difficult to him. Long ere the holy city was laid in ruins the Lord made a world out of nothing, and it will be no labour to him to raise the walls from their heaps and replace the stones in their courses. We can neither continue our own existence nor give being to others ; but the Lord not only is, but he is the Maker of all things that are ; hence, when our affairs are at the very lowest ebb we are not all despairing, because the Almighty and Eternal Lord can yet restore us. "*And the heavens are the work of thine hands.*" Thou canst therefore not merely lay the foundations of Zion, but complete its roof, even as thou hast arched in the world with its ceiling of blue ; the loftiest stories of thine earthly palace shall be piled on high without difficulty when thou dost undertake the building thereof, since thou art architect of the stars, and the spheres in which they move. When a great labour is to be performed it is eminently reassuring to contemplate the power of him who has undertaken to accomplish it ; and when our own strength is exhausted it is supremely cheering to see the unfailing energy which is still engaged on our behalf.

26. "*They shall perish, but thou shalt endure.*" The power which made them shall dissolve them, even as the city of thy love was destroyed at thy command ; yet neither the ruined city nor the ruined earth can make a change in thee, reverse thy purpose, or diminish thy glory. Thou standest when all things fall. "*Yea, all of them shall wax old like a garment ; as a vesture shall thou change them, and they shall be changed.*" Time impairs all things, the fashion becomes obsolete and passes away. The visible creation, which is like the garment of the invisible God, is waxing old and wearing out, and our great King is not so poor that he must always wear the same robes ; he will ere long fold up the worlds and put them aside as worn out vestures, and he will array himself in new attire, making a new heaven and a new earth wherein dwelleth righteousness. How readily will all this be done. "Thou shalt change them and they shall be changed ;" as in the creation so in the restoration, omnipotence shall work its way without hindrance.

27. "*But thou art the same,*" or, "*thou art he.*" As a man remains the same when he has changed his clothing, so is the Lord evermore the unchanging One, though his works in creation may be changed, and the operations of his providence may vary. When heaven and earth shall flee away from the dread presence of the great Judge, he will be unaltered by the terrible confusion, and the world in conflagration will effect no change in him; even so, the Psalmist remembered that when Israel was vanquished, her capital destroyed, and her temple levelled with the ground, her God remained the same self-existent, all-sufficient being, and would restore his people, even as he will restore the heavens and the earth, bestowing at the same time a new glory never known before. The doctrine of the immutability of God should be more considered than it is, for the neglect of it tinges the theology of many religious teachers, and makes them utter many things of which they would have seen the absurdity long ago if they had remembered the divine declaration, "I am God, I change not, therefore ye sons of Jacob are not consumed." "*And thy years shall have no end.*" God lives on, no decay can happen to him, or destruction overtake him. What a joy is this! We may lose our dearest earthly friends, but not our heavenly Friend. Men's days are often suddenly cut short, and at the longest they are but few, but the years of the right hand of the Most High cannot be counted, for they have neither first nor last, beginning nor end. O my soul, rejoice thou in the Lord always, since he is always the same.

28. "*The children of thy servants shall continue.*" The Psalmist had early in the Psalm looked forward to a future generation, and here he speaks with confidence that such a race would arise and be preserved and blessed of God. Some read it as a prayer, "let the sons of thy servants abide." Any way, it is full of good cheer to us; we may plead for the Lord's favour to our seed, and we may expect that the cause of God and truth will revive in future generations. Let us hope that those who are to succeed us will not be so stubborn, unbelieving and erring as we have been. If the church has been minished and brought low by the lukewarmness of the present race, let us entreat the Lord to raise up a better order of men, whose zeal and obedience shall win and hold a long prosperity. May our own dear ones be among the better generation who shall continue in the Lord's ways, obedient to the end. "*And their seed shall be established before thee.*" God does not neglect the children of his servants. It is the rule that Abraham's Isaac should be the Lord's, that Isaac's Jacob should be beloved of the Most High, and that Jacob's Joseph should find favour in the sight of God. Grace is not hereditary, yet God loves to be served by the same family time out of mind, even as many great landowners feel a pleasure in having the same families as tenants upon their estates from generation to generation. Here is Zion's hope, her sons will build her up, her offspring will restore her former glories. We may, therefore, not only for our own sakes, but also out of love to the church of God, daily pray that our sons and daughters may be saved, and kept by divine grace even unto the end,—established before the Lord.

We have thus passed through the cloud, and in the next Psalm we shall bask in the sunshine. Such is the chequered experience of the believer. Paul in the seventh of Romans cries and groans, and then in the eighth rejoices and leaps for joy; and so, from the moaning of the hundred and second Psalm, we now advance to the songs and dancing of the hundred and third, blessing the Lord that, "though weeping may endure for a night, joy cometh in the morning."

EXPLANATORY NOTES AND QUAIN T SAYINGS.

Title.—"A prayer," etc. The prayer following is longer than others. When Satan, the Law-Adversary, doth extend his pleas against us, it is meet that we should enlarge our counter pleas for our own souls; as the powers of darkness do lengthen and multiply their wrestlings, so must we our counter wrestlings of prayer. Eph. vi. 12, 18.—*Thomas Cobbet, 1657.*

Title.—"When he . . . poureth out," etc. Here we have the manner of the church's prayer suitable to her extremity illustrated by a simile taken from a vessel overcharged with new wine or strong liquor, that bursts for vent. On the heart-burst-

ing cries she sends out all the day ! Here is no lazy, slothful, lip labour, stinted form of prayer, no empty sounds of verbal expressions, which can never procure her a comfortable answer from her God, or the least ease to her burthened soul ; but poured-out prayers as *Hannah*, 1 Sam. i. 15, and *Jeremy*, Lam. ii. 12, pressed forth with vehemence of spirit and heart pangs of inward grief : thus the Lord deals with his church and people ; ere he pours out cups of consolation they must pour out tears in great measure.—*Fintens Canus Vove*.

Title.—

This is the mourner's prayer when he is faint,
And to the Eternal Father breathes his plaint.

—*John Keble*.

Whole Psalm.—The Psalm has been attributed to *Daniel*, to *Jeremiah*, to *Neemiah*, or to some of the other prophets who flourished during the time of the captivity. The author of the Epistle to the Hebrews has applied the *twenty-fifth*, *twenty-sixth*, and *twenty-seventh* verses to our Lord, and the perpetuity of his kingdom.—*Adam Clarke*.

Whole Psalm.—I doubt whether, without apostolic teaching, any of us would have had the boldness to understand it ; for in many respects it is the most remarkable of all the Psalms—the Psalm of “THE AFFLICTED ONE”—while his soul is overwhelmed within him in great affliction, and sorrow, and anxious fear.—*Adolph Saphir*, in “*Expository Lectures on the Epistle to the Hebrews*.”

Verse 1.—“*Hear my prayer, O Lord, and let my cry come unto thee.*” When, at any time, we see the beggars, or poor folks, that are pained and grieved with hunger and cold, lying in the streets of cities and towns, full of sores, we are somewhat moved inwardly with pity and mercy ; but if we our own selves attend and give ear to their wallings, cryings, and lamentable noises that they make, we should be much more stirred to show our pity and mercy on them ; for no man else can show the grief of the sick and sore persons, so well and in so pathetic a manner as he himself. Therefore, since the miserable crying and wailing of those that suffer bodily pain and misery can prevail so much upon the hearts of mortal creatures ; I doubt not, Good Lord, but thou, who art all merciful, must needs be inclined to exercise thy mercy, if my sorrowful cry and petition may come unto thine ears, or into thy presence.—*John Fisher* (1459–1535) in “*A Treatise concerning the fruitful Sayings of David*,” 1714.

Verse 1.—“*My prayer.*” His own, and not another’s ; not what was composed for him, but composed by him ; which came out of his own heart, and out of unfeigned lips, and expressed under a feeling sense of his own wants and troubles ; and though dictated and inwrought in his heart by the Spirit of God, yet, being put up by him in faith and fervency, it is called his own, and which he desires might be heard.—*John Gill*.

Verse 1.—“*My cry.*” Lest my praying should not prevail, behold, O God, I raise it to a cry ; and crying, I may say, is the greatest bell in all the ring of praying : for louder than crying I cannot pray. O, then, if not my prayer, at least “*let my cry come unto thee.*” If I be not heard when I cry, I shall cry for not being heard ; and if heard when I cry, I shall cry to be heard yet more ; and so whether heard or not heard, I shall cry still, and God grant I may cry still ; so thou be pleased, O God, to “hear my prayer,” and to “let my cry come unto thee.”—*Sir R. Baker*.

