

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

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Old Testament Study: Exodus 27

A Study by C. H. Mackintosh (1820-1896)

Exodus 27 - The Brazen Altar

¹ And thou shalt make an altar of shittim wood, five cubits long, and five cubits broad; the altar shall be four-square: and the height thereof shall be three cubits. ² And thou shalt make the horns of it upon the four corners thereof: his horns shall be of the same: and thou shalt overlay it with brass. ³ And thou shalt make his pans to receive his ashes, and his shovels, and his basons, and his fleshhooks, and his firepans: all the vessels thereof thou shalt make of brass. ⁴ And thou shalt make for it a grate of network of brass; and upon the net shalt thou make four brasen rings in the four corners thereof. ⁵ And thou shalt put it under the compass of the altar beneath, that the net may be even to the midst of the altar. ⁶ And thou shalt make staves for the altar, staves of shittim wood, and overlay them with brass. ⁷ And the staves shall be put into the rings, and the staves shall be upon the two sides of the altar, to bear it. ⁸ Hollow with boards shalt thou make it: as it was shewed thee in the mount, so shall they make it.

⁹ And thou shalt make the court of the tabernacle: for the south side southward there shall be hangings for the court of fine twined linen of an hundred cubits long for one side: ¹⁰ And the twenty pillars thereof and their twenty sockets shall be of brass; the hooks of the pillars and their fillets shall be of silver. ¹¹ And likewise for the north side in length there shall be hangings of an hundred cubits long, and his twenty pillars and their twenty sockets of brass; the hooks of the pillars and their fillets

of silver.

¹² And for the breadth of the court on the west side shall be hangings of fifty cubits: their pillars ten, and their sockets ten. ¹³ And the breadth of the court on the east side eastward shall be fifty cubits. ¹⁴ The hangings of one side of the gate shall be fifteen cubits: their pillars three, and their sockets three. ¹⁵ And on the other side shall be hangings fifteen cubits: their pillars three, and their sockets three.

¹⁶ And for the gate of the court shall be an hanging of twenty cubits, of blue, and purple, and scarlet, and fine twined linen, wrought with needlework: and their pillars shall be four, and their sockets four. ¹⁷ All the pillars round about the court shall be filleted with silver; their hooks shall be of silver, and their sockets of brass.

¹⁸ The length of the court shall be an hundred cubits, and the breadth fifty every where, and the height five cubits of fine twined linen, and their sockets of brass. ¹⁹ All the vessels of the tabernacle in all the service thereof, and all the pins thereof, and all the pins of the court, shall be of brass.

²⁰ And thou shalt command the children of Israel, that they bring thee pure oil olive beaten for the light, to cause the lamp to burn always. ²¹ In the tabernacle of the congregation without the vail, which is before the testimony, Aaron and his sons shall order it from evening to morning before the Lord: it shall be a statute for ever unto their generations on the behalf of the children of Israel. (KJV)

We have now arrived at the brazen altar which stood at the door of the tabernacle; and I would call my reader's most particular attention to the order of the Holy Ghost in this portion of our book. We have already remarked that from Exodus 25:1 to Exodus 27:19, forms a distinct division, in which we are furnished with a description of the ark and mercy-seat, the table and candlestick, the curtains and the vail, and, lastly, the brazen altar and the court in which that altar stood. If my reader will turn to Ex. 35:15, Ex. 37:25, and Ex. 40:26, he will remark that the golden altar of incense is noticed, in each of the three instances, between the candlestick and the brazen altar. Whereas,

when Jehovah is giving directions to Moses, the brazen altar is introduced immediately after the candlestick and the curtains of the tabernacle. Now, inasmuch as there must be a divine reason for this difference, it is the privilege of every diligent and intelligent student of the word to inquire what that reason is.

Why, then, does the Lord, when giving directions about the furniture of **"the holy place,"** omit the altar of incense and pass out to the brazen altar which stood at the door of the tabernacle? The reason, I believe, is simply this. He first describes the mode in which He would manifest Himself to man; and then He describes the mode of man's approach to Him. He took His seat upon the throne, as **"the Lord of all the earth."** The beams of His glory were hidden behind the vail — a type of Christ's flesh (see Heb. 10:20); but there was the manifestation of Himself, in connection with man, as in **"the pure table,"** and by the light and power of the Holy Ghost, as in the candlestick. Then we have the manifested character of Christ, as a man down here on this earth, as seen in the curtains and coverings of the tabernacle. And, finally, we have the brazen altar as the grand exhibition of the meeting-place between a holy God and a sinner. This conducts us, as it were, to the extreme point, from which we return, in company with Aaron and his sons, back to the holy place, the ordinary priestly position, where stood the golden altar of incense. Thus the order is strikingly beautiful. The golden altar is not spoken of until there is a priest to burn incense thereon, for Jehovah showed Moses the patterns of things in the heavens according to the order in which these things are to be apprehended by faith. On the other hand, when Moses gives directions to the congregations (see chapter 35), when he records the labors of **"Bezaleel and Aholiab,"** (see chap. 37 and 38), and when he sets up the tabernacle (see chapter 49), he follows the simple order in which the furniture was placed.

The prayerful investigation of this interesting subject, and a comparison of the passages above referred to, will amply repay my reader. We shall now examine the brazen altar.

This altar was the place where the sinner approached God,

in the power and efficacy of the blood of atonement. It stood **“at the door of the tabernacle of the tent of the congregation,”** and on it all the blood was shed. It was composed of **“shittim wood and brass.”** The wood was the same as that of the golden altar of incense; but the metal was different, and the reason of this difference is obvious. The altar of brass was the place where sin was dealt with according to the divine judgment concerning it. The altar of gold was the place from whence the precious fragrance of Christ’s acceptableness ascended to the throne of God. The **“shittim wood,”** as the figure of Christ’s humanity, must be the same in each case; but in the brazen altar, we see Christ meeting the fire of divine justice; in the golden altar, we behold Him feeding the divine affections. At the former, the fire of divine wrath was quenched; at the latter, the fire of priestly worship is kindled. The soul delights to find Christ in both; but the altar of brass is what meets the need of a guilty conscience. It is the very first thing for a poor, helpless, needy, convicted sinner. There cannot be settled peace, in reference to the question of sin, until the eye of faith rests on Christ as the antitype of the brazen altar. I must see my sin reduced to ashes in the pan of that altar, ere I can enjoy rest of conscience in the presence of God. It is when I know, by faith, in the record of God, that He Himself has dealt with my sin in the Person of Christ, at the brazen altar—that He has satisfied all His own righteous claims—that He has put away my sin out of His holy presence, so that it can never come back again—it is then, but not until then, that I can enjoy divine and everlasting peace.

I would here offer a remark as to the real meaning of the **“gold”** and **“brass”** in the furniture of the tabernacle. **“Gold”** is the symbol of divine righteousness or the divine nature in **“the man Christ Jesus.”** **“Brass”** is the symbol of righteousness, demanding judgment of sin, as in the brazen altar; or the judgment of uncleanness, as in the brazen laver. This will account for the fact that inside the tent of the tabernacle, all was gold—the ark, the mercy-seat, the table, the candlestick, the altar of incense. All these were the symbols of the divine nature—the inherent personal excellence of the Lord Jesus

Christ. On the other hand, outside the tent of the tabernacle, all was brass—the brazen altar and its vessels, the laver and its foot.

The claims of righteousness, as to sin and uncleanness, must be divinely met, ere there can be any enjoyment of the precious mysteries of Christ’s Person, as unfolded in the inner sanctuary of God. It is when I see all sin and all uncleanness perfectly judged and washed away, that I can, as a priest, draw nigh and worship in the holy place, and enjoy the full display of all the beauty and excellency of the God-man, Christ Jesus.

The reader can, with much profit, follow out the application of this thought in detail, not merely in the study of the tabernacle and the temple, but also in various passages of the word; for example, in the first chapter of Revelation, Christ is seen **“girt about the paps with a golden girdle”** (Rev. 1:13), and having **“his feet like unto fine brass, as if they burned in a furnace”** (Rev. 1:15). **“The golden girdle”** is the symbol of His intrinsic righteousness. The **“feet like unto fine brass”** express the unmitigated judgment of evil—He cannot tolerate evil, but must crush it beneath His feet.

