

SCRIPTURE STUDIES

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"Come now, let us reason together," says the Lord..." Isaiah 1:18

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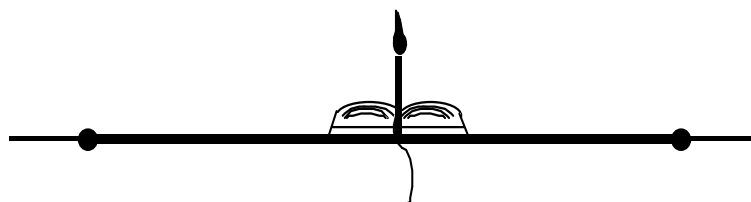
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A Study in Psalms: Exodus 3:11-22

Moses Balks at the Call of God

¹¹But Moses said to God, “Who am I, that I should go to Pharaoh and bring the Israelites out of Egypt?”

¹²And God said, “I will be with you. And this will be the sign to you that it is I who have sent you: When you have brought the people out of Egypt, you will worship God on this mountain.”

¹³Moses said to God, “Suppose I go to the Israelites and say to them, ‘The God of your fathers has sent me to you,’ and they ask me, ‘What is His name?’ Then what shall I tell them?”

¹⁴God said to Moses, “I AM WHO I AM. This is what you are to say to the Israelites: ‘I AM has sent me to you.’”

¹⁵God also said to Moses, “Say to the Israelites, ‘The LORD, the God of your fathers—the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac and the God of Jacob—has sent me to you.’ This is my name forever, the name by which I am to be remembered from generation to generation.

¹⁶“Go, assemble the elders of Israel and say to them, ‘The LORD, the God of your fathers—the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob—appeared to me and said: I have watched over you and have seen what has been done to you in Egypt.

¹⁷And I have promised to bring you up out of your misery in Egypt into the land of the Canaanites, Hittites, Amorites, Perizzites, Hivites and Jebusites—a land flowing with milk and honey.’

¹⁸“The elders of Israel will listen to you. Then you and the elders are to go to the king of Egypt and say to him, ‘The LORD, the God of the Hebrews, has met with us. Let us take a three-day journey into the desert to offer sacrifices to the LORD our God.’ ¹⁹But I know that the king of Egypt will not let you go unless a mighty hand compels him. ²⁰So I will stretch out my hand and strike the Egyptians with all the wonders that I will perform among them. After that, he will let you go.

²¹“And I will make the Egyptians favorably disposed toward this people, so that when you leave you will not go empty-handed. ²²Every woman is to ask her neighbor and any woman living in her house for articles of silver and gold and for clothing, which you will put on your sons and daughters. And so you will plunder the Egyptians.”

When we think of Moses, we think of a strong leader, a faithful man of God. We tend to forget that Moses resisted strongly the call of God, but this he did. In Exodus 3:1 through 4:17, Moses puts forth to God five responses, resisting the call of God. This is a little surprising, given that, before he fled from Egypt, Moses boldly sought to rescue his people (see Acts 7:25). “Formerly he had volunteered his services as a patriotic de-

fender of his countrymen. But he had acted from impetuosity of temper, and without any authorized mission. Having learned humility in the school of adversity, he had been led to distrust his own qualifications; and, especially considering his obscure condition as a shepherd, he felt himself too insignificant to wait upon Pharaoh" [JFB, 287]. "In Egypt, forty years before, Moses had acted like the impetuous horse and rushed ahead of God, but now he is acting like the stubborn mule and resisting God" [Wiersbe, 17].

Moses' first response to God's call concerned his own qualifications and reputation: **"But Moses said to God, 'Who am I, that I should go to Pharaoh and bring the Israelites out of Egypt?'"** (vs. 11). Moses had a point. Moses had been a shepherd in Midian for forty years, so indeed, who was he to be the leader of God's people? However, in matters relating to the service of God, God Himself is the one who determines who is qualified and who is not. "What Moses thought of himself, or what others thought of Moses, really wasn't important. God had spoken and that was all Moses needed for assurance that he was the right man for the job" [Wiersbe, 17].

God responded to Moses: **"And God said, 'I will be with you. And this will be the sign to you that it is I who have sent you: When you have brought the people out of Egypt, you will worship God on this mountain'"** (vs. 12). First, God gave Moses the greatest promise anyone could get from God as they serve Him: **"I will be with you."** **"I will be with you"** is all the assurance God's servants need in order to succeed" [Wiersbe, 18]. Next, He promised Moses a sign. The sign, though, was unusual. The sign was that Moses and the Israelites would worship God on that mountain. In other words, the sign that God was with Moses would be the success of Moses in leading the Israelites out of Egypt. God was promising Moses success.

Despite this promise, Moses continued in his resistance: **"Moses said to God, 'Suppose I go to the Israelites and say to them, 'The God of your fathers has sent me to you,' and they ask me, 'What is His name?' Then what shall I tell them?'"** (vs. 13). Moses first asked, **"Who am I?"**; now he says to God (in essence), "Who are you?" The tone here, it seems to me, is that Moses felt a little embarrassed to serve a God that had no name. Moses seemed to be saying, "The Egyptians worshiped gods who had cool names—names like Ammon (the Concealed), and Phthah (the Revealer), and Ra (the Swift). Let me have a cool name to call you." Moses' attitude here is the same as that of many nowadays. People, at times, become Christians (in name) because it is the trendy thing to do. There are times when being a Christian is fashionable. Then also, there are times when being a Christian is very square. What we all must realize is this: the search for a religion should be a search for truth, not popularity. I am a Christian because I know Christianity to be true, not to win points with my neighbor.