Verses 1, 2.—This language is the language of godly sorrow, of faith, of tribulation, and of anxious hope : of *faith*, for the devout suppliant lifts up his heart and voice to heaven, “as seeing him who is invisible,” (Heb. xi. 27) and entreats him to hear his prayer and listen to his crying : of *tribulation*, for he describes himself as enduring affliction, and unwilling to lose the countenance of the Lord in the time of his trouble : of *anxious hope*, for he seems to expect, in the midst of his groaning, that his prayers, like those of *Cornelius*, will “go up for a memorial before God” who will hear him, “and that right soon.”—*Charles Oxenden*, in “*Sermons on the Seven Penitential Psalms*,” 1838.

Verses 1, 2.—The Lord suffereth his babbling children to speak to him in their own form of speech, (albeit the terms which they use be not fitted for his spiritual, invisible, and incomprehensible majesty) ; such as are, “*Hear me,*” “*hide not thy face,*” “*incline thine ear to me,*” and such like other speeches.—*David Dickson*.

Verses 1, 2.—Note, David sent his prayer as a sacred ambassador to God. Now there are four things requisite to make an embassy prosperous. The ambassador

must be regarded with favourable eye : he must be heard with a ready ear : he must speedily return when his demands are conceded. These four things David as a suppliant asks from God his King.—*Le Blanc*.

Verse 2.—“*Incline thine ear unto me.*” The great exhaustion of the afflicted one is hinted at : so worn out is he, that he is hardly able to cry any more, but with a faint voice only feebly mutters, like a weak, sick man, whose voice if we would catch, we must *incline the ear*.—*Martin Geier*.

Verse 3.—“*Consumed like smoke,*” would be better read, “*pass away as in smoke,*” as if they disappeared into smoke and ashes. “*Burned as an hearth,*” is not a felicitous translation, for a “*hearth*” should be incombustible. Better “*burned as a faggot,*” as any fuel. The sentiment, My days waste away to nothing, turn to no good account, are lost.—*Henry Cowles*.

Verse 3.—“*My days are consumed like smoke ;*” or, as Hebrew, literally, “*in (into) smoke.*” The very same expression which David, in Ps. xxxvii. 20, had used of “*the enemies of the Lord :*” “*They shall consume into smoke*” (compare Ps. lxxviii. 2). Hereby the ideal sufferer virtually complains that the lot of the wicked befalls him, though being righteous (Ps. ci.).—*A. R. Fausset*.

Verse 3.—“*My days are consumed like smoke.*” As the smoke is a vapour proceeding from the fire, yet hath no heat in it ; so my days are come from the torrid zone of youth into the region of cold and age ; and as the smoke seems a thick substance for the present, but presently vanisheth into air ; so my days made as great shew at first as if they would never have been spent ; but now, alas, are wasted and leave me scarce a being. As the smoke is fuliginous and dark, and affords no pleasure to look upon it ; so my days are all black and in mourning ; no joy nor pleasure to be taken in them. And as the smoke ascends indeed, but by ascending wastes itself and comes to nothing : so my days are wasted in growing, are diminished in increasing ; their plenty hath made a scarcity, and the more they have been the fewer they are. And how, indeed, can my days choose but be consumed as smoke, when “*my bones are burned as an hearth*” ? for as when the hearth is burned there can be made no more fire upon it ; so, when my bones, which are as the hearth upon which my fire of life is made, come once to be burned ; how can any more fire of life be made upon them ? and when no fire can be made, what will remain but only smoke ?—*Sir R. Baker*.

Verse 3.—“*As an hearth.*” Or, as a *trivet*, or, *gridiron* ; so the Targum : or, as a *frying-pan* : so the Arabic version.—*John Gill*.

Verse 4.—“*My heart is smitten, and withered like grass.*” The metaphor here is taken from grass, cut down in the meadow. Is first “*smitten*” with the *scythe*, and then “*withered*” by the *sun*. Thus the Jews were smitten with the judgments of God ; and they are now withered under the fire of the *Chaldeans*.—*Adam Clarke*.

Verse 4.—“*I forget to eat my bread.*” I have heard of some that have forgotten their own names, but I never heard of any that forgot to eat his meat ; for there is a certain prompter called hunger that will make a man to remember his meat in spite of his teeth. And yet it is true, when the heart is blasted and withered like grass, such a forgetfulness of necessity will follow. Is it that the withering of the heart is the prime cause of sorrow ; at least cause of the prime sorrow ; and immoderate sorrow is the mother of stupidity, stupefying and benumbing the animal faculties, that neither the understanding nor the memory can execute their functions ? Or is it, that sorrow is so intentive to that it sorrows for, that it cannot intend to think anything else ? Or is it, that nature makes account, that to feed in sorrow were to feed sorrow, and therefore thinks best to forbear all eating ? Or is it, that as sorrow draws moisture from the brain and fills the eyes with water ; so it draws a like juice from other parts, which fills the stomach instead of meat ? However it be, it shews a wonderful operation that is in sorrow ; to make not only the stomach to refuse its meat, but to make the brain forget the stomach, between whom there is so natural a sympathy and so near a correspondence. But as the vigour of the heart breeds plenty of spirits, which conveyed to all the parts, gives every one a natural appetite ; so when the heart is blasted and withered like grass, and that there is no more any vigour in it, the spirits are presently at a stand, and then no marvel if the stomach lose its appetite, and forget to eat bread.—*Sir R. Baker*.

Verse 4.—“*I forget to eat my bread.*” When grief hath thus dejected the spirits,

the man has no appetite for that food which is to recruit and elevate them. Ahab, smitten with one kind of grief, David with another, and Daniel with a third, all forgot, or refused, to eat their bread. 1 Kings xxi. 4; 2 Sam. xii. 16; Dan. x. 3. Such natural companions are mourning and fasting.—*Samuel Burder*.

Verse 5.—“*My bones cleave to my skin.*” When the bones cleave to the skin, both are near cleaving to the dust.—*Joseph Caryl*.

Verse 5.—That grief readily causes the body to pine away is very well known. It is related of Cardinal Wolsey, by an eye-witness, that when he heard that his master's favour was turned from him, he was wrung with such an agony of grief, which continued a whole night, that in the morning his face was dwindled away into half its usual dimensions.

Verse 6.—“*I am like a pelican of the wilderness.*” The Kaath was a bird of solitude that was to be found in the “*wilderness*,” i.e., far from the habitations of man. This is one of the characteristics of the *pelican*, which loves not the neighbourhood of human beings, and is fond of resorting to broad, uncultivated lands, where it will not be disturbed. In them it makes its nest and hatches its young, and to them it retires after feeding, in order to digest in quiet the ample meal which it has made. Mr. Tristram well suggests that the metaphor of the Psalmist may allude to the habit common to the pelican and its kin, of sitting motionless for hours after it has gorged itself with food, its head sunk on its shoulders, and its bill resting on its breast.—*J. G. Wood*.

Verse 6.—“*A pelican of the wilderness.*” Here only [at Hulet] have I seen the pelican of the wilderness, as David calls it. I once had one of them shot just below this place, and, as it was merely wounded in the wing, I had a good opportunity to study its character. It was certainly the most sombre, austere bird I ever saw. It gave one the blues merely to look at it. David could find no more expressive type of solitude and melancholy by which to illustrate his own sad state. It seemed as large as a half-grown donkey, and when fairly settled on its stout legs, it looked like one. The pelican is never seen but in these unfrequented solitudes.—*W. M. Thomson*.

Verse 6.—Consider that thou needest not complain, like Elijah, that thou art left alone, seeing the best of God's *saints* in all ages have smarted in the same kind—instantly in *David*: indeed sometimes he boasts how he ‘lay in green pastures, and was led by still waters;’ but after he bemoans that he ‘sinks in deep mire, where there was no standing.’ What is become of those green pastures? parched up with the drought. Where are those still waters? troubled with the tempest of affliction. The same David compares himself to an “*owl*,” and in the next Psalm resembles himself to an “*eagle*.” Do two fowls fly of more different kind? The one the *scorn*, the other the *sovereign*; the one the *slowest*, the other the *swiftest*; the one the most *sharp-sighted*, the other the most *dim-eyed* of all birds. Wonder not, then, to find in thyself sudden and strange alterations. It fared thus with all God's servants in their agonies of temptation; and be confident thereof, though now run aground with grief, in due time thou shalt be all afloat with comfort.—*Thomas Fuller*.

