

Owl or Eagle

by C.H. Spurgeon

C.H. Spurgeon teaches that the spiritual life of believers fluctuates between despair and joy, likening them to owls in times of trouble and eagles in times of renewal, emphasizing that only the Lord can transform sorrow into soaring gladness.

Scripture: Psalm 102:6, Psalm 103:5, Job 3:11, Lamentations 3:19, John 16:33, Hebrews 12:1

Topics: "Christian Experience", "Faith and Trust", "Spiritual Renewal"

Description

In this devotional sermon, C.H. Spurgeon explores the contrasting spiritual states of believers, using the metaphor of the owl and the eagle drawn from Psalms 102 and 103. He highlights how saints differ from one another and from themselves over time, emphasizing the transforming power of faith in Christ. Spurgeon encourages believers to look beyond their present troubles and trust in God's unchanging covenant for renewal and joy. This sermon offers comfort and practical guidance for navigating the ups and downs of the Christian life.

Transcript

"I am like an owl of the desert." Psalm 102:6.

"Who satisfies your mouth with good things; so that your youth is renewed like the eagle's."

Psalm 103:5.

IN the 102nd Psalm, the Believer likens himself to an owl, and in the 103rd Psalm, in almost the parallel verse, he is compared to an eagle. What a blessing it is that the saints of God, in the olden times, were moved by the Holy Spirit to write down their experiences. And what a mercy it is that they wrote them out so fully! They have not given us miniatures so much as full-length portraits. Especially was this the case with David—again and again he draws himself to the very life. Possibly, if left to himself, he would have omitted from his autobiography some of his faults and failings, as well as the grosser sins of his life, but he was under the guidance of the Spirit of God and, therefore, he has shown us his true self—infirmities, iniquities and all that he was! It is related of Oliver Cromwell that when his portrait was about to be painted by an eminent artist, the painter desired to conceal the wart upon the Protector's face, but the true hero said, "Paint me just as I am, wart and all." In a similar style, David, the champion and hero of Israel, in the portrait of himself, painted by himself, shows us his scars and warts, his blemishes and imperfections.

This, I say again, is a great mercy because if it were not for this fact, we might have supposed that these gracious men of the olden time were not subject to the same infirmities as ourselves. And we might have concluded that we were not the Lord's people, "for, surely," we would have said, "God's true people never wandered as we wander, never failed as we fail, were never downcast as we are and were never on the borders of despair as we sometimes are." But we turn to this blessed Book and we find that the saints of God described in it were very much like the saints of the present time. The sea of life is rough to us and it was rough to them. Their vessels leaked, then, and ours leak now. The winds sometimes blow a hurricane just as they did, then, and spiritual navigation was, in their day, very much what it is today. This must always be a cause of consolation to us and also a means of direction, for, seeing that they fought and struggled as we do, we can examine their methods to discover how they gained their victories. And, having the same sort of enemies to deal with and the same Divine assistance at our disposal, we flee for help and strength where they fled and use the same means which they used so well in overcoming their adversaries. If God had changed, that would have altered matters for us, but, since He is still the same and deals with His children after the same rule of Grace, we are both comforted and instructed as we read how He delivered His ancient people. I hope it may be so while we are meditating upon our two texts.

Observe, first, that the saints of God have differed, the one from the other. Some think that these two Psalms are by different authors, yet one of them says, "I am like an owl of the desert," while the other says, "My youth is renewed like the eagle's." But, as I believe that these Psalms were both written by the same person, I see another line of thought, which is that the saints of God have, at times, differed from themselves. Extremes have met in them. They have been like an owl one day and like an eagle another day. We shall close our meditations by observing that the Lord alone can change the sadness of His people into gladness and make the owl of the desert into the eagle that soars aloft on mighty wings.

I. To begin, then, THE SAINTS OF GOD HAVE DIFFERED, THE ONE FROM THE OTHER. One mournfully hoots, "I am like an owl of the desert." Another, stretching his broad wings, cries, as he mounts towards Heaven, "My youth is renewed like the eagle's."

