

The Empty Place—a Christmas Day Sermon

by C.H. Spurgeon

C.H. Spurgeon teaches that the emptiness of a place, whether due to persecution, sin, sickness, or neglect, calls believers to faithful devotion, repentance, and steadfastness in Christ.

Scripture: 1 Samuel 20:25, Hebrews 10:25, Romans 12:1, Acts 9:1-22

Topics: "Persecution", "Grace and Repentance", "Christian Fellowship"

Description

In "The Empty Place—a Christmas Day Sermon," C.H. Spurgeon reflects on the spiritual significance of absence in the life of a believer. Using the example of David's empty seat, Spurgeon explores themes of persecution, repentance, grace, and the importance of faithful attendance at worship and prayer meetings. He calls Christians to steadfastness amid trials and to a renewed commitment to serve God with zeal. This devotional sermon encourages believers to examine their own spiritual presence and dedication in the church and their personal walk with Christ.

Transcript

"And David's place was empty." 1 Samuel 20:25.

THERE may be much to learn from an empty place. The world thinks much of the places which have been emptied through the home-going of its celebrated men. Those who have served the world are remembered by it. Those who have served the Church are remembered, too, and empty chairs in the world, in the Church, and in the family awaken a great many memories.

I do not intend to keep to one subject, tonight. I think I have, in these words about David's place, a roving commission and, keeping to my text, I shall be able to consider a great many subjects and to speak briefly upon each.

I. First, then, let us think of THE EMPTY PLACE IN THE PERSECUTOR'S HOUSE—"David's place was empty."

David had good reason for vacating his place at Saul's table, for the passionate king was so malicious and so embittered against him, that he sought his life. Saul had, on several occasions, in his fits of mad anger, hurled javelins at the man to whom he owed so much—and the envious king determined to put his rival to death at the first convenient opportunity! David, therefore, very properly left a place in which his life was continually in peril.

Oh, how happy are we, in these days, that we are not subjected to the fierce sufferings and the cruel persecutions which the early Christians and even our own forefathers had to endure! How often, in a Jewish family, as soon as a young man had become a follower of Christ, from that moment none of his household would acknowledge him. He was a follower of the hated Nazarene! "A curse be upon him," said his father. And even a mother's tenderness seemed to be dried up, so that she could not think of him without bitterness and gall. The same thing happened, also, in the old Roman families. The child of a Roman noble had stepped into some little place where humble and unlettered people met to hear the Gospel preached, to sing songs in the name of Jesus, and to keep holy, one day in the week—and there that youthful heart had learned the story of the Cross, and by the Grace of God had been brought to love the Savior. As soon as the fact was made known, the officers of justice would take the child away from the father's house and haul the young Believer off to prison—and so another seat was empty.

When persecution grew very hot in the old Roman times, you know how the good, and the great, and the true, the strong and the old, the young man and the maiden had, alike, to flee for their lives. If they remained, it was only to be dragged before the Roman praetor and short work was made of them at the stake or in the arena. After a little while, nothing was left of them but a heap of ashes from the martyr fire, or a few bones that the wild beasts did not care to eat. Thus another "David's place was empty."

Horrible work was worked, too, when the Church of Rome had its full power, and the officers of the Inquisition, at dead of night, knocked at the door of some Christian man and demanded either himself, or his wife, or son, or daughter. They had to surrender themselves without a word, that they might be immured in the damp, dark vaults of that hellish institution, never to be seen again, except, on some dreadful day, when they were marched out, in derision, to be burnt alive because they would not bow before images of ivory and wood, and call those idols the Christ to whom homage and reverence should be paid! You know how it was in our own land—how many a seat was empty during the persecutions of Queen Mary. And after that, when our noble sires would not conform to the established Church of this land and, therefore, were hunted into the dens and caves of the earth, as though they had been wild beasts, instead of men of whom the

world was not worthy. Many of the bravest and best of England's sons and daughters fled away to America and found another and a safer home there, in New England, where the wild rocks were less flinty than the hearts of men here in England.

