

THE AUSTRALIAN ANABAPTIST

God's solid foundation stands firm. 2 Tim. 2-19

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Neither do men light a candle, and put it under a bushel,
but on a candlestick; and it giveth light unto all that are in
the house.

Matthew 5:15

From The Editor's Desk.

This month we conclude the message by Brother Merle Ruth “Recognizing a Lukewarm Experience” and during the process of selecting other content two articles “The Anchor and the Cables” and “The Beginnings of Apostasy” were noted to have a somewhat similar theme as recognizing our lukewarmness as a sign of drift and the beginning of apostasy, all relate to staying firmly in one place and not drifting.

It brought to mind an experience of the coast of southern China some 40 years ago during my service on a Navy vessel not much larger than a fishing trawler when a typhoon held us in its unrelenting grip for five days and nights, taking us many nautical miles offcourse on our way to Hong Kong from South Vietnam, we had reason to fear for our very lives but I praise the Lord He preserved our lives. No anchor or cables no matter how strong or how large would have kept us safe nor would they have been able to keep us from drifting offcourse, we did have what is called a “sea anchor” in place which is a large canvas contraption dragged behind the ship on very strong cables to keep the ship’s head pointing into the oncoming sea and prevent it – hopefully – from capsizing but it does not arrest the drift and I believe it is the same in our journey of faith.

We can carry our Bible knowledge, (anchor) we can have strong family ties (cables) in the congregation to which we belong, we may even display the outward appearance of good and faithful members and be vocal in expressing it to other brethren and sisters (sea anchor), to all appearances we are keeping our direction of travel into the oncoming and ongoing storms of life but inside our compass or guide (Holy Spirit) knows and tells us we are drifting. Prayerfully the articles selected will help us to recognise our drift or the beginning of it and cause us to make secure our ship of faith.

But now I have found, and you can also find, that no matter the storms of life we do have an Anchor and you can have the same by grounding yourself deep in the Saviour’s love, using His Word as the cables that secure you to Him who is not only our Anchor of Faith but also the Rock of our Salvation, the Rock that is steadfast and sure eternally.

May you draw encouragement from the song “Will Your Anchor Hold” and see in it God’s hand restraining the forces of darkness from overwhelming you and capsizing your faith and making you shipwreck on the shores of worldly concerns and pleasures.

JvL.

Will Your Anchor Hold?

Will your anchor hold in the storms of life,
When the clouds unfold their wings of strife?
When the strong tides lift and the cables strain,
Will your anchor drift, or firm remain?

(refrain) *We have an anchor that keeps the soul
Steadfast and sure while the billows roll,
Fastened to the Rock which cannot move,
Grounded firm and deep in the Savior's love.*

It is safely moored, 'twill the storm withstand,
For 'tis well secured by the Savior's hand;
And the cables, passed from His heart to mine,
Can defy that blast, thro' strength divine. (refrain)

It will surely hold in the Straits of Fear—
When the breakers have told that the reef is near;
Though the tempest rave and the wild winds blow,
Not an angry wave shall our bark o'erflow. (refrain)

It will firmly hold in the Floods of Death—
When the waters cold chill our latest breath,
On the rising tide it can never fail,
While our hopes abide within the Veil. (refrain)

When our eyes behold through the gath'ring night
The city of gold, our harbor bright,
We shall anchor fast by the heav'nly shore,
With the storms all past forevermore. (refrain)
Priscilla J. Owens 1882.

MINISTER'S CORNER.

Recognising a Lukewarm Experience

Conclusion of the message in the August issue by Merle Ruth, Valley View Mennonite Church Revival Meeting.

The previous section concluded with the story of the frog and its adjustments to its gradually changing circumstances and Brother Merle concludes with this observation:

“I believe that the most subtle, the most disarming thing about lukewarmness is likewise the gradualness with which it overtakes its victim. Although lukewarmness is very deceptive and consequently is not recognised by many it nevertheless can be recognised by the spiritually healthy Christian.”

He then continues his message as follows:

Accepting that assumption I come now with another question, question number six.

6] What are the indications, the symptoms, not the marks by which lukewarmness can be recognised?

Now this obviously calls for a multiple answer.

Initially I would say that we are recognising lukewarmness when we see its true character in contrast to any of the false fronts behind which it may hide. We like to dress up our lukewarmness in some kind of respectable religious garb, we may call it Christian tolerance, we may call it godly prosperity, we may call it, well we may even call it spiritual growth.

There may be a reflection of some of this in the glowing language with which those Laodiceans described themselves, while they said I am rich and increased with goods and have need of nothing, the Lord is blessing me! Why we must surely be one of His children!

Well the Lord quickly brushed aside those claims.

We are recognising lukewarmness when we see it for what it really is and call it by its right name.

Again we are recognising lukewarmness when we become painfully aware of the discrepancies or of a discrepancy existing between the divine ideal and the level of our own personal experience or that of another individual.

God has made very plain to us what His will is for us, He says the same thing in a number of ways so that He will surely not be misunderstood. We

can know what He expects of us, we can know how we ought to live, that when lukewarmness overtakes one he is content to operate on a sub Christian plane, he fails to live up to this spiritual potential, the element of the supernatural fades out of his life, he lives like the natural man on the carnal plane. He is easily irritated, he criticises freely, complains about requirements, makes fun of conscientious brethren and sisters and uses excuses for not participating when asked.

Again we are recognising lukewarmness when we detect an absence of fervency of spirit.

