

PSALM CXXXIV.

TITLE.—A Song of Degrees. *We have now reached the last of the Gradual Psalms. The Pilgrims are going home, and are singing the last song in their Psalter. They leave early in the morning, before the day has fully commenced, for the journey is long for many of them. While yet the night lingers they are on the move. As soon as they are outside the gates they see the guards upon the temple wall, and the lamps shining from the windows of the chambers which surround the sanctuary; therefore, moved by the sight, they chant a farewell to the perpetual attendants upon the holy shrine. Their parting exhortation arouses the priests to pronounce upon them a blessing out of the holy place: this benediction is contained in the third verse. The priests as good as say, "You have desired us to bless the Lord, and now we pray the Lord to bless you."*

The Psalm teaches us to pray for those who are continually ministering before the Lord, and it invites all ministers to pronounce benedictions upon their loving and prayerful people.

EXPOSITION.

BEHOLD, bless ye the LORD, all ye servants of the LORD, which by night stand in the house of the LORD.

2 Lift up your hands *in* the sanctuary, and bless the LORD.

3 The LORD that made heaven and earth bless thee out of Zion.

1. "*Behold.*" By this call the pilgrims bespeak the attention of the night-watch. They shout to them—Behold! The retiring pilgrims stir up the holy brotherhood of those who are appointed to keep the watch of the house of the Lord. Let them look around them upon the holy place, and everywhere "behold" reasons for sacred praise. Let them look above them at night and magnify him that made heaven and earth, and lighted the one with stars and the other with his love. Let them see to it that their hallelujahs never come to an end. Their departing brethren arouse them with the shrill cry of "Behold!" Behold!—see, take care, be on the watch, diligently mind your work, and incessantly adore and bless Jehovah's name.

"*Bless ye the LORD.*" Think well of Jehovah, and speak well of him. Adore him with reverence, draw near to him with love, delight in him with exultation. Be not content with praise, such as all his works render to him; but, as his saints, see that ye "bless" him. He blesses you; therefore, be zealous to bless him. The word "bless" is the characteristic word of the Psalm. The first two verses stir us up to bless Jehovah, and in the last verse Jehovah's blessing is invoked upon the people. Oh to abound in blessing! May *blessed* and *blessing* be the two words which describe our lives. Let others flatter their fellows, or bless their stars, or praise themselves; as for us, we will bless Jehovah, from whom all blessings flow. "*All ye servants of the LORD.*" It is your office to bless him; take care that you lead the way therein. Servants should speak well of their masters. Not one of you should serve him as of compulsion, but all should bless him while you serve him; yea, bless him for permitting you to serve him, fitting you to serve him, and accepting your service. To be a servant of Jehovah is an incalculable honour, a blessing beyond all estimate. To be a servant in his temple, a domestic in his house, is even more a delight and a glory: if those who are ever with the Lord, and dwell in his own temple, do not bless the Lord, who will? "*Which by night stand in the house of the LORD.*" We can well understand how the holy pilgrims half envied those consecrated ones who guarded the temple, and attended to the necessary offices thereof through the hours of night. To the silence and solemnity of night there was added the awful glory of the place where Jehovah had ordained that his worship should be celebrated; blessed were the priests and Levites who were ordained to a service so sublime. That these should bless the Lord throughout

their nightly vigils was most fitting: the people would have them mark this, and never fail in the duty. They were not to move about like so many machines, but to put their hearts into all their duties, and worship spiritually in the whole course of their duty. It would be well to watch, but better still to be "watching unto prayer" and praise.

When night settles down on a church the Lord has his watchers and holy ones still guarding his truth, and these must not be discouraged, but must bless the Lord even when the darkest hours draw on. Be it ours to cheer them, and lay upon them this charge—to bless the Lord at all times, and let his praise be continually in their mouths.