This may be accounted for in various ways. Something may be set down to the different times in which men have lived. David, on the whole, lived in times in which the Church of God prospered. Some think that the 102nd Psalm was written by Nehemiah, or by Daniel, who lived in more troublous times, when the House of God lay waste and Israel was carried into captivity. The children of God usually sympathize very much with the condition of things by which they are surrounded. When there are revivals, they are cheered. And when there is a long season of declension, they feel humbled and brought low. We do not expect that the age of Jeremiah should bring forth many rejoicing saints. Neither, on the other hand, should we expect that the days in which the Lord magnified His name through His servant, David, should bring forth a majority of mournful saints. Much will, therefore, depend upon the times in which God's people live—yet not as much as some would think. There have always been some who have blessed the name of the Lord when they have been the only godly persons in the district. They have shone like stars of the first magnitude amidst the thick darkness of the night that reigned around them. While there have been others who, even in times of refreshing, have cried out, "My leanness, my leanness!"

Something must also be set down to the various works in which different men have been engaged for the Lord. Some of God's servants must be of a joyful disposition, or they would never get through the heavy work that is appointed to them. Others, who have the heavy task of rebuking incorrigible sinners and threatening God's judgments upon them, are naturally of a somewhat gloomy cast of mind. They would not be fitted for their stern work if they were not, themselves, stern. I have no doubt that those wonderful

sermons of John Bunyan, when he "preached in chains to men in chains," were the more powerful because there was a sympathy in the sorrow of his heart with those who were themselves in sorrow through their sin. God may be as much glorified by a weeping Jeremiah as by an eagle-winged Ezekiel!

The trials of God's people also differ. All of them feel the weight of His rod, but they do not all feel it alike. There are some Believers whose path is comparatively smooth. In temporal things they are well provided for. They have good bodily health, the members of their family are spared to them, they seem to travel along a very easy way to Heaven. But there are others to whom the getting to Glory is like crossing the Atlantic in a storm! They have wave upon wave—all God's billows sometimes seem to go over them. Divine Wisdom arranges our lot, but our lots are not precisely alike. I do not doubt that there is a more equal distribution of happiness than we sometimes dream. Still, there are differences and those differences are very conspicuous, here and there, among Christians.

Still, I think a great deal more is to be set down to constitutional temperament than to any of these outside things. I know some of my dear Brothers and Sisters who, if they were very poor, would still be happy. Indeed, I have seen them very sick and ill, but they have still been joyful! I have gone with them to the graveside, but they have rejoiced in the Lord even there. They could not help doing so—there seemed to be a fountain of joy in them, like water in a well that springs up continually! On the other hand, there are some brethren—I will not say that there are many, here—still, there are some who could not help grumbling wherever they might be! If they had the fat of the land upon their table, it would not quite suit their appetite—they would prefer a mixture of bitter herbs! I believe that there are some Christians whom God Himself will never satisfy until He takes them to Heaven. They seem to have a soul that utterly disdains to be content and shows its greatness, I suppose, in continually feeling that nothing is quite good enough for it. That is a dreadful constitution for any man to have! Perhaps it is his liver that is wrong, or, more likely his heart, but there is no doubt whatever that physical disease has a great effect upon constitutional temperament. And some sad folk are rather to be pitied than to be blamed for the dark and somber view which they take of everything around them.