Often and often, when persecution has arisen for the Truths of God's sake, David's seat has been empty. If martyr days should come back, could we vacate our places? Could the husband let his wife and children go for Christ's sake? Could the child, again, give up the father's love? Could you wrench yourselves away from all your dear ones to prove that you were truly Christ's—and that you loved Him better than father or mother, husband or wife, or any of your kin? God grant that the true martyr spirit may not die out of our hearts, even if, in God's gracious Providence, it is not called into terrible exercise as among the brave peasants of Switzerland, or the noble covenanters of Scotland, or the old Nonconformists of this country! At any rate, whatever we are called to endure, may we be true and loyal to the Gospel for which our fathers bled and died. And if the times of persecution should ever come again, and come they may, may we be ready, again, to vacate the place of comfort, luxury and peace for our Lord Jesus Christ's sake!

II. There is another place which sometimes becomes empty, that is, THE PLACE OF SINFUL PLEASURES. This empty place is the result of the working of God's Grace in the heart.

I know that concerning some here, it may be said, with very great thankfulness, that David's place is empty. Ah, dear Friend, where was your place, seven years ago, on such a night as this in our so-called Christian land? Ah, well, we do not want you to tell where it was, you had better be silent about that! But, with a holy blush, and then with devout thankfulness to God, rejoice that, so far as you are concerned, David's place in the seat of the scornful is now empty! You know that the ale-bench would not suit you now, nor the place where the lascivious song awakens enthusiastic applause from the ribald throng—you would be out of place in the company of the flippant, the foolish, the blasphemous and those who find their pleasures in forgetting their God—and think it no sin to break though His Laws. No, thank God, that place is now empty!

Grace makes a wonderful change in a man! It is not so much that he dares not go where he used to find delight—he would not go if he were paid to go, no, not even if he were flogged to make him go! Old pleasures are not given up by us simply because we think them wrong. We know they are evil and that would be one reason for abandoning them, but we give them up because they are no longer pleasures to us. We have no delight whatever in them, now, nor would we have them if we were free to choose them for ourselves. Were the Law of God suspended and we were permitted to take as much of the pleasure of sin as we liked, we would decline to take any, since it is not pleasure to us. Oh, be thankful, dear Friend, that Grace has made such a change in you! And resolve in your heart that, as Grace has done this for you, you will use your utmost endeavors to get the same gracious work done for your friends, that others may be captured from Satan's ranks.

Oh, what a gap God sometimes makes in the devil's army when He takes one of his most active soldiers and enlists him in the army of Jesus Christ—and then makes a recruiting sergeant of him to enlist others for his new Captain! There are no servants of God like those who have been valiant soldiers of Satan! Saul of Tarsus, when once made into an Apostle, was not only not a whit behind the very chief, but we may venture to say that he was the very foremost of all the Apostles and did more for Christ than any of them! Oh, may many a David's place, among those who are seeking sinful pleasures, be speedily emptied by God's almighty Grace! And if the devil should fill it up with another of his foolish votaries, may God be pleased to empty that place again and again! May many, like Moses, choose rather to suffer affliction with the people of God, than to enjoy the pleasures of sin for a season.

III. Now I shall speak of other empty places which are better than those I have mentioned. During the past year it has happened several times, to some of us, that David's place has been empty. I mean that, for a time, THE PLACE OF OUR

OCCUPATION HAS BEEN EMPTY.

Perhaps some of you have not had a single hour's sickness during the past year. I will remind you of your mercies that you may be very grateful to God for them. Some of us have had days, some have had weeks, and some have had even months when David's place was empty. Not long at a time, perhaps, but usually some time or other during the year, this pulpit has had to be empty, so far as the regular preacher was concerned. Infirmities lay aside the preacher, for a while, at any rate, and with many here there comes, every now and then, a season when they have to be away from the chapel, and from the business, and from the family circle. And there is extra watchfulness in the household and there is special care,

and it may be that, sometimes, there is cause for anxiety and fear. Perhaps, in some of your cases, there has been much of necessary concern. Remember those nights when the fever was about to turn, those

hours when there were anxious whispers by the loved ones around your bed, "Will he get over it? Can he survive?" You remember those trying experiences? I want you to remember them in order that you may bless the Lord who has spared your life, and raised you up, again, to health and strength. If David's place has not been often empty, be grateful for the health that God has given you. If it has been empty for a while, but you are still in the land of the living, be grateful for the restoration which the Lord has granted to you.