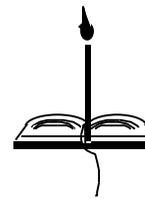
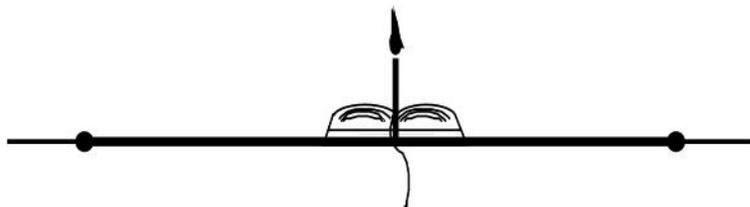
Such is the Christ with whom we have to do. He judges sin, but He saves the sinner. Faith sees sin reduced to ashes at the brazen altar; it sees all uncleanness washed away at the brazen laver; and, finally, it enjoys Christ, as He is unfolded, in the secret of the divine presence, by the light and power of the Holy Ghost. It finds Him at the golden altar, in all the value of His intercession. It feeds on Him at the pure table. It recognizes Him in the ark and mercy-seat as the One who answers all the claims of justice, and, at the same time, meets all human need. It beholds Him in the veil, with all its mystic figures. It reads His precious name on everything. Oh! For a heart to prize and praise this matchless, glorious Christ!

Nothing can be of more vital importance than a clear understanding of the doctrine of the brazen altar; that is to say, of the doctrine taught there. It is from the want of clearness as to this, that so many souls go mourning all their days. They have never had a clean, thorough settlement of the whole matter of their guilt at the brazen altar. They have never really

beheld, by faith, God Himself settling on the cross, the entire question of their sins. They are seeking peace for their uneasy consciences in regeneration and its evidences,—the fruits of the Spirit, frames, feelings, experiences,—things quite right and most valuable in themselves, but they are not the ground of peace. What fills the soul with perfect peace is the knowledge of what God hath wrought at the brazen altar. The ashes in yonder pan tell me the peace-giving story that *all is done*. The believer's sins were all put away by God's own hand of redeeming love. **“He hath made Christ to be sin for us, who knew no sin, that we might be made the righteousness of God in him”** (II Cor. 5:21). All sin must be judged; but the believer's sins have been already judged in the cross; hence, he is perfectly justified. To suppose that there could be anything against the very feeblest believer, is to deny the entire work of the cross. His sins and iniquities have been all put away by God Himself, and therefore they must needs be perfectly put away. They all went with the outpoured life of the Lamb of God.

Dear Christian reader, see that your heart is thoroughly established in the peace which Jesus has made **“by the blood of His cross.”**

This article is taken from: Mackintosh, C. H. *Notes on the Book of Exodus*. London: George Morrish, 1858. A PDF file of this book can be downloaded, free of charge, at <http://www.ClassicChristianLibrary.com>



A Classic Study: Job 1:10 (part 2)

[Here we continue a reprint of a small portion of Joseph Caryl's study in Job. Mr. Caryl wrote twelve volumes on the book of Job. His study is a great example of how deep one can dig into the truths of the Bible.]

A Study by Joseph Caryl (1644) Job 1:10 (part 2) – God's Blessing on Work

10th “Hast not thou made an hedge about him, and about his house, and about all that he hath on every side? Thou hast blessed the work of his hands, and his substance is increased in the land.” (KJV)

It follows, **“Hast thou not made an hedge about him...? Thou hast blessed the work of his hands, and his substance is increased in the land.”**

“Thou hast blessed...”: The root for the word **“blessed”** used here signifies to bow the knee as well as to bless, because men used to bow the knee in blessing God or man. Blessings are carried three ways.

First, *from man to man: one man blesses another*. There were prophetic or extraordinary blessings, as Isaac blessed Jacob, and Jacob blessed his sons upon his death-bed; and there is a popular or ordinary blessing; to wish well to another is to bless another; every time we pray for our friends, we bless our friends. So man from man.

Secondly, *man blesses God*; and then man blesses God when he praises God, when he takes notice of and returns thanks for the blessings received from God. **“Bless the Lord O my soul...”** (Ps. 103:2) **“and forget not all,”** (that is), *forget not any of his benefits*. Thankfully, to remember benefits is to bless the Lord. The cup in the sacrament of the Lord's Supper is

called the *cup of blessing* (see I Cor. 10:16), because therein we commemorate the death of Christ, and render thanks to the name of the Lord, for the unspeakable benefits conveyed to us by his blood.

Thirdly, as here in the text, *God blesses man*. Now God blesses man, when he causes that to prosper which man undertakes. Man's blessing to man, it is only a wish, an optative blessing, but God's blessing to man is an operative blessing, as Aquinas expresses it, "When God wishes us good, he does us good."

So then, the sense is, *thou hast blessed*: that is, thou hast caused him to prosper and thrive in what he undertakes, as we shall see in the object of the blessing. *Thou hast blessed the work of his hands*.

"The work of his hands": We are not to understand it strictly for manual or hand labors, as if Job were a man employed in ordinary manual services, in the labor of his hands, but according to an ordinary use of speech amongst the Hebrews, and likewise amongst other nations, by the *work of the hands*, is understood any kind of labor, any kind of business whatsoever. As it is said of Christ, that *the pleasure of the Lord did prosper in his hands* (Isa. 53:10). Now the work that Christ had to do was not a handy work, yet it did prosper in his hands; that is, as he was managing and going about it, it did prosper and took success. It was effectual for the redemption and salvation of his people. This was prospering of the work of his hands. In this sense, the work of the head may be called the work of the hands; likewise, the work of the tongue, the work of the hands; any work, any business that a man does, may be called the work of his hands. So then, *thou hast blessed the work of his hands*; that is, thou hast blessed everything that Job goes about, as a magistrate, as a minister, or as a master of a family; in any of, in all his relations, thou hast caused his endeavors to prosper. In Deut. 28, a universal blessing is thus promised, **"Blessed thou shalt be when thou comest in, and blessed shalt thou be when thou goest out"** (Deut. 28:6): between those two are contained all the labors and undertakings of that people. By their going forth is meant the beginning of their labors, and by their coming in is meant the end and conclusion

of their labors, so that, beginning and ending, when they set their hands to a business, and when they took their hands from a business, they should be blessed; that is, they should have a thorough blessing upon all their labors. So here, **"thou hast blessed the work of his hands,"** that is, everything he puts his hands to.

"And his substance is increased in the land"—That is the third thing which Satan observes here concerning Job, that he was not only blessed in the estate wherein he was, but God did mightily increase and multiply his estate. **"He is increased in the land."** The word which we translate **"increased,"** signifies not an ordinary increase, but such an increase as breaks the bounds; it signifies so to increase in such an abundance, as that the former place where those things were, cannot contain nor hold them, but they must seek some new place, more room for them: such a kind of increase is here meant. So the word is used in Ex. 1:12 concerning the people of Israel when they were in Egypt, when they were afflicted, the text says, **"The more they afflicted them, the more they multiplied and grew."** The same word is there used to show the wonderful increase of the people of Israel when they were in their affliction. It was such as did break the bounds. As it is with a river, the more it is stopped, the more it swells and breaks all the banks and bays, whatsoever is set to hinder the course of it. So much is meant in that place of Moses when the people of Israel were stopped and hindered from their increase: they like a river did swell overall; they did increase so as they did break all the bounds. Thus of Job, **"his substance is increased."** It is as if we should say in our language, he had so much that there was no end, no room for his substance; as the rich fool said in Luke 12, when his estate was increased: *What shall I do? My barns are not big enough; I must pull them down and build larger, that they may hold my estate*. So Job's estate was so increased that the compass he had for that present could not contain it. He must make new folds for his sheep they increased so; and he must build bigger houses for his family. **"He is increased;"** he is broken forth in the land. In Gen. 38:29, when Tamar brought

forth twins, the text says that one put out his hand, and as he drew it back, his brother came out, and therefore they called his name Pharez (the same original word that is here used for *increased*), because of the breach that he made. So this signifies the breaking forth of the estate of Job in the land: he increased wonderfully and exceedingly. Thus, Satan by the most emphatic words, still heightens the dealings of God with Job, that he may the more debase the services of Job towards God.