I incline to think, however, that we must not lay too much stress upon such things as these, but that the main difference will be discovered in another direction. Some saints have more faith than others have—and very much in proportion to their faith will be their condition of heart and mind! Such saints, having more faith than others have, will also have more zeal for God, more conscientious observance of His commands, more complete devotion to His will, more self-denying consecration to His service—and where there is much of all these things, there will be more joy than there can be in any other condition of heart and life! If you are a true Believer in the Lord Jesus Christ, yet are slack in serving God, you shall get to Heaven but you shall have very little Heaven on the way there. But if your faith rests, like a trustful child,

upon the Omnipotence and Immutability of God. If you simply and implicitly rely upon the atoning Sacrifice of Christ and then, out of love to your Lord, are fired with a sacred devotion to be used to Christ's Glory, your peace shall be as a river and your righteousness as the waves of the sea! God, in His all-wise Sovereignty, may send you various trials which will cast you down, but it is according to the gracious rule of His Kingdom to give the sweet reward of His Presence to His obedient children. He says to us, as He did to His ancient people, "If you will walk contrary unto Me, then will I also walk contrary unto you." But if you walk with God as Enoch did, you shall have the joy which doubtless beamed from Enoch's face, beaming also from yours!

The practical lesson of this first part of my subject is this. Do not judge yourself, dear Brother or Sister in Christ, by any other human being. Do not say, "I cannot be a Christian because I am not as mournful as So-and-So was." God forbid that you should fall into such a delusion as to think that you ought to imitate any man's miseries! Do not say, on the other hand, "I cannot be a Christian because I have not the joys which I have heard such an eminent saint speak of." It would be an ill day for you if you should try to counterfeit those joys! The man who said, "I am like an owl," and the man who said, "My youth is renewed like the eagle's," are both in Heaven praising God! If they were two different men, both were accepted in the same Savior, both were washed in the same precious blood and both entered into the same everlasting Glory—and you, whether you are joyful or miserable, if you are depending alone upon the atoning work of Jesus Christ, shall be there too, in due time, to praise the Lord forever with them!

II. But now, secondly, I have to remind you that SAINTS DIFFER FROM THEMSELVES AT DIFFERENT PERIODS. They are not at all times what they are sometimes.

I feel morally certain that David wrote both these Psalms, for there are very similar expressions in both of them. Anyone who has studied every verse and letter of the Psalms, with diligent care, as I may rightly claim that I have done, gets to feel as if he knew the tones of David's voice and could tell which is Asaph's and which is David's. And there is, to my mind, a Davidic ring in this 102nd Psalm quite as surely as there is in the 103rd. If it is so, then it was David who one day said, "I am like an owl of the desert." And the day after said to his own soul, concerning his God, "Who satisfies your mouth with good things, so that your youth is renewed like the eagle's." It was the same man in different moods—and Brothers and Sisters, we know, experimentally, that the children of God have these various moods!

First, notice the contrast here—a contrast which I have verified and so have you, if you are a child of God. Here is a man under sense of sin. He has discovered that he is a lost soul. The arrows of God drink up the life of his spirit and his self-righteousness is smitten and withered. He cannot bear company and gaiety, nor even the common joys of life, so he gets away alone and pines, and cries, "I am like an owl of the desert." The most dreadful verses that he can find in the book of Job, or the Lamentations of Jeremiah exactly suit his case. This is how he talks to his God—"I have eaten ashes like bread, and mingled my drink with weeping because of Your indignation and Your wrath: for You have lifted me up and cast me down." But look what happens when the Lord Jesus Christ manifests Himself to that poor guilty sinner! He looks at Christ upon the Cross—it is a trembling look and his eyes are half blinded by his tears and by the mists arising from his doubts and fears—but he does look to Christ, honestly and sincerely, and trusts Him with his soul!

Have you not seen the change that such an experience works in men? Now he is not like an owl any longer. His sin is completely forgiven. In a moment he has passed from darkness into marvelous light, from bondage into liberty, from death unto life! Now, like the eagle, he stretches his wings and mounts aloft into the glorious sunlight! Ask him whether he is like an owl, now, and he will say, "God forbid! Why should I be?" See how the man walks now? Before, his feet seemed like lead. Now, they appear almost as if they were winged, like the feet of the fabled messenger of the gods. Now, the man runs along the path of duty! He delights in his God. He loves Him! He adores Him! He triumphs in Him and boasts of the Lord Jesus Christ as His Savior. All this change is sometimes worked in a single hour—yes, in a single moment the sackcloth and ashes are taken away, the loins are girded with the garments of praise—and sorrow is changed into overflowing bliss! There you have one example of the contrast between the owl and the eagle spirit.