It may be in ourselves or in another. Those who are filled with the wine of God, those who wash themselves in the water of the Word, those who commune with God are warm-hearted persons, they love the Lord, they love the Lord with a pure heart fervently, they have the welfare of the church at heart, they are hurt by any thing that reflects unfavourably upon God's people or upon the name of Christ.

For the cause of Christ they sacrifice freely, Paul reminded the Galatians that when they first believed they would have plucked out their own eyes and given it to Paul but they were no longer minded that way. Something present before was absent now, they had lost their fervency, they had grown lukewarm.

This is another one of the alarming things about lukewarmness. It can exist when one is possibly not even violating one of the church standards. Yes, one can even be a polite, mild-mannered church member and all the while be lukewarm. When we recognise, as Paul did in the Galatians, the absence of something spiritually vital then we are recognising lukewarmness. The absence of spiritual fervency will be reflected in a dying out of spiritual interests and enthusiasm. Instead of the heartfelt experience that worship once was it now becomes merely a performance, merely an act, the prayer that was once viewed as a privilege becomes a burden, the sermons that were once so interesting now become boring, the Sunday School quarterly gets opened only on Sunday, worships services are endured rather than enjoyed, the lukewarm person comes late and leaves early.

He has lost his appetite for anything that presents a spiritual challenge. He no longer relishes meeting and conversing with the saints, even on a Sunday morning it takes very little to keep him home.

Once he may have been a faithful reader of church periodicals but now those have been replaced, they have been crowded out by the newspaper and by the secular magazine.

And here is another mark of lukewarmness.

The newly converted person who is thriving spiritually has a vision, a vision of how things could be, how they ought to be, he views his unbelieving neighbours and friends as potential Christians, he perceives what the Church ought to be and what his church could be doing and should be doing, he is touched by the plight of the lost, he is eager to share with them his experience with Christ.

But when fervency gives way to lukewarmness all that vision and concern evaporates. You now no longer invite your neighbours to revival services. Subconsciously you doubt very much that the Gospel could change them. You begin entertaining the idea that somehow God will accept them any way. In the name of realism and practicality and expediency your thinking descends to the level of the natural man, matters of a purely secular kind begin to slow up all your interests, priorities get reversed.

If there is a conflict between a social engagement or a business engagement and one of your Congregational services it is always the church that needs to suffer.

The lukewarm person may have once welcomed the counsel of others and valued the guidelines of the church but now he habitually keeps his opinion against the group, attempts to help him are resented, he does pretty much as he pleases and then a rationalising process justifies his obvious disobedience.

The lukewarm person has lost the joy and gratitude that he once had. He has become preoccupied with the restrictions of God and his church, so preoccupied with them that he fails to recognise the glorious liberty of the children of God.

Well these are some of the many marks of lukewarmness, others could be named, but really it only takes a few straws to show which way the wind is blowing, only a few straws.

And now the final question number seven.

7] Why all this concern about lukewarmness?

I have three answers.

1]. Because we are also susceptible to this lukewarmness. In my opinion lukewarmness represents the most imminent, the most subtle threat that we face, it is the pitfall to which we are most exposed. It is therefore a danger against which we must guard with the utmost diligence.

2]. We ought to be highly concerned about lukewarmness because deliverance from it is so rare. We tend to think that a little religion is better than none at all but Jesus seems to imply that He would rather see and deal with an individual who was cold than one who is lukewarm.

Evidently our Lord has learned that the lukewarm person is the one with whom He is the least successful in striking a responsive chord, the one that He himself is least likely to be able to revive and so He says: "I would that thou were cold or hot."

3]. This concern is proper and valid because lukewarmness is so offensive to the Lord of the Church. Evidently nothing is more intolerable to our Lord than lukewarmness. I can think of no other class of people for whom Jesus expressed so great a dislike: "I would that they would be cold or hot so then because they were lukewarm I will spew them out of my mouth." That is how the Lord looks upon the lukewarm person!

Well I am glad that in closing this letter to the Laodiceans that Christ could still hold out a ray of hope. Look at verse 20:

"Behold, I stand at the door, and knock: if any man hear my voice, and open the door, I will come in to him, and will sup with him, and he with me." [Rev.3:20](#).

If I am a lukewarm church member this invitation is spoken directly to me because you can count on it that wherever there is a closed heart there is a knocking Christ, wherever a lukewarm church member there is a need to renew the personal relationship with the Lord Jesus, the one and only remedy for lukewarmness is a personal renewal of Fellowship with the living Christ. That is the one and only remedy.

Open the door of your heart and allow Him to come in and sup with you and you with Him.

Renewal of fellowship with the living Christ is the one and only remedy for a lukewarm condition.

I see also in these words a striking reflection of the condescending grace of God.

He at whose door we ought to come and beg for admission is willing that the roles be reversed and that instead of us coming to His door He comes

to our door, and He not only comes but He stands, He knocks and He waits, that is indeed amazing grace.

My friend if you are a lost sheep He is seeking you tonight.

Where is Christ in your life?

Is He on the inside or is He on the outside?

Is He at the centre of your life or is He out there at the perimeter?

Is He on the throne of your heart or is He on the shelf?

Someday He who now wants to be your Saviour will be your Judge and He will need to deal with you then on that basis of how you are dealing with Him now.

If you keep Him out of your heart now He will then need to keep you out of heaven.

If you are not right with the Lord now is the time to do whatever needs to be done to get right.