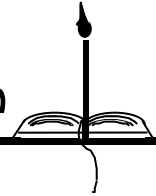
God's answer to Moses is simple, yet very profound: **"God said to**

Moses, ‘I AM WHO I AM. This is what you are to say to the Israelites: ‘I AM has sent me to you’” (vs. 14). If the True and Living God is to have a name, that name must be limitless and all-inclusive of all that God is. The name “I AM” reflects, all at once, the reality of God, the eternity of God, and the sufficiency of God. “He is the self-existent One who always was, always is, and always will be, the faithful and dependable God who calls Himself ‘I AM’” [Wiersbe, 18]. He is all, and does all. He needs no one else.

God also identified Himself as the personal God of His people, the children of Israel: **“God also said to Moses, ‘Say to the Israelites, ‘The Lord, the God of your fathers—the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac and the God of Jacob—has sent me to you.’ This is my name forever, the name by which I am to be remembered from generation to generation”** (vs. 15). It is quite sad that the children of Israel would have to be reminded who their God—the Only True God—is, after all He had done for their forefathers. But sadly, they had fallen into the worship of Egyptian gods (see Josh. 24:14). Their true God, with the help of Moses, was to gather them together to be a nation literally under God.

The Lord told Moses exactly what to tell the Israelites: **“Go, assemble the elders of Israel and say to them, ‘The LORD, the God of your fathers—the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob—appeared to me and said: I have watched over you and have seen what has been done to you in Egypt. And I have promised to bring you up out of your misery in Egypt into the land of the Canaanites, Hittites, Amorites, Perizzites, Hivites and Jebusites—a land flowing with milk and honey”** (vss. 16–17). It is quite surprising that Moses continued to be reluctant to obey God, for God was making it very easy for him. God was giving Moses the script to use when he was to speak to the people. Moreover, God was once again guaranteeing success: **“The elders of Israel will listen to you. Then you and the elders are to go to the king of Egypt and say to him, ‘The Lord, the God of the Hebrews, has met with us. Let us take a three-day journey into the desert to offer sacrifices to the Lord our God.’”** God admitted to Moses that he would face opposition from Pharaoh, but He promised that Moses would have the full backing of the Might and Power of our Almighty God: **“But I know that the king of Egypt will not let you go unless a mighty hand compels him. So I will stretch out my hand and strike the Egyptians with all the wonders that I will perform among them.”** And once again, God guaranteed success, this time before Pharaoh: **“After that, he will let you go. And I will make the Egyptians favorably disposed toward this people, so that when you leave you will not go empty-handed. Every woman is to ask her neighbor and any woman living in her house for articles of silver and gold and for clothing, which you will put on your sons and daughters. And so you will plunder the Egyptian.”** As we see, in the full wisdom of His foreknowledge, God had it all planned out.

A Classic Study: PATIENCE IN AFFLICTION



A Classic Study by Richard Baxter (1615–1691)

[Here, we continue a reprint of excerpts from Richard Baxter's work entitled *Obedient Patience*. In each article, Mr. Baxter gives advice on how to be patient through a specific type of affliction.]—*Ed.*

When God Seemeth Not to Bless Means to Us: Preaching, Praying, etc. - II

[This study is continued from last month's study. In this study, Mr. Baxter has been exhorting us to patience when our prayers seem not to be answered. In this section, he has been teaching us about prayer. Specifically, he has told us: 1. What kind of means prayer is ("Not a purchasing means, nor a meriting by giving God anything which may benefit Him; nor doth it work any change on God; but it procureth blessings by the fitting the petitioner to receive them"); 2. What prayer it is that is such a means ("Prayer that is not dissembled; Prayer of sincere, yet weak Christians; Fervent and faithful prayers of men of eminent faith and holiness"). In this issue, he will go on to tell us: 3. What may be expected by means of prayer, and what not. 4. Prove that prayer is not in vain, nor God's promises to it broken; 5. Why you should be patient under God's denials.]—*Ed.*

3. Now I will tell you what grant of prayers you may or may not expect from God:

(i) The attaining of salvation, or our ultimate end, every true Christ doth pray for, and shall obtain.

(ii) The obtaining of all those means which are of absolute necessity to salvation, every true Christian prayeth for, and shall obtain; such as are our part in the merits and intercession of Christ, the pardon of sin as to the damning punishment, the necessary grace of the Spirit, deliverance from the dominion of sin: these we may be sure of.

(iii) There be some subordinate means so ordinarily needful, though not absolutely necessary, that we must pray for them with great earnestness, and may pray for them with great hope, though not with certainty of

obtaining them; such are the use of Bibles, the benefit of a faithful minister, sacraments, Christian society, time of preparation for a comfortable death, etc.

(iv). There are some things which seem better to selfish persons, and to flesh and blood, than indeed they are, and are of very mutable, various use; sometimes they are good for us, and at other times hurtful; to one man they are good, and to another bad: such are outward prosperity, wealth, honor, ease, health, friends, and life. God best knoweth both to whom these things are good, and when, and how far, and how long; and because we know not, we cannot tell when, and how far, and to whom God will give them, when we pray for them; but we must ask in hope, according to our best understanding, and willingly leave all to the wisdom and will of God.

(v). There are some things which would be certainly good for us if we had them, which sin maketh us unfit to receive, or, as the Scripture speaketh, **“unworthy of”**, not only in the sense of the law of works, as all are, but even of the law of grace, or God’s ordinary gospel dispensation. Such are greater measures of grace, and of victory over sin, assistance in duty, and the enjoyment of the best means, and freedom from some temptations and affliction. Guilty, culpable Christians of the worst sort, that have less faith, and desire, and obedience than better men, cannot expect that in that condition their prayers should prevail as much as better; and that God should not punish them by any correction, or deny them greater grace and glory.

