

Wonders Shown to the Dead

by J.C. Philpot

The Psalmist Heman expresses his deep spiritual struggles and asks if God will show wonders to the dead, declare his loving-kindness in the grave, and make his faithfulness known in destruction.

Scripture: Job 8:14, Psalm 42:11, Psalm 88:10, Isaiah 49:14, Lamentations 3:57, Ezekiel 16:6, Romans 15:4

Topics: "Spiritual Distress", "Gods Faithfulness"

Description

J.C. Philpot preaches on the lamentation of Heman in Psalms 88, highlighting the deep soul struggles and the rare absence of hope in this particular Psalm. Unlike other Psalms, Heman's cry lacks the usual notes of faith and confidence, revealing a profound darkness and despair. The sermon delves into the paradox of finding hope and faith in the midst of spiritual distress, emphasizing the need for God's miraculous intervention in the soul's deadness and the wonders of His loving-kindness even in the grave of internal corruption. It explores the manifestation of God's faithfulness in times of destruction and forgetfulness, challenging listeners to seek a deeper, heart-transforming experience of God's righteousness and mercy.

Transcript

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"Wilt thou show wonders to the dead? Shall the dead arise and praise thee? Shall thy loving-kindness be declared in the grave, or thy faithfulness in destruction? Shall thy wonders be known in the dark, and thy righteousness in the land of forgetfulness?"- Ps 88:10-12.

This Psalm, as appears from the title, was written by "Heman the Ezrahite." We have little information in the word of God who this Heman was. But there are two persons of that name whom we find mentioned in the Scriptures. We have one in the first book of Chronicles 1Ch 2:6, a grandson of Judah. "And the sons of Zerah; Zimri, and Ethan, and Heman, and Calcol, and Dara; five of them in all." And in the same book 1Ch 15:17 we have another Heman, who lived in the time of David; "So the Levites appointed Heman, the son of Joel." There seems little doubt that the Heman here spoken of, is the Heman that lived in the time of David; a fellow-singer with Asaph and Ethan, both of whom are authors of Psalms; and though we have little else mentioned concerning him, except that he was noted for his wisdom 1Ki 4:31, and was one of the singers who sang in the temple 1Ch 15:19, God the Holy Ghost has seen fit to leave upon record the lamentation which he poured out under the Lord's afflicting dealings with his soul.

It is remarkable, that in the other Psalms, and I believe in most of the other parts of Scripture where saints are pouring out their lamentations before God, there are blessed gleams and rays of hope, that shoot athwart the darkness under which their souls were labouring. You will scarcely find one of David's Psalms, in whatever mournful key it may be pitched, where there are not some notes of hope -some strains even of faith and confidence. For instance, when he has been crying -"Why art thou cast down, O my soul, and why art thou disquieted within me?" -he goes on to say -"Hope thou in God, for I shall yet praise him, who is the health of my countenance and my God" Ps 42:11. So, in that bitterest of complaints contained in the third chapter of Lamentations, we find Jeremiah, who was there pouring out his afflicted soul into the bosom of God, still saying La 3:57, "Thou drewest near in the day that I called upon thee; thou saidst, Fear not." But if we look at this Psalm of Heman, there appears only one little gleam like a ray of the sun that for a moment bursts through the clouds; and that little gleam is contained in the first verse: "O Lord God of my salvation!" That little word "my" opens for a moment a space between the clouds, through which the Sun of righteousness casts one solitary beam. Generally speaking, you will find, that when the Psalm begins with lamentation, it ends with praise; like the sun, which rising in clouds and mists, sets brightly, and darts forth its parting rays just before it goes down. But here the first gleam shoots across the sky just as the sun rises, and no sooner has the ray appeared, than thick clouds and darkness gather over it; the sun continues its course throughout the whole day enveloped in clouds; and sets at last in a thicker bank of them than it ever had around it during the day. "Lover and friend hast thou put far from me, and mine acquaintance into darkness." In what a dark cloud does the sun of Heman set!