“Thou hast blessed the work of his hands, and his substance is increased in the land.” We may observe here first, *that all success in business is from the blessing of the Lord.* Satan speaks very good divinity here, **“Thou has blessed.”** It is from the Lord. It is said of Joseph, in Gen. 39:23, that **“whatsoever he did the Lord made it to prosper.”** We may do much; we may set our hands to do many things, but we cannot prosper anything. Working is our part, but prospering is the Lord’s part. As it was with the disciples: they could fish all night, but until Christ came, they could not catch. When Christ came the blessing came, and when the blessing came, there was not only fishing and catching, but there was catching in abundance (see Luke 5). So it is in all the works of men’s callings. Men may be laboring, and sweating, and toiling, but there is no prospering, no succeeding, until God comes with a blessing. **“Thou hast blessed the work of his hands.”** Some take all to themselves, and thank their own labors, their own wisdom, policy and parts. Others ascribe all to their good fortune, etc. We see Satan himself here preaches a truth that will confute them. He is more orthodox than human practical atheists. Satan acknowledges, **“Thou hast blessed.”**

Then again, we may observe, since **“Thou hast blessed the work of his hands,”** then, *Everyone ought to be a man of employment.* Everyone ought to have some business to turn his hand to. In the former part of this chapter, we read of Job’s piety and holiness, and of his zeal in the worship of God. Here now we see Job’s care and diligence in his place and calling wherein God had set him, which is called **“the work of his hands.”** Everyone must have two callings, and the one helps forward the other; Job feared God, and Job went on in the business

which God set him. Job is said to serve God continually, and yet Job did work continually. These two continuals may well stand together: for both the continuals are taken for their seasons; continually, that is seasonably according to the several opportunities God called him to, and put into his hands. This rebukes those who have no labor, who can show no work of their hands. It was said to Adam, and in him to mankind, not only as a curse, but as a command, **“In the sweat of thy face thou shalt eat thy bread till thou return to earth;”** this is layed upon all, **“In the sweat of thy face thou shalt eat thy bread”** (Gen 3:19). Not that every man is bound to labor in such an employment as causes the face to sweat, but thereby is meant serious labor and employment in some honest calling. So here, the work of the hands is taken not strictly, but for any employment wherein Job was serviceable to God and his country.

Put these two together, **“Thou hast blessed,”** and **“Thou hast blessed the work of his hands,”** and we may observe from both, *that the Lord delights to bless those who are industrious.* It is seldom that there is an industrious hand but there is a blessing of God upon it. Hence as we find in one place, **“The diligent hand maketh rich”** (Prov. 10:4); so in another, **“The blessing of God maketh rich”** (Prov. 10:22). The blessing of God maketh rich and the diligent hand maketh rich; neither of them alone but both conjoined; the blessing of God upon a diligent hand makes rich; a diligent hand cannot make rich without God, and God does not usually make rich without a diligent hand. Therefore it is said here, *that God blessed the work of Job’s hands.* Up and be doing, and the Lord shall be with you. God will not be with us unless we be doing. God does not love to bless those that are idle; if we be doing, God will be blessing, his being with us, is put for his assisting and prospering us. So it is indeed in all things. God does not work that we should sit still, nor bless to the intent that we should do nothing. As it is in Judges 7, they proclaimed *the sword of the Lord, and of Gideon;* those two must go together. Do you want to be blessed with protection? You must labor to protect yourselves. Do not think that the Lord will protect you with

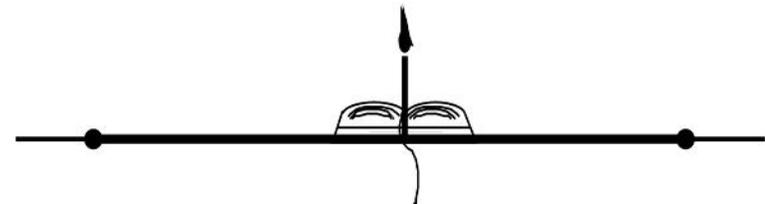
your hands in your pockets, and your swords rusting in your sheaths. When you labor in times of danger to defend yourselves, you may expect defense from the Lord. How unbecoming is it for you now to stand still and say, "Lord help us." We must indeed *stand still* (as Moses counselled the people in Ex. 14:13) in regard of fear and diffidence, but beware of standing still in regard of care and diligence, as ever you hope to *see the salvation of the Lord*. *The sword of the Lord and of Gideon* must be cried up at once; those two must go together.

There is a fourth point that we must observe also from the connection of the two sentences in the text. **"Thou hast blessed the work of his hands, and his substance is increased in the land."** The blessing of God where it falls is effectual. If God does but bless, we shall increase: There is no question of if. If God does but bless, we shall increase mightily. **"Thou hast blessed him, and he is increased."** It is the word that followed the first blessing after the creation: **"God blessed them and said unto them be fruitful and multiply"** (Gen. 1:28). Blessing and multiplying go together; the blessing of God is a powerful blessing. *It is mighty in operation*, and carries all before it. You know what a strong opinion Balaam had concerning the blessing of Balaam. **"I wot that he whom thou blesses is blessed, and he whom thou cursest is cursed"** (Num. 22:6). A strong conceit, and but a conceit. But I desire to raise your esteem of God's blessing, for it is a certain truth: That whom God blesses, they are blessed; God's blessings are fixed and effectual blessings. If he bless, we shall be blessed indeed. His blessings are irreversible, as Balaam was forced to confess: **"Behold he hath blessed and I cannot reverse it."** If once God has blessed, it is not in Satan, nor in all his lying prophets, nor in all the power of the creature to alter it, no nor to retard or hinder it for a moment.

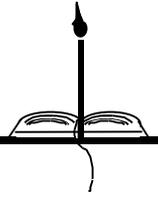
If God now give us the mercy of protection, if he make the hedge about us and bless us in these times, we shall be continued and established in the land; yea we shall be increased in the land, we shall break forth abundantly, to the amazement of all hearers and beholders. Though enemies curse, though hell plot, yet if God bless, we are safe.

This is the thing therefore that we should labor for, to be under the influence of the blessing of God. If we have but that, we have all. Let means be what they will, great or little, or none at all, if God bless he can make anything serve the turn. Anything with a blessing will do it. Anything with a blessing will make us increase; yea make us a strong, a mighty, an invincible people, so that Satan and his instruments shall be forced to acknowledge that there is a hedge about us which they cannot break through, that there is a wall about us which they can neither scale nor batter with all their engines and artillery.

This article is taken from: Caryl, Joseph. *An Exposition with Practical Observations upon the Book of Job*. London: G. Miller, 1644. A PDF file of this book can be downloaded, free of charge, at <http://www.ClassicChristianLibrary.com>



New Testament Study: Matthew 28:16-20



A Study by Scott Sperling

Matthew 28:16-20 - The Great Commission

¹⁶ Then the eleven disciples went to Galilee, to the mountain where Jesus had told them to go. ¹⁷ When they saw him, they worshiped him; but some doubted. ¹⁸ Then Jesus came to them and said, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. ¹⁹ Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, ²⁰ and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age."

The disciples followed Jesus' instructions, as given to Mary Magdalene and the other Mary (see 28:10): **"Then the eleven disciples went to Galilee, to the mountain where Jesus had told them to go"** (vs. 16). When they arrived, they did see Jesus, as he promised: **"When they saw him, they worshiped him; but some doubted"** (vs. 17). This is one of the eleven post-resurrection appearances documented in the Bible. Here is a summary of all of the appearances: to Mary Magdalene (John 20:14-18); to the women right after the resurrection (Mark 16:5-7; Matt 28:9); to Peter (Luke 24:34; 1 Cor. 15:5); to two disciples on the road to Emmaus (Luke 24:13-35); to the disciples in Jerusalem (Luke 24:36-43; John 20:19-23); to Thomas and the others eight days after the resurrection (John 20:26-29); seven disciples on the Sea of Galilee (John 21:1-23); in this passage, when Jesus gives the Great

Commission on a mountain in Galilee (Matt 28:16-20); to five hundred believers (1 Cor. 15:6); to James (1 Cor. 15:7); to the disciples at the ascension (Luke 24:44-53; Acts 1:1-12). So we see, from the post-resurrection appearances that we know about, that Jesus appeared to various people, under varying circumstances. And we know that he appeared as a body, as **"flesh and bones"**, and not as a spirit or ghost (see Luke 24:39).