And, afterwards, in the Christian life, you may see the same difference. Here is a Believer in deep trouble. Christians have a promise that they shall have trouble and that is one of the promises that God always keeps! "In the world you shall have tribulation." Now see the Christian in the time of his tribulation—sometimes he is bowed to the very earth under it. If you need an example, look at Job, covered with sore boils from head to foot, sitting among ashes and scraping himself with a potsherd. His children dead, his property destroyed, his friends—the few that remain—miserable comforters

to him! Watch him a little while till the Lord returns to him in mercy and gives him twice as much as he had before, and "blessed the latter end of Job more than his beginning." So is it, often, with the people of God today. If they do not receive temporal prosperity, they get spiritual blessings that are more valuable by far and so, up from the ashes, God's Jobs still arise! From the willows they take their harps, again, and—

"Loud to the praise of love Divine,

Bid every string awake,"

because the Lord has dealt so graciously with them! So you see that the same men may be like owls in their time of trouble and like eagles in the day of their deliverance out of it.

The contrast will be still more conspicuous if you look at another picture. It is a portrait of yourself and of myself. Do you ever sit down and look within and look around and look beneath? If so, when you look within, you see imperfections, infirmities, temptations, sins. You fetch a long-drawn sigh and moan, "I shall surely fall one day by the hand of the enemy. With all this combustible material in my heart, someday there will be a terrible catastrophe and my profession of religion will be destroyed in a moment." Possibly you look around you. Business is not prospering. Perhaps one child is sick and ill. Another is deformed, another has gone out to a job, but is not behaving well. You have all manner of troubles. Your house is not "so" either with yourself, or with God, as you desire it to be. Then you look down. You feel that you are soon going to die and you wonder how you will bear the pains, groans and dying strife. And your dear wife will be a widow and your children fatherless. Ah, you fetch some more sighs and say to yourself, "I am like a pelican of the wilderness—I am like an owl of the desert." Of course you are and you always will be as long as you turn your eyes inside! But when, instead of looking within, or around you, or looking down to the grave, you look up and see Christ, the ever-living Savior who has passed through the grave and now lives to die no more, you will no longer dread to die because you will know that there is to be a glorious Resurrection in which you shall share!

Then you will not be, any longer, like an owl of the desert, but you will mount aloft, above the clouds, into the clear blue sky of happy fellowship with the ever-blessed God, rejoicing that in Christ Jesus your salvation is accomplished, the Everlasting Covenant is signed, sealed and ratified, your security certain beyond all doubt, you yourself adopted into the family of God and being made ready, in due season, to enter into the glorious abode of eternal bliss! When you realize all this, no longer will you sigh, and cry, and repine, but you will rejoice "with joy unspeakable and full of glory." Give up the habit of looking within or around you, or if you do sometimes mourn over what you see there, even then say, with David, "Although my house is not so with God; yet He has made with me"—you can see the eagle stretching his wings there—"yet He has made with me an everlasting covenant, ordered in all things, and sure."

Let me set before you another contrast. Sometimes even good men, when they rise in the morning, get up in a humor which is anything but amiable. They go downstairs and find their family in a condition which is anything but amiable. They go out to their business and they find their affairs anything but pleasing. All

day long everything seems to go wrong with them, or else they go wrong with everything—which is probably the real truth. Some Believers seem to like to indulge in a little comfortable misery and appear all day long to determine to be unhappy. A certain thing in which they are interested has not prospered as they desired, although it has prospered far beyond their deserts. Another thing has not happened just as they wished it might, though it has happened a great deal better than they ought to reasonably have expected.