(vi). A strong Christian who hath before lived by faith, in a holy, fruitful life, and overcome the strong temptations of flattering prosperity, and fetched most of his daily comforts from the hopes of heaven, may expect with high probability, though not with absolute certainty, that God should give him in answer to his prayers, an answerable victory over all the temptations of adversity, and deliver him from such sufferings as else would be to his great hurt than good.

(vii). Those that God called to propagate the gospel by the attestation and seal of miracles, had answerable faith and grant of their prayers.

4. By thus much you may see, that while prayer and hope are guided by God’s word of precept and promise, they are far from being in vain: and though He give us not all that we desire, He giveth us all that we ought to desire absolutely, and all that we should conditionally desire, if we have the condition. For:

(i). Prayer goeth to Him that can easily give us whatever we need, without loss, or cost, or difficulty; to Him who is fuller of goodness than the sea of water, or the sun of light. And if the sun be an intellectual, free agent, it should in reason be no hard matter to believe that it is willing to

give us light.

(ii). We come not to God before He calleth us: He hath commanded us to ask: it is in His own appointed way and means that we wait for mercy.

(iii). Sincere prayer cometh from God, and therefore is acceptable to Him. It is His Spirit that giveth us holy desires, and teacheth us what and how to ask; and causeth us to believe and hope for mercy. And God despiseth not His Spirit's work. If it cause us but to groan out sincere desires, He knoweth the meaning of them.

(iv). In prayer we retire from ourselves to God. We exercise repentance in humble confession: we acknowledge our insufficiency, emptiness, and unworthiness, and so are the fitter, as beggars, to receive the gifts of His free grace.

(v). True prayer disposeth us to the right use of all that God shall give, and that is the way to obtain our desire. Prayer confesseth sin, and implieth that we take heed of sinning for the time to come: it confesseth unworthiness, and therefore implieth a promise to be thankful. It trusteth to God, and seeketh all of him, and therefore implieth our purpose to live to Him and please Him.

(vi). We go to God in the name of Christ, and have a Mediator whom He heareth always. We plead His worthiness, and that by His own command.

(vii). And prayer hath many promises from God, who is faithful, and never break His promise. "**Ask, and ye shall receive**" (Matt. 7:7).

(viii). Lastly, though we have not all that we would have, yet experience greatly encourageth us to pray, and tells us that prayer hath prevailed with God.

I know that the devil and unbelief has many dissuading objections. Such as:

Objection 1. That God is not moved by our words, much less by long prayers.

Answer. But our hearts are moved while just desire is excited and exercised, and thereby made fitter to receive God's gifts. We pull the boat to the shore, and not the shore to the boat, when we lay hold on the shore and pull at it. If this reason were good, all means in the world were vain as well as prayer. If we do good, and obey God, and forsake sin, if it were to perfection, all this maketh no change in God: shall we therefore conclude, that it is vain, and no means of His acceptance and blessing. Your eating, and drinking, and trading, and ploughing, and sowing, and study, and travels, make no change in God: are they therefore all in vain? And will He give you all that you want without them? Changes are made upon the receiver, not on God.

Objection 2. God knoweth what we want without our prayer, and He

knoweth our desires.

Answer. What though you know what a beggar wants, or what your child wants, will you think him a fit receiver who thinks himself too good to ask, or thinks you must give him all without asking? Is it not God Himself that hath bid you pray, and are His terms too hard? Have you less need than Christ Himself had, who spent whole nights in prayer?

Objection 3. Many live in prosperity that never pray, and many in adversity that pray.

Answer. Dives lived in prosperity (see Luke 14), and so did Herod and Pilate, and so do many Turks and heathens: is Christianity therefore in vain? And will you be contented with the portion of such men? Go into the sanctuary and see their end. Are those now in prosperity who are in hell with devils, past help and hope? Prayer is not to make us richer and greater in the world than other men, but to make us better, and obtain salvation. Do you judge of men by their case in this world or the next? And are those men prosperous, who are the slaves of the flesh, and the world, and the devil? And are they not better, who are secured of the love of God?

5. But I will next tell you what cause you have of patience, even when God seemeth to deny your prayers.

(i). It is an unspeakable mercy that He will not deny us anything that is necessary to our salvation. Is that man miserable, and should he murmur, who is a child of God, a member of Christ, and an heir of heaven; and is pardoned, sanctified, and shall be saved? Is there not enough in Christ and heaven to satisfy you?

(ii). God gave you mercy, yea, invaluable mercy, before you asked it; He gave you your being and reason unasked; He gave the world a Savior unasked; He gave you Christian parents, teachers, and books unasked; and He gave you His first grace unasked, and many a deliverance since. Therefore if He deny you what you ask, it is not because He is backward to give.

(iii). If it be any outward thing that He denieth you, bethink you whether God or you be fitter to dispose of such. Have you more authority and right? He owed you nothing: If He have given you long ago, be thankful for that, though it be past; it was freely given. And who is wiser, and better knoweth how to use you and all men? Is it God or you? Who is better, or unlikelier to choose amiss?

And again, remember how great a sin it is to grudge at God for His government of the world, and to desire to depose Him, and to dispose of anything ourselves. Is this your subjection and submission to His will? Did not Christ by His example teach you better, when He said, "**Not as I will, but as thou wilt**" (Matt. 26:39)? And, "**if this cup may not pass from me unless I drink it, Thy will be done,**" (Matt. 26:42). Man's

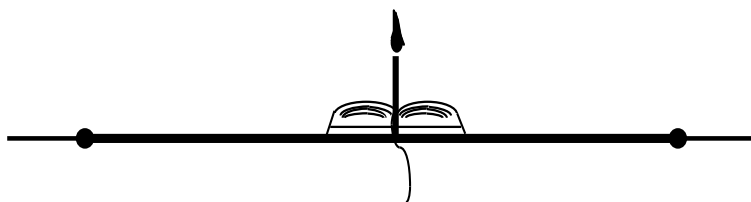
duty, holiness, interest, and rest, lieth in bringing over his own will entirely to the will of God, and his sin and misery in resisting it.

