

Exhortation and Encouragement.



*An Address by S. J. B. Carter on
Psalm xxxvii.*

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EXHORTATION AND ENCOURAGEMENT.

(AN ADDRESS BY S. J. B. CARTER ON
PSALM LXXVII.)

THIS psalm is full of exhortation and encouragement. It is unique among the psalms in this respect—it has in it no prayer and no praise, though both doubtless flow from it. It is, of course, the language of the Jewish remnant in a day yet to come. But there is a moral identity in every age between those who would be loyal and true to God. Thus we get here three men spoken about—the *righteous* man (ver. 16), the *good*, or *gracious* man (ver. 23), and the *perfect* man (ver. 37). Yet, viewing them repre-

sentatively, they are all one and the same man who display these three distinct remnant features.

“A little that a *righteous* man hath is better than the riches of many wicked.” A righteous man who is only that does not appeal to us much. No fault can be found in his conduct, for he is the Pharisee all over. If he owes a hundred pounds and a farthing he will pay the farthing as well as the century. And if he is owed it, he will exact the same. He is a man we may respect and fear, but we find him hard to love. It is the *good* man—the man of grace—we love. “Scarcely for a righteous man will one die,” says Paul, “yet peradventure for a good man some would even dare to die.”

The Lord has a special care over the good man, even as the good man cares for others. “The steps of a good man are ordered by the Lord :

and he delighteth in his way." A good man disperses to the poor, and has a kind word to and for everybody, and is charitable and lenient in his judgment, even of his enemies. Yet his goodness must be combined with righteousness, otherwise his very affections, or emotions, may lead him off the path of uprightness.

When we get *righteousness* and *grace* (or goodness) together in a man, I think we get "the *perfect* man." "Mark the perfect man, and behold the upright: for the end of that man is peace." The perfect man is not perfect in himself—only one Man was that—but perfect in the object before his heart. He can say, "I count all things but loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord." Says the apostle: "Let us therefore, as many as be perfect, be thus minded."

David, Jehovah describes as "a

man after mine own heart," yet he sinned grievously. But David never made an idol—God was ever supreme in his affections. He could say, whatever his outward delinquencies, "I will walk within my house with a perfect heart." God looks at our hearts and estimates what comes out by what He finds there. Spiritual perfection, or maturity, is not reached intellectually, but in the affections. The aim of all true ministry is that we should be "made perfect in love." (1 John iv. 18.) The perfect man is among John's fathers in the family of God—his heart is full of Christ and he wants and lives nothing else besides Christ.

We said that this psalm is full of exhortation and encouragement. The remnant speak often to one another in accents of counsel and comfort; and so can we! The first word of exhortation is a warning against *fret-*

ting. It is thrice repeated, for we are very liable to fret. How prone we are to fret ! How much there is to fret about ! How foolish it is to fret ! A fretful spirit is a fainting and faithless one. When we fret we writhe and wriggle under what we cannot alter. Instead of being subject we sometimes become savage !

We may fret because things in this world are so wrong. So the first exhortation is : “ Fret not thyself because of evildoers, neither be thou envious against the workers of iniquity.” How many of those who love the Lord are fretfully trying to better the world-system which put Him to death, instead of recognising that by that very act it has proved itself to be incorrigible. The world is a crucified system (Gal. vi. 14) for faith and for God ; it has been judged and ended in the death of Christ. (Heb. ix. 26.) “ The world kingdoms ” will yet be

His, and the kingdom of heaven, though "in mystery," is still here, and loyal subjects are still in it. But it is a kingdom without a King—a King who has been cast out, but received up into heaven.

Some one has said that the very preaching of the kingdom—the rights of Christ—is symptomatic of the rebellious state it is in. But the King is coming to set things right, and thus in patience and not in fretfulness we can possess our souls. (Psa. ii.) When John entered heaven—"behold, a throne stood,"^s unmoved and unmovable, and that gave him rest, as it gives us rest. (Rev. iv. 1, 2; Psa. xi. 3, 4.) The throne of God's earthly government nothing can shake.

Oh! ye who are fretting about the wars, turmoils and miseries abroad, reach up to that throne and rest in "him who worketh all things after

the counsel of his own will." (Eph. i. 7-12, read it.)

But, again, we may fret because things seem all wrong in the *church*. Hence the word: "Fret not thyself because of him who prospereth in his way, because of the man who bringeth wicked devices to pass." This man, the Antichrist, is in principle in evidence everywhere in that which now bears the name of Christ. The antichristian spirit is rampant in Christendom, and everything spells disruption and disorder.

