

The Refuge for the Oppressed

by J.C. Philpot

The sermon emphasizes the importance of knowing God's name and putting our trust in him as our refuge in times of trouble and oppression.

Scripture: Deuteronomy 4:29, Psalm 9:9-10, Psalm 34:17, Proverbs 18:10, Isaiah 55:6, Jeremiah 29:13, Matthew 7:7, Hebrews 11:6

Topics: "Spiritual Refuge", "Trust In God"

Description

J.C. Philpot preaches about the Lord being a refuge for the oppressed in times of trouble, emphasizing the need for a personal experience with God's perfections, seeking Him sincerely, and putting trust in Him. He delves into the spiritual significance of seeking God, knowing His name, and the assurance that God never forsakes those who seek Him. Philpot encourages self-reflection on one's spiritual journey, highlighting the importance of experiencing God's work in the heart and distinguishing true spiritual life from empty profession.

Transcript

Preached at Zoar Chapel, London, on Lord's Day Evening, August 10, 1845, by J. C. Philpot

"The Lord also will be a refuge for the oppressed - a refuge in times of trouble. And those who know Your name will put their trust in You - for You, Lord, have not forsaken those who seek You." Psalm 9:9-10

I found upon the vestry table this morning a letter requesting me to preach from a certain text, "Jesus wept." The writer of that letter must know very little of the perplexities and exercises that I and every minister of truth have with respect to the texts that we preach from. I cannot take a text, and speak from it in the mere exercise of my judgment. Before I can take a text, and preach from it, I must have three things. First, I must see a vein of experience in it; in other words, I must have light upon it - secondly, I must find a measure of sweetness and savor in it; I must know something personally of the experience contained in it, and feel a measure of dew and unction to rest upon it; in other words, I must have life from it - and thirdly, I must find in it sufficient matter to form a tolerably full and connected discourse. I cannot run here, there, and everywhere all through the scriptures, nor deal in vague, loose generalities - but as far as the Lord gives me wisdom, strength, and ability, my path is to unfold the mind of the Spirit in such portions of the scripture as are commended with some savor to my conscience. In making these remarks, I wish not to condemn other gracious men who are led differently. Each has his own path and his own work - and God will bless each according to that line in which he leads him.

I have been much exercised and perplexed as to what text I should preach from. I think I have turned the Bible over this afternoon from beginning to end, without finding any one text in which I could see and feel these three things. At last, my eyes, in turning over the Psalms, fell upon these words. But it remains to be proved whether God directed my eyes there; for if he directed my eyes there, and brought a measure of their sweetness and savor into my soul, the effects and fruits will be seen and felt in your consciences.

The text consists of four clauses. May the Lord enable me, in taking up these clauses, so to unfold them, that the dew, power, and savor of the Holy Spirit may rest upon, and seal them with a divine unction to our hearts.

I. "The Lord also will be a refuge for the oppressed." By "the Lord," in the text, we are to understand Jehovah in his Trinity of Persons, and Unity of Essence - Jehovah the Father, Jehovah the Son, and Jehovah the Holy Spirit, Israel's Three-one God. Now God, in his Unity of Essence, and Trinity of Persons, is a refuge to God's poor, oppressed family.

How he is, I shall endeavor under my third head more particularly to unfold - but previously, it will be desirable to enter a little into the meaning of the word "REFUGE."

1. The leading idea contained in the word "refuge" is that of shelter. For instance, we read in the scripture of "the cities of refuge." These were certain cities, three on one side of Jordan and three on the other, which God appointed for the manslayer to flee unto, that the avenger of blood might not smite him with the sword. When the manslayer had fled into these cities of refuge, he found in them shelter, protection and safety.

2. Again. Strongholds, fortified cities, and lofty rocks are set forth in scripture as places of refuge. David says, "The Lord is my rock, and my fortress, and my deliverer., my high tower, and my refuge" 2Sa 22:2,3 . "The high hills are a refuge for the wild goats" Psalm 104:18. All these expressions imply, that when a person escapes to a fortified city, a lofty tower, or a high rock, there he finds shelter.

3. Again. A harbor of refuge is an expression in common use, that is, a natural or artificial haven along a rocky or dangerous coast, into which a ship tossed by the storm, or in danger of being cast upon the rocks, may run, and find safety.