(iv). Either you are sure that what you ask is best for you, or not. If it be wealth or health, you are not sure; more perish by prosperity than by adversity. I before told you that men are condemned for loving somewhat more than God, and holiness, and heaven, and preferring it in their choice. And do you think men are liker to overlove sickness, and poverty, and crosses, more than health, and wealth, and pleasure? And would you have God give you that which is worst for you, only because you pray for it or would have it? You will not do so by your child, no nor by your swine, lest he burst his belly.

But if it be grace, and that which you are sure is best for you, your first duty is to examine whether there be not some great impediment in yourselves that is the cause of God's denial. Do you go to the root of your old sins in your penitent confession? Do you hide no secret guilt or sin, and deal too gently with it? Do you humble yourself to those that you have wronged by word or deed? Do you make just restitution, so far as you are able, to all that you have defrauded? Do you not dally with temptation, and willfully renew your guilt? Do you not over-much hanker after worldly prosperity, or some sinful pleasure? Do you not willfully omit some certain duty to God or man, in your relation or converse, and look after none but yourself, and live unfruitfully to others, your children, servants, and neighbors? If conscience find such guilty as this, presently endeavor faithfully to amend it, and then beg God's further grace, and you shall find him not unwilling to give it you.

But if none of this be the case, but you have the testimony of your consciences, that excepting your unwilling imperfections and infirmities, in simplicity and godly sincerity you have your conversation in the world, and endeavor true obedience to Christ; then you may be sure that God hath denied you no grace essential to Christianity, and necessary to salvation.

(v). And as to increase of grace and higher measures, remember that even the desire of it is an unspeakable mercy: for the desire of perfection is the mark of sincerity, and so of salvation. Be thankful to God for those desires. But this is the affliction next to be spoken to more distinctly.





New Testament Study: Matthew 15:21-39

Perseverant Faith

²¹Leaving that place, Jesus withdrew to the region of Tyre and Sidon. ²²A Canaanite woman from that vicinity came to Him, crying out, “Lord, Son of David, have mercy on me! My daughter is suffering terribly from demon-possession.”

²³Jesus did not answer a word. So His disciples came to Him and urged Him, “Send her away, for she keeps crying out after us.”

²⁴He answered, “I was sent only to the lost sheep of Israel.”

²⁵The woman came and knelt before Him. “Lord, help me!” she said.

²⁶He replied, “It is not right to take the children’s bread and toss it to their dogs.”

²⁷“Yes, Lord,” she said, “but even the dogs eat the crumbs that fall from their masters’ table.”

²⁸Then Jesus answered, “Woman, you have great faith! Your request is granted.” And her daughter was healed from that very hour.

Jesus at this time withdrew to an area that was primarily Gentile, presumably to avoid more conflicts with the Pharisees, with whom He had recently had some run-ins: “**Leaving that place, Jesus withdrew to the region of Tyre and Sidon**” (vs. 1). There, a woman who was familiar with Jesus’ work, and even familiar with the religion of the Jews, came to Him for help: “**A Canaanite woman from that vicinity came to Him, crying out, ‘Lord, Son of David, have mercy on me! My daughter is suffering terribly from demon-possession’**” (vs. 22). Significantly, though a Gentile, she called Jesus “**Son of David**”. Thus, she knew of the promised Jewish Messiah, and she believed Jesus to be him. She also understood that anything Jesus did for her would be an act of “**mercy**”. She came to Jesus not arrogantly, as if claiming a reward for something meritorious she had done, but she came to Jesus humbly, crying, “**Have mercy on me!**”

Interestingly (and uncharacteristically?), “**Jesus did not answer a**

word" (vs. 23). Throughout the Gospels, we see Jesus healing all comers; yet here, He seems to be ignoring a poor woman crying out to Him. Why? Certainly He is teaching a lesson here. Perhaps He is teaching us through this episode that we must persevere in prayer despite God's silence, despite our perception that God is not listening.

The disciples wrongly interpreted Jesus' silence as disapproval, and a desire to be rid of the woman: **"So His disciples came to Him and urged Him, 'Send her away, for she keeps crying out after us'"** (vs. 23). "Christ's people are often less gracious and compassionate than Christ Himself... There is only too much of this spirit among many who profess and call themselves believers" [Ryle, 181]. They said to Jesus, **"Send her away."** But what a ridiculous request that was? Did Jesus ever send anyone in need away? Although men tire of being nagged, Christ does not tire of our prayers. "Continued importunity may be uneasy to men, even to good men; but Christ loves to be cried after" [Henry].

Jesus ignored the disciples' request and spoke to the woman: **"He answered, 'I was sent only to the lost sheep of Israel'"** (vs. 24). Jesus stated His primary mission on earth at that time; that is, to be the Messiah for the Jews. She was well aware of this; she did call Him **"Son of David."** In fact, she saw that He was the Messiah for the Jews more clearly than many of the Jews did. She continued to persevere, in faith that Jesus' mercy would extend beyond the Jews: **"The woman came and knelt before Him. 'Lord, help me!' she said"** (vs. 25).