But Brothers and Sisters, I want to ask you, and myself, also—are we rendering unto God due recompense for all that He has given to us? He has favored us with prolonged life—is that life being spent for Him? It may be that on that sick-bed we turned our face to the wall and prayed, in the bitterness of our spirit, and we then vowed what we would do if the Lord would spare our lives. Or, if we did not put it absolutely into the form of a vow, we resolved that if we were raised up, again, we would be more fervent and more diligent in the Master's cause than we had been before. Have we redeemed those promises? Do I awaken any memories of shame? I think I should—I do in my own heart—and I should not wonder if I do in yours, also. If so, then let the prayer go up from each heart, "My Lord, You have redeemed me with Your precious blood and made me Yours. Your vows are upon me and I bring myself, again, to You on this last Sabbath night of another year, and I say, bind the sacrifice with cords, even with cords to the horns of the altar!—

'My life, which You have made Your care, Lord, I devote to You!' Show me what You would have me to do! Give me strength and wisdom to do it. Keep me diligently in Your service, steadfast in Your fear until David's place is empty, here below, for the last time, and You take me up to fill another place which You have prepared for me at Your right hand!"

I thought it might be well to awaken these thoughts in the mind of those of you who are specially concerned in this part of my subject.

IV. During the past year, many of you now present have had A PLACE IN THE ASSEMBLY OF GOD'S PEOPLE.

I do not quite like to put the question about how often David's place in the congregation of the righteous has been empty. I have very little need to ever say anything to you, dear Friends, about any lack of regular attendance upon the means of Grace. I think no people I have ever heard of are more commonly found listening to the preaching of the Word, or joining in religious service. Yet there may be some of you who have absented yourselves when you should have been present. Or there may be members of other congregations who have fallen into lax and loose habits with regard to forsaking the assembling of themselves together, "as the manner of some is," even as it was in Paul's day. Let any such who may be with us check those habits as soon as they begin. They are very detrimental to all spiritual growth. I do not think you will find a man in good health if he takes his meals at all sorts of irregular hours. As a rule, the body needs its regular periods of receiving nourishment and sustenance—and it is the same with the soul. You will scarcely find a Christian to be in sound health if he neglects the appointed time for being fed with spiritual meat.

You who are unconverted should take special notice of this part of my theme. I think that I need not say very much to the Christian about attending the Lord's House, for he loves the place where God's honor dwells. He can say—

"I have been there and still would go, 'Tis like a little Heaven below."

But as for you who are not converted, I delight to see you in the House of God, willing and even anxious to listen to His Word, for who can tell, who can tell, but what God may bless it to you? "Faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the Word of God." When you are away from the sound of the preacher's voice, there seems less probability that Grace will meet you to awaken your conscience and turn you to Christ. While you are gathered with the Lord's people, I would hope that God will bless to your soul's salvation the Truth of God that is preached. Be often, then, in that place of worship where Jesus Christ is lifted up—and seek to obtain a personal interest in His great salvation.

I love to see you hovering round the Word, listening to the preaching of the Gospel, but do not, I pray you, let it always be true that you are only hearers, for, if you are only hearers, and not doers of the Word, you are simply destroying your own souls! Do you know what is your great danger, you who are hearers, only, and you who are not always hearers? You are running a fearful risk of losing your souls!

What I fear concerning some of you is that you will postpone your decision and wait, and wait, and wait, and wait till you will not feel as much interest as you now do in listening to the Gospel—and gradually you will come to the House of Prayer less often, and David's place will be more often empty—and, by-and-by, the Gospel will grow so stale to you and this poor voice of mine will sound with so dull a tone, and my message will seem so commonplace, that your seat will be found always empty! When this comes to pass, I fear that you will be found wandering further and further from the paths of right, and truth, and hope—and that you will be utterly and hopelessly lost. May God decide you for Christ Jesus before this year of Grace has passed away! May it be, even now, the year of our Lord to your soul, the year in which the Lord, Himself, shall come into your spirit and take possession of your entire nature! Then I know that David's seat in the assembly of God's people will not often be empty.

V. I have now to say just a few words, especially to the members of the Church, about THEIR PLACE AT THE PRAYER MEETING. "David's place was empty." What was being done, then? "Well, it was only a Prayer Meeting!" Yes, but, but, but, but, but, but, that is saying a great deal! Did any member of the Church give that answer? I do not think even one would do so, but I would like to enquire of all the members of this Church, "how many times have you been to the Prayer Meeting this year?" There are some of you who are never away unless something absolutely prevents you from coming. I am glad, even, to see some of you come in late on Monday nights. If you cannot come at seven, come at half-past seven, or come at eight! Come at any time that you can, so that you may but throw in your portion of supplication with the rest of the Brothers and Sisters.