We gather, then, from the Scriptures, that the saints of God, however deeply they may have to wade in soul trouble (and few of God's people ever went deeper into trouble than the author of this Psalm), yet that they are scarcely ever without something which keeps them up; they are very rarely without the secret support of "the everlasting arms;" and it will be difficult to bring forward any continued lamentation of the saints in Scripture, which is utterly destitute of some actings of faith upon God, and some small gleams of hope, whereby their soul was supported. And we gather from the Scriptures also, that notwithstanding these gleams of hope, and these actings of faith in the soul, it may go down into the greatest depths of spiritual distress -into those depths of which Heman speaks, when he says, "Thy wrath lieth hard upon me, and thou hast afflicted me with all thy waves" Ps 88:7.

There are few of us, I believe, who can fully enter into this Psalm; the sea is too deep for our stunted stature. We may, perhaps, find some shallows in it, wherein we may wade; but I believe few of us have ever gone into those depths of soul affliction, of which Heman speaks here so feelingly, and under which he groans with such deep lamentation. In the verses that I have read to you the water appears to be somewhat more shallow than the generality of the Psalm; and I dare say some of us here present, who know something of what it is to have darkness of soul and trials and exercises of mind, and have some acquaintance with that charnel-house of corruption that we carry about with us, if we cannot go all lengths with this deeply taught saint, yet may be able, perhaps, to travel with him a little way along the road.

"Wilt thou show wonders to the dead? Shall the dead arise and praise thee? Shall thy loving-kindness be declared in the grave? or thy faithfulness in destruction? Shall thy wonders be known in the dark? and thy righteousness in the land of forgetfulness?"

In these verses we find mention made of four things on the part of God: "wonders," "loving-kindness," "faithfulness," and "righteousness." These were four attributes of the blessed Jehovah, which the eyes of Heman had been opened to see, and which the heart of Heman had been wrought upon to feel. But he comes, by divine teaching, into a spot where these attributes seem to be completely lost to him; and yet,

(so mysterious are the ways of God!) the spot in which he was was the very place where those attributes were to be more powerfully displayed, and made more deeply and experimentally known to his soul. The Lord led the blind by a way that he knew not into these spots of experience, that in them he might more fully open up to him those attributes of which he had already gained a glimpse; but in leading him into these paths, the Lord brought him in such a mysterious way, that all his former knowledge of them was baffled. He therefore puts up this inquiry to the Lord, how it was possible that in those spots where he now was, these attributes could be displayed or made known?

Now, it will be my business, with God's blessing, to trace out some of those spots in which the Psalmist was, when he breathed forth this anxious inquiry; and to show how the very attributes, concerning which he was exercised, are suitable, and suitable only to those particular spots in which he was at the very time that he poured forth this piteous complaint.

1. He begins -"Wilt thou show wonders to the dead?" He is speaking here of his own experience; he is that "dead" person, to whom those "wonders" are to be shown. And being in that state of experience, he considered that every act of mercy shown to him where he then was, must be a "wonder."

All God's people are brought by the Spirit's operations upon their souls, sooner or later, to be in that spot where Heman was. Paul was there, when he said -"I was alive without the law once, but when the commandment came, sin revived, and I died." Then, surely, he was "dead;" that is, he had been killed, slaughtered in his feelings by the spirituality of God's law made known in his conscience -killed, as to all hopes of creature-righteousness -killed, as to all expectation of fleshly holiness -and killed, as to any way of salvation which the creature could devise.

But the word "dead" carries with it a still further meaning than this. It expresses a feeling of utter helplessness; not merely a feeling of guilt and condemnation, so as to be slain to all hopes of salvation in self, but also to feel perfectly helpless to lift up his little finger to deliver himself from the lowest hell. If a man is never brought there, he will never want a miracle to be wrought; and God's people now need miracles to be wrought in their souls, just as much as the lame and the blind and the deaf and the dumb wanted miracles to be wrought in their bodies whilst Christ tabernacled upon earth. Whenever, then, the Lord shows any token of mercy to one who lies dead in his feelings before him, it is a wonder, a miracle, which is displayed in his soul; and he looks upon it as a most astonishing wonder, that ever the Lord should speak to him one word of mercy, that he ever should; give to him one "token for good," that he ever should pass by him as he lies "in his blood," an outcast and an alien, and bid him live; that he ever should "spread the skirt of his garment over him, enter into covenant with him, and call him his" Eze 16:6-8.