Jesus continued to test her faith: **"He replied, 'It is not right to take the children's bread and toss it to their dogs'"** (vs. 26). It may be surprising to some to see Jesus speak with such harshness to a woman in need, but His purpose was to draw out her faith. Jesus was mimicking somewhat the Jews' tendency to look down on the Gentiles, for the Jews regularly called the Gentiles "dogs". Yet He was also pointing out that the Jews did and do have a place of pre-eminence in the eyes of God, being the chosen people of God. This place of pre-eminence in the eyes of God has not ended, even though they largely rejected Jesus as their Messiah. Paul wrote of the special place the Jews have in the heart of God: **"As far as the gospel is concerned, they are enemies on your account; but as far as election is concerned, they are loved on account of the patriarchs, for God's gifts and His call are irrevocable"** (vs. 28).

The woman, in her faith, was not to be put off by theological technicalities. "Faith can find encouragement even in that which is discouraging" [Henry]. She knew her Lord had the power and grace to heal her daughter. She accepted that Jesus' primary mission was to minister to the Jews, but knew that there was enough of Jesus to go around for everybody: **"'Yes, Lord,' she said, 'but even the dogs eat the crumbs that fall from their masters' table'"** (vs. 27). She knew that the crumbs of Jesus are greater fine gold.

Note that she did not contradict what Jesus said, but said, **“Yes, Lord.”** This is refreshing. So many of God’s people in the Bible (and in modern day life) say, **“But, Lord...”** The woman of faith said, **“Yes, Lord,”** and intelligently framed her request so that it would be consistent with His mission and His teaching. Jesus honored her for this, and rewarded her for her faith: **“Then Jesus answered, ‘Woman, you have great faith! Your request is granted.’ And her daughter was healed from that very hour”** (vs. 28). This woman, through her faith, did what the Pharisees and Teachers of the Law were unable to do: she held her own in a verbal wrestling match with Jesus. She wrestled with Jesus, just as Jacob wrestled with the Lord. Her faith persevered, and was victorious. And certainly Jesus was glad to give her the victory. “Howsoever Christ seem to wrestle with a believer, yet He is purposed to give faith the victory, and to yield Himself in this conflict to the believer” [Dickson].

The Feeding of the Four Thousand

²⁹Jesus left there and went along the Sea of Galilee. Then He went up on a mountainside and sat down.

³⁰Great crowds came to Him, bringing the lame, the blind, the crippled, the mute and many others, and laid them at His feet; and He healed them. ³¹The people were amazed when they saw the mute speaking, the crippled made well, the lame walking and the blind seeing. And they praised the God of Israel.

³²Jesus called His disciples to Him and said, “I have compassion for these people; they have already been with me three days and have nothing to eat. I do not want to send them away hungry, or they may collapse on the way.”

³³His disciples answered, “Where could we get enough bread in this remote place to feed such a crowd?”

³⁴“How many loaves do you have?” Jesus asked.

“Seven,” they replied, “and a few small fish.”

³⁵He told the crowd to sit down on the ground.

³⁶Then He took the seven loaves and the fish, and when He had given thanks, he broke them and gave them to the disciples, and they in turn to the people. ³⁷They all ate and were satisfied. Afterward the disciples picked up seven basketfuls of broken pieces that were left over.

³⁸The number of those who ate was four thousand, besides women and children. ³⁹After Jesus had sent the crowd away, He got into the boat and went to the vicinity of Magadan.”

After healing the daughter of the woman of faith: **“Jesus left there and went along the Sea of Galilee. Then He went up on a mountainside and sat down”** (vs. 29). Jesus was not to be alone, though; nor was He to be inactive: **“Great crowds came to Him, bringing the lame, the blind, the crippled, the mute and many others, and laid them at His feet; and He healed them. The people were amazed when they saw the mute speaking, the crippled made well, the lame walking and the blind seeing. And they praised the God of Israel”** (vss. 30–31). Jesus was still (most likely) in an area with many Gentiles. In fact, this passage seems to indicate that much of the crowd was Gentile, for the passage specifies that they praised the God of **“Israel.”** It could well be that the people had heard of the healing of the daughter of the woman of faith, and so they too brought their sick. If so, then that one woman’s faith had beneficial effect upon many in the area.

Matthew here relates the miraculous feeding of the four-thousand. This episode is very similar to the feeding of the five-thousand, which occurred earlier (Matthew told of that event in chapter 14). But clearly, they were two separate events, for the same author speaks of them both. And yet, if they both had not been referred to by the same author, but strictly by different authors, critics would have claimed that they were the same event with inconsistencies between Biblical authors. This episode teaches us that similar events related by more than one Gospel writer may very well have been separate events, especially if they contradict each other in some way. Jesus’ life on earth was full of great works and magnificent miracles, enough to fill many books. Many of these were similar, yet separate events.

Jesus must have been an engaging and captivating person, for, without planning to ahead of time, the people remained with Him for an extended period of time: **“Jesus called His disciples to Him and said, ‘I have compassion for these people; they have already been with me three days and have nothing to eat. I do not want to send them away hungry, or they may collapse on the way’”** (vs. 32). We see again that Jesus does not send people away without meeting their needs.

Despite witnessing the feeding of the five thousand, the disciples seemed clueless as to how these people could be fed: **“His disciples answered, ‘Where could we get enough bread in this remote place to feed such a crowd?’”** (vs. 33). It could well have been that the disciples were hesitant to suggest another miraculous feeding, because Jesus had rebuked some people for following Him expecting to get free food (see John 6:26). If this was not the case, we really must wonder at the disciples. They are typical of those who forget to turn to Jesus in times of trouble. “Past experience must teach us to hope for the future the same blessing which God has once or often bestowed upon us” [Calvin, 174].



A Topical Study: Self-Examination

The Necessity of Self-Examination, pt. 2 by Jonathan Edwards (1703-1758)

Search me, O God, and know my heart; try me, and know my thoughts; and see if there be any wicked way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting. (Ps. 139:23-24, AV).

Section 1

All men should be much concerned to know whether they do not live in some way of sin.