You may need to repent of your lukewarmness.

You may need to mend some ruptured personal relationship.

You may need to answer for the first time the call to commit your life to the Lord.

Whatever your need may be we urge you in the name of the Lord for your sake, for God's sake, come now, come while the door is open.

My friend if you have come to years of accountability although I don't know you personally I know that you must either be a blood washed saint or hell bound sinner and to every sinner here God is saying: Come now let us reason together saith the Lord, though your sins be as scarlet they shall be as white as snow.

You can go out those doors cleaner than you ever were before but you must want it to enough to do something about it. God has done all He could, the next move is our move, your move.

If the Lord is speaking to you harden not your heart, if today you hear His voice harden not your heart. You know it will be harder at any other time than now, why not make that needed decision now?

I pray you are confident that your name is written there on the page white and fair. I hope that God will have no occasion to blot it out because one of these days the books will be opened, what a day, what a day!

I would you like to leave with you this closing thought:

We can easily forgive the child who is afraid of the dark but the real tragedy of life is that man or woman who is afraid of the light.

Let's not be afraid of the Light. Let's allow the Light to shine into every corner of our heart. Let's allow it to shine on any dirt that may be in the corners of our life.



So then because thou art lukewarm, and neither cold nor hot, I will spue thee out of my mouth.

Rev. 3:16.



THE BEGINNINGS OF APOSTASY.

Reprint of an article in Messenger of Truth September 1985.

It is evident in the Scriptures that within and from the Christian church there would be serious departures from true faith. There are warnings about it; there are descriptions of the extent it would arrive at. And there are references to beginnings that were being manifested already in the time of the apostles.

Paul said to the brethren at Ephesus, "For I know this, that after my departing shall grievous wolves enter in among you, not sparing the flock. Also of your own selves shall men arise, speaking perverse things, to draw away disciples after them" (Acts 20:29,30). He wrote to Timothy, "Now the Spirit speaketh expressly, that in the latter times some shall depart from the faith, giving heed to seducing spirits and doctrines of devils" (1 Tim. 4:1). To the Thessalonian Christians, he said, "Let no man deceive you by any means: for that day shall not come, except there come a falling away first. (2 Thess. 2:3).

In the verses that follow, Paul wrote about a "man of sin" being revealed,

"Who opposeth and exalteth himself above all that is called God, or that is worshipped; so that he as God sitteth in the temple of God, showing himself that he is God." That is apostasy in its ultimate form!

We must realize that apostasy did not then, nor will it now, begin on that level in the church. In his time, however, the Apostle Paul evidently was seeing something that was moving in that direction, for he said, "For the mystery of iniquity doth already work." There is an awesome mystery in all this. John the Revelator, seeing the fulfillment of this mystery, said, "I wondered with great admiration" (Rev. 17:6).

The preaching of the gospel of Jesus Christ, the establishing of the church in the power of the Holy Spirit, and the spread of the faith as explained in Scripture is a thrilling story. But before the Book closes, we are made aware of foreign elements that were rising and making themselves felt. Paul made mention of "Hymeneus and Alexander; whom I have delivered unto Satan" (1 Tim. 1:20). This could have been the same Alexander as "the coppersmith [who] did [him] much evil" (2 Tim. 4:14). John the apostle referred to "Diotrephes, who loveth to have the preeminence ... prating against us with malicious words: and not content therewith, neither doth he himself receive the brethren, and forbiddeth them that would, and casteth them out of the church" (3 John 9-10).

In the letters to the seven churches of Asia Minor, the departure from Christian principles is striking. The message was clear that unless restoration would take place, these brethren and churches could not endure.

In observing the operation of the church, the march of truth through the centuries, we see a continued battle. The church has continually struggled to prevent departures from taking place, to save herself from departures from truth and from apostasies that developed. The losses, however, have often been great and painful. It has sometimes happened that the apostate elements have come into great prominence and have nearly monopolized the scene, as happened in the fourth century of the Christian era. We believe, however, that somewhere true faith always survived, though often in an obscure remnant.

We would be most unwise to assume that our times are not conducive to apostasy taking place in the church. Indeed, in view of the extremely effective and prevalent means of communication in our day and the many subtle and pernicious voices we are subjected to, we must be mindful that we are in perilous times.

The roots and beginnings of apostasy are in any neglect of the commandments of God and disobedience to the Holy Spirit—in any lukewarmness. As long as we are able to recognize and deal with them on time, they cannot bring about serious or general departures. But whenever it happens that an area of problem and disobedience develops that we are powerless to truly correct, we are getting in trouble in that direction. Among the many warnings that we can gather from the Scripture, let us look at a few that indicate an apostate development.

Jude wrote about something that was facing them: Certain men had crept in unawares, and he termed the process that was taking place as "turning the grace of our God into lasciviousness" (Jude 4). In other words, they must have been placing under the canopy of grace that which was not under grace and emphasizing grace in a way that gave room for serious inconsistencies. When our understanding of grace brings about permissiveness, we are in danger. We are going wrong.

Another warning to look at is the teaching of the apostle Paul to Timothy in 1 Timothy 6. There Paul teaches moderation in financial affairs and warns against the desire for riches. Those who have coveted after money "have erred from the faith." An error had introduced itself among them in that their gain was to them a sign of God being with them: "supposing that gain is godliness" (1 Tim. 6:5). Sometimes there are those who feel comforted and confirmed in their material success or riches. Where that becomes evident or excessive, the instruction is: "from such withdraw thyself." Concerns have been expressed that this may be an area where we have been less successful in maintaining scriptural injunctions as practiced in the church in times past.