But if we look at the expression as it simply stands, it seems to be uttered by one who is passing under the sentence of death before the wonder is displayed. It does not run in the past tense, "Hast thou shown wonders to the dead?" It is not couched in the present tense, "Art thou showing wonders to the dead?" The language is not the language of praise for the past; nor of admiration for the present; but that of anxious inquiry for the future: "Wilt thou show wonders to the dead?" Is it possible? Am I not too great a sinner? Is not my case too desperate? Have I not transgressed too deeply? Have I not incurred thy righteous wrath too unpardonably? Am I not a sinner to so aggravated an extent and of so black a dye, that mercy never can reach my soul? "Wilt thou show wonders to the dead?" Oh it would be a "wonder," if ever thou couldst cast one glimpse of mercy on such a dead wretch.

But there is another meaning which the words will bear, which is of a soul, after it has received some testimony of mercy from the Lord, and been indulged with some tokens of his love and favour, through the wiles of a deceitful heart, the idolatrous alienation of depraved affections, and the secret baits and traps of Satan, falling into a state of carnality, barrenness, deadness, and helplessness towards God. When a man has got there, it seems to him that it would be as great a wonder that ever he should have a revival of spirit, and that as great a miracle must be wrought in him a second time to bring his soul into any life and liberty and feeling and contrition before God, as ever it was a miracle, and an act of wondrous mercy, in the first instance, to quicken him into spiritual life. God will teach his dear people that the day of miracles is not past. The day of miracles is no more past, than the day of the Holy Ghost's effectual work is gone by; and those that deny spiritual miracles in the soul, may just as well deny that the Holy Ghost exercises his sovereign operation in the church of God below. God will teach his people, that he is still working miracles; aye, he will bring them to that close spot in soul feeling, that nothing but a miraculous salvation can deliver them from going down into the chambers of death. And he will effectually convince them that he must stretch forth his hand in their soul as manifestly in a spiritual sense, as when he was upon earth, he stretched forth his hand, and delivered the lepers, the lame, and the blind from their bodily diseases.

And that the Psalmist does mean this, seems evident from the next clause of the same verse, "Shall the dead arise and praise thee?" This is not the language of a soul dead in trespasses and sins, but it is the breathing of a living soul struggling and grappling with death. What a difference there is, where there is life working in and under death, and where death reigns absolutely! between the quickened soul and that in which there is nothing but death, death without one spark of spiritual life, death without one ray of heavenly teaching. There is no groan, no sigh, no lamentation, no piteous inquiry, no pouring out of the heart before God, where the soul is utterly dead, any more than there is life and breath in a corpse in the tomb. But wherever life is implanted in the soul from the Fountain of life, that life groaning under death. It sighs from out of the grave; it gasps for breath, under the corpse which overlies it; and seeks to heave itself up from that dead weight, from that superincumbent mass of carnality which clasps it in its rigid and chilling embrace; it endeavours to uplift and extricate itself from that body of sin and death which spreads its cold and torpid mass all round it so that it is unable to arise. Do you know the workings of life in this way? the heavings, the gaspings, the uprisings of the life of God in your soul, pressed, overlain, overwhelmed, and all but suffocated by that carnal, dead, barren, earthly, devilish nature, which lies as a weight upon you? Depend upon it, friends, if you have never known what it is to gasp, and pant, and groan, and sigh under the weight of a body of sin and death, you know nothing of the vital operations of the Holy Ghost in your conscience.

What then, "shall the dead arise and praise thee?" What! the dark, stupid, cold, barren, helpless soul, that cannot lift up one little finger, that cannot utter one spiritual word, that cannot put forth one gracious desire, that cannot lift up itself a hair's breadth out of the mass that presses it down - "shall it arise?" and more than that, "praise thee?" What! can lamentation ever be turned into praise? Can complaint ever be changed into thanksgiving? Can the mourner ever shout and sing? Oh! it is a wonder of wonders, if "the dead" are to "arise;" if "the dead" are to "praise thee;" if "the dead" are to stand upon their feet, and shout victory through thy blood!"