In this passage in Matthew, Jesus appears in Galilee. It is an appointment of sorts, set up with the women who saw Jesus directly after the resurrection. Jesus told them: **"Go and tell my brothers to go to Galilee; there they will see me"** (28:10). And they did see Jesus: **"When they saw him, they worshiped him; but some doubted"** (vs. 17). Significantly, **"some doubted."** Why? It is apparent from the documented post-resurrection appearances that Jesus was not instantly recognized. For instance, the two who walked with Jesus to Emmaus did not immediately recognize that it was Jesus that they were walking with (see Luke 24:16). And then, the disciples in the boat on the Sea of Galilee did not immediately recognize that it was Jesus suggesting that they throw their net to the other side of the boat (see John 21:5ff). I believe that the reason for the lack of instant recognition was that Jesus still bore the scars of the beatings he received before his death, and of the resurrection itself. We know from Jesus' encounter with "doubting" Thomas that Jesus still bore the scars from the nails of the resurrection in his hands, and from the spear in his side (see John 20:27). So, I believe, his appearance was altered by the abuse of the beatings and the crucifixion (Isaiah prophesies that **"his appearance was so disfigured beyond that of any human being and his form marred beyond human"** – see Isa. 52:14), so that he was not immediately recognized in his post-resurrection body. Whatever the case, as Jesus told Thomas: **"Because you have seen me, you have believed; blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed"** (John 20:29). And unfortunately, even for

the most stolid of believers, doubt visits from time to time. “Doubt is a universal experience of finite followers of Jesus. Every one of us has been a ‘doubting Thomas’ at some time, and the tension between worship and doubt is with us as much as with the disciples... Like the disciples we are on an upward pilgrimage of faith and discipleship throughout our time on earth, and like them we can overcome failure through radical surrender in the strength the Spirit supplies” [Osbourne].

At this appointed time in Galilee, Jesus had something important to say to the disciples. He began: **“All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me”** (vs. 18). In the previous verse, the disciples **“worshipped”** the risen Jesus; here Jesus boldly proclaims that he is worthy of that worship. “It was a despised Galilean, a wandering and homeless teacher, that gave this audacious command; but it was a teacher just raised from the dead, and endowed by God with universal authority” [Broadus, 592]. “He is making clear that the limitations that applied throughout the incarnation no longer apply to him. He has supreme authority throughout the universe” [Morris].

Jesus goes on, in this stated **“authority”**, to give disciples a commission: **“Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age”** (vss. 19-20). This is what’s called “Great Commission.” It summarizes the primary duties of Jesus’ followers on earth. “How vast is the range of thought presented or suggested by this saying of our Lord: (1) Theology, the doctrine of the Trinity, and the mediatorial authority of Christ; (2) Discipleship, and the work of discipling others; (3) The great missionary idea, all the nations; (4) The ceremonial element of Christianity; (5) Christian ethics; (6) Christ’s perpetual spiritual presence with those who serve him; (7) Christ’s final coming” [Broadus, 596].

The primary command of the Great Commission is to **“go and make disciples of all nations”**; this is done by **“baptizing them”** and **“teaching them to obey”** what Christ has commanded. Evangelization, the mere spreading of the Good News, is not enough (though it is the first step); **“disciples”** must be made: true followers of Christ and his teachings. “The task of the church is not just to evangelize but to disciple the world for Christ... Every single person who is won to Christ must be anchored in Christ and taught how to live for Christ in day-to-day decisions. Christianity is a practical, ethical religion, and we cannot separate the secular from the sacred. Until the secular areas of our lives have been **‘baptized’** with holiness, we are not truly disciples of Jesus” [Osbourne].

Jesus here is establishing a religion for *all* peoples of the world, for those of **“all nations.”** The church was established and foreseen by Jesus to be a world-wide church. “Christianity is essentially a missionary religion, analogous to the great conquering nations, the Romans, English, Russians. It must spread, by a law of its nature; it must be active at the extremities, or it becomes chilled at the heart; must be enlarging its circumference, or its very center tends to be defaced” [Broadus, 593]. “We must bear in mind that the picture of Jesus as a Jewish rabbi, with a little group of disciples around him, traveling in leisurely fashion in rural Galilee contrasts sharply with the missionary-minded church that we find in the early chapters of Acts. From the beginning the church exercised a missionary function and sought to make disciples out of those who listened to its proclamation. Why this sudden and dramatic change? Surely it is the fact of the resurrection of Jesus, coupled with the charge the risen Lord gave to his followers to make disciples of all nations” [Morris]. “The first disciples, Christians, became missionaries, messengers of salvation, as soon as the Church was founded at Pentecost. Upon that first feast of Pentecost, there were three thousand Christians; at the end of the first century, five hundred thou-

sand; under the first Christian ruler, Constantine the Great, about ten millions; in the eighth century, some thirty millions; at the era of the Reformation, nearly one hundred millions; and now [in the late 1800s], well nigh two hundred millions” [Rieger, in *Lange’s*, 563]. And as of this writing, there are some two billion who consider themselves Christians. The Great Commission, as far as reaching the peoples of the world with the Gospel message, has largely been carried out.

At the time when Jesus gave the Great Commission, the establishment of a religion for all the peoples of the world was a radical thought. “The idea of one religion for all the world then seemed very strange. No existing religion could aim at it, since the existing religions were believed to be merely the products of national instincts and aspirations; each religion was part of the furniture of a nation, or at most of a race. Celsus, looking out on Christianity in the second century of our era, with the feelings of Gibbon or of Voltaire, said that a man must be out of his mind to think that Greeks and Barbarians, Romans and Scythians, bondmen and freemen, could ever have one religion. Nevertheless this was the purpose of our Lord” [Liddon, in Broadus, 594].

And why is Christianity the appropriate religion for people of all nations? Because it is the religion of the one true and only God. It is the way of salvation that the one true God has offered to all of mankind. The Great Commission is “that salvation by Christ, should be offered to all, and none excluded that did not by their own unbelief and impenitence exclude themselves. The salvation they were to preach, is a common salvation, whoever will, let him come and take the benefit of the act of indemnity” [Henry, 256].

In order to be true **“disciples,”** and followers of Christ, we are to be **“baptized in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit,”** just as Jesus himself was baptized. Baptism “is a sign both of entrance into Messiah’s covenant community and of pledged submission to his lord-

ship” [Carson, 597]. Baptism is a rite that consecrates those who are baptized “into the sincere service of the sacred Trinity, and confirms them by this holy Sacrament, in the faith of the forgiveness of their sins, and in the hope of life eternal. This is the end, use, and efficacy of baptism” [Trapp, 282]. Baptism unites us with Christ, in his death and resurrection. As Paul teaches: **“Or don’t you know that all of us who were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? We were therefore buried with him through baptism into death in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, we too may live a new life”** (Romans 6:3-4). “Baptism is a mere ceremonial and initial act of obedience to Christ, which should be followed by a lifelong obedience to all his commandments” [Broadus, 596].

Baptism in the name of the three persons of the Trinity—**“of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit”**—affirms that all three persons of the Trinity were involved in our salvation. We receive the forgiveness of the Father, through the finished work of Jesus Christ who died for our sins. We are led to this knowledge and realization through the work of the Holy Spirit.

After baptism, disciples are to be taught to **“obey everything”** Jesus has commanded of his disciples. “Following Jesus will entail understanding and obeying his teaching” [Turner, 690]. “The baptized disciples of Christ may not walk as they like, but must study to observe all that Christ has commanded” [Dickson, 356]. “What the disciples teach is not mere dogma steeped in abstract theorizing but content to be *obeyed*” [Carson, 599].

The original apostles gave us writings—the Gospels, detailing the life of Christ and a summary of his teachings; and the Epistles, which expand, detail and clarify the teachings of Christ, and what it means to be a Christian. These writings are the foundational teachings of what disciples of Christ are to **“obey.”** And so, carrying out the Great Commission

consists primarily in teaching the Word of God, as expressed in the New Testament.