Truth is maintained by keeping a straight course, when we "turn not from it to the right hand or to the left" (Josh. 1:7). We do not prevent apostasy by being extreme. The danger in advocating ultra-conservative or too narrow of views is probably not so much in that those views will prevail, though that can happen. Often the greater damage is in causing positions to polarize, and it becomes more difficult to bring about correction.

Apostasy can find an inroad because its early manifestations are appealing. But in its more developed form, it causes much pain, especially as the brotherhood becomes subjected to the tossing about that it brings. We probably have little idea of the distress we would face in serious departures from the faith as families and congregations would polarize in conflicting

situations. But the greatest loss would be that the plain way of salvation would be confused. We all have vital reasons to resist departure from the faith. We all have a crucial part in preventing it, too.

We avoid departure from truth by living deeply committed lives to Jesus Christ. Second Corinthians 10:5 says, "Casting down imaginations, and every thing that exalteth itself against the knowledge of God and bringing into captivity every thought to the obedience of Christ." There is no departure from the truth in that instruction!

Verse 6 of that same chapter goes on to say, "And having in a readiness to revenge all disobedience, when your obedience is fulfilled." So the first thing is dedicated, self-denied personal lives before God. From there, it goes to our mutual care for each other by encouragement, admonition, reproof, and exhortation.

The discipline of the church is a critical factor and might be called the final line of defense against departure from the truth. We can exhort, we can preach, we can plead, and it all has its place. But if it is not sustained by the proper application of church discipline, including, when necessary, excommunication and the ban, we will lose the battle.

Yes, that is where the battle has often been won or lost. We know the importance of it. Under test, however, we are sometimes inclined to weaken. It is easy enough to have conviction in this when the crisis point is far away. But when it comes close to home—when it is our parents, our brothers and sisters, or our children—that is when we show whether we really believe that it is God's remedy for departure from Him.

Inasmuch as a general slackness or drift overtakes us, we need to be able to come to a general expression and rededication to the course of truth. As ministers and deacons, we often need to renew our commitment to our calling. As parents, we often need our vision renewed as to how we want the church to be for the salvation and prosperity of our families, so that there is always a sure refuge to point our children to, even if some have taken their own way. Young Christians need to deepen their consecration and faith, with a concern for how conditions in the church are now and will be in a future day.

The rewards for maintaining truth and purity are beyond computation. It is then that our fellowship is sweet and the brotherhood is meaningful. It is there that "the Lord commanded the blessing, even life for evermore" (Ps. 133:3). Only in that way can we live in safety.

Jude wrote, "Beloved, when I gave all diligence to write unto you of the common salvation, it was needful for me to write unto you, and exhort you that ye should earnestly contend for the faith which was once delivered unto the saints" *Brother Ben.*



THE ANCHOR AND THE CABLES

"Which hope we have as an anchor of the soul, both sure and stedfast, and which entereth into that within the veil" Hebrews 6:19.

Heartily we sing the words of a sacred hymn, "We have an anchor that keeps the soul Steadfast and sure while the billows roll, Fastened to the Rock which cannot move, Grounded firm and deep in the Saviour's love" (Christian Hymnal, no. 483)! But when "tempest rage and the wild winds blow," our faith is often put to the test.

The Scriptures speak of trying times just such as that. Correspondingly, they tell us of a sifting, whereby the true state of the heart is made known. The Word confirms that this may be instigated by the evil one, as in Job's case. And Jesus told Peter that Satan desired to sift him as wheat (Luke 22:31). But Jesus prayed for the apostle that his faith would not fail. True to His high office, our Lord is interceding today for us, also (Heb. 7:25). The prophet Amos foresaw that God, too, would sift His people, but not the least of grain would be lost (Amos 9:9). The atmosphere and conditions of our day are serving as a sieve, and the faith of some is showing itself deficient. Faith in God, which moves one to embrace the faith of the saints, is waning (Luke 18:8). The chaff is becoming more apparent. While this is painful, it is better to know the truth now, before the Judgment Day break upon us. Should one be found wanting, there is grace for needed renewal when we confess our sins. This sifting also helps sanctify and purify the church by bringing to light those impurities that may have been hidden (1 John 2:19).

The sacred hymn quoted above mentions an ominous peril, "When the breakers have told thereof is near..." Then, will one's anchor hold "in the straits of fear?" Far out in the deep, waves are not always so eye-catching, but the ocean is transporting massive amounts of energy in huge swells. As they near the coast and begin to collide with the rising shore, or strike a barrier, as a reef, that energy explodes into geysers of spray and foam. The roar and thunder of mighty breakers can be awesome and fearful.

Our times are like that. The spiritual forces that are crashing now against the reefs and the shores of time have perhaps been approaching out in the deep for decades, even centuries. But now, as Jesus said, there is "distress of nations, with perplexity; the sea and the waves roaring" (Luke 21:25). Furthermore, with the decrease of faith and fear of God there naturally comes more ready indulgence of the lusts of the flesh. These developments are like breakers telling that the reef is near. The culmination of all things is drawing nearer. But in the face of the storm may our hearts sing with assurance, "We have an anchor that keeps the soul Steadfast and sure while the billows roll."