David was much concerned to know this concerning himself: he searched himself, he examined his own heart and ways, but he did not trust to that. He was still afraid lest there might be some wicked way in him, which had escaped his notice: therefore he cries to God to search him. And his earnestness appears in the frequent repetition of the same request in different words: **“Search me, O God, and know my heart, try me, and know my thoughts.”** He was very earnest to know whether there were not some evil way or other in him, in which he went on, and did not take notice of.

1. We ought to be much concerned to know whether we do not live in a state of sin. All unregenerate men live in sin. We are born under the power and dominion of sin, are sold under sin, every unconverted sinner is a devoted servant to sin and Satan. We should look upon it as of the greatest importance to us, to know in what state we are, whether we ever had any change made in our hearts from sin to holiness, or whether we be not still in the gall of bitterness and bond of iniquity, whether ever sin were truly mortified in us, whether we do not live in the sin of unbelief, and in the rejection of the Saviour. This is what the apostle insists upon with the Corinthians: **“Examine yourselves, whether ye be in the faith, prove your own selves, know ye not your own selves, how that Jesus Christ is in you, except ye be reprobates”** (II Corinthians 13:5). Those who entertain the opinion and hope of themselves that they are godly,

should take great care to see that their foundation be right. Those that are in doubt should not give themselves rest till the matter be resolved.

Every unconverted person lives in a sinful way. He not only lives in a particular evil practice, but the whole course of his life is sinful. The imagination of the thoughts of his heart is only evil continually. He not only doth evil, but he doth no good, **“They are altogether become filthy: there is none that doeth good, no not one.”** (Psalm 14:3). Sin is an unconverted man’s trade it is the work and business of his life, for he is the servant of sin. And ordinarily hypocrites, or those who are wicked men, and yet think themselves godly, and make a profession accordingly, are especially odious and abominable to God.

2. We ought to be much concerned to know whether we do not live in some particular way which is offensive and displeasing to God: this is what I principally intend.

We ought to be much concerned to know whether we do not live in the gratification of some lust, either in practice or in our thoughts: whether we do not live in the omission of some duty, some thing which God expects we should do, whether we do not go into some practice or manner of behaviour which is not warrantable. We should inquire whether we do not live in some practice which is against our light, and whether we do not allow ourselves in known sins.

We should be strict to inquire whether or not we have not hitherto allowed ourselves in some or other sinful way, through wrong principles and mistaken notions of our duty: whether we have not lived in the practice of some things offensive to God through want of care and watchfulness, and observation of ourselves. We should be concerned to know whether we live not in some way which doth not become the profession we make; and whether our practice in some things be not unbecoming of Christians, contrary to Christian rules, not suitable for the disciples and followers of the holy Jesus, the Lamb of God. We ought to be concerned to know this, because,

(1.) God requires of us that we exercise the utmost watchfulness and diligence in his service. Reason teaches that it is our duty to exercise the utmost care, that we may know the mind and will of God, and our duty in all the branches of it, and to use our utmost diligence in everything to do it, because the service of God is the great business of our lives. It is that work which is the end of our beings, and God is worthy, so that we should serve Him to the utmost of our power in all things. This is what God often expressly requires of us: **“Take heed to thyself, and keep thy soul diligently, lest thou forget the things that thine eyes have seen, and lest they depart from thy heart all the days of thy life”** (Deut. 4:9). And 5:15,16: **“Take ye therefore good heed to yourselves, lest ye corrupt yourselves.”** And Deuteronomy 6:17: **“You shall diligently keep the commandments of the Lord your God, and His testimonies, and His statutes which He hath commanded thee.”** And

Proverbs 4:23: **“Keep thy heart with all diligence, for out of it are the issues of life.”** So we are commanded by Christ to **“watch and pray”** (see Matthew 26:41) and Luke 21:34, 36: **“Take heed to yourselves, lest at any time your hearts be overcharged with suffering and drunkenness, and the cares of this life.”** Ephesians 5:15: **“See that ye walk circumspectly.”** So that if we be found in any evil way whatsoever, it will not excuse us that it was through inadvertence, or that we were not aware of it, as long as it is through want of that care and watchfulness in us which we ought to have maintained.

(2.) If we live in any way of sin, we live in a way whereby God is dishonoured; but the honour of God ought to be supremely regarded by all. If everyone would make it his great care in all things to obey God, to live justly and holily, to walk in everything according to Christian rules; and would maintain a strict, watchful, and scrupulous eye over himself, to see if there were no wicked way in him; would give diligence to amend whatsoever is amiss; would avoid every unholy, unchristian, and sinful way; and if the practice of all were universally as becometh Christians; how greatly would this be to the glory of God, and of Jesus Christ! How greatly would it be to the credit and honour of religion! How would it tend to excite a high esteem of religion in spectators, and to recommend a holy life! How would it stop the mouths of objectors and opposers! How beautiful and amiable would religion then appear, when exemplified in the lives of Christians, not maimed and mutilated, but whole and entire, as it were in its true shape, having all its parts and its proper beauty! Religion would then appear to be an amiable thing indeed.

If those who call themselves Christians, thus walked in all the paths of virtue and holiness, it would tend more to the advancement of the kingdom of Christ in the world, the conviction of sinners, and the propagation of religion among unbelievers, than all the sermons in the world. For want of this concern and watchfulness in the degree in which it ought to take place, many truly godly persons adorn not their profession as they ought to do, and, on the contrary, in some things dishonour it. For want of being so much concerned as they ought to be to know whether they do not walk in some way that is unbecoming a Christian and offensive to God, their behaviour in some things is very unlovely, and such as is an offense and stumbling-block to others, and gives occasion to the enemy to blaspheme.