Verse 6.—“*Owl*.” Some kind of owl, it is thought, is intended by the Hebrew word *côs*, translated “*little owl*,” in Lev. xi. 17; Deut. xiv. 16, where it is mentioned amongst the unclean birds. It occurs also in Ps. cii. 6. “*I am like a pelican of the wilderness: I am like an owl of ruined places*” (A. V., “*desert*”). The Hebrew word *côs* means a “*cup*” in some passages of Scripture, from a root meaning to “*receive*,” to “*hide*,” or “*bring together*”; hence the pelican, “*the cup*,” or “*pouch-bird*,” has been suggested as the bird intended. In this case the verse in the Psalm would be rendered thus:—“*I am become like a pelican in the wilderness, even as the pouch-bird in the desert places.*” But the fact that both the pelican and the *côs* are enumerated in the list of birds to be avoided as food is against this theory, unless the word changed its meaning in the Psalmist's time, which is improbable. The expression *côs* “*of ruined places*” looks very much as if some owl were denoted. The Arabic definitely applies a kindred expression as one of the names of an owl, viz., *um elcharab*, i.e., “*mother of ruins*.” The Septuagint gives *νυκτιόραξ* as the meaning of *côs*; and we know from Aristotle that the Greek word was a synonym of *ōros*, evidently, from his description of the bird, one of the eared owls. Dr. Tristram is disposed to refer the *côs* to the little *Athene Persica*, the most common of all the owls in Palestine, the representative of the *A. noctua* of Southern Europe. The Arabs call this bird “*boomah*,” from his note; he is described “*as a grotesque*

and comical-looking little bird, familiar and yet cautious ; never moving unnecessarily, but remaining glued to his perch, unless he has good reason for believing he has been detected, and twisting and turning his head instead of his eyes to watch what is going on." He is to be found amongst rocks in the wadys or trees by the water-side, in olive yards, in the tombs and on the ruins, on the sandy mounds of Beersheba, and on "the spray-beaten fragments of Tyre, where his low wailing note is sure to be heard at sunset, and himself seen bowing and keeping time to his own music." *W. Houghton, in "Cassell's Biblical Educator," 1874.*

Verse 6.—"Owl of the desert."

Save that from yonder ivy-mantled tower,
The moping owl does to the moon complain
Of such as, wand'ring near her secret bow'r,
Molest her ancient solitary reign.

—*Thomas Gray (1716-1771).*

Verse 7.—"I watch." During the hours allotted to sleep "I wake," like a little bird which sits solitary on the house top, while all beneath enjoy the sleep which he giveth to his beloved.—*Alfred Edersheim.*

Verse 7.—"A sparrow alone upon the house top." When one of them has lost its mate—a matter of every-day occurrence—he will sit on the house top alone, and lament by the hour his sad bereavement.—*W. M. Thomson.*

Verse 7.—"I am as a sparrow alone," etc. It is evident that the "sparrow alone and melancholy upon the house tops" cannot be the lively, gregarious sparrow which assembles in such numbers on these favourite feeding-places [the house tops of the East]. We must therefore look for some other bird, and naturalists are now agreed that we may accept the *Blue Thrush* (*Petrocoscyphus cyaneus*) as the particular tzippor, or small bird, which sits alone on the house tops. The colour of this bird is a dark blue, whence it derives its popular name. Its habits exactly correspond with the idea of solitude and melancholy. The Blue Thrushes never assemble in flocks, and it is very rare to see more than a pair together. It is fond of sitting on the tops of houses, uttering its note, which, however agreeable to itself, is monotonous and melancholy to a human ear.—*J. G. Wood, in "Bible Animals."*

Verse 7.—"A sparrow." Most readers are struck with the incongruity of the image, as it appears in our version, intended by the Psalmist to express a condition of distress and desolation. The sparrow is found, indeed, all over the East, in connection with houses, as it is with ourselves ; but it is everywhere one of the most social of birds, cheerful to impertinence ; and mischievously disposed, instead of being retiring in its habits, and melancholy in its demeanour. The word, in the original, is a general term for all the small birds, insectivorous and frugivorous, denominated clean, and that might be eaten according to the law, the thrushes, larks, wagtails, finches, as well as sparrows. It seems to be, indeed, a mere imitation of their common note, like the one which we have in the word "chirrup." Most critics are, therefore, content with the rendering "solitary bird," or "solitary little bird." But this is very unsatisfactory. It does not identify the species ; and there is every probability that there must have been a particular bird which the Psalmist, writing at the close of the Babylonish captivity, had in his eye, corresponding to his representation of it, and illustrative of his isolated condition.

Such there is at the present day, of common occurrence in Southern Europe and Western Asia. Its history is very little known to the world, and its existence has hitherto escaped the notice of all biblical commentators. Remarkably enough, the bird is commonly, but erroneously, called a sparrow, for it is a real thrush in size, in shape, in habits, and in song. It differs singularly from the rest of the tribe, throughout all the East, by a marked preference for sitting solitary upon the habitation of man. It never associates with any other, and only at one season with its own mate ; and even then it is often seen quite alone upon the house top, where it warbles its sweet and plaintive strains, and continues its song, moving from roof to roof. America has its solitary thrush, of another species, and of somewhat different habits. The dark solitary cane and myrtle swamps of the southern states are there the favourite haunts of the recluse bird ; and the more dense and gloomy these are the more certainly is it to be found flitting in them.—*The Biblical Treasury."*

Verse 7.—"Alone." But little do men perceive what solitude is, and how far it extendeth ; for a crowd is not company, and faces are but a gallery of pictures, and talk but a tinkling cymbal where there is no love. The Latin adage meeteth it a

little: "*magna civitas, magno solitudo*;" because in a great town friends are scattered, so that there is not that fellowship, for the most part, which is in less neighbourhoods; but we may go further, and affirm most truly, that it is a mere and miserable solitude to want true friends, without which the world is but a wilderness; and even in this sense also of solitude, whosoever in the frame of his nature and affections is unfit for friendship, he taketh it of the beast, and not from humanity.—*Francis Bacon.*

Verse 7.—"Alone." See the reason why people in trouble love solitariness. They are full of sorrow; and sorrow, if it have taken deep root, is naturally reserved, and flies all conversation. Grief is a thing that is very silent and private. Those people that are very talkative and clamorous in their sorrows, are never very sorrowful. Some are apt to wonder, *why melancholy people delight to be so much alone*, and I will tell you the reason of it. 1. Because the disordered humours of their bodies alter their temper, their humours, and their inclinations, that they are no more the same that they used to be; their very distemper is averse to what is joyous and diverting; and they that wonder at them may as wisely wonder why they will be diseased, which they would not be if they knew how to help it; but the *Disease of Melancholy* is so obstinate, and so unknown to all but those who have it, that nothing but the power of God can totally overthrow it, and I know no other cure for it. 2. Another reason why they choose to be alone is, because people do not generally mind what they say, nor believe them, but rather deride them, which they do not use so cruelly to do with those that are in other distempers; and no man is to be blamed for avoiding society, when it does not afford the common credit to his words that is due to the rest of men. But, 3, Another, and the principal reason why people in trouble and sadness choose to be alone, is, because they generally apprehend themselves singled out to be the marks of God's peculiar displeasure, and they are often by their sharp afflictions a terror to themselves, and a wonder to others. It even breaks their hearts to see how low they are fallen, how oppressed, that were once as easy, as pleasant, as full of hope as others are, Job vi. 21: "Ye see my casting down, and are afraid." Ps. lxxi. 7. "I am as a wonder unto many." And it is usually unpleasant to others to be with them. Ps. lxxxviii. 18: "Lover and friend hast thou put far from me, and mine acquaintance into darkness." And though it was not so with the friends of Job, to see a man whom they had once known happy, to be so miserable; one whom they had seen so very prosperous, to be so very poor, in such sorry, forlorn circumstances, did greatly affect them; he, poor man, was changed, they knew him not, Job. ii. 12, 13, "And when they lifted up their eyes afar off, and knew him not, they lifted up their voice, and wept; and they rent every one his mantle, and sprinkled dust upon their heads toward heaven. So they sat down with him upon the ground seven days and seven nights, and none spake a word unto him: for they saw that his grief was very great." As the prophet represents one under spiritual and great afflictions, "that he sitteth alone, and keepeth silence," Lam. iii. 28.—*Timothy Rogers* (1660–1729), in "A Discourse on Trouble of Mind, and the Disease of Melancholy."