True believers have a lively hope (1Peter1:3). The liveliness of that hope is in Jesus having been raised from the dead and being seated at the right hand of the Father. The whole scope of the Christian's security is based on "two immutable things, in which it was impossible for God to lie" (Heb. 6:18). The two unchangeable "things" are God's promises and the oath He swore to confirm those promises. In secular society, "men verily swear by the greater: and an oath for confirmation is to them an end of all strife" (Heb. 6:16). Being God could swear by none greater, He swore by Himself. He called upon His very attributes and righteousness to witness the surety of His promises. When faith springs up in the heart and lays hold on these truths, it is the "end of all strife" relating to acute doubts, fears, and unbelief.

God would not be God if He did not do what He has promised. It has been said that God's promise is His debt. That is a fitting way of pointing out the believer's security. God will not—indeed cannot—be slothful in paying His solemn obligation. He gave His only begotten Son to be the testator of all that He has pledged. Christ is now the Amen of every promise (2 Cor. 1:20). The Son of God is the "anchor of the soul, both sure and stedfast, and which entereth into that within the veil"(Hebrews 6:19). Furthermore, we have the earnest of the Spirit to confirm this (Eph. 1:13-14). In the age of sail power, many storm-assailed ships could not manage to enter the harbor during a howling gale because of contrary currents at the harbor's entrance. It is said that sometimes the sailors would then let down a large enough boat to carry the anchor. With bravery and exertion, the men rowed the anchor into the harbor, with the cable playing out behind. They dropped the anchor right in the calm harbor, and the ship was held fast until the storm passed over. The mariners were comforted, knowing that despite the opposing wind and current, the anchor was inside the harbor.

In like manner, Jesus has entered "into that within the veil." One could

say that Christ has carried our anchor into the safe harbor. But Jesus Himself is the anchor. He knew the impossibility of our safe navigation into the harbor through the storms of life and oppositions of Satan. Feeling for us, He braved death and then entered right into the harbor of God's presence, there to intercede for us. Although still on the tumultuous, heaving sea of time, we should be comforted to know that our Anchor is already in the harbor.

"And the cables, passed from His heart to mine, Can defy the blast, thro' strength divine." The cable between the Anchor in heaven and our frail bark on the sea of time must be meet to the stress that the storm imposes on our vessel. It is not a question of whether the Anchor will hold. The matter of concern is the cable. A mere intellectual belief will surely snap in the gale of humanism and liberalism roaring today. Membership in the church, of itself, proves of no avail. Vaguely and only culturally being affiliated with a historical faith also will not hold in the straits of fear. Only the "cables, passed from His heart to mine" by the Holy Ghost will keep our "hearts and minds through Christ Jesus" (Phil. 4:7).

The cables that the Holy Spirit passes from Heaven to us relate to the Word of God. Their composition is true justifying faith and solid conviction on Scriptural teachings. Relating to this, there are too many barks out in the tempest, tossed here and there because of little conviction of right or wrong. They are drifting in the storm, if indeed they realize there is a tempest blowing. It is the pressing burden of Christian parents, and the church, to help our younger generations receive the Heavenly cables that will connect them to the Anchor.

No cable of the nature of which we speak here will hold unless braided throughout with the principle of gospel obedience. This isn't obedience because of a law, or grudging obedience. It is obedience born out of love for the Savior and the fear of God. It is voluntary, glad servitude from the heart, not mere compliance. In short, the same faith whereby one claims justification takes hold on the Word, moving him to walk the walk. It causes one to shun the vain elements of pride and worldliness. It gives power to the church to call sin what it is and not compromise with casual and lukewarm spirits asking for an easier way.

Sincere believers are concerned about the cables. If one's cables were to be followed to their origin, would they lead in spirit right into the heavenly harbor? No one would accuse God of untruth, so the question of our perseverance relates to the cables between the Anchor and us.



MEDITATIONS ON PSALM 95

From *“The Treasury of David”* by C.H. Spurgeon.

 **Psalm 95:1.**

“O come, let us sing unto the LORD: let us make a joyful noise to the rock of our salvation.”

“O come, let us sing unto the Lord.” Other nations sing unto their gods, let us sing unto Jehovah. We love Him, we admire Him, we reverence Him, let us express our feelings with the choicest sounds, using our noblest faculty for its noblest end. It is well thus to urge others to magnify the Lord, but we must be careful to set a worthy example ourselves, so that we may be able not only to cry *“Come,”* but also to add *“let us sing,”* because we are singing ourselves. It is to be feared that very much even of religious singing is not unto the Lord, but unto the ear of the congregation. Above all things we must in our service of song take care that all we offer is with the heart's sincerest and most fervent intent directed towards the Lord himself. *“Let us make a joyful noise to the rock of our salvation.”* With holy enthusiasm let us sing, making a sound which shall indicate our earnestness; with abounding joy let us lift up our voices, actuated by that happy and peaceful spirit which trustful love is sure to foster. As the children of Israel sang for joy when the smitten rock poured forth its cooling streams, so let us make a joyful noise to the rock of our salvation. The author of this song had in his mind's eye the rock, the tabernacle, the Red Sea, and the mountains of Sinai, and he alludes to them all in this first part of his hymn. God is our abiding, immutable, and mighty rock, and in Him we find deliverance and safety, therefore it becomes us to praise Him with heart and with voice from day to day; and especially should we delight to do this when we assemble as His people for public worship.

*“Come let us to the Lord sing out
With trumpet voice and choral shout.”*

 **Psalm 95:2**

“Let us come before his presence with thanksgiving, and make a joyful noise unto him with psalms.”