Thus, the leading idea in the word "refuge" is shelter and safety - a place where one that has the guilt of blood upon his conscience, or one who is attacked by an enemy, or one who is tossed upon the stormy main, may find a secure shelter.

The Lord Jehovah in his Trinity of Persons, is this refuge for his people! He is their city, he is their rock, he is their harbor - unto him they flee in their distress, and find eternal safety.

But before we can find the Lord to be a refuge and a shelter for our souls, we must, by the work of the Holy Spirit upon our conscience, be brought into that spot to which the Lord as a refuge is adapted. The cities of refuge were nothing except to the man who had shed blood - the stronghold and fortified city are nothing except to one who is pursued by an enemy - the harbor of refuge is nothing to a vessel sailing on a smooth sea. Danger, attack, alarm, violence, peril - these things make a refuge suitable and desirable.

Carry this idea into spiritual things, as the text unfolds it. "The Lord also will be a refuge for the oppressed." Does not the Holy Spirit here point out the people who need refuge?

Who are these "oppressed"? They are the Lord's tried family, his quickened, exercised, and often perplexed people. These are oppressed in various ways. But it is their oppression which makes Jehovah sought after as a refuge for their souls.

There is a great deal of NATURAL oppression in this country. What strides it is making! This country presents at this moment a fearful spectacle - the rich getting richer, and the poor getting poorer; avarice sweeping into its lap the labors of the poor, increasing thereby its ill-gotten substance - and many of those who toil by their hands reduced to extremity and well-near starvation. These things I would not allude to, were not many of God's people suffering participants. The poor child of God suffers under the iron hand and iron heel of oppression just as much as his fellow men.

But there is this difference between them. The oppressed men of the world know no Jehovah as a refuge to flee unto - but the Lord's oppressed family flee for refuge unto that invisible God whom the world knows nothing of. They have a God of providence on whom to fix their eye - and the Lord, who counts the very hairs of their head, and who knows they stand in need of supplies for their temporal necessities, at times opens his hand. They have not fled to him for refuge in vain - for they thus see more clearly his bounty in providence relieving them from their oppression.

But there is another sense of the word, a higher and deeper signification, that is, oppressed SPIRITUALLY. All the Lord's people are not oppressed naturally - but all the Lord's people are, in their measure, oppressed spiritually. For instance,

1. There is the HEAVY BURDEN OF SIN. The guilt of sin lies weighty and powerful upon many a tender conscience. This is an oppression which often bows the family of God down to the earth with sorrow, fills them with fearful pangs of apprehension as to what will be their future portion, lays and keeps them low, and often makes them sigh and groan under the heavy burden upon their shoulders. But it is this very oppression, in the hands of the Spirit, which leads them to make the Lord their refuge. We need heavy weights and burdens to bring us to a point in our souls. We are often trifling with the things of God, getting a few doctrines in our judgment without knowing their power and blessedness in our soul's experience. And so some go on for years hovering around the truth, without coming into the feeling power of it, satisfied with a sound creed, without having the sweetness and savor of divine realities made manifest in their conscience.

Now, when the Lord has purposes of mercy and love to manifest - when he is determined that a man should know him to be the only refuge, he lays burdens upon his back, he brings guilt into his conscience, he sets his secret sins before his eyes, he makes him feel that of sinners he is chief. Wherever this is laid by the Spirit upon a man's conscience, it will bring him, sooner or later, to the Lord as his refuge. 'What can I do?' says the poor burdened soul; 'what help can I find from the creature? What salvation can I find in myself, a poor guilty wretch, weighed down with the oppression of sin?' This will make him seek after the Lord as his refuge, for he has none other to flee unto.

2. But he is oppressed also by SATAN, that enemy of his soul's peace. And O, what an oppressor is this! I have been speaking of earthly oppressors. I have been endeavoring to shoot an arrow at those exactors who grind the face of the poor. But what are those outward oppressors to the inward oppressor? What is the iron hand of creature oppression to the iron hand of Satan when he is let loose upon a man's soul? How many of God's people have to groan and sigh bitterly on account of the oppression of this cruel exactor, harassing, teasing, assailing, tempting, perplexing, and confusing them in some way or other -

drawing them into sin, or driving them into despondency. The Lord came, it was an especial part of his mission, to heal those who were oppressed by the devil. Satan is the oppressor of the whole human race - but he is the oppressor particularly of God's family. But when we are oppressed in this way, if the Lord be our teacher, it will drive us off the creature, out of a mere name to live, out of fleshy religion and natural wisdom, and bring us to the Lord himself, as the refuge of our souls.