Verse 8.—"Mine enemies reproach me." It is true what Plutarch writes, that men are more touched with reproaches than with other injuries; affliction, too, gives a keener edge to calumny, for the afflicted are more fitting objects of pity than of mockery.—*Mollerus.*

Verse 8.—"Mine enemies reproach me," etc. If I be where they are they rail at me to my face; and if I be not amongst them they revile me behind my back; and they do it not by starts and fits, that might give me some breathing time; but they are spitting their poison all the day long; and not single and one by one, that might leave hope of resisting; but they make combinations, and enter leagues against me; and to make their leagues the stronger, and less subject to dissolving, they bind themselves by oath, and take the sacrament upon it. And now sum up all these miseries and afflictions; begin with my fasting; then take my groaning; then add my watching; then the shame of being wondered at in company; then the discomfort of sitting disconsolate alone; and, lastly, add to these the spite and malice of my enemies; and what marvel, then, if these miseries joined all together make me altogether miserable; what marvel if I be nothing but skin and bone, when no flesh that were wise would ever stay upon a body to endure such misery.—*Sir R. Baker.*

Verse 8 (last clause). Swearing by one, means, to make his name a by-word

of execration, or an example of cursing. (Isai. lxxv. 15; Jer. xxix. 22; xlii. 18).—*Carl Bernard Moll, in Lange's Commentary.*

Verse 9.—“*I have eaten ashes like bread.*” Though the bread indeed be strange, yet not so strange as this,—that having complained before of forgetting to eat his bread, he should now on a sudden fall to *eating of ashes like bread.* For had he not been better to have forgotten it still, unless it had been more worth remembering? For there is not in nature so unfit a thing to eat as *ashes*; it is worse than Nebuchadnezzar's grass.—*Sir R. Baker.*

Verse 9.—“*I have mingled my drink with weeping.*” If you think his bread to be bad, you will find his drink to be worse; for *he mingles his drink with tears*: and what are tears, but brinish and salt humours? and is brine a fit liquor to quench one's thirst? May we not say here, the remedy is worse than the disease? for were it not better to endure any thirst, than to seek to quench it with such drink? Is it not a pitiful thing to have no drink to put in the stomach, but that which is drawn out of the eyes? and yet whose case is any better? No man certainly commits sin, but with a design of pleasure; but sin will not be so committed; for whosoever commits sin, let them be sure at some time or other to find a thousand times more trouble about it than ever they found pleasure in it. For all sin is a kind of surfeit, and there is no way to keep it from being mortal but by this strict diet of eating ashes like bread and mingling his drink with tears. O my soul, if these be works of repentance in David, where shall we find a penitent in the world besides himself? To talk of repentance is obvious in everyone's mouth; but where is any that eats ashes like bread, and mingles his drink with tears?—*Sir R. Baker.*

Verse 10.—“*For thou hast lifted me up, and cast me down.*” Thou hast lifted me up of a great height, in that thou madest me like unto thine image, touching my reasonable soul, and hast given me power, by thy grace, to inherit the everlasting joys of heaven, both body and soul, if I did live here after thy commandments. What greater gift canst thou give me, Lord, than to have the fruition of thee that art all in all things? How canst thou lift me higher than to eternal beatitude? But then, alas, thou hast letten me fall down again, for thou hast joined my noble soul with an earthly, heavy, and a frail body; the weight and burden thereof draweth down my mind and heart from the consideration of thy goodness, and from well doing, unto all kinds of vices, and to the regarding of temporal things according to his nature. The earthly mansion keepeth down the understanding. Thus setting me up, as it were, above the wind, thou hast given me a very great fall (Job xxx. 22). I am in creation above all other kind of earthly creatures, and almost equal with angels; but being in this estate thou hast knit a knot thereto, that for breaking the least of thy commandments I shall suffer damnation. So that without thy continual mercy and help I am in worse case herein than any brute beast, whose life or soul dieth with the body.—*Sir Anthony Cope (1551).*

Verse 10.—“*For thou hast lifted me up and cast me down.*” That is that I might fall with greater poise. *Significatur gravissima collisio.* Here the prophet accuseth not God of cruelty, but bewaileth his own misery. *Miserum est fuisse felicem,* it is no small unhappiness to have been happy.—*John Trapp.*

Verse 11 (*first clause*).—My days (my term of life) are as the lengthened shade, the lengthening shade of evening, that shows the near approach of night. The comparison, though not strictly expressed, is beautifully suggestive of the thought intended.—*Thomas J. Conant.*

Verse 11 (*last clause*).—The “*and I,*” in the Hebrew, stands in designed contrast to “*But thou,*” ver. 12.—*A. R. Fausset.*

Verse 13.—“*Thou shalt arise, and have mercy,*” etc. *Tu miserebere,* “*Thou shalt,*” as the Shunamite to the prophet, catching hold on his feet, though Gehazi thrust her away, *Vivit Dominus,* “*As the Lord liveth, and as thy soul liveth, I will not let thee go;*” and, as Jacob to the angel, when he had wrestled the whole night with him, *Non dimittam,* I will not let thee loose till I have a blessing from thee.—From “*A Sermon at Paules Crosse on behalfe of Paules Church, March 26, 1620.*” By the *B. of London*” [John King].

Verse 13.—“*The set time.*” There is a certain set time for God's great actions. He lets the powers of darkness have their hour, and God will take his hour. He

hath a set time for the discovery of his mercy, and he will not stay a jot beyond it. What is this time? verse 9, etc. When they "eat ashes like bread, and mingle their drink with weeping;" when they are most humble, and when the servants of God have moral affection to the church; when their humble and ardent affections are strong, even to the ruin and rubbish of it; when they have a mighty desire and longing for the reparation of it, as the Jews in captivity had for the very dust of the temple: verse 14: "For thy servants take pleasure in her stones, and favour the dust thereof." "*For*" there notes it to be a reason why the set time was judged by them to be come. That is God's set time when the church is most believing, most humble, most affectionate to God's interest in it, and most sincere. Without faith we are not fit to desire mercy, without humility we are not fit to receive it, without affection we are not fit to value it, without sincerity we are not fit to improve it. Times of extremity contribute to the growth and exercise of these qualifications.—*Stephen Charnock.*

Verse 14.—"For thy servants take pleasure in her stones." That is, they are still attached to her, and regard her with extreme affection, although in ruins. Jerusalem itself affords at this day a touching illustration of this passage. There is reason to believe that a considerable portion of the *lower part* of the walls which enclose the present mosque of Omar, which occupies the site of the ancient Jewish temple, are the same, or at least the southern, western, and eastern sides are the same as those of Solomon's temple. At one part where the remains of this old wall are the most considerable and of the most massive character—where two courses of masonry, composed of massive blocks of stone, rising to the height of thirty feet—is what is called the Wailing Place of the Jews. "Here," says Dr. Olin, "at the foot of the wall, is an open place paved with flags, where the Jews assemble every Friday, and in small numbers on other days, for the purpose of praying and bewailing the desolations of their holy places. Neither the Jews nor Christians are allowed to enter the Haram, which is consecrated to Mohammedan worship, and this part of the wall is the nearest approach they can make to what they regard as the precise spot within the forbidden enclosure upon which the ancient temple stood. They keep the pavement swept with great care, and take off their shoes, as on holy ground. Standing or kneeling with their faces towards the ancient wall, they gaze in silence upon its venerable stones, or pour forth their complaints in half-suppressed, though audible tones. This, to me, was always a most affecting sight, and I repeated my visit to this interesting spot to enjoy and sympathise with the melancholy yet pleasing spectacle. The poor people sometimes sobbed aloud, and still found tears to pour out for the desolations of their 'beautiful house.' 'If I forget thee, O Jerusalem, let my right hand forget her cunning. If I do not remember thee, let my tongue cleave to the roof of my mouth; if I prefer not Jerusalem above my chief joy.'"—*Killo's Pictorial Bible.*

Verse 16.—"When the Lord shall build up Zion, he shall appear in his glory." So sincere is God to his people, that he gives his own glory in hostage to them for their security; his own robes of glory are locked up in their prosperity and salvation: he will not, indeed he cannot, present himself in all his magnificence and royalty, till he hath made up his intended thoughts of mercy to his people; he is pleased to prorogue the time of his appearing in all his glory to the world till he hath actually accomplished their deliverance, that he and they may come forth together in their glory on the same day: "*When the Lord shall build up Zion, he shall appear in his glory.*" The sun is ever glorious in the most cloudy day, but appears not so till it hath scattered the clouds that muffle it up from the sight of the lower world: God is glorious when the world sees him not; but his declarative glory then appears, when the glory of his mercy, truth and faithfulness break forth in his people's salvation. Now, what shame must this cover thy face with, O Christian, if thou shouldst not sincerely aim at thy God's glory, who loves thee, yea, all his children so dearly, as to ship his own glory and your happiness in one bottom, that he cannot now lose the one, and save the other!—*William Gurnall.*