(3.) We should be much concerned to know whether we do not live in some way of sin, as we would regard our own interest. If we live in any way of sin, it will be exceedingly to our hurt. Sin, as it is the most hateful evil, is that which is most prejudicial to our interest, and tends most to our hurt of any thing in the world. If we live in any way that is displeasing to God, it may be the ruin of our souls. Though men reform all other wicked practices, yet if they live in but one sinful way, which they do not forsake, it may prove their everlasting undoing.

If we live in any way of sin, we shall thereby provoke God to anger, and bring guilt upon our own souls. Neither will it excuse us that we were not sensible how evil that way was in which we walked, that we did not consider it; that we were blind as to any evil in it. We contract guilt not only by living in those ways which we know, but in those which we might know to be sinful, if we were but sufficiently concerned to know what is sinful and what not, and to examine ourselves, and search our own hearts and ways. If we walk in some evil way, and know it not for want of watchfulness and consideration, that will not excuse us; for we ought to have watched and considered, and made the most diligent inquiry.

If we walk in some evil way, it will be a great prejudice to us in this world. We shall thereby be deprived of that comfort which we otherwise might enjoy, and shall expose ourselves to a great deal of soul trouble, and sorrow, and darkness, which otherwise we might have been free from. A wicked way is the original way of pain or grief. In it we shall expose ourselves to the judgments of God, even in this world; and we shall be great losers by it, in respect to our eternal interest; and that though we may not live in a way of sin willfully, and with a deliberate resolution, but carelessly, and through the deceitfulness of our corruption's. However, we shall offend God, and prevent the flourishing of grace in our hearts, if not the very being of it.

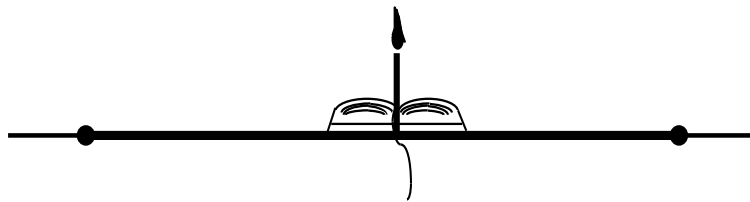
Many are very careful that they do not proceed in mistakes, where their temporal interest is concerned. They will be strictly careful that they be not led on blindfold in the bargains which they make; in their traffic one with another, they are careful to have their eyes about them, and to see that they go safely in these cases; and why not, where the interest of their souls is concerned?

(4.) We should be much concerned to know whether we do not live in some way of sin, because we are exceedingly prone to walk in some such way. — The heart of man is naturally prone to sin, the weight of the soul is naturally that way, as the stone by its weight tendeth downwards. And there is very much of a remaining proneness to sin in the saints. Though sin be mortified in them, yet there is a body of sin and death remaining; there are all manner of lusts and corrupt inclinations. We are exceeding apt to get into some ill path or other. Man is so prone to sinful ways, that without maintaining a constant strict watch over himself, no other can be expected than that he will walk in some way of sin.

Our hearts are so full of sin that they are ready to betray us. That to which men are prone, they are apt to get into before they are aware. Sin is apt to steal in upon us unawares. Besides this, we live in a world where we continually meet with temptations, we walk in the midst of snares; and the devil, a subtle adversary, is continually watching over us, endeavouring, by all manner of wiles and devices, to lead us astray, **"I am jealous over you. I fear, lest by any means, as the serpent beguiled Eve through his subtlety, so your minds should be corrupted from the simplicity that**

is in Christ" (II Corinthians 11:2-3). **"Be sober, be vigilant, because your adversary the devil, as a roaring lion, walketh about, seeking whom he may devour."** (I Peter 5:3).

(5.) We ought to be concerned to know whether we do not live in some way of sin, because there are many who live in such ways, and do not consider it, or are not sensible of it. It is a thing of great importance that we should know it, and yet the knowledge is not to be acquired without difficulty. Many live in ways which are offensive to God, who are not sensible of it. They are strangely blinded in this case. **"Who can understand his errors? Cleanse thou me from secret faults"** (Psalm 19:12). By secret faults, the psalmist means those which are secret to himself, those sins which were in him, or which he was guilty of, and yet was not aware of.



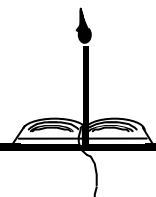
Conscience and Remorse

"Good-bye," I said to my conscience—
 "Good-bye for aye and aye,"
 And I put her hands off harshly,
 And turned my face away;
 Ad conscience smitten sorely
 Returned not from that day.

But a time came when my spirit
 Grew weary of its pace;
 And I cried: "Come back, my conscience;
 I long to see thy face."
 But conscience cried: "I cannot;
 Remorse sits in my place."

-- Paul Laurence Dunbar (1872-1906)

A Study in Psalms: Psalm 60



Psalm 60 - Young King David's Struggles

For the director of music.

To [the tune of] "The Lily of the Covenant."

A *miktam* of David. For teaching.

When he fought Aram Naharaim and Aram Zobah,
and when Joab returned and struck down twelve thousand
Edomites in the Valley of Salt.

- ¹You have rejected us, O God,
and burst forth upon us;
You have been angry—
now restore us!
- ²You have shaken the land and torn it open;
mend its fractures, for it is quaking.
- ³You have shown Your people desperate times;
You have given us wine that makes us stagger.
- ⁴But for those who fear You,
You have raised a banner
to be unfurled against the bow. *Selah*
- ⁵Save us and help us with Your right hand,
that those You love may be delivered.
- ⁶God has spoken from His sanctuary:
"In triumph I will parcel out Shechem
and measure off the Valley of Succoth.
- ⁷Gilead is mine, and Manasseh is mine;
Ephraim is my helmet, Judah my scepter.
- ⁸Moab is my washbasin,
upon Edom I toss my sandal;
over Philistia I shout in triumph."
- ⁹Who will bring me to the fortified city?
Who will lead me to Edom?
- ¹⁰Is it not You, O God, You who have rejected us
and no longer go out with our armies?
- ¹¹Give us aid against the enemy,
for the help of man is worthless.
- ¹²With God we will gain the victory,
and He will trample down our enemies.