3. The DAILY CONFLICT that God's people have to pass through, produced by the body of sin and death under which they "groan being burdened," and by the sinfulness of a depraved nature, grievously oppresses all the living family of God. But this very oppression is overruled for their good - this very body of sin and death, which is the heavy burden of their souls, is made to work for their spiritual profit - it leads them to the Lord to support them under it, who graciously brings them through, and enables them to overcome in this battle.

Now the Lord is "a refuge for the oppressed." Every oppressed soul, sooner or later, finds him to be such. But in order to find the Lord to be our refuge, we must be cut off from every false refuge; as the prophet declares, "The hail shall sweep away the refuge of lies, and the waters shall overflow the hiding-place" Isaiah 28:17. As long as we can hide our heads in a lie, we shall hide them there; as long as we can escape into a creature refuge, into that hole shall we slink. The hail therefore of God's wrath needs to be felt in the soul to sweep away the lying refuges; the waters of judgment must come into, and overflow our flimsy hiding-place, and bring us out of it, lest they drown us in it; and then, and not until then, shall we know by heart experience that the Lord God Almighty is a refuge for the oppressed.

II. But the second clause of the text opens up still further when Jehovah is a refuge - "a refuge IN TIMES OF TROUBLE." Do you not see how the scriptures always put together the malady and the remedy? How they unfold the promises as suitable to certain states and cases of soul? and how all the perfections of God are adapted to his people only so far as they are brought into peculiar circumstances? This vein runs through all the scripture. So here the Lord is declared to be a refuge. But when? "In times of trouble." We do not need him to be a refuge when there is no trouble. Shall I use the expression without irreverence? - we can then do without him. We can love the world, can amuse ourselves with the things of time and sense, can let our heads go astray after the perishing, transitory vanities of a day - we can set up an idol in our heart - we can bow down before a 'golden god' - we can have our affections wholly fixed on those naturally dear to us - we can get up in the morning, pass through the day, and lie down at night very well without God. But when times of trouble come, when afflictions lie heavily upon us, when we are brought into those scenes of tribulation through which we must pass to arrive at the heavenly Canaan - then we need something more than flesh and blood - then we need something more than the perishing creature can unfold; then we need something more than this vain world can amuse us with. We then need God; we need the everlasting arms to be underneath our souls; we need to feel support; we need manifestations and consolations; we need something from the Lord's own lips dropped with the Lord's own power into our hearts!

1. These "times of trouble" are sometimes times of TEMPORAL trouble. If you live long enough, you will have about as much temporal trouble as you can well stand under; you will have as many waves and billows of temporal sorrow as will sometimes seem about to drown you. But what a mercy it is, when the waves and billows of temporal sorrow beat upon the head, like the surf upon the rocks, to have a God to go to! not to be looking here and there, driven perhaps to a mad-house, to strong drink, to the noose, razor, or pond. But to have a God to go to! an ever-living, ever-loving Jesus, who opens wide his arms, unfolds the treasures of his sympathizing bosom, and says, "Come unto me, all you that labor and are

heavy laden, and I will give you rest."

Now these "times of trouble" which the Lord's people have to pass through, make them to know that there is a God above. And this is a grand distinguishing feature of a child of God - that his very worldly troubles are, so to speak, the wave that carries his bark farther on towards the kingdom of God. When worldly troubles come upon a natural man, they are the ebbing wave that carries him away from God to dash him upon the rocks. But when temporal troubles come upon a child of God, they are the flowing wave that takes him into the peaceful haven of Jehovah's bosom.

2. But there are SPIRITUAL troubles. And what are all our temporal troubles put together, compared to our spiritual troubles? They are but a drop in a bucket - they are but the dust in the balance. Soul trouble outweighs and ever will outweigh natural trouble. But soul trouble will drive a man to the Lord, if anything will. When we are in soul trouble, we need such a God as he has revealed himself to be in the scriptures - a God of infinite power, infinite mercy, infinite faithfulness, infinite forgiveness, and infinite love.