Verse 16.—"When the Lord shall build up Zion, he shall appear in his glory." There are two reasons why the Lord appears thus glorious in this work rather than in any other. First, because it is a work that infinitely pleaseth him. Men choose to appear in their clothes and behaviour suitable to the work that they are to be employed in: the woman of Tekoah must feign herself to be a mourner when she

goes on a mournful message ; and David, when he goes on a doleful journey, covers his face, and puts on mourning apparel ; but when Solomon is to be crowned, he goes in all his royalty ; and a bride adorns herself gloriously when she is to be married : verily so doth the Lord, when he goes about a work he takes no pleasure in, he puts on his mourning apparel, he covers himself with a cloud and the heavens with blackness ; when he is to do a strange work of judgment, then he mourns, " How shall I give thee up, Ephraim ? how shall I deliver thee, Israel ? how shall I make thee as Admah ? how shall I set thee as Zeboim ? mine heart is turned within me, my repentings are kindled together." Hosea xi. 8. But the building of Zion doth infinitely please him, because Zion is as the apple of his eye to him ; he bought Zion at a dear rate, with his own blood ; he lays Zion in his bosom, he is ravished with Zion, Zion is his love, his dove, his fair one ; he hath chosen Zion, and loves the gates of it, better than all the palaces of Jacob ; and being so pleasing to him, no marvel if he put on all his glorious apparel when he is to adorn and build up Zion. And, secondly, it is because all the glory that he looks for to eternity must arise out of this one work of building Zion ; this one work shall be the only monument of his glory to eternity : this goodly world, this heaven and earth, that you see and enjoy the use of, is set up only as a shop, as a workshop, to stand only for a week, for six or seven thousand years, (" a thousand years is with the Lord but as a day ") ; and when his work is done he will throw this piece of clay down again, and out of this he looks for no other glory than from a *cabul*, a land of dirt, or a shepherd's cottage, or a gourd which springs up in a night and withers in a day ; but this piece he sets up for a higher end, to be the eternal mansion of his holiness and honour ; this is his *metropolis*, his temple, his house where his fire and furnace is, his court, his glorious high throne, and therefore his glory is much concerned in this work. When Nebuchadnezzar would have a city for the honour of his kingdom, and the glory of his majesty, he will make it a stately piece. Solomon made all his kingdom very rich and glorious, but he made his court, and especially his throne, another manner of thing, so stately that the like was not to be seen in any other kingdom ; and therefore no wonder though he appear in his glory in building up of that, which we may boldly say must be one day made as glorious as his wisdom can contrive, and his power bring to pass.—*Stephen Marshall, in a Sermon preached to the Right Honourable the House of Peers, entitled " God's Master-Piece,"* 1645.

Verses 16, 17.—" Shall build—shall appear—will regard—and will not despise." These futures, in the original, are all present ; " *buildeth—appeareth—regardeth—and despiseth not.*" The Psalmist, in his confidence of the event, speaks of it as doing.—*Samuel Horsley.*

Verse 17.—" *He will regard the prayer of the destitute,*" etc. The persons are here called " *the destitute.*" The Hebrew word which is here translated " *destitute*" doth properly signify *myrica*, a low shrub, *humiles myricæ*, low shrubs that grow in wildernesses, some think they were *juniper shrubs*, some a kind of wild *tamaris*, but a base wild shrub that grew nowhere but in a desolate forlorn place ; and sometimes the word in the text is used to signify the deserts of Arabia, the sandy desert place of Arabia, which was a miserable wilderness. Now when this word is applied to men, it always means such as were *forsaken men, despised men* ; such men as are stripped of all that is comfortable to them : either they never had children, or else their children are taken away from them, and all comforts banished, and themselves left utterly forlorn, like the barren heath in a desolate howling wilderness. These are the people of whom my text speaks, that the Lord will regard the prayer of " *the destitute* ;" and this was now the state of the Church of God when they offered up this prayer, and yet by faith did foretell that God would grant such a glorious answer. . . .

This is also a lesson of singular comfort to every afflicted soul, to assure them their prayers and supplications are tenderly regarded before God. I have often observed such poor forsaken ones, who in their own eyes are brought very low, that of all other people they are most desirous to beg and obtain the prayers of their friends, when they see any that hath gifts, and peace, and cheerfulness of spirit, and liberty, and abilities to perform duties, O how glad they are to get such a man's prayers ! " I beseech you, will you pray for me, will you please to remember me at the throne of grace," whereas, in truth, if we could give a right judgment, all such would rather desire the *poor*, and the *desolate*, to be *mediators* for them ; for, certainly, whomsoever God neglects, he will listen to the cry of those that are forsaken and

destitute. And therefore, O thou afflicted and tossed with tempests, who thinkest thou art wholly rejected by the Lord, continue to pour out thy soul to him; thou hast a faithful promise from him to be rewarded: "he will regard the prayer of the destitute."—*Stephen Marshall, in a Sermon entitled "The Strong Helper,"* 1645.

Verse 17.—"He will regard the prayer of the destitute." It is worthy of observation that he ascribes the redemption and restoration of the people to the prayers of the faithful. That is truly a free gift, and dependent wholly upon the divine mercy, and yet God himself often attributes it to our prayers, to stir us up and render us the more active in the pursuit of prayer.—*Mollerus.*

Verse 17.—"The prayer of the destitute." A man that is destitute knows how to pray. He needs not any instructor. His miseries indoctrinate him wonderfully in the art of offering prayer. Let us know ourselves destitute, that we may know how to pray; destitute of strength, of wisdom, of due influence, of true happiness, of proper faith, of thorough consecration, of the knowledge of the Scriptures, of righteousness.

These words introduce and stand in immediate connection with a prophecy of glorious things to be witnessed in the latter times. We profess to be eager for the accomplishment of those marvellous things; but are we offering the prayer of the destitute? On the contrary, is not the Church at large too much like the church at Laodicea? Will not a just interpretation of many of its acts and ways bring forth the words, "I am rich and increased in goods, and have need of nothing"? And do not its prayers meet with this reproachful answer, "Thou art wretched, and miserable, and poor, and blind, and naked, and knowest it not. Thy temporal affluence implies not spiritual affluence. Thy spiritual condition is inversely as the worldly prosperity that has turned thy head. I counsel thee to buy of me gold tried in the fire. Give all thy trashy gold—trashy while it is with thee—give it to my poor; and I will give thee true gold—namely, a sense of thy misery and meanness; a longing for grace, purity, usefulness; a love of thy fellow-men; and my love shed abroad in thy heart."—*George Bowen.*

Verse 17.—"Not despise their prayer." How many in every place (who have served the Lord in this great work) hath prayer helped at a dead lift? Prayer hath hitherto saved the kingdom. I remember a proud boast of our enemies, when we had lost *Bristol* and the *Vies*, they then sent abroad even into other kingdoms a triumphant paper, wherein they concluded all was now subdued to them, and among many other confident expressions, there was one to this purpose, *Nil restat superare Regem*, etc., which might be construed two ways; either thus,—*There remains nothing for the King to conquer, but only the prayers of a few fanatic people*; or thus,—*There is nothing left to conquer the King, but the prayers of a few fanatic people*: everything else was lost, all was now their own. And indeed we were then in a very low condition. Our strongholds taken, our armies melted away, our hearts generally failing us for fear, multitudes flying out of the kingdom, and many deserting the cause as desperate, making their peace at *Oxford*; nothing almost left us but *preces et lachrymæ*; but blessed be God, *prayer was not conquered*; they have found it the hardest wall to climb, the strongest brigade to overthrow; it hath hitherto preserved us, it hath raised up unexpected helps, and brought many unhoping for successes and deliverances. Let us therefore, under God, set the crown upon the head of prayer. Ye nobles and worthies, be ye all content to have it so; it will wrong none of you in your deserved praise; God and man will give you your due. *Many of you have done worthily, but prayer surpasses you all*: and this is no new thing, prayer hath always had the pre-eminence in the building of Zion. God hath reserved several works for several men and several ages; but in all ages and among all men, prayer hath been the chiefest instrument, especially in the building up of Zion.—*Stephen Marshall.*

Verse 17.—"Not despise their prayer." He will, then, give ear to the suits of the poor, and not reject their supplications. But who will believe this? Is it likely, that when God is in his glory, he will attend to such mean things as hearkening to the poor? Can it stand with the honour of his glory to stand reading petitions, and specially of men that come in *forma pauperis*? scarce credible indeed with men, who, raised in honour, keep a distance from the poor and count it a degree of falling to look downwards: but credible enough with God, who counts it his glory to regard the inglorious; and being the Most High, yet looks as low as to the lowest, and favours them most who are most despised. And this did Christ after his transfiguration, when he had appeared in his glory; he then shewed acts of greatest humility; he then

washed the disciples' feet ; and made Peter as much wonder to see his humbleness, as he had done before to see his glory.—*Sir R. Baker.*

Verse 18.—" *Shall praise the Lord.*" The people whom God in mercy brings from a low and mean condition, are the people from whom God promises to receive praise and glory. Indeed, such is the selfishness of our corrupt nature, that if we are anything, or do anything, we are prone to forget God, and sacrifice to our own nets, and burn incense to our own yare ; inasmuch, that whenever God finds a people who shall either trust in him, or praise him, it must be " an afflicted and poor people," (Zeph. iii. 11—13 ; Ps. xxii. 22—25), or a people brought from such an estate : free grace is even most valued by such a people. And if you look all the Scripture over, you will find that all the praises and songs of deliverance that have been made to God have proceeded from a people that have thus judged of themselves, as those that were brought to nothing ; but God in mercy had brought them back again from the gates of death, and usually until they had such apprehensions of themselves they never gave unto God the glory due unto his name.—*Stephen Marshall.*

Verse 18.—Expositors observe upon this text, that this redeemed Church takes no thought concerning themselves, about their own ease, pleasure, wealth, gain, or anything else which might accrue unto themselves by this deliverance, to make their own life easy or sweet ; but their thoughts and studies are wholly laid out, how the present and succeeding generations should give all glory to God for it. . . .

