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

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Old Testament Study: Exodus 1:1-14

The Children of Israel Face Affliction

¹These are the names of the sons of Israel who went to Egypt with Jacob, each with his family: ²Reuben, Simeon, Levi and Judah; ³Issachar, Zebulun and Benjamin; ⁴Dan and Naphtali; Gad and Asher. ⁵The descendants of Jacob numbered seventy in all; Joseph was already in Egypt.

⁶Now Joseph and all his brothers and all that generation died, ⁷but the Israelites were fruitful and multiplied greatly and became exceedingly numerous, so that the land was filled with them.

⁸Then a new king, who did not know about Joseph, came to power in Egypt. ⁹“Look,” he said to his people, “the Israelites have become much too numerous for us. ¹⁰Come, we must deal shrewdly with them or they will become even more numerous and, if war breaks out, will join our enemies, fight against us and leave the country.”

¹¹So they put slave masters over them to oppress them with forced labor, and they built Pithom and Rameses as store cities for Pharaoh. ¹²But the more they were oppressed, the more they multiplied and spread; so the Egyptians came to dread the Israelites ¹³and worked them ruthlessly. ¹⁴They made their lives bitter with hard labor in brick and mortar and with all kinds of work in the fields; in all their hard labor the Egyptians used them ruthlessly.

Here we begin a study in the Book of Exodus, the second book in the Bible, and the second book authored by Moses. This book continues where the book of Genesis left off. Recall that during a famine, all of the sons of Jacob, and their families, went to Egypt to live, where Joseph was an aide to the Pharaoh. Moses sums this up: **“These are the names of the sons of Israel who went to Egypt with Jacob, each with his family: Reuben, Simeon, Levi and Judah; Issachar, Zebulun and Benjamin; Dan and Naphtali; Gad and Asher. The descendants of Jacob numbered seventy in all; Joseph was already in Egypt”** (vss. 1–5). On his death bed, Joseph prophesied that the children of Israel would one day leave Egypt and return to the land that had been promised them (see Gen. 50:24). The book of Exodus (which is a Greek word meaning, “a going out”) is basically about how the children of Israel came to leave Egypt, and then what happened after they left. In this book, due to the affliction they face, the children of Israel drew together as a nation, with God Himself as

their leader. God even writes the law for this nation. The book of Exodus chronicles the giving of the law to the children of Israel.

As we study the book of Exodus, it is good to keep in mind that the exodus of the children of Israel from Egypt can be seen as being symbolic of the exodus of a child of God from the ways of the world when he receives a new birth through faith in Christ. "Here in the deliverance of Israel out of Egypt, is shadowed forth our spiritual deliverance by Christ: they, under Moses, escaped from the tyranny of Pharaoh and the bondage of Egypt; we, by Christ, are set free from the spiritual captivity of sin and Satan" [Willet, Intro]. The passage through the Red Sea is symbolic of baptism. The wanderings in the desert are symbolic of our wanderings in the world after regeneration, as we look forward to entrance to the promised land.

A lesson that we can learn from the book of Exodus is that God deals with His own people through affliction. We see in this book "that the Lord, when the people sinned, scourged them, and yet not to their destruction, but to their amendment: it showeth that God is not partial, but will punish sin, even in His own children, and also, that the afflictions, which God layeth upon His children, tendeth not to their aversion, but is sent rather to work their conversion" [Willet, Intro].

The affliction of the children of Israel begins right away in the book of Exodus: "**Now Joseph and all his brothers and all that generation died, but the Israelites were fruitful and multiplied greatly and became exceedingly numerous, so that the land was filled with them. Then a new king, who did not know about Joseph, came to power in Egypt. 'Look,' he said to his people, 'the Israelites have become much too numerous for us. Come, we must deal shrewdly with them or they will become even more numerous and, if war breaks out, will join our enemies, fight against us and leave the country.' So they put slave masters over them to oppress them with forced labor, and they built Pithom and Rameses as store cities for Pharaoh**" (vss. 6-11). When Joseph brought all his brothers and their families to Egypt, they were warmly welcomed because of Joseph's privileged position in Pharaoh's court, and Pharaoh gave them "**the best of the land of Egypt**" (see Gen. 45:18 and Gen. 47:6). So, it is no surprise that the "**Israelites were fruitful and multiplied greatly and became exceedingly numerous, so that the land was filled with them**" (vs. 7), especially since God promised Abraham He would multiply his descendants (see Gen. 12:1-3; 15:5; 17:2,6; 22:17). The children of Israel had entered Egypt with just "**seventy**" people in all, but they would leave Egypt, some four hundred years later, with "**about 600,000 men on foot, besides women and children**" (see Ex. 12:37). Such a growth in population over 400 years could have been achieved, according to my calculations, if there was an average of about four children per family (if we assume that families started having children at about an age of twenty). So, I would not call the growth of population miraculous, but certainly the Israelites were blessed by God to sustain such a population growth.

What made the increase of the Israelites surprising was not so much the population growth rate, but that they did not intermingle with the Egyptians. Because of this, the Israelites were able to maintain their cul-

tural identity over the 400 years. However, this maintenance of their cultural identity intimidated **“a new king”** who came to power: **“Look, he said to his people, ‘the Israelites have become much too numerous for us. Come, we must deal shrewdly with them or they will become even more numerous and, if war breaks out, will join our enemies, fight against us and leave the country’”** (vss. 9–10). To **“deal shrewdly”** was just a euphemism for persecute, as is made clear: **“So they put slave masters over them to oppress them with forced labor, and they built Pithom and Rameses as store cities for Pharaoh”** (vs. 11). **“Dealing shrewdly”** was Pharaoh’s excuse for his sin in persecuting the innocent children of Israel. “When men deal wickedly it is common for them to imagine that they deal wisely, but the folly of sin will at last be manifested before all men” [Wesley, on vs. 10].