These times of soul trouble make God's people know that the Lord is their refuge. If I am in soul trouble - if my heart is surcharged with guilt - if my conscience is lacerated with the pangs of inward compunction, can the creature give me relief? can friends dry the briny tear? can they still the convulsive sigh? can they calm the troubled breast? can they pour oil and wine into the bleeding conscience? They are utterly powerless in the matter. They may increase our troubles, and they often, like Job's friends, do so - but they cannot alleviate it. Only one hand can ease the trouble - the same hand that laid it on; only one hand can heal the wound - the same that mercifully inflicted it.

Now, in these times of soul trouble, if ever we have felt it - and we must know for ourselves whether we ever have, we shall make the Lord our refuge. There is no other to go to. We may try every arm but his, we may look every way but the right, and we may lean upon every staff but the true. But, sooner or later, we shall be brought to this spot - that none but the Lord God Almighty, who made heaven and earth, who brought our souls and bodies into being, who has kept and preserved us to the present hour, who is about our bed, and about our path, and spies out all our ways, and who has sent his dear Son to be a propitiation for our sin - that none but this eternal Creator, Preserver, and Redeemer, who made and upholds heaven and earth, can speak peace, pardon, and consolation to our hearts.

But you will observe, that the text speaks of "TIMES of trouble." It does, not define and it is a great mercy it has not defined what these times are, how many, or how long - nor does it define what that trouble shall be. Whatever trouble comes upon a child of God, is a "time of trouble," and however long it may last, or however short it may endure, it is still a "time of trouble." And in these times of trouble, the Lord will be his refuge.

But how sweet it is in these times of trouble to have a God to go to - to feel that there are everlasting arms to lean upon, that there is a gracious ear into which we may pour our complaints, that there is a heart, a sympathizing heart, in the bosom of the Lord of life and glory, that feels for us; to know that there is a hand to relieve, and to experience, at times, relief from that Almighty and gracious hand!

III. "And those who know your name will put their trust in you." There is a knowing of God's name. By the "name of God" are to be understood the revealed perfections of the Almighty - all that he has revealed concerning himself in the scriptures of truth. Every attribute, every perfection, everything that God has said about himself, is summed up in the "name of God." But especially does the "name of God" signify the Son of his love, who is "the brightness of his glory, and the express image of his Person;" as he said to Moses,

"Behold, I send an Angel before you, to keep you in the way, and to bring you into the place which I have prepared. Beware of him and obey his voice, provoke him not - for my name is in him;" that is, all my revealed perfections, all my glorious character, all my divine attributes are in him; for "in him dwells all the fullness of the Godhead bodily."

Now, there is a knowing this name of God; that is, there is such a thing as an experimental acquaintance in the soul with the perfections of God as revealed in the scriptures. His name is therefore known when the perfections of God are revealed in the heart and conscience by the power of the Spirit. And this is by virtue of living faith in the soul. By faith we see God. By faith we know God. When we receive into our hearts the truth as it is in Jesus, and when we believe by living faith what God has said of himself in the word, then we know the name of God - and every manifestation of God's mercy, every token of God's favor, and every shining in of God's perfections, is a discovery in our hearts, a raising up in our souls of the knowledge of God's name.

Now, until we know God's name, we cannot, we shall not, put our trust in him. But if we know his name, if we have received into our hearts the perfections of God, and have a personal experience of them - then the necessary and infallible consequence will be, that we shall put our trust in him. Let us take a review of some of these perfections of God, which when made known enable the soul to put its trust in him.

1. For instance. There is God's ETERNAL FAITHFULNESS - the covenant faithfulness of a covenant God. Now, if we have received into our hearts this perfection of the Almighty - if we have any personal, experimental knowledge of it, from having found God faithful to his word in our soul's experience - by knowing that name, or that part of God's name, we put our trust in him, as in a faithful, promise-making, and promise-keeping Jehovah. But wherever the Lord makes his faithfulness known to his people, he will test that knowledge. Our faith is to be put into the furnace, and our knowledge of God is to be tried as with fire. We may believe in his faithfulness - but that is not enough. Our belief in his faithfulness must be tried before it can be known, or proved to be genuine. The Lord therefore hides himself, veils his face with a dark cloud, does not shine forth into our souls as we would gladly have him, brings upon us a train of perplexing circumstances, and appears, instead of doing the thing we desire him to do, to do the thing exactly contrary. But if we know his name, if we know him to be a faithful God, in spite of all appearances - then we shall put our trust in that faithfulness, because that faithfulness has been proved in times past, and has been received into the heart as a part of God's eternal character.