But I am ashamed of some of our members. They will say, "Whom do you mean?" Last Sunday week, a little boy came to this Tabernacle for the first time. So, when I stood up and began to preach, the little fellow said to his nurse, "Nurse, is Mr. Spurgeon talking to me?" I wish you would all say that, if my words apply to you, for I am talking to some of the members of the Church when I say that I am ashamed of you who never come to the Prayer Meetings! I do not mean this rebuke for you who live at a very great distance, or who are fully occupied with your families or business ca-res—for you would be wrong to come. God forbid that I should ask you to present to Him one duty stained with the blood of another duty! But there are some who might be here, and ought to be here at our Prayer Meetings and they are spiritually suffering positive mischief in their own souls through their absence, besides the loss that they are causing to the treasury of the Church—for the wealth of the Church lies in the power of intercession!

The measure of the Church's influence will be found to be in exact proportion to the amount of prayer presented by the members, for if there is not much prayer, there cannot be much power. "But we can pray

at home," says one. Yes, I know you can, but, as a rule, I think the people who pray at home are those who pray at Prayer Meetings, too. The assembling of ourselves together for prayer is very generally (special circumstances being taken into consideration) the exponent of our private prayer. Let me stir up any of you whose places at the Prayer Meetings have been empty, and let it not be so again.

My Beloved in the Lord, my fellow-soldiers in Christ, what has been the source and secret of our strength, as a Church, up till this time? It has been our prayer! How well do I remember what Prayer Meetings we had in Park Street! When we began we were so very few and feeble that, in most of the Prayer Meetings we had, we met in a little vestry. But we soon had to burst open our doors and get into the Chapel, and we have never gone back into the vestry since then! And oh, the power that the Lord graciously gave us in prayer! I felt there, and many of you felt, that we seemed, by our supplications, to bring down the blessing of God upon us! And then our numbers were speedily increased, souls were converted, and God was glorified!

If we slacken prayer, we shall condemn ourselves! We have proved, not by hearsay, but by personal experience, that prayer is power—and if we relax our prayer even to a small extent, or even for a little while, we shall deserve to have this place made a by-word and a hissing—and all our prosperity taken from us and Ichabod written upon our walls! May God grant that this voice may be silent in death before this people shall ever cease to be a praying people! Rather may our prayerfulness be quickened and our intercessions multiplied—and let it not be said of any men or women here who fear the Lord—that their place is empty when God's people assemble together for prayer!

VI. There is another David's place that is sometimes empty and that ought not to be so. IT IS THE PLACE OF

CHRISTIAN SERVICE.

My dear Brothers and Sisters, our gifts are various. God has been pleased to place us in different positions and to give us different talents. But every saved man or woman has some work to do for Christ. Are we doing that work? There is our Sunday school. It troubles me if I ever know that teachers are needed there. There are many other schools where members of this Church are occupied as teachers. We are supplying, I might say without any exaggeration, half the Sunday school teachers of half the denominations in the district, for I have always said to you, "Go anywhere that you can find an opportunity of doing good—never mind where it is. If you have ability to teach, go and teach in anybody's school where your services are needed." Yet there are some among us who hide their talents in a napkin and do not use them—and, as a consequence—there is some David's place empty.

You are not all called to the same work for Christ. I like to miss, tonight, some of those I saw here this morning, and I should not mind missing some of you for the same reason. Why? Because they are gone to teach in the Ragged Schools, or to speak at the mission stations, or in the lodging houses. When a Christian man says to me, "There are workers needed at such and such a Ragged School, or mission hall. I would like to be hearing a sermon, but I would rather be doing good than getting good," I say to him, "Right, my Brother, while London is what it is, you must be content to get one sermon a day and feed your soul on that—and then go and do all you can for your Lord the rest of the Sabbath." It would be well for the younger members of our Churches to be, for a time, in constant attendance on the means of Grace because they need to be instructed in Divine things. But every instructed Christian is bound to be a worker for Christ among the perishing masses all around us.

Seek to serve your Savior wherever He opens a door of usefulness. You need not go, tonight, into the street to preach, the weather is not suitable for open-air services just now. But when the summer comes, let every corner of the street have its evangelist and let every man, woman, and child who love the Lord, do the work He desires them to do! And let it not be said of any of us that, "David's place was empty." Oh, the joy of doing good! Brethren, next to Heaven, the greatest joy that can be found is the joy of doing good to others! Did you ever meet some poor man who said to you, "Bless your heart, you led me to the Savior"? Did you ever see a woman look you in the face with unspeakable love and say to you, "You are my father in Christ Jesus. You brought me to the Savior's feet"? If you once knew this joy, you would always be hungering after more of it! You would never be fully satisfied with what you have done and would be always wanting to do yet more and more!