The Pharaoh did not really have a valid reason to persecute the Israelites. They were not causing any problems. They were a peaceful people. They undoubtedly contributed to the economy. There was no real earthly reason to deal harshly with them. As often happens, the blessings of God on His people aroused the jealousy of the wicked. Beyond this, there was undoubtedly spiritual warfare being waged here. The devil ever seeks an opportunity to attack God’s people. More specifically, the children of Israel, throughout human history, have often been targeted for persecution. These episodes of persecution are manifestations of the prophesied enmity between the seed of the serpent and the seed of the woman (see Gen. 3:15). “Note, it has been the policy of persecutors to represent God’s Israel as a dangerous people, hurtful to kings and provinces, not fit to be trusted, nay, not fit to be tolerated, that they may have some pretence for the barbarous treatment they design on them” [Henry, on vs. 8ff]. “No people in recorded history have suffered as the Hebrew people have suffered, but every nation or ruler that has persecuted the Jews has been punished for it. After all, God’s promise to Abraham was, ‘I will bless those who bless you, and I will curse him who curses you’ (Gen. 12:3)” [Wiersbe, on vs. 11].

As a result of the persecution, quite a change had taken place in the lives of the Israelites: **“They made their lives bitter with hard labor in brick and mortar and with all kinds of work in the fields; in all their hard labor the Egyptians used them ruthlessly”** (vs. 14). The new Pharaoh had turned their sweet lives into **“bitter”** ones. The Israelites, who through the fine service that Joseph had given him, once were favored by the Pharaoh, were now reviled by the entire nation of Egypt. Unfortunately, in life, change happens. “The place of our satisfaction may soon become the place of our affliction... Those may prove our sworn enemies whose parents were our faithful friends; nay, the same persons that loved us may possibly turn to hate us: therefore cease from man, and say not concerning any place on this side heaven, ‘This is my rest forever’” [Henry, on vss. 8–14].

But why would God let such a change take place for His people? Why would he allow their lives to go from prosperity to bitterness? First, let us note that this affliction upon the children of Israel was foretold by the Lord to Abraham, many years before it happened: **“Then the Lord said to [Abraham]: ‘Know for certain that your descendants will be**

strangers in a country not their own, and they will be enslaved and mistreated four hundred years” (Gen. 15:13). Abraham was given many great and wonderful promises: This one (one may think) wasn't one of them! I guess we have to take the good promises of God with the bad! (These promises are bad, of course, from a human point of view.) There are many promises of God, I dare say, that we humans feel we could do without. For instance, there are many promises concerning the wrath of God to come in the end-times. Then also, Jesus promised: **“In this world you will have trouble”** (John 16:33). We naturally do not want **“trouble”**; this is a promise most of us feel we could do without.

So now we ask, why would God promise trouble for us? Let us return to the case of the Israelites. Let us hear from a few eminent commentators on why the Israelites experienced persecution in Egypt (many of these may apply to our own situations): “1. That the Israelites should hate the impure manners and superstitions of Egypt. 2. That by this means they might be stirred up to pray to God for their deliverance, and to long for the land of Canaan. 3. That God might take just occasion to show his judgments upon Egypt. 4. That the Israelites also might be occasioned hereby more justly to shake off the Egyptians cruel yoke. 5. That God's goodness and power might be seen, in supporting His people and increasing them even in the midst of their affliction. 6. That the Israelites remembering their cruel bondage in Egypt, should have no mind to go thither again” [Willet, on Ch. 1]. God allowed the persecution of the Israelites “to prepare Israel for their inheritance. The rough schooling they had in Egypt served to develop their muscles and toughen their sinews. Also their bitter lot in Egypt and their trials in the wilderness were calculated to make the land that flowed with milk and honey the more appreciated when it became theirs” [Pink, 11]. All of Joseph's generation was gone (see vs. 6), so “the desire and the memory of the land of Canaan, which they had never seen, might have died out of the minds of their descendants, if they had not been forcibly aroused to seek after it” [Calvin, on vs. 6]. We can apply many of these same reasons to our own troubles. For instance, God will often send trouble our way in this world to make us long for our promised land.

God allowed the persecution, but He stood with the Israelites through the times of trouble. The effect of the persecution on the Israelites was not what the Egyptians intended: **“But the more they were oppressed, the more they multiplied and spread; so the Egyptians came to dread the Israelites and worked them ruthlessly”** (vss. 12–13). The persecution did not weaken them, but made the Israelites stronger, and brought them together as a nation. A similar result has occurred throughout the history of the church, whenever she faced persecution. “Times of affliction have often been the church's growing times: being pressed, it grows. Christianity spread most when it was persecuted: the blood of the martyrs was the seed of the church” [Henry, vs. 8ff].

The Egyptians must have realized that there was a higher power behind the strengthening of the Israelites. But rather than bow to God in humility and repent from persecuting God's people, the Egyptians chose to defy God, and **“worked [the Israelites] ruthlessly.”**



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.*

Settled Doubts of Sincerity and Salvation; Temptations to Despair, pt. 1

But it is yet a heavier affliction when a soul is in a settled doubtfulness of its sincerity, justification, and salvation, yea, and strongly persuaded that he hath no grace, nor ever shall have, and hath little hope left of mercy and salvation; and the more he examines and thinks of it, the more he believeth this sad conclusion.