2. His LOVING-KINDNESS and TENDER MERCY are another part of the name of God. He has shown this in the gift of his only-begotten Son. "Hereby we perceive the love of God, because he laid down his life for us." Now, if we have tasted a measure, though it be but a small measure, of the loving-kindness and tender mercy of God - if ever his grace has dropped into our souls, like the dew upon a branch - if ever this secret of the Lord has been upon our tabernacle - we know that part of the name of the Lord, and if we know it, we put our trust in it. We feel it to be trustworthy, to be a support for the soul who knows that the loving-kindness and tender mercy of God are from everlasting to everlasting.

3. Another part of his name is, his infinite and unspeakable WISDOM. Can he err? Has he ever erred? In all the multiplicity and variety of circumstances that have distressed the children of God, has the Lord ever taken a wrong step? Though he has baffled nature, though he has disconcerted reason, though he has turned our plans upside down, though perhaps he has done the thing that we most feared, and thwarted every natural purpose and inclination of our heart - can we say that he has erred? that he has made a mistake? that he has acted unwisely? that he has not done that which is for our spiritual good? Murmuring,

rebellious, unbelieving heart - hold your peace! Shall man, foolish man, a worm of the earth, a creature of a day, lift up his puny voice and say that God can make a mistake? Your path is very dark, very intricate, very perplexed - you cannot see the hand of God in the trial that is now resting upon you; you cannot believe that it will work together for your good. I admit it. I have felt it. I have known it.

But the time will come, when this dark path in which you are now walking, shall be seen full of radiancy and light, when you will prove the truth of those words - "He brought the blind by a way that they knew not." When we know God to be infinitely wise, that he cannot err, that all his dealings must be stamped with his own eternal wisdom, we are silenced, we hold our peace, we have nothing to say, we are where Aaron was. When his sons Nadab and Abihu were smitten by the Lord, Aaron knew that God could not err; he "held his peace" Le 10:3. This is our right spot. If we know anything of the folly of the creature - if we know anything of the wisdom of God - this is our spot. When our dear Nadabs and Abihus are smitten before our face, our spot is to hold our peace, to put our mouth in the dust; for God is still accomplishing his object, in the face, and in spite of nature, sense, and reason.

"Those who know your name." They who have these perfections revealed in their hearts, who have something more than a name to live, who have something deeper than a sound creed, that know God's name by a manifestation of that blessed and glorious name to their conscience, they, and they alone, will put their trust in God. These are great words. Put your trust in God! Have you ever seen him? Is he not invisible, dwelling in the light, which no man can approach unto, whom no man has seen, nor can see? What! put our trust in an invisible Being, one whom we have never seen? Surely, there must be something more than mere human nature here. Yes, there is something more than nature here. What says the scripture of one of the ancient worthies? "He endured, as seeing him who is invisible." He saw him who was invisible - he felt the presence, he knew the power, he beheld by the eye of living faith, the invisible Jehovah.

We must have precisely, in our measure, the same experience in our hearts, before we can put our trust in God. The faith of most professors (shall I say, nine out of ten?) is nothing but an empty trust, nothing but a name, an idea, an opinion, a speculation. It is not a heartfelt reality, known in the depths of their conscience before the eyes of a living God. 'But,' say they, 'they put their trust in God.' Yes, so they do - in a God of their own framing, by a trust of their own devising.

But to put their trust in an invisible God, just as though he was present for their eyes to look upon and their hands to touch; to rest on him the salvation of their immortal souls; to put all their concerns into his hands, and carry that on for a series of years - thus to put their trust in the invisible God, something more than flesh and blood - something more than nature, sense, and reason - something more than creature wisdom and creature prudence - something more than an enlightened judgment, is needful here.