2. "*Lift up your hands in the sanctuary.*" In the holy place they must be busy, full of strength, wide-awake, energetic, and moved with holy ardour. Hands, heart, and every other part of their manhood must be upraised, elevated, and consecrated to the adoring service of the Lord. As the angels praise God day without night, so must the angels of the churches be instant in season and out of season. "*And bless the LORD.*" This is their main business. They are to bless men by their teaching, but they must yet more bless Jehovah with their worship. Too often men look at public worship only from the side of its usefulness to the people; but the other matter is of even higher importance: we must see to it that the Lord God is adored, extolled, and had in reverence. For a second time the word "bless" is used, and applied to Jehovah. Bless the Lord, O my soul, and let every other soul bless him. There will be no drowsiness about even midnight devotion if the heart is set upon blessing God in Christ Jesus, which is the gospel translation of God in the sanctuary.

3. This last verse is the answer from the temple of the pilgrims preparing to depart as the day breaks. It is the ancient blessing of the high-priest condensed, and poured forth upon each individual pilgrim. "*The LORD that made heaven and earth bless thee out of Zion.*" Ye are scattering and going to your homes one by one; may the benediction come upon you one by one. You have been up to Jehovah's city and temple at his bidding; return each one with such a benediction as only he can give—divine, infinite, effectual, eternal. You are not going away from Jehovah's works or glories, for he made the heaven above you and the earth on which you dwell. He is your Creator, and he can bless you with untold mercies; he can create joy and peace in your hearts, and make for you a new heaven and a new earth. May the Maker of all things make you to abound in blessings.

The benediction comes from the City of the Great King, from his appointed ministers, by virtue of his covenant, and so it is said to be "out of Zion." To this day the Lord blesses each one of his people through his church, his gospel, and the ordinances of his house. It is in communion with the saints that we receive untold benisons. May each one of us obtain yet more of the blessing which cometh from the Lord alone. Zion cannot bless us; the holiest ministers can only wish us a blessing; but Jehovah can and will bless each one of his waiting people. So may it be at this good hour. Do we desire it? Let us then bless the Lord ourselves. Let us do it a second time. Then we may confidently hope that the third time we think of blessing we shall find ourselves conscious receivers of it from the Ever-blessed One. Amen.

EXPLANATORY NOTES AND QUAIN T SAYINGS.

Whole Psalm.—It is a beautiful little ode, equally full of sublimity and simplicity. It is commonly supposed to be the work of David. With what admiration should we contemplate the man whose zeal in the cause of religion thus urged him to embrace every opportunity that could occur to him, among the lowest as well as the highest ranks of life, of promoting the praise and glory of his Creator; now composing penitential hymns for his own closet; now leading the temple service in national eulogies of the sublimest pitch to which human language can reach; and now descending to the class of the watchman and patrol of the temple and the city, and tuning their lips to a reverential utterance of the name and the

service of God!—*John Mason Good* (1764—1827), in “*An Historical Outline of the Book of Psalms.*”

Whole Psalm.—This Psalm consists of a greeting, verses 1, 2, and the reply thereto. The greeting is addressed to those priests and Levites who have the night-watch in the Temple; and this antiphon is purposely placed at the end of the collection of Songs of Degrees in order to take the place of a final beracha.* In this sense Luther styles the Psalm *epiphonema superiorum*.† It is also in other respects an appropriate finale.—*Franz Delitzsch.*

Whole Psalm.—The last cloud of smoke from the evening sacrifice has mixed with the blue sky, the last note of the evening hymn has died away on the ear. The watch is being set for the night. The twenty-four Levites, the three priests, and the captain of the guard, whose duty it was to keep ward from sunset to sunrise over the hallowed precincts, are already at their several posts, and the multitude are retiring through the gates, which will soon be shut, to many of them to open no more. But they cannot depart without one last expression of the piety that fills their hearts; and turning to the watchers on tower and battlement, they address them in holy song, in what was at once a brotherly admonition and a touching prayer: “*Behold, bless ye the LORD, all ye servants of the LORD, which by night stand in the house of the LORD. Lift up your hands in the sanctuary, and bless the LORD.*” The pious guard are not unprepared for the appeal, and from their lofty heights, in words that float over the peopled city and down into the quiet valley of the Kedron, like the melody of angels, they respond to each worshipper who thus addressed them with a benedictory farewell: “*The LORD bless thee out of Zion, even he who made heaven and earth.*”—*Robert Nisbet.*