Well-meant endeavours are made, methods and means are employed by clerics and divines and sincere souls to bring chaos into order and unity! But the rightly-instructed believer knows that "evil men and seducers shall wax worse and worse." We cannot set things right in the "great house," but we can set ourselves right by setting ourselves apart

from its evils and pursuing "righteousness, faith, love, peace." Fretfulness will not help, but faithfulness does !

But yet again the Spirit of Christ in the "remnant" warns against fretting ourselves about *ourselves* : "Fret not *thyself*, it only tendeth to evil doing" (margin). We may fret ourselves because our local company is not getting on well, or because we see little or no results in gospel work, or because in our souls we are not prospering. Beloved brethren, "it only tendeth to evil doing." We feel we must do something to better matters, and what we do makes things worse because it is done in a wrong spirit. We fail to judge ourselves as utterly good for nothing, and thus we become more and more self-centred and unhappy. Instead of fretting about ourselves, let us look to God to lift us above ourselves,

that we may find in Him our rest, our resource and our reward.

Thus we see that in order to be perfectly happy we must be irretrievably disappointed three times—with the *world*, with the *church*, and finally and most of all with *ourselves*. Then we can look up to God and sing as we never sang before :

“ No good in creatures can be found,

All, all is found in Thee :

We must have all things and abound

. Through Thy sufficiency.”

Now we come to what is positive. How simple, how needful, is this fourfold exhortation combined with encouragement!—“ Trust,” “ Delight,” “ Commit,” “ Rest.”

Why does it say, “ Trust in the Lord,” and immediately add, “ and do good ” ? Is it not because we sometimes hesitate to do good because we know that doing it entails suffering ? Never mind the consequences !

“Do good,” and leave the results with God. The path of obedience is the path of blessing. The land of promise, the inheritance, is worth suffering for. “So shalt thou dwell in the land, and shalt feed on faithfulness.” (Margin.) Faithfulness ever provides abundant food—what it gives satisfies. Then we turn from what is given to the blessed Giver.

“Delight thyself also in the Lord ; and he shall give thee the desires of thine heart.” The soul advances in acquaintance with the Lord, and finds its chief joy in Him. How comes it about that many of the desires of our heart are not satisfied ? Depend upon it if we delight in Him, only His desires will be ours. Consequently we shall be delighted with all He does. “Whatsoever the king did pleased all the people.” There you have the clue. Whatever the Lord does to, for, with, by or in us pleases

us. We feel He cannot act wrongly. We have not a desire apart from His desire.

But what about the future consequences of faithfulness to Him? "Commit thy way unto the Lord." Count upon Him to smooth out every difficulty. "Trust *also* in him; and he shall bring it to pass." And what is that? "He shall bring forth thy righteousness as the light, and thy judgment as the noonday."

Is any one listening to me suffering from being misunderstood and misrepresented? Do not fret because of obloquy; and above all things refrain from taking up the cudgels to vindicate your character. Care for the character of the Lord, and He will care for yours. He can manage matters for you better than you can. What good results from hunting down that which defames you? You will never catch it. Somebody has said, "A

false report can run round the world before truth has time to put its boots on.” But truth will prevail at last.

“Cease from anger, and forsake wrath.” Why does that come in just here? Alas! we may nurse our grievances, and brood over our wrongs, supposed or real, and thus become vindictive! “Rest in the Lord, and wait patiently for him.” Whenever we have to wait thus it is because He waits. “Therefore will the Lord wait, that he may be gracious,” says the prophet. We may not be in a fit state to receive what He has for us, which often is something much better than we ask or expect. He has the blessing in hand, but we must wait for Him to bestow it in His own time.

“Hidden in the hollow of His blessed hand,
 Never foe can follow, never traitor stand :
 Not a surge of worry, not a shade of care,
 Not a blast of hurry touch the spirit there.”

And now we reach the climax of it all: "A little while." (Ver. 10.) The remnant will look for deliverance by the destruction of the wicked, but we look toward heaven, to the Lord Himself, to take us *out* of this ungodly world. "For yet a very little while he that comes will come, and will not delay." That is the promise!

But, says some weary one, why has He delayed nearly two thousand years? "One day is with the Lord as a thousand years, and a thousand years as one day." So according to the reckonings of God it is only like the day before yesterday that Jesus said, "Surely I come quickly."

On the winding river of time we can only see a little bit ahead. But there is One on the mountain-top who sees where the river rises and where it empties itself into the ocean of eternity. Everything is as present under His eye—"A little while"! !

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How brief it appears from the standpoint of eternity. Soon we shall view all in the never-ending bliss of His presence above. Then exhortation and encouragement will cease because no longer needed.

We shall no longer need to "trust Him for all that's to come," as we often sing now; yet we shall never cease, can never cease, singing, "We'll praise Him for all that is past."