“Let us come before his presence with thanksgiving.” Here is probably a reference to the peculiar presence of God in the Holy of Holies above the mercy-seat, and also to the glory which shone forth out of the cloud which

rested above the tabernacle. Everywhere God is present, but there is a peculiar presence of grace and glory into which men should never come without the profoundest reverence. We may make bold to come before the immediate presence of the Lord - for the voice of the Holy Ghost in this Psalm invites us, and when we do draw near to Him we should remember His great goodness to us and cheerfully confess it. Our worship should have reference to the past as well as to the future; if we do not bless the Lord for what we have already received, how can we reasonably look for more. We are permitted to bring our petitions, and therefore we are in honour bound to bring our thanksgivings. *“And make a joyful noise unto him with Psalms.”* We should shout as exultingly as those do who triumph in war, and as solemnly as those whose utterance is a Psalm. It is not always easy to unite enthusiasm with reverence, and it is a frequent fault to destroy one of these qualities while straining after the other. The perfection of singing is that which unites joy with gravity, exultation with humility, fervency with sobriety. The invitation given in verse 1 is thus repeated in the second with the addition of directions, which indicate more fully the intent of the writer. One can imagine David in earnest tones persuading his people to go up with him to the worship of Jehovah with sound of harp and hymn, and holy delight. The gladness of his exhortation is noteworthy, the noise is to be *joyful*; this quality he insists upon twice. It is to be feared that this is too much overlooked in ordinary services, people are so impressed with the idea that they ought to be serious that they put on the aspect of misery, and quite forget that joy is as much a characteristic of true worship as solemnity itself.

Psalm 95:3

“For the LORD is a great God, and a great King above all gods.”

“For the Lord is a great God, and a great King above all gods.” No doubt the surrounding nations imagined Jehovah to be a merely local deity, the god of a small nation, and therefore one of the inferior deities; the Psalmist utterly repudiates such an idea. Idolaters tolerated gods many and lords many, giving to each a certain measure of respect; the monotheism of the Jews was not content with this concession, it rightly claimed for Jehovah the chief place, and the supreme power. He is great, for He is all in all; He is a great King above all other powers and dignitaries, whether angels or princes, for they owe their existence to Him; as for the idol gods, they

are not worthy to be mentioned. This verse and the following supply some of the reasons for worship, drawn from the being, greatness, and sovereign dominion of the Lord.

 Psalm 95:4

“In his hand are the deep places of the earth: the strength of the hills is his also.”

“In his hand are the deep places of the earth.” He is the God of the valleys and the hills, the caverns, and the peaks. Far down where miners sink their shafts, deeper yet where lie the secret oceans by which springs are fed, and deepest of all in the unknown abyss where rages the flaming huge central fires of earth, there Jehovah's power is felt, and all things are under the dominion of His hand. As princes hold the mimic globe in their hands, so does the Lord in very deed hold the earth. When Israel drank of the crystal fount which welled up from the great deep, below the smitten rock, the people knew that in the Lord's hands were the deep places of the earth. *“The strength of the hills is his also.”* When Sinai was altogether on a smoke the tribes learned that Jehovah was God of the hills as well as of the valleys. Everywhere and at all times is this true; the Lord rules upon the high places of the earth in lonely majesty. The vast foundations, the gigantic spurs, the incalculable masses, the untrodden heights of the mountains are all the Lord's. These are His fastnesses and treasure-houses, where He stores the tempest and the rain; whence also He pours the ice-torrents and looses the avalanches. The granite peaks and adamantine aiguilles are His, and His the precipices and the beetling crags. Strength is the main thought which strikes the mind when gazing on those vast ramparts of cliff which front the raging sea, or peer into the azure sky, piercing the clouds, but it is to the devout mind the strength of God; hints of Omnipotence are given by those stern rocks which brave the fury of the elements, and like walls of brass defy the assaults of nature in her wildest rage.

 Psalm 95:5

“The sea is his, and he made it: and his hands formed the dry land.”

“The sea is his.” This was seen to be true at the Red Sea when the waters saw their God, and obediently stood aside to open a pathway for His people. It was not Edom's sea though it was red, nor Egypt's sea though it washed her shores. The Lord on high reigned supreme over the flood, as

King for ever and ever. So is it with the broad ocean, whether known as Atlantic or Pacific, Mediterranean or Arctic; no man can map it out and say “*Tis mine*”; the illimitable acreage of waters knows no other lord but God alone. Jehovah rules the waves. Far down in vast abysses, where no eye of man has gazed, or foot of diver has descended, He is sole proprietor; every rolling billow and foaming wave owns Him for monarch; Neptune is but a phantom, the Lord is God of ocean. “*And he made it.*” Hence His right and sovereignty. He scooped the unfathomed channel and poured forth the overflowing flood; seas were not fashioned by chance, nor their shores marked out by the imaginary finger of fate; God made the main, and every creek, and bay, and current, and far-sounding tide owns the great Maker's hand. All His! Creator and Controller of the sea, let those who fly in the swift ships across the wonder-realm of waters worship thee alone!

“*And his hands formed the dry land.*” Whether fertile field or sandy waste, He made all that men call *terra firma*, lifting it from the floods and fencing it from the overflowing waters. “The earth is the Lord's, and the fulness thereof.” He bade the isles upraise their heads, He levelled the vast plains, upreared the table-lands, cast up the undulating hills, and piled the massive Alps. As the potter moulds his clay, so did Jehovah with His hands fashion the habitable parts of the earth. Come ye, then, who dwell on this fair world, and worship Him who is conspicuous where'er ye tread! Count it all as the floor of a temple where the footprints of the present Deity are visible before your eyes if ye do but care to see. The argument is overpowering if the heart be right; the command to adore is alike the inference of reason and the impulse of faith.