What a different thing the religion of the Bible is from that superficial, flimsy, cobweb religion, which is spread in every direction in the professing world, like the threads of the gossamer on the autumn fields! The warp and weft of the Holy Spirit's teachings, what a strong, weighty, substantial, closely-woven web it is, compared with these gossamer threads that glisten in the dew, and which the step of a child can break

by thousands! Why, people think that they have only just to read about Christ, and then they can believe in Christ, and rejoice in Christ, and stand fast in Christ, and take of the things of Christ just as easily as a man comes to his breakfast table, and takes the loaf and cuts himself as much as he wants. But look at the religion of the Bible; look at the experience of the saints there recorded, mark the helplessness that is stamped upon their feelings; see the mighty work that they travel through in their souls; hear the groanings of their exercised hearts; listen to the sighs they pour forth out of their complaining lips. Is their religion of a flimsy texture? Is their hope a spider's web? Job 8:14 And is it not the divine pattern to which our religion, if it will stand the trying day, must be conformed? Oh! the Spirit of the Lord speaking in the Scriptures, blows away the flimsy gossamer web of the present day, like the chaff out of the summer threshing-floors. And let a man talk as long as he will about Jesus Christ, and his salvation, his blood and righteousness, he knows nothing, absolutely nothing about them, until he is brought into some of those straits and trials into which God brought Heman: and when he is brought there, he will begin to know how suitable they are to him, and how suitable he is to them. He will begin to feel what a miracle, what a mighty miracle of mercy and grace must be wrought in his soul, to make him an experimental partaker of "the truth as it is in Jesus." But our Calvinistic preachers have laid down such a railroad, have so filled the carriages, and start with such locomotive speed at the head of the train, that the real "mourners in Zion" cannot travel with them. But there is no making a new road to heaven; there is no levelling and relaying that road which the Holy Ghost has cast up. It is over hills and down valleys and among rough stones, a way of tribulation, a road that galls the weary traveller's feet.

2. But we pass on to another attribute of God, which is manifested in another spot of the saints' experience: "Shall thy loving-kindness be declared in the grave?" We have come a step lower now. We had been communing with "the dead" -we had been sitting by the corpse; but now we must go a step lower. We must go to the sepulchre; we must follow it to the tomb; we must accompany the corpse to the grave. For he says, "Shall thy loving-kindness be declared in the grave,"

Now, what does this signify spiritually? What is "the grave" but the place where corruption riots, where putrefaction and rottenness reigns? But the grave of which Heman was speaking, was no literal grave. God does not show loving-kindness there. Not but that he regards the ashes of his saints; not but that a day will come, when their bodies will be raised and re-united to their souls, that as they have borne the image of the earthly, they may also bear the image of the heavenly. But "the grave" of which Heman speaks here, is the internal grave -the inward sepulchre of known and felt corruption.

Heman, then, could talk about corruption. He was one of the "corruption preachers" it seems. He was not for setting aside a knowledge of internal pollution, he was not for standing upon the lofty mountains of presumption, having cast aside his corruptions, as the snake casts its slough, in the valley below, and elevated above all sense and feeling of his carnal nature. If he were not in "the grave," why need he ask the Lord to manifest his loving-kindness there? But he is shut up in that gloomy abode, a living inhabitant of "the grave" of internal corruption and felt pollution. Those former virtues of his, which once were sweet and fragrant, had now become a stench; those hands, which once could take hold of natural religion, were now not merely dead and unable to move, but fast sinking into putrefaction and corruption; that mouth which once could pour forth its natural prayers, and that heart which once could devise natural imaginations, were not merely stopped in death, but also turned into the loathsomeness of the grave.

Here, then, is a striking figure of what a living soul feels, under the manifestations of the deep corruptions of his heart. All his good words, once so esteemed, -and all his good works, once so prized, - and all his prayers, and all his faith and hope and love, and all the imaginations of his heart, not merely paralysed