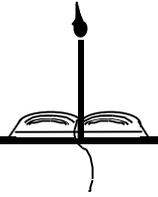
Jesus ends his Great Commission with a word of encouragement: **“And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age”** (vs. 20). This statement emphasizes the *personal* relationship that all followers of Christ have with him. Christianity is not a religion that consists of merely a book with rules in it; it is a religion that has promised a personal relationship with the risen Lord. As Christians, we are not left alone to figure out the complex workings of the world; rather, Jesus is **“with us always, to the very end of the age”**, and moreover, the Holy Spirit dwells in us, to help us navigate the twists and turns we encounter as we live. Significantly, Jesus did not say “I will be with you” (suggesting a future time of meeting); he said, **“I am with you,”** promising an always-current presence. “When Christ saith, ‘I am with you,’ you may add what you will: to protect you, to direct you, to comfort you, to carry on the work of grace in you, and in the end to crown you with immortality and glory. All this and more is included in this precious promise” [Trapp, 282]. “He emphasizes the importance of his continuing presence and concludes his Gospel with the magnificent assurance to the followers of Jesus that that presence will never be withdrawn; he will be with them always, to the end of the world and to the end of time.” [Morris]. “He is with us daily to pardon and forgive,—with us daily to sanctify and strengthen,—with us daily to defend and keep,—with us daily to lead and to guide,—with us in sorrow, and with us in joy,—with us in sickness, and with us in health,—with us in life, and with us in death,—with us in time, and with us in eternity” [Ryle, 413].

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A Topical Study: Prayer



[Matthew Henry is greatly known for his magnificent commentary on the whole Bible. He also wrote a book proposing A Method for Prayer, in between writing volumes of that commentary. This series of articles is from that book.]

A Study by Matthew Henry (1662-1714)

How to Begin Every Day with God, pt. 6

**My voice shalt thou hear in the morning, O Lord;
in the morning will I direct my Prayer unto thee,
and I will look up
(Psalm 5:3).**

The particular time, fixed in the text for this good work, is the morning; and the Psalmist seems to lay an emphasis upon this, **“in the morning,”** and again, **“in the morning”;** not then only, but then to begin with: Let that be one of the hours of prayer. Under the law we find that every morning there was a Lamb offered in sacrifice (see Ex. 29:39); and every morning the Priest burned incense (see Ex. 30:7); and the singers stood every morning to thank the Lord (see I Chr. 23:10). And so it was appointed in Ezekiel’s temple (Ezek. 46:13-15), by which an intimation was plainly given, that the spiritual sacrifices should be offered by the spiritual priests every morning, as duly as the morning comes. Every Christian should pray in secret; and every master of a family, with his family, morning by morning: and there is good reason for it.

1. The morning is the first part of the day, and it is fit that he that is the first should have the first, and the first served. The world had its beginning from him, we had ours;

and therefore whatever we begin, it concerns us to take him along with us in it. The days of our life, as soon as ever the sun of reason riseth in the soul, should be devoted to God, and employed in his service; from the womb of the morning let Christ have the dew of thy youth (see Psalm 110:3), the firstlings of the flock. By morning and evening prayer we give glory to him, who is the Alpha and the Omega, the first and the last; with him we must begin and end the day, begin and end the night, who is the beginning and the end, the first cause, and the last end.

Wisdom hath said, **“Those that seek me early shall find me”** (Prov. 8:17); early in their lives, early in the day; for hereby we give to God that which he ought to have, the preference above other things. Hereby we show that we are in care to please him, and to approve ourselves to him, and that we seek him diligently. What we do earnestly, we are said in scripture to do early (as in Ps. 101:8). Industrious men rise betimes; David expresseth the strength and warmth of his devotion, when he saith, **“O God, thou art my God, early will I seek thee”** (Ps. 63:1).

2. In the morning we are fresh and lively, and in the best frame. When our spirits are revived with the rest and sleep of the night, we live a kind of new life, and the fatigues of the day before are forgotten. The God of Israel neither slumbers nor sleeps, yet, when he exerts himself more than ordinary on his people’s behalf, he is said to awake as one out of sleep (see Psalm 78:65). If ever we be good for anything, it is in the morning; it has therefore become a proverb, *Aurora Musis Ar-nica*; and if the morning be a friend to the muses, I am sure it is no less so to the graces. As he that is first should have the first; so he that is best should have the best; and then, when we are fittest for business, we should apply ourselves to that which is the most needful business.

Worshipping God is work that requires the best powers of the soul, and when they are at the best; and it well deserves them. How can they be better bestowed, or turned to a better

account? **“Let all that is within me bless his holy name,”** saith David (Ps. 103:1); and all is little enough. If there be any gift in us by which God may be honoured, the morning is the most proper time to stir it up (see II Tim. 1: 6), when our spirits are refreshed, and have gained new vigour; then **“awake my glory, awake psaltery and harp, for I myself will awake early”** (Ps. 57:8). Then let us stir up ourselves to take hold on God.

3. In the morning we are most free from company and business, and ordinarily have the best opportunity for solitude and retirement, unless we be of those sluggards that lie in bed, with yet a little sleep, a little slumber, until the work of their calling calls them up, with how long wilt thou sleep, O sluggard? It is the wisdom of those that have much to do in the world, that have scarcely a minute to themselves all day, to take time in the morning, before business crowds in upon them, for the business of their religion, that they may be entire for it, and therefore the more intent upon it.

As we are concerned to worship God then when we are least burdened with deadness and dullness within, so also when we are least exposed to distraction and diversion from without; the apostle intimates how much it should be our care to attend upon the Lord without distraction (see I Cor. 7:35). And therefore that one day in seven (and it is the first day too, the morning of the week), which is appointed for holy work, is appointed to be a day of rest from other work. Abraham leaves all at the bottom of the hill when he goes up into the mount to worship God. In the morning, therefore, let us converse with God, and apply ourselves to the concerns of the other life, before we are entangled in the affairs of this life. Our Lord Jesus has set us an example of this, who, because his day was wholly filled up with public business for God and the souls of men, rose up in the morning a great while before day, and before company came in, and went out into a solitary place, and there prayed (see Mark 1:35).

4. In the morning we have received fresh mercies from God, which we are concerned to acknowledge with thankfulness to his praise. He is continually doing us good, and loading us with his benefits. Every day we have reason to bless him, for every day he is blessing us, in the morning particularly; and therefore as he is giving out to us the fruits of his favour, which are said to be new every morning (see Lam. 3:23), because though the same that we had the morning before, they are still forfeited, and still needed, and upon that account may be called still new: so we should be still returning the expressions of our gratitude to him, and of other pious and devout affections, which, like the fire on the altar, must be new every morning (see Lev. 6:12).

Have we had a good night, and have we not an errand to the throne of grace to return thanks for it? How many mercies concurred to make it a good night! Distinguishing mercies granted to us, but denied to others; many have not where to lay their heads; our Master himself had not; the foxes have holes, and the birds of the air have nests, but the Son of Man hath not where to lay his head; but we have houses to dwell in, quiet and peaceful habitations, perhaps stately ones: We have beds to lie on, warm and easy ones, perhaps beds of ivory, fine ones, such as they stretched themselves upon that were at ease in Zion; and are not put to wander in deserts and mountains, in dens and caves of the earth, as some of the best of God's saints have been forced to do, of whom the world was not worthy. Many have beds to lie on, yet dare not, or cannot lie down in them, being kept up either by the sickness of their friends, or the fear of their enemies. But we have laid us down, and there has been none to make us afraid; no alarms of the sword, either of war or persecution. Many lay them down and cannot sleep, but are full of tossings to and fro until the dawning of the day, through pain of body or anguish of mind. Wearisome nights are appointed to them, and their eyes are held waking; but we have laid us down and slept without any disturbance, and our sleep was sweet and refreshing, the pleasing

parenthesis of our cares and toils; it is God that has given us sleep, has given it us as he gives it to his beloved. Many lay them down and sleep, and never rise again; they sleep the sleep of death, and their beds are their graves; but we have slept and waked again, have rested, and are refreshed; we shake ourselves, and it is with us as at other times; because the Lord hath sustained us; and if he had not upheld us, we had sunk with our own weight when we fell asleep (see Ps. 3:5).

Have we a pleasant morning? Is the light sweet to us, the light of the sun, the light of the eyes, do these rejoice the heart? And ought we not to own our obligations to him who opens our eyes, and opens the eyelids of the morning upon us? Have we clothes to put on in the morning, garments that are warm upon us? Change of raiment, not for necessity only, but for ornament? We have them from God; it is his wool and his flax that are given to cover our nakedness; and the morning, when we dress ourselves, is the proper time of returning him thanks for it; yet I doubt we do it not so constantly as we do for our food when we sit down to our tables, though we have as much reason to do it. Are we in health and at ease? Have we been long so? We ought to be as thankful for a constant series of mercies, as for particular instances of them, especially considering how many are sick and in pain, and how much we have deserved to be so.