For an ungodly man to know that he is ungodly is the most hopeful preparation to his recovery, and not to be stifled or made light of; but if it be a sincere person,

1. Before I tell you how far patience is useful in this case, I must tell you that on pretence of patience, the cure must not be neglected, nor contempt or senselessness indulged. Sin is it that bringeth men into this dark, uncomfortable state; and it is present sin in which it doth consist: search therefore what guilt of former sin was the cause, and see that it be truly repented of; and then search how much present sin doth cherish it. Usually there is much ignorance in it of the covenant of grace; and a great defectiveness in our sense of the infinite goodness of God, and of the wonders of His love in Christ, and of the ocean of mercy continued in the work of man's redemption. And there is much unbelief or distrust of God and our Redeemer, and of the promises of grace and salvation; and too little trust to the strengthening and comforting help of the Holy Ghost. And there is too little care to cure men's sinful fears and passions; and sometimes too little care to forbear renewing the wounds of conscience by yielding to temptations, and renewing guilty. And where these are the causes, they must first be resisted, and partly overcome.

2. And while the soul sincerely repenteth and striveth against that sin, (especially distrust of God and Christ), it must be considered that God giveth not all His grace at once. Infants are not strong: faith, hope, love,

and comfort are weak before they are strong, and usually are long in getting strength: and weak faith hath always unbelief joined with it; and every weak grace is clogged and clouded by its contrary sin. And while grace is weak, and sin thus cloudeth it, it cannot be expected that the soul should have certainty of sincerity and salvation, or be free from grief, and fears, and doubting. But patient waiting upon Christ in the use of His appointed means, may in time bring faith and every grace to greater strength, and so the soul to more assurance.

3. A man that hath not attained to a certainty of salvation, may yet have more cause of hope and joy, than of fear and sorrow, upon the mere improbability of his damnation. I have oft instanced thus: It would torment a good Christian, if he believed he should ever commit but such sins as David and Peter did (to pass by Solomon); and no Christian ordinarily is sure that he shall not commit as great a sin: and no wise man that by God's grace is resolved against it, should torment himself with such a fear.

No wife is certain, but she may hate or forsake her husband, or he may hate and murder her; nor any child, but that the father or mother may murder it. And yet it is so unlikely, that it is folly to be sad with such a fear. The old fathers, who thought that no ordinary Christian (but a few confirmed ones) can be certain of perseverance or salvation, and those Lutherans and Arminians that are of the same mind, did not yet live in terror for fear of apostasy and damnation, but rejoiced in the comfort of probable hope.

4. If your fears be questioning whether you are true Christians, then become a true Christian, and so end those fears. It may be it is too hard for you to know whether you have been such till now; but you may presently resolve it for the time to come: do but understand the baptismal covenant, and consent to it, and that work is done. Present consent, that is unfeigned, is true Christianity. If you can say that now you are truly willing that Christ with His grace and glory be yours, and you His on His gospel terms, that is, your Priest, Prophet, and King, you are true Christians.

Your concluding that the day of grace is past, and God will never give you grace, nor pardon you, while he is daily entreating you to be reconciled to him, and accept His grace, is an abusive suspicion that God is not sincere, and a contradiction to the tenor of His word and instituted ministry. When He bids us go to the highways and hedges, and compel (even the basest) to come in, for a willing soul to suspect that God is unwilling, is abusively to give Him the lie; but if you are unwilling yourselves, why complain you? It is an odd sight, to see a beggar in the cold entreated to come to the fire, or a man in the sea entreated to come into the ship, and he will not come, and yet cry and complain that he shall never be taken in; that is, because he will not.

5. It is a great mercy of God that you have hearts so far awakened, as to be troubled with care and fear of our everlasting state, which you see the stupid, dreaming world so little regard. And here are two comfortable evidences appear in most Christians in these troubles. First, your fear of punishment hereafter showeth that you have some belief of the word of God, for you believe His threatenings; else why do you fear them? And if you believe that His threatenings are true, it is scarce possible that you should believe that His promises are false; therefore your defect is in the application of these promises to yourself; and to doubt of our own faith or sincerity, is not to doubt of the truth or word of God, and is not damning unbelief (though some mistakingly have written so). Secondly, and you have so much of the applying act, as consisteth in consent and desire. You would fain have Christ, and grace, and glory; and you consent to be His as He consenteth to be yours: else why do your complaints and troubles signify so much? And desire signifieth love and willingness as really as joy doth, though not so pleasingly. So that here is faith, or consent, or willingness, and love to that which you mourn for want of; and those are evidences of grace.

Objection. But may not a wicked man be terrified with the fear of damnation?

Answer. Yes, but if this fear were joined with a willingness to be a true Christian, and to be justified, sanctified, and ruled by Christ, he should be saved.

Objection. But may he not be willing of Christ and holiness, as a means to his salvation, though else he had rather be ungodly and live in sin?

Answer. 1. He cannot truly desire salvation itself, as indeed it is salvation: not to be tormented in hell he may desire; but salvation is to be saved from sin and separation from God, and to live in perfect holiness, love, and joy in the heavenly society, praising God among the blessed forever. The heart of the ungodly is against this holy life. 2. And every man hath some end: if this be not the end intended by any man, it must be some sinful pleasure that he must intend or desire. And to make perfect holiness (which mortifieth all such desires and pleasures) to be desired as a means to attain those pleasures, (which it destroyeth), is a contradiction. So that a wicked man cannot truly desire perfect holiness more than sinful pleasure, neither as his end, nor as the means thereto. Yet I will not deny but that while he hateth it, he may consent that God should make him holy as a *minus malum*, a lesser evil than the pains of hell, which he hateth more. But God hath not promised to give men Christ and holiness, because they hate hell more than it, and desire it not for itself.