and dead, not merely reduced to a state of utter helplessness, but also in soul feeling turned into rottenness and corruption. Now, were you ever there? Did your prayers ever stink in your nostrils? Was your righteousness ever a stench? And are all your good words, and all your good works, and all your good thoughts, once so esteemed, now nothing in your sight but filthy, polluted, and unclean? It is one thing to be there in doctrine; it is another thing to be there in soul feeling. When we are there in soul feeling, we are brought where Heman was, when he said, "Shall thy loving-kindness be declared in the grave?" What! wilt thou manifest thy love to a stinking corpse? what! is thy love to be shed abroad in a heart full of pollution and putrefaction? Is thy loving-kindness to come forth from thy glorious sanctuary, where thou sittest enthroned in majesty, and holiness, and purity, -is it to leave that eternal abode of ineffable light and glory, and enter into the dark, polluted, and loathsome "grave?" What! is thy loving-kindness to come out of the sanctuary into the charnel-house? "Shall it be 'declared' there -revealed there -spoken there- manifested there -made known there?" For nothing else but the declaration of it there will do. He does not say, "Shall thy loving-kindness be declared in the Scriptures?" "Shall thy loving-kindness be declared in Christ?" "Shall thy loving-kindness be declared by the mouth of ministers?" "Shall thy loving-kindness be declared in holy and pure hearts?" -but he says, "Shall thy loving-kindness be declared," uttered, spoken, revealed, manifested, "in the grave?" where everything is contrary to it, where everything is unworthy of it, -the last of all places fit for the loving-kindness of an all-pure God to come.

Now, till a man gets there, he does not know what loving-kindness is. He cannot. How do we measure the strength of a person's affection? Our wife, our relations, our friends, tell us they love us; but how do we know their love? Why, when a trial comes, then we measure the strength of their affection. When a wife can go with her husband into prison, accompany him even to death, stand by him when covered with ignominy and shame, and follow him all over the world, then we say, "There is conjugal affection -there is deep and unshaken love." And so with the loving-kindness of God; the place to have it manifested in is "the grave." That proves the strength of the affection; that shows the depth and the wondrous nature of the love. Never say that you know what it is to enjoy experimentally the loving-kindness of God in your soul's, if you have never been in that spot where the loving-kindness of God is here said to be "declared;" if the stench of the charnel-house has never infected your nostrils, and if you have never gone down in soul feeling into these chambers, never think you know the length and breadth and depth and height of the loving-kindness of God.

But here reason is lost; nature staggers; and all the wisdom of man gives up the ghost. God loves to pour contempt upon human pride, and to bring to nought all the wisdom of the creature; and therefore he brings his people into such spots as show forth the greatness of his loving-kindness. And thus, while he saves them with an everlasting salvation, he makes that salvation precious, by revealing it in such spots and places, that nothing else can suit their case, or deliver their souls. But see the paradox. What! the companion of worms, he that feels himself to be a sepulchre, he that knows himself to be infected with all the pollution of the tomb for him to desire the loving-kindness of a Triune God -that he should want the holy Three-in-one to come, not merely to the outside of the grave, but to the inside of the grave -not merely to come to the marble doors of Lazarus' tomb, but to pass spiritually through the doors into the very place where Lazarus lies, to shed abroad the fragrance and odour of eternal love amidst the putrefaction of the sepulchre, what a mystery is here! But nothing else can satisfy a living soul. He wants testimonies, enjoyments, sweet revelations, and blessed discoveries. Yet, look at the wonder. Not merely a creature, but a ruined creature- not merely a poor dead sinner in his feelings, but a putrefying sinner in his feelings, -for him to want love kisses from the lips of spotless purity, that the loving-kindness and the majesty and

the glory of the Godhead should be declared and manifested in him! Were it not the deepest humility, it would be the highest presumption. Did not the Spirit kindle the prayer, it would seem like the ravings of a maniac.

3. But we pass on to another attribute of God, spoken of in our text: "Or thy faithfulness in destruction?" Heman was exercised in his soul concerning other attributes of the Lord besides his showing wonders, and declaring loving-kindness. What, then, is this "faithfulness" of which Heman speaks? It is, I believe, in two different branches; faithfulness to the promises that God has made in his word of truth -and faithfulness to his own witness and his own work upon the souls of his children. Thus, in his inspired word, where he has externally revealed himself, God has given many absolute promises to his people in Christ. But there are other promises which are addressed to them only as placed in certain situations, -as taught certain lessons, and as standing in a certain experience. For instance, he has promised blessings to the "poor and needy," and to those that "hunger and thirst after righteousness;" that "he will regard the prayer of the destitute;" and will "look down from the height of his sanctuary to hear the groaning of the prisoner, to loose those that are appointed to death." He has filled his word with promises to those that sigh and cry, to the mourning penitent, the heart-broken, the sin-sick, the asking, seeking, and knocking inquirer; and he is bound by his own eternal attributes to be faithful to his own word. Heman, therefore, says to him, "Wilt thou show thy faithfulness in destruction?" There is the point. "Destruction" seems to contradict faithfulness, and yet it is destruction which more fully manifests it. God has so wonderfully ordained and tempered matters, that the very things which seem most to contradict his divine attributes, are the very things that he makes use of to manifest them. Heman would seem to expostulate with God thus: "Hast thou not destroyed my hopes? hast thou not blasted my fond expectations? hast thou not cut away every prop on which I could lean for support? hast thou not ruined everything to which I could look for comfort? Is this 'thy faithfulness' to thy promises? Is it thus that thou dost adhere to thine own revealed word?" Instead of answering my prayer, thou only keepest thyself more distant; instead of relieving my wants, thou only seemest to repel me farther from thee; instead of appearing when I call, thou only hidest thyself behind a thicker cloud; instead of leading me up to the spot where I wish to be, thou only seemest to thrust me farther from thy kingdom.