Perhaps we have experienced some special mercy, to ourselves or our families, in preservation from fire or thieves, from dangers we have been aware of, and many more unseen; weeping perhaps endured for a night, but joy came in the morning, and that calls aloud upon us to own the goodness of God. The destroying angel perhaps has been abroad, and the arrow that flies at midnight, and wasteth in darkness, has been shot in at other's windows, but our houses have been passed over. Thanks be to God for the blood of the covenant sprinkled upon our door posts, and for the min-

istration of the good angels about us, to which we owe it that we have been preserved from the malice of the evil angels against us, those rulers of the darkness of this world, who perhaps creep forth like the beasts of prey, when he maketh darkness and it is dark. All the glory be to the God of the angels.

5. In the morning we have fresh matter ministered to us for adoration of the greatness and glory of God. We ought to take notice, not only of the gifts of God's bounty to us, which we have the comfort and benefit of, they are little narrow souls that confine their regards to them; but we ought to observe the more general instances of his wisdom and power in the kingdom of providence which redound to his honour, and the common good of the universe. The 19th Psalm seems to have been a *Morning Meditation* in which we are directed to observe how the heavens declare the glory of God, and the firmament showeth his handiwork; and to own, not only the advantage we receive from their light and influence, but the honour they do him, who stretched out the heavens like a curtain, fixed their pillars, and established their ordinances, according to which they continue to this day, for they are all his servants. Day by day utters this speech, and night unto night showeth this knowledge, even the eternal power and Godhead of the great Creator of the world, and its great ruler. The regular and constant succession and revolution of light and darkness, according to the original contract made between them, that they should reign alternately, may serve to confirm our faith in that part of divine revelation, which gives us the history of the creation, and the promise of God to Noah and his sons (see Gen. 8:22).

Look up in the morning, and see how exactly the day-spring knows its place, knows its time, and keeps them: how the morning light takes hold of the ends of the earth, and of the air, which is turned to it as clay to the seal, instantly receiving the impressions of it (see Job 28:12-14). I was pleased with an expression of a worthy good minister I heard lately, in his thanksgivings to God for the mercies of the morning: How

many thousand miles (said he) has the sun travelled this last night to bring the light of the morning to us, poor sinful wretches, that justly might have been buried in the darkness of the night. Look up and see the sun as a bridegroom richly dressed, and hugely pleased, coming out of his chamber, and rejoicing as a strong man to run a race; observe how bright his beams are, how sweet his smiles, how strong his influences: And if there be no speech or language where their voice is not heard, the voice of these natural immortal preachers, proclaiming the glory of God, it is a pity there should be any speech or language where the voice of his worshippers is not heard, echoing to the voice of those preachers, and ascribing glory to him who thus makes the morning and evening to rejoice. But whatever others do, let him hear our voice to this purpose in the morning, and in the morning let us direct our praise unto him,

6. In the morning we have, or should have, fresh thoughts of God, and sweet meditations on his name, and those we ought to offer up to him in prayer. Have we been, according to David's example, remembering God upon our beds, and meditating upon him in the night watches? When we awake, can we say, as he did, we are still with God? If so, we have a good errand to the throne of grace by the words of our mouths, to offer up to God the meditations of our hearts; and it will be to him a sacrifice of a sweet-smelling savour. If the heart has been inditing a good matter, let the tongue be as the pen of a ready writer, to pour it out before God (see Ps. 45:1).

We have the word of God to converse with, and we ought to read a portion of it every morning. By it God speaks to us, and in it we ought to meditate day and night, which, if we do, that will send us to the throne of grace, and furnish us with many a good errand there. If God, in the morning, by his grace direct his word to us, so as to make it reach our hearts, that will engage us to direct our prayer to him.

7. In the morning, it is to be feared, we find cause to reflect upon many vain and sinful thoughts that have been in our minds in the night season, and upon that account it is necessary we address ourselves to God by prayer in the morning for the pardon of them. The Lord's Prayer seems to be calculated primarily, in the letter of it, for the morning; for we are taught to pray for our daily bread this day. And yet we are then to pray, **"Father, forgive us our trespasses"**; for, as in the hurry of the day, we contract guilt by our irregular words and actions, so we do in the solitude of the night by our corrupt imaginations, and the wanderings of an unsanctified ungoverned fancy. It is certain the thought of foolishness is sin (see Prov. 24:9). Foolish thoughts are sinful thoughts; the first-born of the old man, the first beginnings of all sin. And how many of these vain thoughts lodge within us wherever we lodge? Their name is legion, for they are many. Who can understand these errors! They are more than the hairs of our head. We read of those that work evil upon their beds, because there they devise it; and when the morning is light they practice it (see Mic. 2:1). How often, in the night season, is the mind disquieted and distracted with distrustful careful thoughts; polluted with unchaste and wanton thoughts; intoxicated with proud aspiring thoughts; soured and leavened with malicious revengeful thoughts; or, at the best, diverted from devout and pious thoughts by a thousand impertinencies. Out of the heart proceed evil thoughts, which lie down with us, and rise up with us; for out of that corrupt fountain, which, wherever we go, we carry about with us, these streams naturally flow. Yea, and in the multitude of dreams, as well as in many words, there are also diverse vanities (see Eccl. 5:2).

And dare we go abroad until we have renewed our repentance, which we are every night, as well as every day, thus making work for? Are we not concerned to confess to him that knows our hearts, their wanderings from him, to complain of them to him as revolting and rebellious hearts, and bent to backslide; to make our peace in the blood of Christ, and to

pray that the thoughts of our heart may be forgiven us? We cannot with safety go into the business of the day under the guilt of any sin unrepented of or unpardoned.

8. In the morning we are addressing ourselves to the work of the day, and therefore are concerned by prayer to seek unto God for his presence and blessing; we come, and are encouraged to come boldly to the throne of grace, not only for mercy to pardon what has been amiss, but for grace to help in every time of need. And what time is it that is not a time of need to us? And therefore what morning should pass without morning prayer? We read of that which the duty of every day requires (see Ezra 3:4); and in reference to that, we must go to God every morning to pray for the gracious disposals of his providence concerning us, and the gracious operations of his Spirit upon us.

We have families to look after, it may be, and to provide for, and are in care to do well for them; let us then every morning by prayer commit them to God, put them under the conduct and government of his grace; and then we effectually put them under the care and protection of his providence. Holy Job rose up early in the morning to offer burnt-offerings for his children; and we should do so, to offer prayers and supplications for them according to the number of them all (see Job 1:5). Thus we cause the blessing to rest on our houses.

We are going about the business of our calling, perhaps; let us look up to God, in the first place, for wisdom and grace to manage them well, in the fear of God, and to abide with him in them; and then we may in faith beg of him to prosper and succeed us in them, to strengthen us for the services of them, to support us under the fatigues of them, to direct the designs of them, and to give us comfort in the gains of them. We have journeys to go, it may be; let us look up to God for his presence with us, and go to no place where we cannot in faith beg of God to go with us.

We have a prospect, perhaps, of opportunities of doing

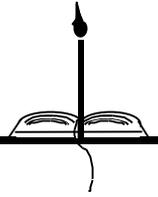
or getting good; let us look up to God for a heart to use the price in our hands, for skill and will, and courage to improve it, that it may not be as a price in the hand of a fool. Every day has its temptations too, some perhaps we foresee, but there may be many more that we think not of, and are therefore concerned to be earnest with God, that we may not be led into any temptation, but guarded against every one; that whatever company we come into, we may have wisdom to do good, and no hurt to them; and to get good, and no hurt by them.

We know not what a day may bring forth; little think we in the morning what tidings we may hear, and what events may befall us before night, and should therefore beg of God grace to carry us through the duties and difficulties which we do not foresee, as well as those which we do, in order to our standing complete in all the will of God, that as the day is, so may our strength be. We shall find, that sufficient unto the day is the evil thereof, and that therefore, as it is folly to take thought for to-morrow's events, so it is wisdom to take thought for today's duty, that sufficient unto this day, and the duty of it, may be the supplies of the divine grace, thoroughly to furnish us for every word and work, and thoroughly to fortify us against every evil word or work; that we may not think, or speak, or do anything all day, which we may have cause upon any account to wish unthought, unspoken, and undone again at night.