There are three special reasons why this should be the great work of the Lord's saved and rescued people, and why indeed they can do no other than study thus to exalt him. I. One is, because they well know that the Lord hath reserved nothing to himself but only his glory ; the benefits he gives to them ; all the sweetness and honey that can be found in them he gives them leave to suck out ; but his glory and his praise is his own, and that which he hath wholly reserved ; of that he is jealous, lest it should either be denied, eclipsed, diminished, or any the least violation offered to it in any kind. All God's people know this of him, and therefore they cannot but endeavour to preserve it for him. II. Secondly, besides, they know, as God is jealous in that point, so it is all the work that he hath appointed them to do ; he hath therefore separated them to himself out of all nations of the world, to be his peculiar ones for this very end, that they might give him all the glory and praise of his mercy. " I have (said God) created him, formed, and made him for my glory." Isai. xliii. 7. This is the law of his new creation, which is as powerful in them as the law of nature, or the first creation, is in the rest of his works. And therefore with a holy and spiritual naturalness (if I may so call it) the hearts of all the saints are carried to give God the glory, as really as the stones are carried to the centre, or the fire to fly upwards : this is fixed in their hearts, the work of grace hath moulded them to it, that they can do no other but endeavour to exalt God, it being the very end why their spiritual life and all their other privileges are conferred upon them.

III. Yea, thirdly, they know their own interests are much concerned in God's glory, they never are losers by it : if in any work of God he want his praise, they will want their comfort ; but if God be a gainer, they shall certainly be no losers. Whatever is poured upon the head of Christ—what ointment soever of praise or glory, it will in a due proportion fall down to the skirts of his garments ; nor is there any other way to have any sweetness, comfort, praise, or glory to be derived unto themselves, but by giving all unto him, to whom alone it belongeth, and then although he will never give away his glory—the glory of being the fountain, the first, supreme, original giver of all good ; yet they shall have the glory of instruments, and of fellow workers with him, which is a glory and praise sufficient.—*Stephen Marshall.*

Verse 18 (first clause).—Calvin translates thus,—"*This shall be registered for the generations to come ;*" and observes,—"*The Psalmist intimates, that this will be a memorable work of God, the praise of which shall be handed down to succeeding ages. Many things are worthy of praise, which are soon forgotten ; but the prophet distinguishes between the salvation of the Church, for which he makes supplication, and common benefits. By the word register he means that the history of this would be worthy of having a place in the public records, that the remembrance of it might be transmitted to future generations.*"

Verse 18.—" *This shall be written.*" Nothing is more tenacious than man's memory when he suffers an injury ; nothing more lax if a benefit is conferred. For this reason God desires lest his gifts should fall out of mind, to have them committed to writing.—*Le Blanc.*

Verse 20.—“*To hear the groaning of the prisoner.*” God takes notice not only of the prayers of his afflicted people, which are the language of grace ; but even of their groans, which are the language of nature.—*Matthew Henry.*

Verse 20.—“*Appointed unto death.*” Who, in their captivity, are experiencing so much affliction, that it is manifest their cruel enemies are desirous of destroying them utterly ; or, at least, of bringing them into such a low and pitiable state, as to blot out their name from among the nations of the earth.—*William Keatinge Clay.*

Verse 24.—“*O my God.*” The leaving out one word in a will may mar the estate and disappoint all a man’s hopes ; the want of this one word, *my* (God,) is the wicked man’s loss of heaven, and the dagger which will pierce his heart in hell to all eternity.

The degree of satisfaction in any good is according to the degree of our union to it, (hence our delight is greater in food than in clothes, and the saint’s joy is greater in God in the other world than in this, because the union is nearer ;) but where there is no property there is no union, therefore no complacency. The pronoun *my* is as much worth to the soul as the boundless portion. All our comfort is locked up in that private cabinet. Wine in the glass doth not cheer the heart, but taken down into the body. The property of the Psalmist’s in God was the mouth whereby he fed on those dainties which did so exceedingly delight him. No love potion was ever so effectual as this pronoun. When God saith to the soul, as Ahab to Benhadad “*Behold, I am thine, and all that I have,*” who can tell how the heart leaps for joy in, and expires almost in desires after him upon such news ! Others, like strangers, may behold his honour and excellencies, but this saint only, like the wife, enjoyeth him. Luther saith, Much religion lieth in pronouns. All our consolation, indeed, consisteth in this pronoun. It is the cup which holdeth all our cordial waters. I will undertake as bad as the devil is, he shall give the whole world, were it in his power, more freely than ever he offered it to Christ for his worship, for leave from God to pronounce those two words, MY GOD. All the joys of the believer are hung upon this one string ; break that asunder, and all is lost. I have sometimes thought how David rolls it as a lump of sugar under his tongue, as one loth to lose its sweetness too soon : “*I will love thee, O LORD, my strength, my buckler, and the horn of my salvation, and my high tower,*” Ps. xviii. 1, 2. This pronoun is the door at which the King of saints entereth into our hearts, with his whole train of delights and comforts.—*George Swinnoek.*

Verse 24.—“*Take me not away,*” is more exactly, *Take me not up,* with possible reference to the case of Elijah, “*taken up.*”—*Henry Cowles.*

Verse 24.—“*Take me not away in the midst of my days.*” The word is, “*Let me not ascend in the midst of my days,*” that is, before I have measured the usual course of life. Thus, *to ascend* is the same as to be *cut off* ; death cuts off the best from this world, and then they ascend to a better. The word *ascend* is conceived to have in it a double allusion ; first, to corn which is taken up by the hand of the reaper, and then laid down on the stubble. Secondly, unto the light of a candle, which as the candle spends, or as that which is the food of the fire is spending, ascends, and at last goes out and vanisheth.—*Joseph Caryl.*

Verse 24.—“*Thy years are throughout all generations.*” The Psalmist says of Christ, “*Thy years are throughout all generations,*” Ps. cii. 24 ; which Psalm the apostle quoteth of him, Heb. i. 10. Let us trace his existence punctually through all times. Let us go from point to point, and see how in particulars the Scriptures accord with it. The first joint of time we will begin that chronology of his existence withal is that instant afore he was to come into the world.

First, We find him to have existed just afore he came into the world, the instance of his conception, Heb. x. 5, in these words, “*Wherefore when he comes into the world, says he, A body hast thou prepared me.*” Ver. 7, “*Lo, I come to do thy will, O God.*” Here is a person distinct from God the Father, a *me*, an *I*, distinct also from that human nature he was to assume, which he terms a “*body prepared.*” . . . Therefore besides and afore that human nature there was a divine person that existed, that was not of this world, but that came into it, “*when he cometh into the world, he says,*” etc., to become a part of it, and be manifested in it.

Secondly, We find him to have existed afore John the Baptist, though John was conceived and born some months afore him. I note these several joints of time because the Scripture notes them, and hath set a special mark upon them : John i. 15. “*John bare witness of him, and cried, saying, This was he of whom I spake, He that cometh after me is preferred before me : for he was before me.*” This priority of

existence is that which John doth specially give witness to. And it is priority in existence, for he allegeth it as a reason why he was preferred afore him; "for he was before me."

Thirdly, We find him existing when all the prophets wrote and spake, 1 Pet. i. 11. The Spirit of Christ is said to have been in all the prophets, even as Paul, who came after Christ, also speaks, "You seek a proof of Christ speaking in me," 2 Cor. xiii. 3. And therefore he himself, whose Spirit it was, or whom he sent, must needs exist as a person sending him.

Fourthly, We find him existing in Moses' time, both because it was he that was tempted in the wilderness, "Neither let us tempt Christ as some of them also tempted, and were destroyed of serpents," 1 Cor. x. 9; and it was Christ that was the person said to be tempted by them, as well as now by us, as the word *καί* "as they also," evidently shows. And it points to that angel that was sent with them, Exod. xliii. 20, 21, in whom the name of God was, and who as God had the power of pardoning sins, ver. 21. See also Acts. vii. 35, Heb. xii. 26.

Fifthly, We find him existing in and afore Abraham's time: "Verily, verily, I say unto you, Before Abraham was, I am," John viii. 58.

Sixthly, We find him existing in the days of Noah, 1 Pet. iii. 19. He says of Christ, that he was "put to death in the flesh, but quickened in the Spirit." He evidently distinguisheth of two natures, his divine and human, even as Rom. i. 3, 4 and elsewhere; and then declares how by that divine nature, which he terms "Spirit," in which he was existent in Noah's times, he went and preached to those of the old world, whose souls are now in prison in hell. These words, "in Spirit," are not put to signify the subject of vivification; for such neither his soul nor Godhead could be said to be, for that is not quickened which was not dead; but for the principal and cause of his vivification, which his soul was not, but his Godhead was. And besides by his Spirit is not meant his soul, for that then must be supposed to have preached to souls in hell (where these are affirmed to be). Now, there is no preaching where there is no capacity of faith. But his meaning is, that those persons that lived in Noah's time, and were preached unto, their souls and spirits were now, when this was written, spirits in prison, that is, in hell. And therefore he also adds this word "sometimes": "who were sometimes disobedient in Noah's days." These words give us to understand that this preaching was performed by Noah ministerially, yet by Christ in Noah; who according to his divine person was extant, and went with him, as with Moses, and the church in the wilderness, and preached unto them.