The inscription tells us that the occasion of the psalm is **“when David fought Aram Naharaim and Aram Zobah, and when Joab returned and struck down twelve thousand Edomites in the Valley of Salt.”** The history of these battles is given in II Sam. 8 and I Chron. 18. They took place fairly shortly after David assumed power as king.

Years before David assumed power as king of Israel, God (through Samuel) had anointed him as king (see I Sam. 16). And yet, David went through many trials on his way to becoming king. So, “the children of God must not think it strange to be put to wrestling, striving, and fighting for a promised kingdom, before they be settled in possession” [Dickson]. Like David, we children of God are promised entrance into a wonderful kingdom. But before we enter it, we will face many struggles, testings and trials.

As we see from the description of these battles in Samuel and Chronicles, and from this psalm, all was not well in Israel when David assumed power. The corruption of Saul had left Israel weak to its enemies, and divided within, so David had much to overcome as he took power. “The latter part of Saul’s administration was full of disaster to the nation, nor did David’s accession at once bring relief. The people were not all of a sudden united on him, and the heathen were very daring and troublesome” [Dickson, 613].

Disobedience to God is a dreadful thing, which can have consequences even over those who are not disobedient. Saul’s disobedience caused the whole nation to suffer. David saw the problems that Israel was experiencing as God’s judgment: **“You have rejected us, O God, and burst forth upon us; You have been angry—now restore us! You have shaken the land and torn it open; mend its fractures, for it is quaking. You have shown Your people desperate times; You have given us wine that makes us stagger”** (vss. 1–3). Much as David’s assumption as king was a glorious and happy time for him, yet through it, he also assumed responsibility for a nation that was full of trouble. David was victorious in his struggle to become king, yet there were many battles ahead. “We have our cares at the same time that we have our joys, and they may serve for a balance to each other, that neither may exceed. They may likewise furnish us with matter both for prayer and praise, for both must be laid before God with suitable affections and emotions. If one point be gained, yet in another we are still striving: the Edomites are vanquished, but the Syrians are not” [Henry].

In the midst of God’s judgment on the land, David prophetically saw relief for the faithful of God: **“But for those who fear You, You have raised a banner to be unfurled against the bow”** (vs. 4). A very important word here, **“But”**: marking a contrast between those under the judgment of God, and those under the banner of God. Those who fear God are unified, as if under a banner. God is their rallying point and their ban-

ner of triumph in victory.

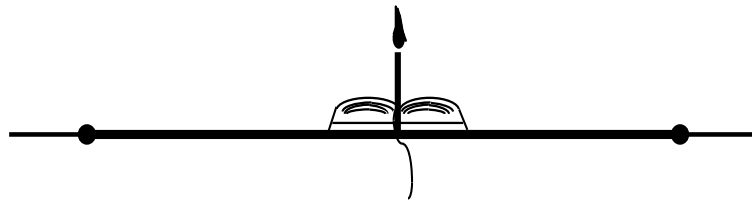
David prays for those under God's banner: **"Save us and help us with Your right hand, that those You love may be delivered"** (vs. 5). Note the order of his petitions: **"Save us"**, then **"help us."** Salvation from God, salvation out of our deserved judgment, is foremost in importance. Oh Lord, save us first from eternal judgment, then take care of the relatively trivial troubles on this earth.

Next, David recalls God's promises about the land he rules: **"God has spoken from His sanctuary: 'In triumph I will parcel out Shechem and measure off the Valley of Succoth. Gilead is mine, and Manasseh is mine; Ephraim is my helmet, Judah my scepter. Moab is My washbasin, upon Edom I toss My sandal; over Philistia I shout in triumph'"** (vss. 6–8). These first three words summarize the history of the world: **"God has spoken."** All that happens, happens according to God's will. These first three words are beloved to God's people. "Faith is never happier than when it can fall back upon the promise of God" [Spurgeon]. David is gaining hope in the midst of his battles by recalling the promise of God about the land of Israel.

This hope gives David faith, even in the midst of trials that God Himself has sent: **"Who will bring me to the fortified city? Who will lead me to Edom? Is it not You, O God, You who have rejected us and no longer go out with our armies?"** (vss. 9–10). Despite His momentary anger, we must lean on God, for He is our only hope. We should plead mercy before Him, for even in the midst of His anger, He loves us.

David well knows that he can depend only on God for deliverance: **"Give us aid against the enemy, for the help of man is worthless"** (vs. 11). Such true words are these: **"The help of man is worthless."** "Whatever our trouble may be, let us look to God for help. When we think we can carry our own burden, it is always too heavy for us" [Plumer, 618].

In faith, David foresees the end: **"With God we will gain the victory, and He will trample down our enemies"** (vs. 12). Indeed, **"the help of man is worthless"**, but "divine working is not an argument for human inaction" [Spurgeon]. God chooses primarily to work through us. This is a great blessing: to share in the work of God; to share in His victories.



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Easter Night

All night had shout of men and cry
Of woeful women
filled His way;
Until that noon of sombre sky
On Friday, clamour and display
Smote Him; no solitude had He,
No silence, since Gethsemane.

Public was death;
but Power, but Might,
But Life again, but Victory,
Were hushed within
the dead of night,
The shuttered dark, the secrecy.
And all alone, alone, alone,
He rose again behind the stone.

-- *Alice Meynell* (1847 - 1922)

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