[This study will continue in the next issue, D.V.]

This article is taken from: Henry, Matthew. *A Method for Prayer*. Glasgow: D. Mackenzie, 1834. (Originally published in 1710). A PDF file of this book can be downloaded, free of charge, at: <http://www.ClassicChristianLibrary.com>

A Study in Wisdom: Psalm 76



A Study by Scott Sperling Psalm 76 – God’s Miraculous Protection

For the director of music. With stringed instruments.
A psalm of Asaph. A song.

- ¹ God is renowned in Judah;
in Israel his name is great.
- ² His tent is in Salem,
his dwelling place in Zion.
- ³ There he broke the flashing arrows,
the shields and the swords,
the weapons of war.
- ⁴ You are radiant with light,
more majestic than mountains
rich with game.
- ⁵ The valiant lie plundered,
they sleep their last sleep;
not one of the warriors can lift his hands.
- ⁶ At your rebuke, God of Jacob,
both horse and chariot lie still.
- ⁷ It is you alone who are to be feared.
Who can stand before you
when you are angry?
- ⁸ From heaven you pronounced judgment,
and the land feared and was quiet –
- ⁹ when you, God, rose up to judge,
to save all the afflicted of the land.

- ¹⁰ Surely your wrath against mankind
brings you praise,
and the survivors of your wrath
are restrained.
- ¹¹ Make vows to the LORD your God
and fulfill them;
let all the neighboring lands
bring gifts to the One to be feared.
- ¹² He breaks the spirit of rulers;
he is feared by the kings of the earth.

This psalm and the previous one can be viewed as a paired set. Psalm 75 praises God, in general, for his righteous character, and his protection in the past of his people, anticipating God’s intervention in the future. This psalm, Psalm 76, praises God for the righteous victory he brought about on behalf of his people, as Jerusalem was under siege. So, Psalm 75 can be read as a prayer for God’s deliverance; Psalm 76 as a prayer of thanks after God’s deliverance. It is good and proper to seek God in prayer at all times, at every step of the way, before, during and after every event of our lives.

We can’t be certain of which conflict or battle is commemorated in this psalm, but many commentators believe it refers to when the Assyrian king Sennacherib besieged Jerusalem (see II Kings 18:17-19:37). Before they could attack, most of the army were mysteriously and miraculously killed in the night: **“That night the angel of the LORD went out and put to death a hundred and eighty-five thousand in the Assyrian camp. When the people got up the next morning—there were all the dead bodies!”** (II Kings 19:35). Specifically, verses 5 and 6 of this psalm seem to support that the psalm specifically commemorates the siege by Sennacherib, and God’s miraculous deliverance that ended it.

In any case, though this psalm seems to commemorate a specific event, “it is a psalm proper for a thanksgiving-day, upon the account of public successes, and not improper at other

times, because it is never out of season to glorify God for the great things he has done for his church formerly, especially for the victories of the Redeemer over the powers of darkness, which all those Old Testament victories were types of" [Henry, 817].

The Psalmist begins: **"God is renowned in Judah; in Israel his name is great"** (vs. 1). While God is revealed all over the world, to peoples of all nations, by the revelation of his great works and creation, God had made himself known in a special way to the people of Israel. He spoke directly to them; he gave them his law; he raised up prophets to instruct and guide his people; he directed his people to make a **"dwelling place in Zion"** (see vs. 2) for him. "It is true that God is known, or makes himself known everywhere; but it is also true that he does this in some places, and at some times, in a more marked and striking manner than he does in other places and at other times. The most clear and impressive displays of his character are among his own people,—in the church" [Barnes, 278]. "Although Judah and Israel were unhappily divided politically, yet the godly of both nations were agreed concerning Jehovah their God; and truly whatever schisms may mar the visible church, the saints always appear as one in magnifying the Lord their God" [Spurgeon, 302]. It is a supreme act of grace, and should be a source of great pride, that God chose to directly reveal himself to his people.

God not only revealed himself to the people of Israel, he chose to dwell there: **"His tent is in Salem, his dwelling place in Zion"** (vs. 2). **"Salem"** is the old, pre-Israel name of Jerusalem. The word **"Salem"** literally means "peace", so by using this term for the city of God, the Psalmist reminds God's people of the peace that could be had after God's intervention and protection on their behalf. And if, indeed, this psalm is commemorating Jerusalem's victory over Sennacherib, then evoking "peace" would be appropriate, because no weapon had to be raised to defeat them (Sennacherib's army died in their sleep).

By referring to **"Salem"**, the Psalmist is also evoking another episode in the history of God's people where God intervened. The only other use of the word **"Salem"** in the Old Testament is in Genesis 14, just after Abraham routed (with the help of God) the troops of four kings to save his nephew Lot, who was being held captive. God's protection of his people in that episode can be compared to his same work of protection here in this psalm.

"There he broke the flashing arrows, the shields and the swords, the weapons of war" (vs. 3). God miraculously intervened on behalf of his people. Foolish they are who fight against God. Defeat is certain. Whatever mighty weapons man can shape are worthless in the face of an all-powerful God.

The Psalmist continues, speaking of God's glory and power: **"You are radiant with light, more majestic than mountains rich with game"** (vs. 4). The Psalmist, in speaking of God's **"radiance"** and **"majesty"**, seems to struggle to come up with words, in our limited human vocabulary, to describe the infinite glory and power of God.

"The valiant lie plundered, they sleep their last sleep; not one of the warriors can lift his hands. At your rebuke, God of Jacob, both horse and chariot lie still" (vss. 5-6). The strongest and bravest of men, the **"valiant"** and **"the warriors"**, are no match for God's power. Their weakness is laughable in comparison to God's might. God's mere **"rebuke"** stills their **"horses"** and **"chariots"**. "Whatsoever strength, courage, wit, or any other point of perfection any man hath, God who gave it, can take it away when he pleaseth" [Dickson, 182]. "The best appointed armies, the most magnificent warlike preparations under God's rebuke soon come to naught" [Plumer, 736]. "With thy mighty word of command, and without any more ado, God can nod men to destruction" [Trapp, 590].

"It is you alone who are to be feared. Who can stand before you when you are angry?" (vs. 7). We fear much in this world, but it is God **"alone"** whom we should fear, and

then trust that he can get us through any dire situation. Surely, the seeing of the army of Sennacherib stricken in their sleep would spur on the Israelites to a **“fear”** of the Lord. “When the Lord doth smite the wicked, he doth warn his own people to stand in awe” [Dickson, 183]. And certainly, if we would truly **“fear”** the Lord—be in awe of his power and might, have a deep and knowledgeable respect for his law, strive preeminently to carry out his will in our lives—our lives would be transformed for the better, for God only desires the best for us. “It would be an unspeakable mercy to this world if it were possible to bring the minds of all its inhabitants directly and powerfully under the control of the fear of God” [Plumer, 736].

The Psalmist rhetorically gives a reason for fearing the Lord: **“Who can stand before you when you are angry?”** (vs. 7). This is a question for any and all who dwell on earth. At some point in our existence, each and every one of us will, in effect, stand before God in judgment. And at that time, we will become painfully aware that we have fallen extremely short of the holiness God prescribes, and we will realize just how much we deserve the anger of God. But God, in his great mercy, has provided away for us to **“stand before him when he is angry.”** If we clothe ourselves with Christ, by accepting his gift of sacrifice which paid the price of our sins, only then can we **“stand before God.”**

The Psalmist continues: **“From heaven you pronounced judgment, and the land feared and was quiet—when you, God, rose up to judge, to save all the afflicted of the land”** (vss. 8-9). When men stand in the presence of the mighty works of God, the result is stunned silence. Here, the stunned silence occurred when **“God rose up to judge, to save all the afflicted of the land.”** The wording here can’t help but evoke Christ’s work, as he also **“rose up,”** not in judgment, but that we may escape God’s judgment. Christ too **“rose up, to save all the afflicted of the land.”**

“Surely your wrath against mankind brings you praise, and the survivors of your wrath are restrained” (vs. 10). The mighty works of God affect different people in different ways. The beneficiaries of it turn to **“praise”**, the **“survivors”** of it **“are restrained.”**

“Make vows to the LORD your God and fulfill them; let all the neighboring lands bring gifts to the One to be feared” (vs. 11). No doubt, as the great invading army surrounded Jerusalem, the Israelites made **“vows to the LORD.”** It is in man’s nature to turn to God in times of great distress. We say, “Lord! If you will get out of this, I will do such and such.” The Psalmist reminds the people: **“Fulfill the vows.”** “God keeps his promises, let not his people fail in theirs. He is their faithful God and deserves to have a faithful people” [Spurgeon, 304].