On this wide sea all will be wrecked, except the vessels of mercy whom God is bringing to their destined haven. But he that in the quiet depths of conscience, and in the actings and exercise of that faith of which God alone is the giver, puts his trust in the name of the Lord God, and gives up himself, with all that he is and has, in the solemn moments when God weighs up the secrets of his heart and puts the thoughts of his soul into his balance - he that can solemnly, deliberately, feelingly, experimentally, and believingly thus put his trust in an invisible God - Father, Son, and Holy Spirit - does so because he knows the name of that God in whom he trusts.

Here is the turning point. Here is the grand line between life and death - on the one side, a dead professor - on the other side, a living soul. Mere notional confidence, masquerading to be true faith - that will one day be consumed by the blaze of God's nostrils, as flax before the fire - it will never endure the appearance of the Son of God. But the weakest spark of living faith in the soul, the humblest confidence of a child of God, will never be disappointed. That faith will be crowned in the day of the Lord's appearing. It will issue in honor, bliss, and glory.

IV. "For you, Lord, have not forsaken those who seek you." There is a word here that sweetly closes the subject - "those who seek you." There are some perhaps here who say, 'These things are too high for me - I cannot attain unto them. 'I have searched my heart,' say some of you; 'I don't know whether I have passed through all that oppression you have been speaking of.' 'I have cast a hasty glance over what I have felt to be my experience,' say others, 'and I cannot speak positively of times of deep soul trouble. You have been explaining to us what it is to know the name of God, and to put our trust in the invisible Jehovah. When I search my heart, and trace out the feelings of my soul, chilling apprehensions arise, whether I am really a partaker of that grace you have been describing.' Now, shall I cut you off? Does the word of God rather cut you off? Look at it. It puts in a word for you - "You, Lord, have not forsaken those who seek you."

"Those who seek you." Now, this takes in the poor, the halt, the lame, the crippled - the little ones of God's family, who cannot mount up into great heights of experience, and have not sunk into great depths of soul trouble. It does not leave out any of God's family, for not a 'hoof of Israel' is to be left behind.

There is, then, a seeking of God. But before we can seek God, we must have two things wrought by divine power in our souls. First, we must have a desire to find something; and then, we must know something of that God from whom we are seeking that which we desire to find. If I lose anything, I seek for it. I am merely playing, merely trifling, I am at a child's game, to be looking and searching into every corner, if I have lost nothing, and want to find nothing. So that, if there be not lodged in the depths of our heart, a solemn spiritual desire to find Jesus as the salvation of our soul, as our hope, our portion, our treasure, our all, our seeking is a dream - it is only child's play - it is mocking God - it is trifling with our own soul - it is only playing the part of a varnished hypocrite.

Is this, then, wrought with divine power in your conscience - that you want to know Jesus and the power of his resurrection - that you long to feel his atoning blood sprinkled upon your conscience - that you pant to taste his dying love shed abroad in your heart - that you desire to know the fellowship of his sufferings, and be led by the Holy Spirit into solemn union with a broken-hearted Lord? Do you want to know whether your name is in the book of life? Whether the Holy Spirit has really begun a work of grace upon your conscience? Whether you are truly in the narrow, narrow way that leads to eternal life? Does this ever fill your soul with trembling anxiety, so as to lie nearer to your heart than any worldly care, or any earthly thing?

Then, if this be the case, you are seeking that you may find something; and you know what you want. You want power, you want mercy, you want the blessing that makes rich, you want the testimony of God and the sweet consolations of the Holy Spirit in your soul. If you do not want this, all your profession is a lie. But if you want this, you have also been taught by the Holy Spirit where to get it - you have been brought off the creature, been emptied of your own righteousness, weakened as to your own strength, had your evil heart laid bare, felt the burden of sin in a guilty conscience, and known real anxiety, and, at times, distress of mind. You have seen the way of salvation through the Son of God. You believe though it may

not bring peace into your heart that he is "the way, the truth, and the life," and you believe that none but he, in his sweet manifestations, can do your helpless soul good.