Seventhly, He was extant at the beginning of the world, "In the beginning was the Word." In which words, there being no predicate or attribute affirmed of this word, the sentence or affirmation is terminated or ended merely with his existence: "he was," and he was then, "in the beginning." He says not that he was made in the beginning, but that "he was in the beginning." And it is in the beginning absolutely, without any limitation. And therefore Moses's beginning, Gen. i. 1, is meant, as also the words after show, "All was made by him that was made;" and, ver. 10, the world he came into was made by him. And as from the beginning is usually taken from the first times or infancy of the world; so then, when God began to create, then was our Christ. And this here is set in opposition (John i. 14) unto the time of his being made flesh, lest that should have been thought his beginning. And unto this accords that of Heb. i. 10, where, speaking of Christ, out of Psalm cii., "*Thou, Lord, in the beginning hast laid the foundations of the earth;*" so as to be sure he existed then. But further, in Psalm cii. 24, it runs thus, "*Thy years are throughout all generations.*" We have run, you see, through all generations since the creation, and have found his years throughout them all. And yet lest that should be taken only of the generations of this world, he adds (as Rivet expounds it), "*Before thou laidst the foundation of the earth.*"

Eighthly, So then we come to this, that he hath been before the creation, yea, from everlasting.

But, *Ninthly*, If you would have his eternity yet more express, see Heb. vii. 3, where mentioning Melchisedec, Christ's type, he renders him to have been his type in this—"Without father, without mother, without descent, having neither beginning of days, nor end of life; but made like unto the Son of God; abideth a priest continually." Where his meaning is to declare that, look what Melchisedec was *typicē*, or *umbratē*, in a shadow, that our Christ was really and substantially.

Lastly, Add to this that in Micah v. 2, "But thou, Bethlehem Ephratah, though thou be little among the thousands of Judah, yet out of thee shall he come forth

unto me that is to be ruler in Israel ; whose goings forth have been from of old, from everlasting ;" where he evidently speaks of two births Christ had, under the metaphor of going forth : one as man at Bethlehem in the fulness of time, the other as Son of God from everlasting. As Son of God, his goings forth (that is, his birth) are from everlasting. And it is termed, "goings forth," in the plural ; because it is *actus continuus*, and hath been every moment continued from everlasting. As the sun begets light and beams every moment, so God doth his Son. So then we have *two everlasting*s attributed to Christ's person ; one to come, Heb. i. 10, and another past, here in Micah v. 2. And so as of God himself it is said, Ps. xc. 2, "From everlasting to everlasting thou art God," so also of Christ.—*Condensed from T. Goodwin's Treatise on "The Knowledge of God the Father, and his Son Jesus Christ."*

Verse 25.—"Earth." "Heavens." He names here the most stable parts of the world, and the most beautiful parts of the creation, those that are freest from corruptibility and change, to illustrate thereby the immutability of God, that though the heavens and earth have a prerogative of fixedness above other parts of the world, and the creatures that reside below, the heavens remain the same as they were created, and the centre of the earth retains its fixedness, and are as beautiful and fresh in their age as they were in their youth many years ago, notwithstanding the change of the elements, fire and water being often turned into air, so that there may remain but little of that air which was first created, by reason of the continual transmutation ; yet this firmness of the earth and heavens is not to be regarded in comparison of the unmoveableness and fixedness of the being of God. As their beauty comes short of the glory of his being, so doth their firmness come short of his stability.—*Stephen Charnock.*

Verse 26.—"They shall perish." The greater the corruption, the vaster the destruction. Some think that the fiery deluge shall ascend no higher than did the watery. It may be the *earth* shall be burned, that is the worst guest at the table, the common sewer of all other creatures, but shall the heavens pass away ? It may be the airy heaven ; but shall the starry heaven where God hath printed such figures of his glory ? Yes, *cælum, elementum, terra*, when *ignis ubique ferox ruptis regnabit habenis*. The former deluge is called the world's winter, the next the world's summer. The one was with a cold and moist element, the other shall be with an element hot and dry. But what then shall become of the saints ? They shall be delivered out of all ; walking like those three servants in the midst of that great furnace, the burning world, and not be scorched, because there is one among them to deliver them, "the Son of God," Dan. iii. 25, their Redeemer. But shall all quite perish ? No, there is rather a mutation than an abolition of their substance. "*Thou shalt change them, and they shall be changed,*" not abolished. The concupiscence shall pass, not the essence ; the form, not the nature. In the altering of an old garment, we destroy it not, but trim it, refresh it, and make it seem new. They pass, they do not perish ; the dross is purged, the metal stays. The corrupt quality shall be renewed, and all things restored to that original beauty wherein they were created. "The end of all things is at hand," 1 Pet. iv. 7 : an end of us, an end of our days, an end of our ways, an end of our thoughts. If a man could say as Job's messenger, I alone am escaped, it were somewhat ; or might find an ark with Noah. But there is no ark to defend them from that heat, but only the bosom of Jesus Christ.—*Thomas Adams.*

Verse 26.—"Like a garment." The whole creation is as a garment, wherein the Lord shows his power clothed unto men ; whence in particular he is said to clothe himself with light as with a garment. And in it is the hiding of his power. Hid it is, as a man is hid with a garment ; not that he should not be seen at all, but that he should not be seen perfectly and as he is. It shows the man, and he is known by it ; but also it hides him, that he is not perfectly or fully seen. So are the works of creation unto God, he so far makes them his garment or clothing as in them to give out some instances of his power and wisdom ; but he is also hid in them, in that by them no creature can come to the full and perfect knowledge of him. Now, when this work shall cease, and God shall unclothe or unveil all his glory to his saints, and they shall know him perfectly, see him as he is, so far as a created nature is capable of that comprehension, then will he lay them aside and fold them up, at least as to that use, as easily as a man lays aside a garment that he will wear or use no more. This lies in the metaphor.—*John Owen.*

Verse 27.—"Thou art the same." The essence of God, with all the perfections of his nature, are pronounced the same, without any variation from eternity to eternity. So that the text doth not only assert the eternal duration of God, but his immutability in that duration; his eternity is signified in that expression, "thou shalt endure;" his immutability in this, "thou art the same." To endure, argues indeed this immutability as well as eternity; for what endures is not changed, and what is changed doth not endure. "*But thou art the same,*" אַתָּה הוּא, doth more fully signify it. He could not be the same if he could be changed into any other thing than what he is. The Psalmist therefore puts, not thou *has been* or *shall be*, but *thou art* the same, without any alteration; thou art the same, that is, the same God, the same in essence and nature, the same in will and purpose, thou dost change all other things as thou pleaseth; but thou art immutable in every respect, and receivest no shadow of change, though never so light and small. The Psalmist here alludes to the name *Jehovah, I am*, and doth not only ascribe immutability to God, but exclude everything else from partaking in that perfection.—*Stephen Charnock.*

Verse 28.—"The children of thy servants shall continue." In what sense is "children" taken? Either the children of their flesh, or of their faith. Some say the children of the same faith with the godly teachers and servants of the Lord, begotten by them to God, as noting the perpetuity of the church, who shall in every age bring forth children to God. 'Tis the comfort of God's people to see a young brood growing up to continue his remembrance in the world, that when they die religion shall not die with them, nor the succession of the church be interrupted. This sense is not altogether incongruous; but rather I think the children of their body are here intended; it being a blessing often promised: see the next Psalm, verse 17. "The mercy of the LORD is from everlasting to everlasting upon them that fear him, and his righteousness unto children's children," "*Shall continue;*" "*shall be established.*" In what sense is it spoken? Some think only *pro more jæderis*, according to the fashion of that covenant which the people of God were then under, when eternity was but more darkly revealed and shadowed out, either by long life, or the continuance of their name in their posterity, which was a kind of literal immortality. Clearly such a kind of regard is had, as appeareth by that which you find in Ps. xxxvii. 28. "*The Lord loveth judgment, and forsaketh not his saints; they are preserved for ever.*" How? since they die as others do: mark the antithesis, and that will explain it. "*They are preserved for ever: but the seed of the wicked shall be cut off.*" They are preserved in their posterity. Children are but the parents multiplied, and the parent continued; 'tis *nodosa æternitas*; when the father's life is run out to the last, there is a knot tied, and the line is still continued by the child. I confess, temporal blessings, such as long life, and the promise of a happy posterity, are more visible in the eye of that dispensation of the covenant; but yet God still taketh care for the children of his people, and many promises run that way that belong to the gospel-administration, and still God's service is the surest way to establish a family, as sin is the ready way to root it out. And if it doth not always fall out accordingly, yet for the most part it doth; and we are no competent judges of God's dispensations in this kind, because we see Providence by pieces, and have not the skill to set them together; but at the day of judgment, when the whole contexture of God's dealings is laid before us, we shall clearly understand how the children of his servants continue, and their seed is established.—*Thomas Manton.*

Verse 28.—O the folly of the world, that seeks to make perpetuities to their houses by devises in the law, which may perhaps reach to continue their estates, but can it reach to continue their seed? It may entail lands to their heirs, but can it entail heirs to their lands? No, God knows! This is a perpetuity of only God's making, a privilege of only God's servants: for "*The children of his servants shall continue, and their seed shall be established before him;*" but that any others shall continue is no part of David's warrant.—*Sir R. Baker.*

HINTS TO PREACHERS.