 Psalm 95:6

“*O come, let us worship and bow down: let us kneel before the LORD our maker.*”

O come, let us worship” Here the exhortation to worship is renewed and backed with a motive which, to Israel of old, and to Christians now, is especially powerful; for both the Israel after the flesh and the Israel of faith may be described as the people of His pasture, and by both He is called “*our God.*” “*O come, let us worship and bow down.*” The adoration is to be humble. The “*joyful noise*” is to be accompanied with lowliest reverence. We are to worship in such style that the bowing down shall indicate that we count ourselves to be as nothing in the presence of the all-glorious

Lord. *“Let us kneel before the Lord our maker.”* As suppliants must we come; joyful, but not presumptuous; familiar as children before a father, yet reverential as creatures before their Maker. Posture is not everything, yet is it something; prayer is heard when knees cannot bend, but it is seemly that an adoring heart should show its awe by prostrating the body, and bending the knee.

 Psalm 95:7

“For he is our God; and we are the people of his pasture, and the sheep of his hand. Today if ye will hear his voice,”

“For he is our God.” Here is the master reason for worship. Jehovah has entered into covenant with *us*, and from all the world beside has called us to be His own. If others refuse Him homage, we at least will render it cheerfully. He is ours, and our God; ours, therefore will we love Him; our God, therefore will we worship him. Happy is that man who can sincerely believe that this sentence is true in reference to himself. *“And we are the people of his pasture, and the sheep of his hand.”* As He belongs to us, so do we belong to Him. *“My Beloved is mine, and I am his.”* And we are His as the people whom He daily feeds and protects. Our pastures are not ours, but His; we draw all our supplies from His stores. We are His, even as sheep belong to the shepherd, and His hand is our rule, our guidance, our government, our succour, our source of supply. Israel was led through the desert, and we are led through this life by *“that great Shepherd of the sheep.”* The hand which cleft the sea and brought water from the rock is still with us, working equal wonders. Can we refuse to “worship and bow down” when we clearly see that “this God is our God for ever and ever, and will be our guide, even unto death”?

But what is this warning which follows? Alas, it was sorrowfully needed by the Lord's ancient people, and is not one whit the less required by ourselves. The favoured nation grew deaf to their Lord's command, and proved not to be truly His sheep, of whom it is written, *“My sheep hear my voice”*: will this turn out to be our character also? God forbid. *“To-day if ye will hear his voice.”* Dreadful *“if”* Many would not hear, they put off the claims of love, and provoked their God. *“To-day,”* in the hour of grace, in the day of mercy, we are tried as to whether we have an ear for the voice of our Creator. Nothing is said of to-morrow, *“he limiteth a certain day,”* He presses for immediate attention, for our own sakes He asks instantaneous

obedience. Shall we yield it? The Holy Ghost saith “To-day,” will we grieve Him by delay?

 Psalm 95:8

“Harden not your heart, as in the provocation, and as in the day of temptation in the wilderness:”

“Harden not your heart.” If ye will hear, learn to fear also. The sea and the land obey Him, do not prove more obstinate than they!

“Yield to his love who round you now the bands of a man would cast.”

We cannot soften our hearts, but we can harden them, and the consequences will be fatal. To-day is too good a day to be profaned by the hardening of our hearts against our own mercies. While mercy reigns let not obduracy rebel. *“As in the provocation, and as in the day of temptation in the wilderness”* (or, *“like Meribah, like the day of Massah in the wilderness”*). Be not wilfully, wantonly, repeatedly, obstinately rebellious. Let the example of that unhappy generation serve as a beacon to you; do not repeat the offences which have already more than enough provoked the Lord. God remembers men's sins, and the more memorably so when they are committed by a favoured people, against frequent warnings, in defiance of terrible judgments, and in the midst of superlative mercies; such sins write their record in marble. Reader, this verse is for you, for you even if you say, *“He is our God, and we are the people of his pasture.”* Do not seek to turn aside the edge of the warning; thou hast good need of it, give good heed to it.

 Psalm 95:9

“When your fathers tempted me, proved me, and saw my work.”

“When your fathers tempted me.” As far as they could do so they tempted God to change His usual way, and to do their sinful bidding, and though He cannot be tempted of evil, and will never yield to wicked requests, yet their intent was the same, and their guilt was none the less. God's way is perfect, and when we would have Him alter it to please us, we are guilty of tempting Him; and the fact that we do so in vain, while it magnifies the Lord's holiness, by no means excuses our guilt. We are in most danger of this sin in times of need, for then it is that we are apt to fall into unbelief, and to demand a change in those arrangements or, providence which are the transcript of perfect holiness and infinite wisdom. Not

to acquiesce in the will of God is virtually to tempt Him to alter His plans to suit our imperfect views of how the universe should be governed. “*Proved me.*” They put the Lord to needless tests, demanding new miracles, fresh interpositions, and renewed tokens of His presence. Do not we also peevishly require frequent signs of the Lord's love other than those which every hour supplies? Are we not prone to demand specialities, with the alternative secretly offered in our hearts, that if they do not come at our bidding we will disbelieve? True, the Lord is very condescending, and frequently grants us marvellous evidences of His power, but we ought not to require them. Steady faith is due to one who is so constantly kind. After so many proofs of His love, we are ungrateful to wish to prove Him again, unless it be in those ways of His own appointing, in which He has said, “*Prove me now.*” If we were for ever testing the love of our wife or husband, and remained unconvinced after years of faithfulness, we should wear out the utmost human patience. Friendship only flourishes in the atmosphere of confidence, suspicion is deadly to it: shall the Lord God, true and immutable, be day after day suspected by His own people? Will not this provoke Him to anger? “*And saw my work.*” They tested Him again and again, throughout forty years, though each time His work was conclusive evidence of His faithfulness. Nothing could convince them for long.