Now, this leads you - if you know these things by divine teaching - this leads you to seek. How do you seek? You pray, you sigh, you cry, you groan, you search the scriptures, you hear the word. Your poor heart, sometimes, is panting after the Lord as the deer pants after the waterbrooks. You are crying for a sweet discovery of Jesus' blood to your conscience. Sometimes you are doubting, sometimes fearing - sometimes hoping, sometimes desponding - sometimes lifted up - sometimes cast down - sometimes feeling that you are a child of God - sometimes almost believing that you are a child of the wicked one. And yet on you go. You cannot rest satisfied, as thousands are, with a name to live, with a form of godliness, with the externals of religion. Something vital, something inward, something experimental, something saving, revealed by the Holy Spirit in your heart and conscience, you know to be the sum and substance of vital godliness - and if you have not this, you feel you have nothing. You cannot take up with anything short of this. You cannot rest upon external consistency. You cannot believe by your own strength. You cannot store your head with a system of sound doctrines, and rest in a scriptural creed. If you have not Jesus in your heart and in your arms, you have nothing, you feel you have nothing.

And this often tries your mind. You cannot get a sweet view of Jesus, cannot feel him coming into your heart in soft love and power. He will not speak. He will not whisper peace. He will not tell you that you are his. He will not bind up your wounds. He will not discover himself in the manifestations of his mercy. This tries you. It is a good thing it does. For this whets your appetite for divine things. This makes you hunger and thirst after righteousness. This makes you weary, and therefore to need rest. This makes you troubled, and therefore to need consolation. This makes you perplexed, and therefore to crave a divine solution to your difficulties. This makes you empty, and therefore you long to be divinely filled.

Now, it says for your comfort - you who seek the Lord - who really pour out your very soul before him - who seek him on your bed - who seek him in the different hours of the day - who seek him with an honest heart - who really hunger and thirst after him for what he is in himself - this is spoken for your consolation, "You, Lord" - David solemnly appeals to God himself - "You, Lord, have not forsaken those who seek you." 'They often fear that you have forsaken them. They often doubt and tremble in their minds whether you will ever appear. But you, Lord, have not forsaken them.' Do you often find it so? Is there not sometimes a little encouragement? Do you not sometimes under the word hear your experience traced out? Is there no little enlargement sometimes in prayer? Is there no sweet text, that sometimes comes into your bosom, and makes your very soul feast, as it were, with honey and the honey-comb? Is there no sweet sensation raised up in your heart, whereby you believe that really God is at work upon your soul?

Now, the Lord never forsakes his people. He says, "I the Lord do keep it; I will water it every moment - lest any hurt it, I will keep it night and day." O these secret waterings of God upon the soul! O these secret leadings of the blessed Spirit in the heart! How he revives the soul when dead! How he opens it when shut up! How he enlarges it when contracted! How he draws it with the cords of love! How, from time to time, he lays the everlasting arms underneath the fainting, tottering spirit! He "has not forsaken those who seek him." There may be long seasons of darkness. We may pray, and get no answer. We may cry, and the Lord give no token. We may fear that he never will hear us; yet it will be found in the end, that the Lord has not forsaken those who seek him. No, not for one moment; some appearance on our behalf, though we cannot clearly see it - some support, though we may not sensibly feel it - some check in the conscience, though we may not be fully conscious of it - some secret guidings of the feet, though we may not be able plainly to discern them.

"You, Lord, have not forsaken those who seek you." No! He never will forsake them, for his promise runs thus, "I will never leave you, nor forsake you." The Lord never forsakes the work of his hands. He will never give up his little ones into the hands of Satan that he may destroy their souls. He will not forsake those who seek his face, and call upon his name.

Can you find, you that desire to fear God - and there is no use my speaking to any one else, for they have no ear to hear, nor heart to feel - can you feel anything of this experience in your heart and conscience?

Let me just recapitulate a few of the things I have endeavored to unfold this evening, that they may be warm in our memory, and sealed upon our conscience, if God pleases.

Were you ever oppressed, or had a real burden of sin? Were you ever harassed by the devil? ever plagued by a body of sin and death? Did you ever grieve and groan on account of the sin that dwells in you? If you have, I will pass on to another enquiry. Did this lead you to God as your refuge? There is the turning point. A man may have convictions, fears, and troubles, and they may only harden his heart the more - drive him from God, instead of drawing him to God. But what has been the case with your soul? Has it brought you to God as your refuge? so that, in solemn moments, you have fallen down before God, and said, "You are my refuge, and my hope in the land of the living!" If ever this experience has taken place in your soul, you are a child of God. The Lord is a refuge for the oppressed. But he never opens his arms, and never bows down his ear, except to his own poor and needy family.