Have you ever met a Brother in that condition? I have, and I have also met Sisters in the same condition! I have gone to visit them and their story, from beginning to end while I have been there, has been about their rheumatism, or about the smallness of their allowance from the church or the parish, or about their sorrow at having lost so many friends and helpers! But what a mercy it is when the sorrowful soul is helped to shake off that depression and to say, with Habakkuk, "Although the fig tree shall not blossom, neither shall fruit be on the vines; the labor of the olive shall fail, and the fields shall yield no meat; the flocks shall be cut off from the fold, and there shall be no herd in the stall: yet I will rejoice in the Lord, I will joy in the God of my salvation." This is the way to leave the owl in the desert and to let the eagle soar upwards in his glorious flight! Suppose we have miseries—have we not also mercies? Are Marah's waters bitter? Then put the Cross of Christ into them and they will at once be sweetened! Is your way rough? Yet your God leads you in it, so it must be the right way! Does it traverse a desert? Yet the manna has always fallen even there! Are you weary and footsore? Then remember that "there remains, therefore, a rest for the people of God."

Some people will always look on what they call "the black side" of things, but to faith's eye, there is no black side, for even the dark side of God's Providential dealings with us glows with light when faith looks at it! Many people appear to take a telescope and try to look through it upon the unknown future and, before they look, in their anxiety they breathe on the glass and then, as they gaze, they cry, "There are a great many clouds to be seen!" Yet, all the while, it is only their own breath that has created them! It is best for the Believer to leave the future with God—to rest entirely in His purposes of love and mercy and to march forward singing to his God—

"What may be my future lot Well I know concerns me not! This should set my heart at rest, What Your will ordains is best"

Here is another contrast. From the 102nd Psalm we learn that the Believer, in his trouble, had forgotten to eat his bread, but in the 103rd Psalm we are told that the Believer, in his joy, has his mouth satisfied with good things. There are some persons who fall into spiritual trouble through neglecting the means of Divine Grace. You say that you are very depressed in spirit, that you have lost your evidences and are brought very low. Brother, let me ask you some personal questions. How long is it since you were at a Prayer Meeting? How long is it since you were at a week-night service? How long is it since you left off the habit of carefully reading a daily portion of God's Word? How long is it since you enjoyed conscious fellowship with the Lord Jesus Christ? I asked a Christian, as I believe him to be, that question some time ago, and he shook his head and said, "I wish you had not asked me that question, for, alas, it has been many a month since I could truly say that I have had any such fellowship." If that is the case with any of you, do you wonder that you are like an owl of the desert? If a child never goes to his father to get a good word from him, is it any wonder that he doubts whether his father loves him? What wife would live in the same house with her husband and yet never speak to him by the six months together? It would be a shame if she did act like that, yet here are some of us, with Christ always near us, living on without speaking to Him, or having fellowship with Him! Well may such a person be like an owl of the desert— but let a man

begin diligently to attend the means of Grace, let him be much in private prayer, let him seek fellowship with Jesus—and he will soon shake off his mourning and forget his sorrows! And up again into the clear air he will mount, like the eagles, on wings renewed by God!

The last point of contrast is this. The owl is a bird that is afraid of the light. It loves the darkness and, therefore, it loves not the sunshine. But the eagle is not afraid of the sun—it even dares to stare into the face of the great father of day! There are also some Christians who appear to be afraid of the Light of God. They have a little, but they do not want too much. I have heard of a good man who would never read, at family prayer, that chapter about Philip and the eunuch. There is, in that chapter, a good deal of the Light of God upon the subject of Believers' Baptism and that man did not want to read about it, for he was afraid of the Light. Others will not read those passages, in the Epistles, which speak of Election, Predestination, Particular Redemption, Final Perseverance and similar great Truths of God that are revealed by the Holy Spirit. Such people say that these doctrines are too Calvinistic, so they do not read about them, for they do not want to see too much Light. I know Christians—at least they profess to be Christians—who, in various matters, are like the owl of the desert—they do not like the Light. But the true-born child of God needs the Light of God—he cannot have too much of it! He delights to do his Lord's will. He says of everything he does, "If it is not according to God's Word, I desire to be undeceived concerning it. And if there is any Truth of God taught by the Holy Spirit which I have not yet received, I desire to receive it and to sit down humbly at Jesus' feet, to unlearn all I know if it is wrong, and to learn whatever He would have me learn." Let us pray to God to give us the eagle eyes which are glad of the light and to take away from us the sleepy eyes of the owl which only see in the darkness.