Have we ever been there? Have we ever found that the more we try to get near the Lord, the more he seems to thrust us away; that the more we endeavour to get hold of salvation, the farther off we are driven from it; that the more we want to realise our interest in Christ, the sweetness of the promises, and the teachings of the Holy Ghost, the more destitute we feel of them? We are tempted then to say at such times, "Showest thou thy 'faithfulness in destruction' -is this the way that thou manifestest thy faithfulness?" "Why, thy faithfulness would bind, but thou woundest; thy faithfulness would bring near, but thou drivest farther off; thy faithfulness would revive the soul with some drops of heavenly sweetness, but thou puttest a cup of gall and wormwood into our hands." The way in which reason would say that God's faithfulness would be shown is just contrary to these dealings. Nature and reason argue, "I am 'poor and needy,' I am crying unto the Lord, I am seeking his face, I am the very character that he has promised to bless; but so far from fulfilling his word, so far from confirming and acting up to his promise, he only seems to push me farther from him." Well, then, here is the trial of faith, that God's faithfulness is shown in this destruction, because it is in it that his faithfulness is manifested, in never suffering the soul to be tried and tempted more than it can bear, but making a way to escape that it may be able to bear it.

But again, the Lord's faithfulness consists in strict adherence to such testimonies as he has not merely written in his word, but as he has engraved upon his people's hearts. The Lord said to Jacob, that "he

would be with him to keep him in all the places whither he went" -that was the solemn promise he made to him at Bethel. Did he keep him? Did not Laban change his wages ten times? Was he not cheated in that affair which was nearest his heart? He might say, "Lord, didst thou not promise to keep me in all places?"

Art thou then faithful? Showest thou thy faithfulness in this destruction?" But when at last he came to his death-bed, he doubtless saw that the Lord had been manifesting his faithfulness in this apparent destruction; that those very sufferings and ill treatment were the means, in God's hands, of driving him out of the place of exile, and bringing him to his own land. Thus, the very persecutions that he experienced from Laban's hands, in which God did not seem to fulfil one branch of his original promise, that he would "keep him in all places wheresoever he went," were made the means of the second branch of promise being fulfilled, that he would "bring him again to his own land."

The Lord, perhaps, may have dropped a promise into your soul, that he would be your God, and that he would bless you, and keep you, and teach you, and uphold you, that he would not let you be tempted more than you can bear: and sometimes when the Lord does not seem to fulfil his promise, you are ready to pour forth the passionate and unjustifiable language of Jeremiah: "Wilt thou be altogether unto me as a liar, and as waters that fail?" But it is in this destruction that the Lord manifests his faithfulness.

Because what is the Lord's object? It is not for our natural comfort that he is concerned, but for our spiritual profit. The Lord has destroyed your idols; but by destroying your idols, has he not set up himself in your hearts as the only object of worship? He has destroyed, perhaps, some of your property, made you poor in this world's goods, but he has destroyed it, that he might make you lean more strongly upon the arm of Providence. He has put you into those circumstances whereby you have lost your former highly prized character amongst men (I mean not your character in the eyes of God's children), but you have lost the esteem and good opinion of the world and of the professing church, and you are now branded with that black badge of "Antinomian."