I have tasted of this sweetness and I have found it so refreshing to my spirit that I would have every member of this Church taste of it, too. When our Lord reads the roll of those who are doing all the good they can in Sunday school, and Ragged School, and in preaching, teaching, visiting, tract-distributing, or what not, I hope you all will be able to answer, humbly but firmly, "Here am I, my Master, doing Your work as You enable me."

I believe that many of you will be doing Christ's work best at home. You need not teach in the Sunday school—you can have one in your own house. Many a daughter is better occupied in seeing after the younger ones of her own family than anywhere else. Yet with such exceptions as these, I beg you to take the general run of what I have said—I speak unto wise men, judge you what I say—and believe me that there is something to be done by each one who loves the Lord. You are not accountable to me, or to the elders of the Church—you are accountable only to the Crown Prince, the Prince Imperial of Heaven, Christ Jesus, our Lord! He has bought you with His precious blood. You are His. Then serve Him and let not your place of service ever be vacant through your neglect or indolence.

VII. Again, "David's place was empty." I hope that OUR PLACE AT THE LORD'S TABLE will not be empty at any time when it is possible for us to occupy it.

There are not any in this Church, known to me, who absent themselves from the Lord's Table very grossly. But still, there is room for improvement in this matter in the case of some of us. I like to go to that Table every week and my own solemn conviction is that that is none too often. If there is any rule about it in Scripture, there certainly is no rule for going once a month, much less for once a quarter! If there is any rule, it is that on the first day of the week, when we meet together, we should break bread in memory of our Savior's dying love! I commend it to our Brothers and Sisters to consider whether they keep the feast as often as they should, remembering our Master's wondrous passion and death. It may be that they lose much spiritual benefit because their place at the Lord's Table is empty—when it should be filled.

VIII. But I must hasten on towards the conclusion. Brothers and Sisters, tomorrow, when you will be keeping the Christmas feast, there will be many family gatherings. And in those family gatherings there will be SOME HOUSEHOLDS WHERE DAVID'S PLACE WILL BE EMPTY.

As I came here, I was thinking of what inroads death has made in this congregation this year. There have been many vacancies made and there will be many more next year. I miss from one seat, a Sister whom I saw upon her dying bed. And, from another part of the building, a Brother whose cheering words in his last moments did my soul good. I miss here, one, and there, another. I could run my finger along these pews in the area and I could come up on this platform, and I could truly say, concerning one who has been called

Home this year, "David's place is empty." We can hardly say that literally because his son fills it, and long may he fill it, and have God's blessing resting upon him! But here and there, and everywhere in this Tabernacle, I miss some who have gone Home. Our family gathering is gradually breaking up. Thank God it is being reformed up yonder, where there will be no death and no parting!

When you get to your family gathering, perhaps you will have to remember that your mother has died this year, or it may be that your father has gone Home, or perhaps it was the eldest son, or that sweet curly-headed child. Perhaps, tomorrow, you will be merry and I do not say to you, "Be not so," but let these memories come over you, let them direct your thoughts upward, let them remind you that family gatherings are only for a time, and that the great gathering is above! There the immortals meet, there the feast never ends! Look away from earth with all its joys. Let them that have wives be as those that have none. Let them that have children look on their children as dying ones. Let kinships and friendships, and all these things, be regarded as they are—as evanescent—as things that perish in the using. Hear the trumpet sound, "Up and away," and let your hearts be where Jesus is—and let your treasure be there, also!

Those dear ones who are in Heaven beckon us to follow them and we signal to tell them that we are on the way. Surely they must look upon us with amazement if they see us hugging the things of earth as though we were to stay here forever! Let our conversation be in Heaven and let our affection be set on things above—not on things on the earth.

IX. My last reflection is this—THERE WILL BE NO EMPTY PLACE IN HEAVEN. In that great family gathering up above, they will not be able to say, "David's place is empty."