III. My last point, for which I have only a minute or two left, is this—THE LORD ALONE CAN CHANGE SPIRITUAL SADNESS INTO SPIRITUAL GLADNESS.

No hand can heal a broken heart save the Divine hand that made it The minister's words cannot heal your wounds. The Holy Spirit alone can pour in the true balm. The ancient question was, "Is there no balm in Gilead? Is there no physician there?" The answer is, No, there is none. There is no balm in Gilead—that is not the place to look for it. There is no physician there. If there were, the health of God's people might be recovered. But it is not recovered in Gilead and never will be. The only true balm comes from Calvary! The only unfailing Physician is He who has gone up to His Father's Throne, yet who hears the cry of all who call upon Him in sincerity. He alone can turn the owl into an eagle, but

He can do it! He understands your case, for He has passed through an experience exactly similar to yours. He has not only walked the hospitals that is an essential thing for a physician to do, but He has, Himself, lain on the bed in the hospital. Christ took upon Himself our sicknesses and bore our sorrows—and even our sins were caused to meet upon Him when He hung on the accursed tree as the Substitute for all who believe in Him! You have, therefore, the best of physicians to heal you! So, sin-sick Soul, look to Him! If you have only an owl's eyes, yet turn them unto Christ and He will change them into an eagle's eyes. If you are only as the owl of the desert, resolve that you will see no light but His Light, for, then, His Light will surely soon come to you!

Remember, O you Mourners, that there is one Person of the ever-blessed Trinity who has been pleased to consecrate Himself to the work of comforting tried and troubled souls. As Christ has redeemed us, so the Holy Spirit comforts us. He is The Comforter, The Almighty Comforter. As God Himself has become the Comforter, what case of sorrow can be thought to be hopeless? Of old, the Lord said, "As one whom his mother comforts, so will I comfort you; and you shall be comforted." And our Lord Jesus Christ, after going

back to Heaven, has sent us the Holy Spirit to be our Comforter. And the Holy Spirit uses the very best medicine that can possibly be compounded. Do you ask, "What is that?" Christ said to His disciples, "He shall take of Mine, and shall show it unto you." What medicine can ever be equal to the things of Christ? O poor owl of the desert, if the Spirit of God shall come and visit you, as He will, and reveal the things of Christ to your soul, you will then spread your wings, like an eagle, and mount aloft into the heavenlies in Christ Jesus!

With one more remark I will close my discourse. Whenever a soul is cast down by God, there is a reason for it, and that reason is love. When the Lord kills, why does He do that? When He wounds, why does He do it? Here is the reason, given in His own words, "I kill, and I make alive. I wound, and I heal." You must first be stripped by God if you are to be clothed by Him! You must be emptied if you are to be filled! You must be uprooted if you are to be transplanted! You must become nothing if Christ is to be your All-in-All! Is not this Christ's usual rule, that He cuts down the green tree, and makes the dry tree to flourish? The Virgin Mary truly sang, "He has filled the hungry with good things; and the rich He has sent away empty: He has put down the mighty from their seats, and exalted them of low degree." Destitute, empty, broken, crushed, wounded, dead—you are just the sort of people Jesus came to save!