Objection. I fear that this is my case; for I have a great unwillingness to prayer, meditation, and every holy duty.

Answer. 1. Is your unwillingness to believe and trust God, and love

Him perfectly, and to live in His thankful, joyful praises, and to love His word, and ways, and servants, and that forever, greater than your willingness and desire? It is these inward acts that are the holiness of the soul, and to be willing of these, is to be willing to be holy. 2. As to outward exercises, by praying and such like, there may be some such disturbance of the spirits raised by them, through temptations and false thoughts and fears, as put the mind into renewed trouble: and it is that disturbance and trouble in the duty, that many are against, rather than the duty itself. And such may find, that at the same time they would fain have that calmness, confidence, and delight in God, which they would be glad to express by holy prayer. 3. And we must distinguish between a degree of unwillingness or backwardness, which is predominant and effectual, and a degree which doth but strive against holiness, but not overcome. Every Christian hath flesh, which lusteth against the Spirit, and would draw back; and therefore hath some degree of backwardness to his duty: but if this did prevail, he would give it over, which he doth not. 4. And yet for a time, in temptation and melancholy, he may be deterred from some outward duty, and give it over, and yet not lose a holy state of soul. Many a true Christian is many years affrighted from the Lord's supper: and some such persons in deep melancholy and temptations, have given over outward prayer, and hearing sermons and reading, and yet have not given over a desire of holiness, which is heart prayer, nor a desire to love and obey God's word. Sick men cease outward duty in their beds, when they cease not inward piety.

6. It may be God seeth that you were grown dull and sluggish, and he useth this trouble to awake you to a greater care of your duty and salvation: or he saw you in danger of overloving some worldly vanity, and he useth this to embitter and divert you, that you may know better what to mind and desire.

7. The effects of a melancholy disease, or of a natural timorousness of the weak and passionate, are much different from rational, well-grounded doubts of sincerity and salvation. A melancholy person can think of nothing with confidence and comfort: there is nothing but trouble, confusion, fears, and despair in his apprehension. He still seems to himself undone and hopeless. A person naturally timorous, cannot choose but fear, if you show him the clearest reasons of assurance. These are like pain in sickness, which faith and reason will not cure; but should help us to strive against and bear. God will not impute our diseased misery to us as our damning sin.

(This study will continue in the next issue.)



New Testament Study: Matthew 13:44-45

The Treasure and the Pearl

⁴⁴“The kingdom of heaven is like treasure hidden in a field. When a man found it, he hid it again, and then in his joy went and sold all he had and bought that field.

⁴⁵“Again, the kingdom of heaven is like a merchant looking for fine pearls. ⁴⁶When he found one of great value, he went away and sold everything he had and bought it.”

Here Jesus tells two closely related parables. As we have previously stated in our studies of the other parables, all of the parables in this chapter deal, in some way, with the division of men into the righteous and the wicked; they deal with the division of men into those who are citizens of the kingdom of heaven and those who are not. This common theme actually aids us in the interpretation of the parables told in verses 44 and 45. In interpreting these parables, we will go against the interpretation given by the vast majority of commentators, yet our interpretation (we believe) makes more sense, even if the parables stood alone and out of the context of the rest of the parables. However, within the context of the other parables, our interpretation is vastly more sensible than the common interpretation, because the common interpretation does not relate at all to the themes of each and every other parable in this chapter.

Jesus tells the parables: **“The kingdom of heaven is like treasure hidden in a field. When a man found it, he hid it again, and then in his joy went and sold all he had and bought that field. Again, the kingdom of heaven is like a merchant looking for fine pearls. When he found one of great value, he went away and sold everything he had and bought it”** (vss. 44–45). The common interpretation of these parables is as follows (in the words of an eminent commentator): “The general idea which the parable illustrates seems to be this. If a man fully discovers and appreciates the advantages of Christ’s service, he will be so anxious to make those blessings his own as to sacrifice any and everything that may be necessary for that purpose” [Broadus, on vs. 44]. Concerning the

second parable: “In like manner, to be a subject of Messiah’s reign is so precious a privilege, that a man might willingly sacrifice everything else to obtain it; whatever pleasures, honors, possessions, or attainments it is necessary to give up he might willingly abandon—whatever efforts are requisite he might make—in order to secure that which is worth so much” [Broadus, on vs. 45].

Certainly, these interpretations are well written, and in some way compelling. It is true that the gospel message is valuable and to be a member of the kingdom of heaven is a great privilege. However, I cannot bring myself to agree with these interpretations for two primary reasons: First, the kingdom of heaven is not for sale; it is the free gift of God. Both parables depict a man giving up all he has to buy the desired object. We Christians in no way buy any of the manifestations of God’s grace. On the contrary, God’s grace is a gift, freely given by God: **“For God so loved the world that He gave His one and only Son...”** (John 3:16); **“For the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord”** (Rom. 6:23); **“For it is grace you have been saved, through faith—and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God”** (Eph. 2:8).