The Psalmist concludes: **“He breaks the spirit of the rulers; he is feared by the kings of the earth”** (vs. 12). Before the accolades of men, **“rulers”** have no fear, and are intoxicated with the power that they wield. Before the mighty works of God, even the most powerful rulers stand in awe and in fear. What a better place this world would be, if its **“rulers”** and **“kings”** lived in fear of the Lord.

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A Meditation: The Spiritual Chemist

Upon a Counterfeit Piece of Coin
by William Spurstowe (1666)

What physicians say of some diseases, that they are most dangerous which seem to imitate and come nearest unto health, may be applied fitly to adulterous and spurious coins, that the greater resemblance and likeness they have to the true and genuine, the more pernicious and destructive they are to the public; wasting though insensibly not only private estates, but the common treasure and riches of a nation. And therefore, the falsifying of coin, which bears the *image* or *arms* of the prince, as the general warrant to ratify the goodness of it, has been made a crime of the same complexion, with the highest attempt or act done against his *person*, the same capital punishment being inflicted upon him that is found guilty of the one, as is upon him that is guilty of the other. What can be done more to deter any from such practices, than the loss of name, estate, life, in a ghastly and ignominious death? And yet, these severities, which should be as the boundaries at the foot of the mountain, to keep all from offending, are insufficient to restrain many whom the love of gain, and the hope of secrecy do embolden to run a sad hazard, that they may enjoy the sweet.

Secrecy in sinning, though in some respect it extenuates a sin, as making it less *scandalous*, and less *contagious*, yet it is a powerful attractive to incline to the commission of a sin. Potiphar's wife was most vehement in her solliciting of Joseph to folly, when none of the men of the house were within. The harlot in Proverbs makes that as her plea to the young man to hearken her, that **“the good man is not at home, he**

is gone a long journey, he hath taken a bag of money with him, and will come at the day appointed" (Prov. 7:19-20). It was that which put an edge upon the covetousness of Achan, to take the "goodly Babylonish garment, the two hundred shekels of silver, and the wedge of gold" (Josh. 7:21), that he could do it without the privity of any, so that none could charge him with the breach of that strict command which God had given, of not taking the *accursed thing*, lest they make themselves *accursed*, and the camp of Israel *accursed*, and trouble it.

Usually when shame and punishment are the sole motives to deter from sin; the secrecy of doing it, by which both may be declined, sways prevailingly to the commission of it. But how far more presumptuous are they, who adulterate not the coins of princes, but the truths of God, and stamp his name upon their inventions, to give a credit and value unto them? Have such workers of iniquity any darkness and shadow of death where they may hide themselves? Do they think, that though kings cannot discover those oft times that violate the dignities of their crown, that they also can escape the knowledge of the most High? Or is not he as jealous of his Word, which he has magnified above all his name, as they are of every piece that carries their image and inscription upon it? Has he not declared himself to be against those that prophesy the deceits of their own heart, and use their tongues, and say, the Lord God, that they may the more easily deceive the incautious?

As Pompeii built a theater *cum titulo temple*, with the title of a temple, and Apollinaris the heretic a school *cum titulo orthodoxi*, with the title of orthodox: What prevalency such arts in this kind have had, the defections of many particular persons, yea of churches, do abundantly witness. Was not the whole church of Galatia soon removed from him that had called them into the grace of Christ unto another Gospel, by their false teachers blending the necessity of circumcision with the Gospel and of works with faith? And did

not the Corinthians comply more readily with the false apostles than with Paul? "Ye suffer, if a man bring you into bondage, if a man devour you, if a man take of you, if a man exalt himself, if a man do smite you on the face" (II Cor. 11:20).

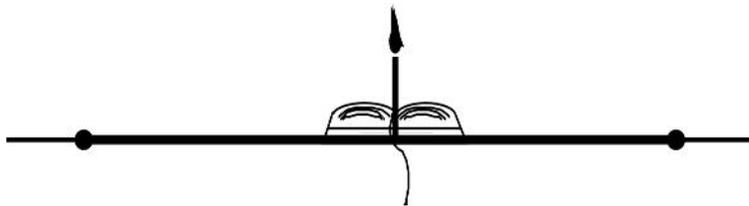
It is the temper and disposition of most to be far more circumspect and jealous in the concernments of their estates, than of their faith, and to use both scale and the test to find out false and light coins, when in matters of faith, the question is seldom made, as to whose image and superscription do they bear. It is enough if they please fancy, or else have the allowance of such whom they have in admiration. Can I then do less than bemoan the slightness and indifferency of Christians about truth, which is the only deposit that God has credited to the saints, and awaken both myself and others to buy the truth at any rate, but to sell it or debase it at no rate. Rob but God once of his truth, and what riches of glory do you leave him? Is not he the God of truth, and are not ye witnesses, chosen by himself, to give testimony unto it? And can you dishonor him more, than to make him like the father of lies, while you either spread the infection of error to others, or receive it from others into your own bosom?

Bethink therefore yourselves, you who deliver the oracles of God, that you be not as the lying vanities of the heathen, which deceived those that repared unto them. What comfort can you ever have in departing from the form of sound words, and in speaking affected and swelling words, which are one of Satan's lures to seduce into errors? Let not such arts, which serve only as the light of the fowler in the night, first to amaze the birds, and then to bring them into the net, ensnare and captivate you. Keep untainted from errors, the doctrines of faith that you profess, which will be your glory; and the duties that you perform to God from hypocrisy, which will be your comfort.

Let not your intercourse with heaven be in such services that are gilded only with words of piety, which make them spe-

cious to men, and wholly destitute of sincerity, which can alone commend them to God. Would it not be a piece of inexcusable folly, for any to heap up a mass of counterfeit coin, and then to value himself to be worth thousands? And is it not far greater for men to think that they have laid up much treasure in heaven, and are rich towards God, by the prayers that they have made, and other services that they have done, which will all be found at the last day *dross*, and not *gold*, and will produce no other return than the increase of a sore condemnation? O the thoughts of it are dreadful, to think, how many will be found poor, miserable, and naked Laodiceans, who confidently presume that they are rich and increased with goods, and have need of nothing. I cannot therefore but pray, Lord help me to buy of thee gold tried in the fire; and to get such truth of grace into my heart that I may never be amongst the number of those who are justly hated by men for hypocrites in this world, and condemned by God for hypocrites in the other world.

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Judging Yourself

“Acquaint yourselves with those marks that are proper only to a true Christian. Overlook all those that are common with hypocrites, such as outward profession, constant attendances, some affections in duties. Let us not judge ourselves by outward acts: A player is not a prince, because he acts the part of a prince. But we must judge ourselves by what we are in our retirements, in our hearts. He only is a good man, and does good, that does it from a principle of goodness within, and not from fear of Laws, or to gain a good opinion in the world... The great accusation the devil brings against Job was that he served not God for naught, that his service was not sincere, that he acted a righteous part for his own ends, and to preserve his worldly prosperity (Job 1:9,10). But if our ends be right, and our actions in the course of them according to His rule, if our hearts in them respect God’s Law, and His glory, how the devils arrows will drop down, as shot against a brazen wall.”

– Stephen Charnock (1628-1680)

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Calvin's Summary of the Gospel

"Man, created originally upright, being afterwards ruined, not partially, but totally, finds salvation out of himself, wholly in Christ; to whom being united by the Holy Spirit, freely bestowed, without any regard of future works, he enjoys in him a twofold benefit, the perfect imputation of righteousness, which attends him to the grave, and the commencement of sanctification, which he daily increases, till at length he completes it at the day of regeneration or resurrection of the body, so that in eternal life and the heavenly inheritance his praises are celebrated for such stupendous mercy."

-- *Johann Calvin (1509-1564)*