He came into the world to save sinners, to seek and to save the lost. So you, being lost, are the most suitable objects for the display of His love. I am sent to preach the Gospel to the broken-hearted, to minister consolation to the afflicted and tried, and to tell of the opening of the prison to them that are bound. Not to those who are satisfied with their own righteousness, but to those who know that they are sinners do we preach a Savior! You who can fall no lower than you are—unless you sink into the lowest Hell—are the very persons to be the objects of Divine regard! Your extremity is God's opportunity to bless you. To you who pine, sigh, cry and say, "We are like the owls of the desert," is this message of mercy proclaimed, by the voice that sounds even in the wilderness, "Comfort you, comfort you My people, says your God. Speak you comfortably to Jerusalem, and cry unto her, that her warfare is accomplished, that her iniquity is pardoned: for she has received of the Lord's hand double for all her sins."

Bankrupt sinners, come and learn how all your debts have been discharged! Wounded sinners, come and be healed by the Great Physician! Yes, and even to you who are dead, and in your graves, the Lord says, "Live." And you shall live, even as the Lord Jesus said to Martha, "He that believes in Me, though he were dead, yet shall he live." The Lord grant you Grace to look to Jesus, that the owls' eyes may now be turned into eagles' eyes and the owls of the desert into eagles, for Christ's sake! Amen.

EXPOSITION BY C. H. SPURGEON: PSALM 102.

Kindly notice the title of this Psalm—"Prayer of the afflicted, when he is overwhelmed, and pours out his complaint before the LORD." I call your attention to it in order to remind you what charges there are in the life of a Believer. Here, in the 102nd Psalm, the afflicted saint is pouring out his complaint. And then, in the 103rd, the rejoicing Believer is blessing the Lord in a jubilant song of grateful praise. Such are a true Christian's ups and downs, nights and days, and I can see how the 103rd Psalm blossoms out of the 102nd. When the afflicted Believer can pour out his complaint before the Lord, it will not be long before he will be able to cry, "Bless the Lord, O my soul; and all that is within me, bless His holy

name." If you carry your complaint in your own bosom, or tell it to some earthly friend, you will probably continue to have cause to complain. But if you pour out your heart before God, it will not be long before He will give you ease and relief.

Verses 1, 2. Hear my prayer, O LORD, and let my cry come unto You. Hide not Your face from me in the day when I am in trouble. "For that would make my trouble to be unbearable." So William Cowper sings—

"That were a grief I could not bear Did You not hear and answer prayer."

2. Incline Your ear unto me. ' 'Stoop down to me. Bend over me. Listen to the moans of my darkness, the whispers of my weakness."

2. In the day when I call, answer me speedily.' 'For I am brought so low that if a delay is not a denial, it will be tantamount to it, for I shall be dead before the answer comes unless it reaches me speedily."

3, 4. For my days are consumed like smoke, and my bones are burned as in a hearth. My heart is smitten and withered like grass; so that I forget to eat my bread. That is a very pitiful state for anyone to be brought into, in which the sorrow of the mind begins to weaken the strength of the body! The soul itself is so inflamed that a fever is generated within the bodily frame, which seems "burned as in a hearth."

5. By reason of the voice of my groaning, my bones cleave to my skin. By grief he had brought himself down to such an emaciated state that his bones pierced through his skin.

6, 7. I am like the pelican of the wilderness: I am like an owl of the desert. I watch and am as a sparrow alone upon the housetop. He had got into such a melancholy state of mind that he shunned human company, sought solitude and became as mournful a creature as "an owl of the desert."

8-10. My enemies reproach me all the day; and they that are mad against me are sworn against me. For I have eaten ashes like bread, and mingled my drink with weeping because of Your indignation and Your wrath: for You have lifted me up and cast me down. Observe that all David's enemies could not make him weep. Mad as they were against him, they could not extort a tear from his eyes, but God's indignation and wrath touched him to the quick and made him mingle his drink with weeping. He felt that God was treating him as wrestlers treat one another—when a man deliberately lifts up his opponent in order that he may give him the worse fall—"You have lifted me up and cast me down." All the joys that he had ever known seemed to make his sorrow the more bitter. The Light of God's Countenance, in which he had formerly walked, made the darkness, in which he was enshrouded, to seem all the blacker.