Beloved, if you are a believer in Christ, if you are the poorest saint and the least worthy of consideration in the whole household, yet you shall have your place in Heaven! You must have it, for God will not have one empty seat, there, and nobody but yourself can fill your place! Our Lord Jesus Christ says—mark His Words—"I go to prepare a place." That is something. But note the next words—"I go to prepare a place for¹ you"—for you, not for somebody else, but for you. If you are a believer in Jesus Christ, you must have the place which Jesus Christ has gone to prepare for you! There is a crown in Heaven which can fit no other head but mine. And there is a harp in Heaven out of which no other fingers but mine can bring music. There is a mansion in the skies which nobody but you can ever occupy and there are joys for you, only, and a place in the complete circle of God's elect that must be filled—and must be filled by you. Oh, what joy is this!

Press onward, my Brothers and Sisters, go on bravely! If the darkness thickens and the dangers multiply, Christ is your life, and you cannot die! The everlasting wings shall cover you and the everlasting arms shall be underneath you. You shall meet us in the place where all the family shall be present and the great Father and the elder Brother shall welcome them all, and no, "David's place" shall be empty! May I be there, may we all be there—and God shall have the praise! Amen and amen.

EXPOSITION BY C. H. SPURGEON PSALM103.

Let us read, dear Friends, the 103rd Psalm, not because we do not know it, but because I trust that we know it by heart, and feel that it is a fit expression for our heart's thankfulness on this last Sabbath evening of another year.

Verse 1. Bless the LORD, O my soul. He has been blessing you; now begin you to bless Him. If, during the week, you have been busy about the things of the world, now leave these unimportant matters and

come to the grandest exercise in which an intelligent spirit can be engaged. "Bless the Lord, O my soul." Let there be no sleeping, now, no coldness, no indifference. Let it be real soul-work. His blessings have been real, let your praises be real, too.

1. And all that is within me, bless His holy name. Bless the whole of His name, and especially the holiness of it. Be glad that you have a holy God. There was a time when this was a terror to you, for you were unholy and unable to delight in God's holiness, but He has cleansed and washed you, and now you can rejoice in the whole of His Character, in the wholeness, or the holiness, of His blessed name.

2. Bless the LORD, O my soul. Do it again. If you have praised Him, now, in your heart, lift up your heart yet higher. Let the praise come up from a greater depth, from the very bottom of your heart, and let it rise to a loftier height, even to the highest Heaven. "Bless the Lord, O my soul."

2. And forget not all His benefits. You have a bad memory for good things, but now try to make your memory awake, forget not any of God's benefits. If you can not remember all, yet do not willfully forget any of them—"Forget not all His benefits." Here is a list to help your memory.

3. Who forgives all your iniquities. Can you not praise the Lord for this? One of those iniquities, like a millstone about your neck, would be sufficient to sink you into Hell, but God forgives them all! He does it, now, as much as ever He did. He still forgives, for the forgiveness of God to His people is a continuous act. Do you, then, continually praise Him and rejoice in Him.

3. Who heals all your diseases. None can set the human frame in order but He who made it. Medicines and physicians are of little service unless God blesses the doctor's skill. Especially does the Lord heal soul sicknesses—and they are very many and very terrible. Bless His name that He continues to heal. As fresh complaints break out in your poor flesh or spirit, and your soul mourns over them, He comes and gives the healing balm.

4. Who redeems your life from destruction. Keeping you from the gates of the grave and, better still, delivering you from the jaws of Hell.

4. Who crowns you with loving kindness and tender mercies. The Lord has made a king of you, and what an empire is yours! And what a crown is this, which you wear! Other crowns make the head lie uneasy, but this is the softest, the best, the richest coronet that ever crowned head did wear! You may be content to keep it though all the Caesars should offer all their pomp to you in exchange for your crown—"He crowns you with loving kindness and tender mercies."

5. Who satisfies your mouth with good things; so that your youth is renewed like the eagle's. The mouth of man is very hard to fill. There are some men's mouths that never will be filled until the sexton gives them a shovelful of earth, for they are covetous and greedy, and always hungry after more. But God has filled your mouth, not with earth, nor with earth's treasure, but "with good things," the very best things! The best of the best He has given you! All that your heart desires, in giving you Himself, so that your youth, when you grow old and feeble in your spirit, returns to you once more. Bless the Lord, then, for all these mercies.

6. The LORD executes righteousness and judgment for all that are oppressed. He lets the oppressor go on for a while, but, sooner or later, there comes a terrible retribution. There is nothing of oppression in this world that can live long, for God is abroad and oftentimes even the horrors of war make an end to the

equal horrors of oppression. God interposes in dreadful judgments to execute vengeance on those that oppress the poor.