But in making you an outcast, he has separated you from the enemies of truth, has brought you nearer to his dear family, and closer, perhaps, to his own bosom, as well as stamped his own image more visibly upon you. The Lord has destroyed your false religion, your natural hopes, your fleshly prayers, your imaginary piety, your mock holiness, and those things in you which were not of himself, but which were of the earth earthy, and were drawing you aside from him; and has made you a poor, naked, empty, stripped wretch before his eyes.

But it is in these very acts of destruction, that he has shown his faithfulness -his faithfulness to his covenant, his faithfulness to his written word, his faithfulness to those promises which he has dropped with power into your heart. And the time will come, when you will see faithfulness stamped upon every dealing of God with you in providence and in grace; and I will tell you where you will see his faithfulness to have been manifested most, -in destruction. You will see God's faithfulness to his covenant most clearly evidenced in destroying your false religion, in order to set up his own kingdom in your soul; in destroying everything which alienated and drew away your affections from him, that he alone might be enshrined in your hearts; and you will say, when the Lord leads you to look at the path he has led you, in after years, "Of all God's mercies his greatest have been those that seemed at the time to be the greatest miseries; the richest blessings which he has given me, are those which came wrapped up in the outside covering of curses; and his faithfulness has been as much or more manifested in destruction, than in restoration."

4. "Shall thy wonders be known in the dark? and thy righteousness in the land of forgetfulness?" Here is another attribute of God about which Heman was exercised. His "righteousness." God's righteousness, I believe, here and elsewhere does not mean only Christ's righteousness, but also the righteous acts of God in dealing with the soul in a way consistent with his own equitable character. Righteousness does not only mean the glorious righteousness of imputation, but often also the righteousness of God's righteous dealings. It is indeed true that Christ's righteousness is shown in the land of forgetfulness, but there is another kind of righteousness there equally manifested, such a righteousness as we read of in the song of Deborah and Barak: "There shall they rehearse the righteous acts (or "righteousnesses)," margin of the Lord, even the righteous acts toward the inhabitants of his villages in Israel." And I must say that the righteousness of God in this sense, though the Scriptures are full of it, is much overlooked by many preachers and writers.

This land of forgetfulness seems to imply two things -our forgetfulness of God, and God's apparent forgetfulness of us. We often get into this sleepy land of forgetfulness toward God; we forget his universal presence, forget his heart-searching eye, forget his former benefits, forget his ancient mercies, forget his past testimonies, forget the reverence which belongs to his holy name, forget everything concerning him; which above all things we have desired most earnestly to remember.

It is then, in this land of forgetfulness, in this dull and heavy country, when, like the disciples in the garden, we sleep instead of watching, that God is still pleased to show forth his righteousness. God's righteousness runs parallel with Christ's atonement, for therein is his intrinsic righteousness manifested, that is, his strict compliance with equity and justice, because equity and justice have been strictly fulfilled by the propitiation of the Son of God. Therefore, the soul says, "Wilt thou show thy righteousness in this land of forgetfulness- where I have forgotten thee, where I turned aside from thee, where I have let slip out of my memory all thy previous dealings with me- and shall thy righteousness be manifested even there? that is, thine equity in showing forth mercy, because for me a sacrifice has been offered, thy righteousness running parallel with the atoning stream of Christ's blood, that this righteousness shall not be forfeited by my forgetfulness.

What! canst thou, when I have forgotten thee, and forsaken thee, and turned my back upon thee, can thy righteousness be there manifested? What! Righteousness running side by side with mercy? and righteousness still preserving all its unbending strictness, because this very backsliding of heart, this very forgetfulness of soul, this very alienation of affection, this very turning my back upon thee, have all been atoned for, blood has been shed for them, the price of them has been paid; and righteousness can be still shown in the land of forgetfulness, because all my sins committed in the land of forgetfulness have been atoned for by redeeming blood."

But the land of forgetfulness often means forgetfulness on God's part -God seems to forget his people. "Zion has said, The LORD hath forsaken me, and my Lord hath forgotten me" Isa 49:14. "Hath God forgotten to be gracious? Hath he in anger shut up his tender mercies?" Does it not seem, at times, as though the Lord had utterly forgotten us, would take no more notice of us, slights us, rejects us, and would not cast one look, or bestow one word upon us? Oh, how often have you and I had to go to a throne of grace, and try to get the Lord's ear, try to cling around the Lord's feet, and ask him for some manifestation of mercy, for one word of comfort to our souls, for one token, for one smile; and come away just as empty as we went; no sweet appearances, no heavenly manifestations, no divine whispers, no blessed token, no soft intimations of his mercy and loving-kindness to us.