11, 12. My days are like a shadow that declines; and I am withered like grass. But You, O LORD, shall endure forever; and Your remembrance unto all generations. That was David's usual way—to comfort himself in his God when he could find no comfort in himself or in his surroundings. You remember that he did so on that memorable occasion when Ziklag was burned and the people spoke of stoning him—"David encouraged himself in the Lord his God." We shall be wise if we follow his example, for, when every other source of joy is dried up, when all earthly wells are stopped up by the Philistines, the stream of God's mercy flows on as freely as ever!

13, 14. You shall arise and have mercy upon Zion: for the time to favor her, yes, the set time, is come. For Your servants take pleasure in her stones, and favor the dust thereof God is sure to bless His Church when the members of it take a deep interest in even the least things that appertain to God's cause. "Your servants take pleasure in her stones, and favor the dust thereof." I fear that, in many churches, the set time to favor Zion has been postponed by the apathy, the lethargy, or the carelessness of many of those who profess to be the servants of God!

15, 16. So the heathen shall fear the name of the LORD, and all the kings of the earth Your Glory. When the LORD shall build up Zion, He shall appear in His Glory. It was to God's Glory for Him to build up the ancient Jewish Kingdom and it is equally to His Glory to build up His Church at the present time—quarrying the stones of nature, changing them by His almighty power, polishing them, by His Grace, after the similitude of a palace, building them up upon the one Foundation, that is, Jesus Christ—laying course upon course until the whole structure shall be finished.

17. He will regard the prayer of the destitute, and not despise their prayer. There is a gracious promise for all destitute souls who cry unto God!

18. This shall be written for the generation to come: and the people which shall be created shall praise the LORD. This is written for our comfort, dear Friends! There it stands permanently, in this blessed Book, that as long as there is a destitute and tried people of God, He will not despise their prayer!

19. For He has looked down from the height of His sanctuary; from Heaven did the LORD behold the earth. As if God was looking down from the battlements of Heaven, observing, watching for something—and what is it that God is looking for?

20. To hear the groaning of the prisoner; to loose those that are appointed to death. Is not that a delightful view of God? Watching not for the music of sweet singers, nor for the noise of victorious warriors, but for "the groaning of the prisoner," the sight of those shut up in the condemned cell, "appointed to death."

21-23. To declare the name of the LORD in Zion, and His praise in Jerusalem; when the people are gathered together, and the kingdoms, to serve the LORD. He weakened my strength in the way; He shortened my days. It is most instructive to notice how the Psalmist ascribes all to God, not only his strength, but his weakness—not merely his extended life, but even the shortening of his days! It takes away the sting from our sorrow when we know that it comes from God. It helps us to bear any apparent calamity when we feel that it is our Heavenly Father's hand that has worked it all, or His will that has permitted it to happen.

24-27. I said, O my God, take me not away in the midst of my days: Your years are throughout all generations. Of old have You laid the foundation of the earth: and the heavens are the work of Your hands. They shall perish, but You shall endure: yes, all of them shall wax old like a garment, as a vesture shall You change them, and they shall be changed: but You are the same, and Your years shall have no end. The ever-living God is our constant comfort amidst the ever-changing scenes of this mortal life! Yes, and when we come even to the border of the land of death-shade, this is still our joy, "The Lord lives," for, from the midst of the Throne of God, we hear our Savior say, "Because I live, you shall live also."

28. The children of Your servant shall continue. We pass away, but our children take our place. As Wesley said, "God buries His workmen, but His work goes on." One generation passes away, but another comes in its place. 28. And their seed shall be established before You. Blessed be the name of the ever-living God!

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