You have known - have you? - "times of trouble." I do not mean natural trouble - though you will have your full portion of that - but soul trouble. Can you recall when? Do you remember how it came on? How long did it last? How weighty did it prove? Above all, what was the effect? Did it bring you to God as a refuge? Did it drive you out of a refuge of lies, a mere name to live, a form of godliness, an external profession? We must look at the result.

Trouble does not prove you a Christian, but your making God to be your refuge in times of trouble proves it. Cain had trouble - Saul had trouble - Ahab had trouble - Judas had trouble - and it never drove them to God. But the trouble of God's people leads them to God, for they have no other rest, no other refuge. Have you not found it so? It is a mercy for you, if you have. Have you any testimony that you know God's name? Have his glorious perfections ever been opened up in your heart? Have you ever received the love of the truth, and seen the glory of God shining forth in the face of his dear Son? And has it produced this effect in your conscience - that you have put your trust, cast your hope, anchored your soul - in these glorious perfections? If so, you are a child of God - none but living souls know these internal dealings.

One word more before we close. If you cannot come in here, can you come in with this - that you seek God? that there is a cry in your soul after him, a desire in your heart to find him gracious, a breathing out of your spirit into his ears and into his bosom? This is almost the lowest evidence of a living soul - and God has mercifully given that evidence to encourage the hearts of his fainting family. Then you are a child of God. If this seeking of your heart is really a spiritual breathing of your soul into his bosom, God will not forsake you; he will not leave undone the work he is carrying on; he will not allow sin, the world, the devil, and self to get the mastery; he never has forsaken, he never will forsake, those that seek him sincerely.

Surely, if we are children of God, we can find our character under one of these heads. Here it is traced out by the finger of God the Spirit; surely, if the Lord is our teacher, we can find some of these characters in our hearts. O what a mercy to have the feeblest spark of grace in our souls! Some men think that I am some reckless - what shall I say? - some reckless hacker and hewer, who does not care how he cuts

down men, women, and children. God forbid I should lay the weight of my little finger upon the soul that the Lord has touched, though it be but the birth of yesterday.

This is my desire and aim - however far I may fall short of it - to trace out every mark of divine life in the soul, and to cut down and pull to pieces every empty profession that wears but the appearance of it. I would, if God gave me wisdom, strength, and ability, encourage the feeblest breath of divine life in the soul, the faintest mark of the finger of God upon the conscience. But as to encouraging an empty profession, as to bolstering up vain confidence, as to deceiving those who would gladly deceive themselves - God in his mercy, as long as I occupy a pulpit, keep me from doing the devil's work! On the one hand, may he enable me he alone can to take forth the precious from the vile, and thus be as God's mouth, and as a Barnabas to comfort God's children; and on the other hand, may he enable me to cut down and hew to pieces everything that does not bear the stamp, lineaments, and features of the work of God upon it.

And I know - I speak not of myself - I am a poor instrument in the hands of the Lord - I know such a ministry God will always bless, if he indeed has sent forth a man with it in his heart and mouth. Such a ministry he will bless, and no other. He will not bless a mere doctrinal ministry; neither will he bless a mere practical ministry - he will not bless anything but an experimental ministry - men equipped, commissioned, and sent forth by his own glorious power to trace out the work of God the Holy Spirit upon the hearts of his people, and distinguish spiritual life from a mere profession, which is death - and thus become instruments in the hand of God to build up the church in its most holy faith.

Some of you I may not see again, perhaps the greater portion of you; for though if God wills, I speak again on Thursday evening, yet many of you may not hear me, at least this year, again. Therefore I would leave this with you, and may God in mercy seal it upon your conscience - What do you know of the things of God in your soul? If you know the least of God's teachings, you are as safe as if you knew the most; but if you know nothing whatever of the teachings of God in your soul, may God in mercy lead you to reflect on what the dreadful consequence will be of living and dying with a mere name to live, and with nothing but a lie in your right hand.

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