The second reason I do not agree with the common interpretation is that (as I have mentioned) the common interpretation does not fit the context of the other parables in the chapter. All of the other parables deal in some way with division of men in the world into those who are members of the kingdom and those who are not. In summary, the parable of the sower (vss. 3–9) deals with the sowing of the gospel message and the differing responses to it by different hearers, thus dividing people into those who respond to the gospel and those who do not; the parable of the tares (vss. 24–30) deals with coexistence in the world of the members of the kingdom and the non-members, until the end of the age when the two types of people are separated; the parable of the mustard seed (vss. 31–33) depicts the growing Church, with a corrupting influence invading and coexisting in the Church along with the members of the kingdom; the parable of the yeast (vs. 33) depicts the growing Church being corrupted from within; the parable of the net (vss. 47–50), as we shall see, similar to the parable of the tares, speaks of the separation at the end of the age of the righteous and the wicked. The common interpretation of the parable of the treasure and the parable of the pearl speaks solely of the gospel message and its value to the members of the kingdom. In my opinion, this interpretation does not fit the context of the five other parables in the chapter.

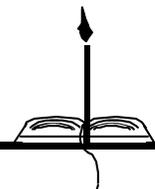
To guide us to (what I believe is) the proper interpretation of the parables in verse 44 and 45, let me ask: in the Gospel message, who is it that does the buying? It is Jesus, of course, who buys (or redeems) the

Church with His blood. As Paul tells us: **“You are not your own; you were bought at a price”** (I Cor. 6:19, 20). He also tells the Ephesians, in his farewell message to them: **“Be shepherds of the church of God, which He bought with His own blood”** (Acts 20:28). Peter specifically tells us that our redemption does not come at the price of worldly things: **“For you know that it was not with perishable things such as silver or gold that you were redeemed from the empty way of life handed down to you from your forefathers, but with the precious blood of Christ, a lamb without blemish or defect”** (I Pet. 1:18, 19). From these verses, it becomes clear that the man in parables is none other than Jesus, and the treasure (in the first parable) and the pearl (in the second parable) is the Church. Just as the men in these parables sell everything to buy their treasures, “so did Jesus Himself, at the utmost cost, buy the world to gain His Church, which was the treasure which He desired” [Spurgeon, on vs. 44]. Jesus **“made Himself nothing”** (see Phil. 2:7). **“For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though He was rich, yet for your sakes He became poor, so that you through His poverty might become rich”** (II Cor. 8:9).

So, in verse 44, the field is the world (significantly, just as **“the field is the world”** in the parable of the tares, see vs. 38), and the treasure is the Church hidden in the world. Again, we have the coexistence of the wicked and the righteous in the world, just as we have in each of the other parables in this chapter. In this parable, the thing that distinguishes the members of the kingdom from those that aren’t is that Jesus **“in His joy went and sold all He had and bought the field”** so as to obtain the treasure, which is the Church. Note that it was **“in his joy”** that the man sold all he had to buy the field. We are told that Jesus also redeemed **“in His joy”**: **“Let us fix our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy set before Him endured the cross, scorning its shame, and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God”** (Heb. 12:2).

Likewise, in verse 45, the merchant is Jesus. This parable emphasizes the importance of the individual to Jesus. The merchant **“found one [pearl] of great value.”** And for this one pearl, **“went away and sold everything he had and bought it.”** This is reminiscent of the parable of the lost sheep, where Jesus is typified as especially searching for the one lost sheep. Jesus died specifically for each one of us, and to Him, each of us is a pearl of great value.

A Topical Study: Self-Examination



A Discourse of Self-Examination, pt. 1 by Stephen Charnock (1628-1680)

[Here, we begin a series on self-examination, which will include a multi-part study by Stephen Charnock, and then one by Jonathan Edwards.]—*Ed.*

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 Cor. 13:5, AV).

Examine yourselves, to see whether you are in the faith; test yourselves. Do you not realize that Christ Jesus is in you—unless, of course, you fail the test? (II Cor. 13:5, NIV).

The apostle having blamed the Corinthians for some enormities among them, and knowing there were some that had not repented of them, comes now to a conclusion to his Epistle, and assures them, that if he should come again to them, he would not spare them, but be sharp against them with his ecclesiastical censures. And as for such who had not been guilty of those crimes, yet had mean thoughts of the apostle, and would have some eminent proof of his apostleship, or of Christ speaking in him (vs. 3); he refers himself to them, and makes them the judges of it, whether they had not found the mighty operation of Christ in him. For although Christ's being crucified evidenced His being subject to the infirmities of man, and the penalty of the Law; yet His resurrection, and His glory is an evidence of the power of God in Him, and with Him: so though I be weak, yet you yourselves bear arguments in you; and therefore **"examine your own selves"**, and try whether there be not a mighty change wrought in your souls, **"whether you are not in the faith"**, and quite other men than you were; if you find not such effects, assure your-

selves, you are not yet in the state of true Christianity.

Some understand this of Christ being in them in regard of the miraculous gifts, the gifts of miracles, tongues, and healing; and understand by faith here, a faith of miracles, which was a special gift, and very resplendent in the primitive church. But that does not seem to be the sense of it; for the possessing such gifts is not a sign of election, nor the want of them a presage of reprobation, or a testimony of insincerity. Miracles may be wrought by those that have not a justifying and saving faith. Judas had the same commission with the rest of the apostles at Christ's first sending them out in the time of his life; and we may well conjecture that miracles were wrought by him, as well as by his colleagues, in that employment. Besides, it cannot be manifested that those gifts were bestowed upon every member of the primitive church; but only upon some called out by God for that purpose. And if by faith be understood here a faith of miracles, whereby they should try themselves whether Christ was in them, those that had not that gift conferred upon them, had no evidence of their being in Christ; or at least had not so illustrious an evidence as the others had, who outstripped the rest of their brethren in those miraculous powers. The gift of miracles was an evidence that Christ was in those instruments, in regard of His power, but true faith only is an evidence that Christ is in a man in regard of His grace.