“They saw His wonders wrought, And then His praise they sung;
But soon His works of pow'r forgot, And murmur'd with their tongue.
“*Now they believe His word, While rocks with rivers flow;*
Now with their lusts provoke the Lord, And He reduc'd them low.”

Fickleness is bound up in the heart of man, unbelief is our besetting sin; we must for ever be seeing, or we waver in our believing. This is no mean offence, and will bring with it no small punishment.

Psalm 95:10

“*Forty years long was I grieved with this generation, and said, It is a people that do err in their heart, and they have not known my ways:*”

“*Forty years long was I grieved with this generation.*” The impression upon the divine mind is most vivid; He sees them before Him now, and calls them “this generation.” He does not leave His prophets to upbraid the sin, but Himself utters the complaint and declares that He was grieved,

nauseated, and disgusted. It is no small thing which can grieve our long-suffering God to the extent which the Hebrew word here indicates, and if we reflect a moment we shall see the abundant provocation given; for no one who values his veracity can endure to be suspected, mistrusted, and belied, when there is no ground for it, but on the contrary the most overwhelming reason for confidence. To such base treatment was the tender Shepherd of Israel exposed, not for a day or a month, but for forty years at a stretch, and that not by here and there an unbeliever, but by a whole nation, in which only two men were found so thoroughly believing as to be exempted from the doom which at last was pronounced upon all the rest. Which shall we most wonder at, the cruel insolence of man, or the tender patience of the Lord? Which shall leave the deepest impression on our minds, the sin or the punishment? unbelief, or the barring of the gates of Jehovah's rest against the unbelievers? *“And said, It is a people that do err in their heart, and they have not known my ways.”* Their heart was obstinately and constantly at fault; it was not their head which erred, but their very heart was perverse love, which appealed to their affections, could not convert them. The heart is the mainspring of the man, and if it be not in order, the entire nature is thrown out of gear. If sin were only skin-deep, it might be a slight matter; but since it has defiled the soul, the case is bad indeed. Taught as they were by Jehovah Himself in lessons illustrated by miracles, which came to them daily in the manna from heaven and the water from the flinty rock, they ought to have learned something, and it was a foul shame that they remained obstinately ignorant, and would not know the ways of God. Wanderers in body, they were also wanderers in heart, and the plain providential goodness of their God remained to their blinded minds as great a maze as those twisting paths by which He led them through the wilderness. Are we better than they? Are we not quite as apt to misinterpret the dealings of the Lord? Have we suffered and enjoyed so many things in vain? With many it is even so. Forty years of providential wisdom, yea, and even a longer period of experience have failed to teach them serenity of assurance, and firmness of reliance. There is ground for much searching of heart concerning this. Many treat unbelief as a minor fault, they even regard it rather as an infirmity than a crime, but the Lord thinketh not so. Faith is Jehovah's due, especially from those who claim to be the people of His pasture, and yet more emphatically from those whose long life has been crowded with evidences of His goodness: unbelief in-

sults one of the dearest attributes of Deity, it does so needlessly and without the slightest ground, and in defiance of all-sufficient arguments, weighty with the eloquence of love. Let us in reading this Psalm examine ourselves, and lay these things to heart.

 Psalm 95:11

“Unto whom I swear in my wrath that they should not enter into my rest.”

“Unto whom I swear in my wrath that they should not enter into my rest.” There can be no rest to an unbelieving heart. If manna and miracles could not satisfy Israel, neither would they have been content with the land which flowed with milk and honey. Canaan was to be the typical resting-place of God, where His ark should abide, and the ordinances of religion should be established; the Lord had for forty years borne with the ill manners of the generation which came out of Egypt, and it was but right that He should resolve to have no more of them. Was it not enough that they had revolted all along that marvellous wilderness march? Should they be allowed to make new Massahs and Meribahs in the Promised Land itself? Jehovah would not have it so. He not only said but swore that into His rest they should not come, and that oath excluded every one of them; their carcases fell in the wilderness. Solemn warning this to all who leave the way of faith for paths of petulant murmuring and mistrust. The rebels of old could not enter in because of unbelief, *“let us therefore fear, lest, a promise being left us of entering into his rest, any of us should even seem to come short of it.”*

One blessed inference from this Psalm must not be forgotten. It is clear that there is a rest of God, and that some must enter into it; but *“they* to whom it was first preached entered not in because of unbelief, there remaineth therefore a rest to the people of God.” The unbelievers could not enter, but *“we* which have believed do enter into rest.” Let us enjoy it, and praise the Lord for it for ever. Ours is the true Sabbath rest, it is ours to rest from our own works as God did from His. While we do so, let us *“come into His presence with thanksgiving, and make a joyful noise unto him with Psalms.”*



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