Whole Psalm.—The tabernacle and temple were served by priests during the night as well as the day. Those priests renewed the altar fire, fed the lamps, and guarded the sacred structure from intrusion and from plunder. The Psalm before us was prepared for the priests who served the sacred place by night. They were in danger of slumbering; and they were in danger of idle reverie. Oh, how much time is wasted in mere reverie—in letting thought wander, and wander, and wander! The priests were in danger, we say, of slumbering, of idle reverie, of vain thoughts, of useless meditation, and of profitless talk; and therefore it is written,—“*Behold, bless ye the LORD, all ye servants of the LORD, which by night stand in the house of the LORD.*” Is it your duty to spend the night in watching? then spend the night in worship. Do not let the time of watching be idle, wasted time; but when others are slumbering and sleeping, and you are necessarily watchful, sustain the praises of God’s house; let there be praise in Zion—still praise by night as well as by day! “*Lift up your hands in the sanctuary, and bless the LORD.*”

We may suppose these words to be addressed to the sacred sentinels, by the head of their course, or by the captain of the guard, or even by the high priest. We can imagine the captain of the guard coming in during the night watches, and saying to the priests who were guarding the temple, “*Behold, bless ye the LORD, all ye servants of the LORD, which by night stand in the house of the LORD.*” Or we could imagine the high priests, when the watch was set for the first part of the night, going to the priests who were under his control, and addressing to them these same soul-stirring words. Now our text is the response of these sacred sentinels. As they listened to the captain of the guard, or to the high priest, telling them to worship by night in the courts of the Lord—to lift up their hands in the sanctuary, and bless the Lord—they answered him, “*The LORD that made heaven and earth bless thee out of Zion.*” So that here you have brought before you the interesting and instructive subject of mutual benediction—the saints blessing each other.—*Samuel Martin*, 1817—1878.

Verse 1.—The Targum explains the first verse of the Temple watch. “The custom in the Second Temple appears to have been this. After midnight the chief of the door-keepers took the key of the inner Temple, and went with some of the priests through the small postern of the Fire Gate. In the inner court this watch divided itself into two companies, each carrying a burning torch; one company turned west, the other east, and so they compassed the court to see whether all

* Blessing.

† “I take this Psalm to be a conclusion of those things which were spoken of before.”—*Luther.*

were in readiness for the Temple service on the following morning. In the bake-house, where the *Mincha* ('meat-offering') of the High Priest was baked, they met with the cry, 'All well.' Meanwhile the rest of the priests arose, bathed themselves, and put on their garments. They then went into the stone chamber (one half of which was the hall of session of the Sanhedrim), and there, under the superintendence of the officer who gave the watchword, and one of the Sanhedrim, surrounded by the priests clad in their robes of office, their several duties for the coming day were assigned to each of the priests by lot. Luke i. 9.—*J. J. Stewart Peroune.*

Verse 1.—"Behold." The Psalm begins with the demonstrative adverb *Behold!* setting the matter of their duty before their eyes, for they were to be stimulated to devotion by looking constantly to the Temple. We are to notice the Psalmist's design in urging the duty of praise so earnestly upon them. Many of the Levites, through the tendency which there is in all men to abuse ceremonies, considered that nothing more was necessary than standing idly in the Temple, and thus overlooked the principal part of their duty. The Psalmist would show that merely to keep nightly watch over the Temple, kindle the lamps, and superintend the sacrifices, was of no importance, unless they served God spiritually, and referred all outward ceremonies to that which must be considered the main sacrifice—the celebration of God's praises. You may think it a very laborious service, as if he had said, to stand at watch in the Temple, while others sleep in their own houses; but the worship which God requires is something more excellent than this, and demands of you to sing his praises before all the people.—*John Calvin.*