7. He made known His ways unto Moses, His acts unto the children of Israel. Bless Him for this! Bless Him for the Old Testament Scriptures! Bless Him that He did not hide Himself of old, but did speak to His people, and reveal Himself by His Prophets, and by the types and symbols of the Law. Bless His name and study much the Revelation of His ways and acts, and get all the good out of it that you can.

8. The LORD is merciful and gracious. Bless Him, O my soul! Bless Him for this, for where would you have been if He had not been merciful? Where would you be if He were not gracious, giving Grace to keep you what you are, and to make you better?

8. Slow to anger, and plenteous in mercy. Blessed words! Any who are under a sense of sin will suck honey out of these choice expressions. "Slow to anger." God does get angry, finally, when Grace has had her day, but He is "plenteous in mercy.

9. He will not always chide. He will chide sometimes. He would not be a kind Father if He did not. That is a cruel father to His children who never chides them. This was Eli's sin and you know how it brought destruction upon him and his house. Our Father takes care to chide us when we need it—but, "He will not always chide."

9, 10. Neither will He keep His anger forever. He has not dealt with us after our sins; nor rewarded us according to our iniquities. Brothers and sisters, bless His name for this! Let every verse, as we read it, awaken fresh gratitude—and let us keep up the music of our souls in harmony with the language of the Psalm.

11, 12. For as the Heaven is high above the earth, so great is His mercy toward them that fear Him. As far as the east is from the west, so far has He removed our transgressions from us. They are gone. There is a chasm between us and our sins which will never be bridged. To an infinite distance has the great Scapegoat carried away all the sins of His people—they shall never return to us.

13. Like as a father pities his children, so the LORD pities them that fear Him. The best of them need pity. There is something to pity in them and, because the Lord pities them, He will not lay too heavy a burden upon them. He will not demand too much of them. He will not give them over to their enemies. He deals tenderly with them because they are so weak.

14. For He knows our frame; He remembers that we are dust. Sometimes we do not remember that, ourselves—we think that we are iron—and we fancy that we shall last forever. But the Lord "remembers that we are dust."

15. 16. As for man, his days are as grass: as a flower of the field, so he flourishes. For the wind passes over it, and it is gone; and the place thereof shall know it no more. Before even the mower's scythe comes, the hot eastern wind has dried up the grass and it is gone. How little a thing carries us away! It seems as if it did not need death to come with a sharp scythe to cut down such frail creatures as we are. He does but breathe upon the field and all the flowers are withered at once. Oh, that we might all be prepared for such a speedy end of our lives and not look upon this world as a place for a long stay, but only as the meadow in which we, in common with other feeble flowers, are blooming out our little hour!

17. But the mercy of the LORD is from everlasting to everlasting upon them that fear Him. Blessed be His name that mercy had no beginning and shall never have an end! You and I are of yesterday and, therefore, we pass away tomorrow. But God is always the same, and of His years there is no end, because He is without beginning—and such is His love to His people—eternal and unchangeable. Bless His name for this, dear Friends. Do not forget what is to be the accompaniment to the reading of the Psalm, but constantly bless the Lord, praise Him, and magnify His holy name.

17, 18. And His righteousness unto children's children; to such as keep His Covenant, and to those that remember His Commandments to do them. Bless Him for His goodness to our children. Some of us have seen the Covenant of the Lord kept to our children as well as to ourselves. May we all have that blessing in the case of all that spring of us!

19. The LORD has prepared His Throne in the heavens; and His Kingdom rules over all. Bless Him for His sovereignty! A God who did not reign would be no God to us! But "the Lord reigns, let the earth rejoice," and let His people be glad because He "has prepared His Throne in the heavens," beyond the reach of all man's attacks or assaults. Beyond all time and change, the Lord reigns on forever and ever, "and His Kingdom rules over all." It extends over all things that are on the earth, and above it, and beneath it—angels and men and devils are all subject to His sway.

20-22. Bless the LORD, you His angels, that excel in strength, that do His Commandments, hearkening unto the voice of His Word. Bless you the LORD, all you His hosts; you ministers of His, that do His pleasure. Bless the LORD, all His works in all places of His dominion: bless the LORD, O my soul. I think, before we pray, we must bless and magnify the Lord by singing Milton's version of Psalm 136—

"Let us with a gladsome mind, Praise the Lord, for He is kind: For His mercies shall endure, Ever faithful, ever sure."

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