He seems, at such seasons, with reverence be it spoken, to be in the land of forgetfulness, for he takes no notice of us. Can he, then, show his righteousness there? What! can righteousness be on my side, when he seems to have forgotten me? Can it be consistent with his righteousness to reveal himself? For a child of God knows that he cannot be acquitted except justice is satisfied; nor does he want the integrity and uprightness and holiness of God to be lowered; he dares not wish for any blot or tarnish to come over God's essential justice; and therefore he says, "Can it be consistent with thy righteousness and thy justice to give me a smile, and favour me with a token for good? In other words, is my name in the book of life? Has blood been shed for my sins? Have my iniquities been freely pardoned? and so righteousness is on my side as well as mercy." As Hart says,

"Justice is now for me."

If righteousness and justice are not on your side, as well as mercy, you will be lost for ever. Unless justice has been fully satisfied for your sins, they will be counted in full tale upon your guilty head. God will never pervert justice for the sake of mercy, nor suffer it to be distorted. Nay, a child of God would wish these two attributes of the great Jehovah to remain in his bosom in all their original purity in all their eternal uprightness, and not to be sullied or distorted one by the other! Has the Lord ever brought your souls to this solemn spot? and have we ever known what it is, I do not say in all its depth, but in a measure, to be led into this spot of experience, which the Holy Ghost has here traced out?

My friends, why has God left on record this experience of Heman? Is it to swell the Bible into a larger size; or to give us some more Sunday reading or set before us a little variety that there may be something interesting or entertaining in the Scriptures? Oh, no. But the things written aforetime are for our instruction that we, through patience and comfort of the Scriptures, might have hope Ro 15:4. There is no use, then, talking of our knowledge, and of our religion, and our church membership; how highly persons think of us, how diligently we read the Scriptures and have our family prayer with such regularity, if we are destitute of heart-work.

I am well convinced that we can only get at the secrets of vital godliness by travelling in the paths of God's marking. They are not to be picked up, and plucked out of the word of God, as a man walking in a garden will pluck a rose here, and gather a tulip there. We cannot walk in the garden of Scripture, and pluck a pretty text, and stick it in our button-hole, put it to our nose, and inhale the fragrance of it. But we must walk in those paths which God has laid out in his word; and that is, to be brought by the hand of God into certain exercises, certain trials, certain spots, and when brought there, to cry out of the depths of a broken heart, for the manifestation of those blessings which we see in the Scripture? and feel our deep need of, but the power, unction, sweetness, and divine application of which "we want to feel in our heart."

Look at your religion, then; look well that it is from God. If it is his work it will stand the test. You need not fear what such a worm of the dust as I can say; you need not tremble for your religion, for if it is worth anything, if it is good, it will bear to be put in the scales. You need not fear to put down a good sovereign. It will bear to be well chinked upon the counter. The clerk at the Bank of England will not take out the brand and stamp "forged" on a good note. You need not fear a few searching questions, if your religion is of the right sort.

Well, how did you get it? Did you come at it as Heman did? Have you any of his deep exercises in your souls before God? If so, you know a little of the power of vital godliness; your eyes are opened to see a little of what true religion is; and as the Lord leads you into real soul-exercises, you begin to feel and to

say, "What a flimsy, empty, superficial, delusive thing the dry Calvinism of the present day is;" and you are calling out from the bottom of your souls to the God of all grace to give you power, and to grant you sweet manifestations, and to bring Jesus into your hearts in all his love and glory; to afford you a sure testimony of your interest in him, and to lead you into the length and breadth and height and depth of his love that passeth knowledge.

Thus you get inwardly and outwardly separated from all dead, dry profession; and are led by the Holy Ghost into the very marrow and fatness of the gospel; and there you feel how different it is to live under the anointings of the blessed Spirit, get your religion from the mere mouth of man, or learning it merely out of the letter of God's word, without the sealing application of truth upon the heart. May the Lord, if it be his will, bless this testimony to your soul's good, and his own eternal glory.

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