Verse 1.—"Behold." The first word in this verse, "*Behold,*" seemeth to point at the reasons which the priests in the Temple had to bless Jehovah; as if it had been said, Behold, the house of God is built, the holy services are appointed, and the Lord hath given you rest from your enemies, that you may serve him acceptably; set about it, therefore, with gratitude and alacrity. We read (1 Chron. ix. 33) that the Levitical singers were "employed in their work day and night"; to the end, doubtless, that the earthly sanctuary might bear some resemblance to that above, where St. John tells us, the redeemed "are before the throne of God, and serve him day and night in his temple": Rev. vii. 15.—*George Horne.*

Verse 1.—"Behold, bless ye the LORD, all ye servants of the LORD." From the exhortation to the Lord's ministers, learn, that the public worship of God is to be carefully looked unto; and all men, but especially ministers, had need to be stirred up to take heed to themselves, and to the work of God's public worship, when they go about it; for so much doth "*behold*" in this place import.—*David Dickson.*

Verse 1.—"By night." Even by night the Lord is to be remembered, and his praises are to be rehearsed.—*Martin Geier, 1614—1681.*

Verse 1.—"Stand in the house of the LORD." The Rabbins say, that the high priest only sat in the sanctuary (as did Eli, 1 Sam. i. 9); the rest stood, as ready pressed to do their office.—*John Trapp.*

Verse 1.—"Which stand in the house of the LORD." You who have now a permanent house, and no longer, like pilgrims, have to dwell in tents.—*Robert Bellarmine.*

Verse 1.—"Which stand in the house of the LORD." Let not this your frequent being in his presence breed in you contempt; as the saying is, "Too much familiarity breedeth contempt;" but bless him always, acknowledge, and with reverence praise his excellency.—*John Mayer, 1653.*

Verse 2.—"Lift up your hands," etc. The lifting up of the hands was a gesture in prayer, it was an intimation of their expectation of receiving blessings from the Lord, and it was also an acknowledgment of their having received the same.—*Samuel Eyles Pierce.*

Verse 2.—"In the sanctuary." The Hebrew word signifying holiness as well as the holy place may here be taken in the former sense, the latter having been sufficiently expressed (verse 1) by "the house of the Lord" The priests (which are here spoken to) before their officiating, which is here expressed by *lifting up their hands*, were obliged to wash their hands.—*Henry Hammond.*

Verse 3.—"The LORD that made heaven and earth bless thee out of Zion." He doth not say, the Lord that made the earth bless thee out of heaven; nor, the Lord that made heaven bless thee out of heaven; but "*bless thee out of Zion.*" As

if he would teach us that all blessings come as immediately and primarily from heaven, so mediately and secondarily from *Zion*, where the Temple stood. If ever, therefore, we would have blessings outward, inward, private, public, secular, spiritual; if ever we would have blessing in our estate, blessing in our land, blessing in our souls, we must pray for it, and pray for it here, in *Zion*, in God's house: for from the piety there exercised all blessings flow, as from a fountain that can never be drawn dry.—*Abraham Wright*.

Verse 3.—"The LORD that made heaven and earth," etc. The priestly benediction brings God before us in a twofold character. He is described first as the Creator of the universe. He is described, in the second place, as dwelling "in *Zion*." In the first aspect, he is represented as the God of nature; in the second, as the God of grace. When I contemplate him as the Creator of the universe, there is abundant proof that he can bless me. When I contemplate him as dwelling in the Church, there is abundant proof that he will bless me. Both of these elements are essential to our faith.—*N. M'Michael*.

Verse 3.—"The LORD that made heaven and earth," etc. As the priests were called upon to bless God in behalf of the people, so here they bless the people in behalf of God. Between the verses we may suppose the previous request to be complied with. The priests, having blessed God, turn and bless the people. The obvious allusion to the sacerdotal blessing (*Num. vi. 23—27*), favours the optative construction of this verse, which really includes a prediction—the Lord will bless thee.—*Joseph Addison Alexander*.

Verse 3.—"The LORD bless thee." All men lie under the curse, till God brings them into the fellowship of his church, and pronounce them blessed by his word, as "The LORD bless thee" doth import.—*David Dickson*.