“Examine yourselves”—Tempt yourselves. The word *tempting* is sometimes taken for trying, as when God is said so tempt Abraham, in commanding him to sacrifice his son, to know or make known to him that he feared God (see Gen. 22:1,12).

“Prove yourselves”—Try yourselves as goldsmiths do metals; prove yourselves that you may know experimentally what is in you.

The phrase speaks diligence in this work; the repetition intimates both diligence and frequency; what is not known in one act, may be known in repeated acts. Self-examination is a duty in all cases, the repetition speaks necessity; it implies also men's natural backwardness to it.

“Know you not your ownelves”—It implies the folly and unreasonableness of the neglect of it, also the possibility and easiness upon a due and diligent inquiry, to know whether Christ be in us or no.

“How that Christ is in you”—Whether the power of Christ hath not wrought in you to the transforming your soul.

“Unless you be reprobates”—The Apostle does not understand by the word reprobates, such as are eternally rejected by God, as reprobates are opposed to the elect. Those that had not Christ in them at that time, might have him afterwards, the work of conversion being daily promoted in the Church; but **“reprobates”**, i.e. counterfeit, adulterate, not yet purified and refined from your dross; or, unless you are unapproved or void of judgment, or unexperienced in the ways of Christ. And he puts a diminutive term, **“unless”** you be somewhat and in part insincere: Or it may go

further, and the apostle might mean thus: If after the power of Christ, which hath appeared so gloriously among you, you find no strong operation in your own souls towards him, you have reason to suspect that you are not owned by him, that he may give you over to yourselves.

In this verse, observe,

1. The duty expressed: **“Examine yourselves. Prove yourselves.”**
2. The matter of it: **“Whether you be in the faith.”**
3. The enforcement and motive: **“Except you are reprobates.”**

Doctrine: Self-examination is a necessary duty belonging to everyone in the Church, and requires much diligence in the performing of it.

Hence some observe, that when it is expressed, that God created man in His own image, **“In the image of God created He him”** (Gen. 1:27, AV), the word is *Elohim*, which is a name of God belonging to His judicial acts, which imply trial and examination: in the image of *Elohim* created He him, i.e. with a power of self-trial and self-judging. This self-examination is an exact and thorough search into a man’s self, an exquisite consideration in what posture he stands to God. The word is the rule, a glass wherein we see God’s will; and conscience is the examiner, that is, the glass wherein we see our lives, and the motions of our hearts: and which, by the help of the word, does dissect and open the soul to itself.

I shall not prosecute this doctrine fully, only lay down some conclusions:

1. *’Tis a necessary duty, in regard to our comfort.* What good does it do a man to hear that a Christ is sent to redeem, that a ransom is paid, that sin is pardonable, hell avoidable, Heaven attainable upon the conditions of faith, and not know whether he hath so advantageous a grace in him, which only entitles him to such glorious privileges? What comfort in Christ, in His meritorious passion, in His triumphant resurrection and ascension, in His prevalent intercession, unless we know that by faith we are united to Him, and consequently have an interest in all the gracious fruits of His different states of humiliation and exaltation? If we can find this grace in our souls, what a joy unspeakable does result from thence? Christ as a King will protect my soul, Christ as a Priest hath expiated my sins, Christ as a Prophet will remove my ignorance, my soul was in His mind upon the cross, my concerns are in His breast in Heaven, my name is enrolled in the register of His subjects.

’Tis necessary,

- (1) *Because there are common graces.* As there is an outward and inward call, so there is an outward profession, and an inward transformation. There are some virtues come from the hand of God as Creator, and some immediately from the Spirit as a renewer; some common virtues for the preservation of humane society, and some special graces for the fabric of an invisible Church. There is an acceptance of the Law for an outward

practice, without and affection to the Lawgiver, or an esteem of the spirituality of the Law itself. There is a sanctification in opposition to Judaism, or Paganism, or some erroneous opinion, which is common to those that may apostatize (see Heb. 10:29). The Apostle calls the Church of Corinth saints **“called to be saints”** (see I Cor. 1:2), saints by vocation outwardly, not all saint by a new vocation inwardly.

(2) *Because there are counterfeit graces.* There is much false coin in the world, washed pewter, and gilded brass; there are sepulchers garnished outwardly, and full of rottenness and stench within; there are many that want not their artifices in religion, as well as in common converse. Good things may be imitated, when they are not rooted. The Apostle speaks of a **“dead faith”** (see James 2:26), which is like the carcass of a man without life; a faith that deserves no more the name of faith than a carcass does the title of a man, when the enlivening and principal part is fled. There is a **“repentance unto life”** (Acts 11:18), which supposeth a dead repentance, such as Ahab’s humiliation, like marble sweating tears in moist and rainy weather, without any mollifying of the natural hardness; or Judas his sorrow, raised by the fire in his conscience, not like Peter’s by a spiritual influence of his Master. There is a **“lively hope”** (I Pet. 1:3) which supposeth a dead hope; there is a **“lively stone”** (I Pet. 3:5) which implies that there are lifeless stones that are not inwardly fitted and prepared for the spiritual building. The building upon the rock and the sand might have the same beauty, form, and ornaments, but not the same foundation; one was stable and the other tottering. There is a **“repentance towards God”** (Acts 20:21) when the dishonor of God afflicts us, which implies there is a repentance towards ourselves, when the danger of our own persons starts a pretended sorrow for sin. There is a faith that is sound and lasting, a faith that is temporary and perishing, a faith that starts up like a mushroom in a night, and withers at the next scorching temptation; there is a faith common with devils, and a faith proper to Christians; there is a faith *of* Christ, and a faith *in* Christ.