Title.—I. Afflicted men may pray. II. Afflicted men should pray even when overwhelmed. III. Afflicted men can pray—for what is wanted is a pouring out of their complaint, not an oratorical display. IV. Afflicted men are accepted in prayer—for this prayer is placed on record.

Verses 1, 2.—Five steps to the mercy-seat. The Psalmist prays for, I. Audience: "Hear my prayer." II. Access: "Let my cry come before thee." III. Unveiling: "Hide not thy face." IV. An intent ear: "Incline thine ear." V. Answer.—*C. Davis*.

Verses 1, 17, 19, 20.—An interesting discourse may be founded upon these passages. I. The Lord entreated to hear—verse 1. II. The Promise given that he will hear—verse 17. III. The Record that the Lord has heard—verses 19 and 20.

Verse 2.—I. Prayer in trouble is most needed. II. Prayer in trouble is most heeded. III. Prayer in trouble is most speeded: "Answer me speedily." Or, I. Prayer in trouble: "In the day," etc. II. The prayer of trouble: "Hide not thy face;" not remove the trial, but be with me in it. A fiery furnace is a paradise when God is with us there.—*G. R.*

Verse 2 (first clause).—He deprecates the loss of the divine countenance when under trouble. I. That would intensify it a thousandfold. II. That would deprive him of strength to bear the trouble. III. That would prevent his acting so as to glorify God in the trouble. IV. That might injure the result of the trouble.

Verse 2 (last clause).—I. We often need to be answered speedily. II. God can so answer. III. God has so answered. IV. God has promised so to answer.

Verses 3—11.—I. The causes of grief. 1. The brevity of life. *v.* 3. 2. Bodily pain. *v.* 3. 3. Dejection of spirit. *v.* 4, 5. 4. Solitariness. *v.* 6, 7. 5. Reproach. *v.* 8. 6. Humiliation. *v.* 9. 7. The hidings of God's countenance. *v.* 10. 8. Wasting away. *v.* 11. II. The eloquence of grief. 1. The brevity of life is as vanishing "smoke." 2. Bodily pain is fire in the bones. 3. Dejection of spirit is "withered grass." Who can eat when the heart is sad? 4. Solitariness is like "The pelican in the wilderness, the owl in the desert, and the sparrow upon the house top." 5. Reproach is being surrounded by madmen—"they that are mad." 6. Humiliation is "eating ashes like bread," and "drinking tears." 7. The hidings of God's countenance is lifting up in order to be cast down. 8. Wasting away is a shadow declining and grass withering.—*G. R.*

Verse 4.—Unbelieving sorrow makes us forget to use proper means for our support. I. We forget the promises. II. Forget the past and its experiences. III. Forget the Lord Jesus, our life. IV. Forget the everlasting love of God. This leads to weakness, faintness, etc., and is to be avoided.

Verse 6.—This as a text, together with *ciii.* 5, makes an interesting contrast, and gives scope for much experimental teaching.

Verse 7.—The evils and benefits of solitude; when it may be sought, and when it becomes a folly. Or, the mournful watcher—alone, outside the pale of communion, insignificant, wishful for fellowship, set apart to watch.

Verse 9.—The sorrows of the saints—their number, bitterness, sources, correctives, influences, and consolations.

Verse 10.—I. The trial of trials—*thine* indignation and *thy* wrath. II. The aggravation of that trial—former favour, "thou hast lifted me up," etc. III. The best behaviour under it: see former verse, and verses 12 and 13.

Verse 10 (last clause).—The prosperity of a church or an individual often followed by declension; worldly aggrandisement frequently succeeded by affliction; great joy in the Lord very generally succeeded by trial.

Verses 11, 12.—*I* and *Thou*, or the notable contrast. I. *I*: my days are like a shadow, 1. Because it is unsubstantial; because it partakes of the nature of the darkness which is to absorb it; because the longer it becomes the briefer its continuance. 2. I am like grass cut down by the scythe; scorched by drought. II. *Thou*. Lord. Ever enduring. Ever memorable. Ever the study of passing generations of men.—*C. D.*

Verse 13.—I. Zion often needs restoration. It needs "mercy." II. Its restoration is certain: "Thou shalt arise," etc. III. The seasons of its restoration are determined. There is a "time" to favour her; a "set" time. IV. Intimations of those coming seasons are often given: "The time, the set time, is come."—*G. R.*

Verses 13, 14.—I. Visitation expected. II. Predestination relied upon. III.

Evidence observed. IV. Enquiry suggested—Do we take pleasure in her stones? etc.

Verses 13, 14.—The interest of the Lord's people in the concerns of Zion one of the surest signs of her returning prosperity.

Verse 15.—The inward prosperity of the church essential to her power in the world.

Verse 16.—God is Zion's purchaser, architect, builder, inhabitant, Lord. I. Zion built up. Conversions frequent; confessions numerous; union firm; edification solid; missions extended. II. God glorified. In its very foundation; by its ministry; by difficulties and enemies; by poor workers, and poor materials; and even by our failures. III. Hope excited. Because we may expect the Lord to glorify himself. IV. Inquiry suggested. Am I concerned, as built, or building? not merely doctrinally, but experimentally?

Verse 17.—I. The destitute pray. II. They pray most. III. They pray best. IV. They pray most effectually. Or the surest way to succeed in prayer is to pray as the destitute; show the reason of this.

Verse 18.—I. A memorial. II. A magnificat.—*W. Durban.*

Verses 18—21.—I. Misery in extremis. II. Divinity observant. III. Deity actively assisting. IV. Glory consequently published.

Verses 19—22.—I. The notice which God takes of the world, *v.* 19. 1. The place from which he beholds it: "from heaven," not from an earthly point of view. 2. The character in which he beholds it; "from the height of his sanctuary," from the mercy-seat. II. What attracts his notice most in the world. The groaning of the prisoner and of those appointed to death. III. The purpose for which he notices them. "To loose," etc.; "to declare," etc. 1. For human comfort. 2. For his own glory. IV. When his notice is thus fixed upon the earth. "When," etc., *v.* 22.—*G. R.*

Verse 23.—For the sick. I. Submission—The Lord sent the trial—"He weakeneth," etc. II. Service—exonerated from some work, he now requires of me patience, earnestness, etc. III. Preparation—for going home. IV. Prayer—for others to occupy my place. V. Expectation—I shall soon be in heaven, now that my days are shortened.

Verse 24.—I. *The prayer.* "Take me not away," etc. 1. Not in the midst of life, is the prayer of some. 2. Not in the midst of worldly prosperity, is the prayer of many, for the sake of those dependent upon them. 3. Not in the midst of spiritual growth, is the prayer of not a few: "Oh spare me, that I may recover strength," etc. 4. Not in the midst of Christian work and usefulness, is the prayer of others. II. *The plea.* "Thy years," etc.; years are plentiful with thee, therefore to give me longer days will be an easy gift—and thine own are throughout all generations.—*G. R.*

Verses 25—27.—I. The unchangeableness of God amidst past changes: "of old," etc. 1. He was the same before as after he had laid the foundations of the earth. 2. He was the same after as before. II. The unchangeableness of God amidst future changes. "They shall perish," etc. 1. The same before they perish as after. 2. After as before. III. The unchangeableness of God in the past and the future. "Thou art the same," etc.—*G. R.*

Verses 26, 27.—I. How far God may change—only in his garments, or outward manifestations of creation and providence. II. Wherein he cannot change—his nature, attributes, covenant, love, etc. III. The comfortable truths which may be safely inferred, or which gather support from this fact.

Verses 26, 27.—I. The material universe of God. 1. No more to him than a garment to the wearer. 2. Ever waxing old, but he the same. 3. Soon to be changed, and left to perish, but of his years no end. II. Our relation to each—1. Let us never love the dress more than the wearer. 2. Nor trust more in the changeable than in the abiding. 3. Nor live for that which will die out.

Verse 28.—The true apostolical succession. I. There always will be saints. II. They will frequently be the seed of the saints after the flesh. III. They will always be the spiritual seed of the godly, for God converts one by means of another. IV. We should order our efforts with an eye to the church's future.