Verse 3.—"The LORD bless thee out of *Zion*." The Church is the conservator of Divine revelation; the Church is the offerer on earth of true worship; it consists of a company of priests, a royal priesthood, part of whose mission is "to offer up spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God by Jesus Christ." The Church is the heritor of the covenants. God's covenants are made with his Church, and his promises are addressed chiefly to his Church. The Church is the scene of special Divine ministrations, God shows himself to his Church as he does not to that which is called the world. It is also the scene of special heavenly influences: and in a sense next to that in which God is said to reside in heaven, the Church is the dwelling-place of the Most High. Now, what is it to be *blessed out of Zion*? It is surely to be blessed with *Zion's* blessings, and to have *Zion's* endowments and gifts rendered sources of advantage and profit to us.—*Samuel Martin*.

Verse 3.—"Bless thee." The singular instead of the plural "bless you," because the words are taken from the form used by the High Priest in blessing the people. *Num. vi. 24.*—*J. J. Stewart Perowne*.

Verse 3.—"Bless thee." It is addressed to the church as one person, and to each individual in this united, unit-like church.—*Franz Delitzsch*.

HINTS TO PREACHERS.

Whole Psalm.—There are two things in this Psalm. I. Our blessing God: verses 1, 2. 1. How? By gratitude, by love, by obedience, by prayer, by praise. 2. Where? "In the house of the Lord," "in the sanctuary." 3. When? Not in the day merely, but at night. Some of old spent the whole night, others part of the night, in the temple, praising God. As Christ spent whole nights in prayer for his people, they should not think it too much occasionally to spend whole nights in praise of him. Evening services should not be neglected on the Sabbath, nor on other days of the week.

II. God blessing us: verse 3. 1. The persons blessed: "bless thee"—every one who blesses him. 2. The condition: "out of *Zion*." In the fulfilment of religious duties, not in the neglect of them. 3. The blessing itself: of the Lord. They are blessed whom he blesses.—*G. R.*

Whole Psalm.—I. God—Jehovah—the fountain of blessing. II. The heavens

and the earth, evidence of divine capacity to bless. III. The church, a channel of blessing. IV. The saints, the means of spreading blessing, through the spirit of blessing. V. The riches involved in the divine benediction.—*Samuel Martin.*

Whole Psalm.—I. Unique service: temple watching, night-sentinelship. II. Sublime society: the awful things of the sanctuary. III. Holy uplifting: hands, hearts, eyes. IV. Praise in the darkness heard far up in the light. V. Response from the stars fulfilling the prayer: "The Creator Lord bless *thee*."—*W. B. H.*

Verse 1.—I. Night settles on the holy place: dark periods of church story. II. But God has his guards: Wycliffe and his band watching for the Reformation; Waldenses, etc. Never a night so dark but God is praised and served. III. Be it night or day, let the Levites fulfil their courses.—*W. B. H.*

Verse 1.—The Lord's servants exhorted to be, 1. Devout and joyful in their service. Sing at your work, though it be in the dark. 2. Zealous to employ every season of service aright. "By night," as by day, "bless the Lord." 3. Careful to avoid all hindrances to devotion in their service. When tempted to indolence and drowsiness, say—

"Wake, and lift up thyself, my heart,
And with the angels bear thy part,
Who all night long, unwearied, sing
High praise to the Eternal King."

W. H. J. P.

Verse 1.—Directions for worship. I. It should be with great care: "Behold." II. With grateful joy: "Bless ye the Lord." III. Unanimously: "all ye." IV. With holy reverence, as by "servants of the Lord." V. With unflagging constancy: "stand by night."

Verse 1.—"Ye that stand by night." The night-watchman of the Lord's house, their value, their obscurity, their danger-slumber, their consolation, their dignity, their reward.

Verse 2.—Ingredients of worship. I. Uplifted hands. Energy, courage, prayer, aspiration. II. Uplifted hearts. Thank, praise, adore, and love the Lord.

Verse 3.—The Divine Benediction. I. From the Creator: ample, new, varied, boundless, enduring—all illustrated by his making heaven and earth. II. From the Redeemer: blessings most needful, rich, effectual, abiding,—all illustrated and guaranteed by his dwelling among men, purchasing a church, building an abode, revealing his glory, reigning on his throne