(3). *Because every man is in a state of grace or nature.* There is a state of grace (Rom. 5:1), and a state of wrath (Eph. 2:3). The world is made up of receivers of Christ, or rejecters of Him, true subjects to God, or rebels against Him. There are two families: the family of God, and the family of the devil. The visible Church was not without its distinction; the Ark contains unclean as well as clean beasts; there is a Cain in Adam’s family, a Ham in Noah’s Ark, an Ishmael in Abraham’s house, and a Judas in our Savior’s retinue; and at the last day, the whole world will be distinguished into only two kinds, of sheep and goats. ’Tis necessary therefore to inquire whose we are, whether we belong to the God of Heaven, or the god of this world; whether we have the renewed image of God, or still retain the old stamp of the devil.

(This study will continue, D.V., in the next issue.)

A Study in Psalms: Psalms 55



Psalm 55 - The Agony of Betrayal

For the director of music. With stringed instruments.

A maskil of David.

¹Listen to my prayer, O God,
do not ignore my plea;
²hear me and answer me.

My thoughts trouble me
and I am distraught
³at the voice of the enemy,
at the stares of the wicked;
for they bring down suffering upon me
and revile me in their anger.

⁴My heart is in anguish within me;
the terrors of death assail me.

⁵Fear and trembling have beset me;
horror has overwhelmed me.

⁶I said, "Oh, that I had the wings of a dove!
I would fly away and be at rest—

⁷I would flee far away
and stay in the desert; *Selah*

⁸I would hurry to my place of shelter,
far from the tempest and storm."

⁹Confuse the wicked, O Lord,
confound their speech,
for I see violence and strife in the city.

¹⁰Day and night they prowl about on its walls;
malice and abuse are within it.

¹¹Destructive forces are at work in the city;
threats and lies never leave its streets.

¹²If an enemy were insulting me,
I could endure it;
if a foe were raising himself against me,
I could hide from him.
¹³But it is you, a man like myself,
my companion, my close friend,
¹⁴with whom I once enjoyed sweet fellowship
as we walked with the throng
at the house of God.

¹⁵Let death take my enemies by surprise;
let them go down alive to the grave,
for evil finds lodging among them.

¹⁶But I call to God,
and the LORD saves me.
¹⁷Evening, morning and noon I cry out in distress
and He hears my voice.
¹⁸He ransoms me unharmed
from the battle waged against me,
even though many oppose me.
¹⁹God, who is enthroned forever,
will hear them and afflict them— *Selah*
men who never change their ways
and have no fear of God.

²⁰My companion attacks his friends;
he violates his covenant.
²¹His speech is smooth as butter,
yet war is in his heart;
His words are more soothing than oil,
yet they are drawn swords.

²²Cast your cares on the LORD
and He will sustain you;
He will never let the righteous fall.
²³But You, O God, will bring down the wicked
into the pit of corruption;
Bloodthirsty and deceitful men
will not live out half their days.
But as for me, I trust in You.

Once again, in this psalm, David prays for God's help in a time of trouble. We are not given in this psalm, or in the inscription, the occasion that prompted these prayers, but we know that at the root of the trouble was the betrayal of a close friend. This would suggest that the occasion of the psalm was when David's trusted counsellor, Ahithophel, betrayed David and joined with Absalom, David's own son, in rebellion (see II Sam. 15:12). When we encounter passages in the Bible about betrayal, we should pay special attention, for there is a great possibility that the passages contain a prophetic reference to Judas's betrayal of Jesus, since **"the volume of the book"** is about our Lord Jesus Christ.

David cries out to God: **"Listen to my prayer, O God, do not ignore my plea; hear me and answer me. My thoughts trouble me and I am distraught at the voice of the enemy, at the stares of the wicked, for they bring down suffering upon me and revile me in their anger"** (vss. 1-3). As Jesus promised, **"In this world, you will have trouble"** (John 16:33). "We shall never be done weeping and praying till we are done with earth, and have passed to the enjoyment of God" [Plumer, on vs. 1]. And at the first sign of trouble, the wise, godly man will turn immediately to God in prayer, as does David.

On the occasion of this psalm, David was quite upset: **"My heart is in anguish within me; the terrors of death assail me. Fear and trembling have beset me; horror has overwhelmed me"** (vss. 4-5). Even the most godly of men face fear, as evidenced here. "It is not a thing inconsistent with godliness to be much moved with fear in time of danger; natural affections are not taken away in conversion, but sanctified and moderated" [Dickson, on 5]. Even Jesus sweat drops of blood. Yet it is somewhat of a surprise that David, who fought lions and bears, who slew Goliath, experienced such a strong feeling of fear: **"Horror has overwhelmed me."** Thanks be to God that we can turn to Him in times of trouble! "The godly have an advantage above all natural men: for when natural strength and courage fail them, they have nothing behind; but the godly have faith in God, to open a fountain of fresh supply of wisdom, courage, and strength to them, when all natural parts fail them; for, David being now emptied of natural strength, hath wisdom and strength to go to God, and the hope of heart to be helped by Him" [Dickson, on vss. 4-5].

In his fear, David's desire, rather than face his trouble, was to flee from it: **"I said, 'Oh, that I had the wings of a dove! I would fly away and be at rest—I would flee far away and stay in the desert; I would hurry to my place of shelter, far from the tempest and storm'"** (vss. 6-8). Yes, it would be nice to have **"wings of a dove"** at our beck and call, to get us out of trouble whenever we face it. And yes, God could

provide such a thing. He could whisk down a chariot of fire, at will, to help us escape. But God prefers, in the vast majority of cases to rescue us in far more natural ways. He more often chooses to walk with us through the trial, rather than fly us over the trial. The Israelites had to pass through the Red Sea, rather than be whisked over it.

Absent **“wings of a dove”**, David prays for God to handle his enemies: **“Confuse the wicked, O Lord, confound their speech, for I see violence and strife in the city. Day and night they prowl about on its walls; malice and abuse are within it. Destructive forces are at work in the city; threats and lies never leave its streets”** (vss. 9–11). David prays for God to **“confuse the wicked”** and **“confound their speech”**, so as to take away the ability of his enemies to cooperate in their evil, just as God did at the Tower of Babel.

There was something about David’s enemies that was especially distressing to him: **“If an enemy were insulting me, I could endure it; if a foe were raising himself against me, I could hide from him. But it is you, a man like myself, my companion, my close friend, with whom I once enjoyed sweet fellowship as we walked with the throng at the house of God”** (vss. 12–14). His enemy was once a close friend. **“None are such real enemies as false friends”** [Spurgeon, on vs. 12]. It was especially upsetting to David that this enemy was a fellow worshipper with him, **“with whom [he] once enjoyed sweet fellowship as [they] walked with the throng at the house of God.”** There are few things more disturbing than when we enter into serious conflict against brothers and sisters in the Lord. This, of course, should not happen to true believers, for believers should always strive to be Christlike, and Christ is the Prince of Peace. In David’s conflict, his adversaries were clearly not walking with the Lord. They were acting on their own behalf, not on behalf of the Lord.

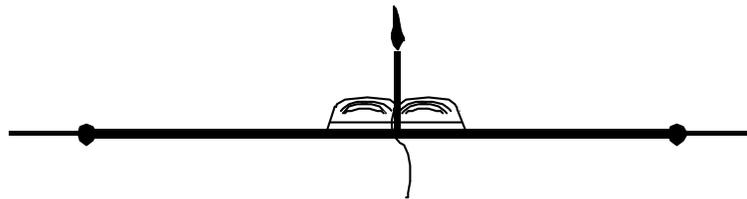
David’s feelings of being betrayed caused him to pray an especially wrathful prayer: **“Let death take my enemies by surprise; let them go down alive to the grave, for evil finds lodging among them”** (vs. 15). David’s malice for his adversaries was injecting itself in his prayers. Possibly we, as outsiders looking in, would suggest that David pray for the repentance of his enemies, rather than their destruction; however, how do we know how we would act in the same situation, as our enemies ruthlessly sought to destroy us? And certainly, David, in this situation, was in the right; and just as certainly, David’s adversaries (if they were Absalom and Ahithophel) deserved severe judgment.

For David’s adversaries **“evil finds lodging among them”**, but David avoids evil by constantly seeking God in his troubles: **“But I call to God,**

and the Lord saves me" (vs. 16). "The Psalmist would not endeavour to meet the plots of his adversaries by counterplots, nor imitate their incessant violence, but in direct opposition to their godless behavior would continually resort to his God" [Spurgeon, on vs. 16]. In the midst of his troubles, David found time for fervent prayer at least three times a day: **"Evening, morning and noon I cry out in distress and He hears my voice"** (vs. 17). "If our poor, frail bodies need refreshment from food three times a day, who that knows his own weakness will say that we need not as frequent refreshment for our poor frail spirits?" [Plumer, on vs. 17].

As often happens in David's psalms, he recalls past deliverances by God, and these recollections strengthen him in his faith that God will come through for him again: **"He ransoms me unharmed from the battle waged against me, even though many oppose me. God, who is enthroned forever, will hear them and afflict them—men who never change their ways and have no fear of God"** (vss. 18–19).

David is convinced of the bloodguiltiness of his foes, their treachery amplified by their feigned friendship: **"My companion attacks his friends; he violates his covenant. His speech is smooth as butter, yet war is in his heart; his words are more soothing than oil, yet they are drawn swords"** (vss. 20–21). The contrast between David's own righteous behavior in the situation versus the wickedness of his foes convinces David that God will take his part: **"Cast your cares on the Lord and He will sustain you; He will never let the righteous fall. But You, O God, will bring down the wicked into the pit of corruption; blood-thirsty and deceitful men will not live out half their days. But as for me, I trust in You"** (vss. 22–23). Oh, praise be to God that we can **"cast our cares on the Lord."** May we ever fervently seek Him in times of trouble. May we walk in His ways, and not be corrupted by the sins of the wicked who battle against us, so that in righteousness we can seek His help, and trust in Him for deliverance.



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Our Affliction Temporary

“Whatever afflictions may befall us here, they will not last long, but will soon be swallowed up in the greater joys or sorrows of the eternal world. These tears will not always flow; these sighs will not always heave our breasts. We can sigh no longer than the vital breath inspires our lungs; and we can weep no longer than till death stops all the fountains of our tears; and that will be in a very little time. And when we enter into the eternal world, if we have been the dutiful children of God here, His own gentle hand shall wipe away every tear from our faces, and He will comfort the mourners. Then all the sorrows of life will cease forever, and no more painful remembrance of them will remain than of the pains and

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