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Old Testament Study: Exodus 2:1-10

Moses' Ark

¹Now a man of the house of Levi married a Levite woman, ²and she became pregnant and gave birth to a son. When she saw that he was a fine child, she hid him for three months. ³But when she could hide him no longer, she got a papyrus basket for him and coated it with tar and pitch. Then she placed the child in it and put it among the reeds along the bank of the Nile. ⁴His sister stood at a distance to see what would happen to him.

⁵Then Pharaoh's daughter went down to the Nile to bathe, and her attendants were walking along the river bank. She saw the basket among the reeds and sent her slave girl to get it. ⁶She opened it and saw the baby. He was crying, and she felt sorry for him. "This is one of the Hebrew babies," she said. ⁷Then his sister asked Pharaoh's daughter, "Shall I go and get one of the Hebrew women to nurse the baby for you?"

⁸"Yes, go," she answered. And the girl went and got the baby's mother. ⁹Pharaoh's daughter said to her, "Take this baby and nurse him for me, and I will pay you." So the woman took the baby and nursed him. ¹⁰When the child grew older, she took him to Pharaoh's daughter and he became her son. She named him Moses, saying, "I drew him out of the water."

Pharaoh's hatred of the Israelites, as we saw in the previous chapter, has reached a pinnacle, as he gave this order to the Egyptian people: "Every boy that is born you must throw into the Nile, but let every girl live" (Ex. 1:22). At this very time, Moses was born: "Now a man of the house of Levi married a Levite woman, and she became pregnant and gave birth to a son" (vss. 1-2). "Observe the beauty of providence: just at the time when Pharaoh's cruelty rose to this height, the deliverer was born, though he did not appear for many years after" [Henry, on vss. 1-4].

Though unnamed here, the parents of Moses deserve to have their names known to everyone, because of their faith and bravery. Moses' father was Amram, and his mother was Jochebad (see Ex. 6:20). After seeing

their beautiful new son, they could not obey the Pharaoh's evil command: **"When she saw that he was a fine child, she hid him for three months"** (vs. 2). For this act of bravery (for surely they would have been severely punished had Pharaoh found out), they are honored in the hall of faith in Hebrews 11: **"By faith Moses' parents hid him for three months after he was born, because they saw he was no ordinary child, and they were not afraid of the king's edict"** (Heb. 11:23). Because this act of bravery is depicted as a special act of faith, we can infer that most of the Hebrew women submitted to the Pharaoh's edict. It also seems that, before Moses was born, Jochebad was prepared to submit to Pharaoh. She already had two other children (a daughter Miriam, and a son Aaron), and so, she possibly thought that obeying the Pharaoh was necessary to protect these children. But she saw, in some sort of prophetic way, something special in the infant Moses. We are not told exactly what she saw, except that she saw that he was **"a fine child"** (vs. 2). This small prophetic sign was enough to strengthen her in her faith and courage, and cause her to defy Pharaoh. "Note, a lively active faith can take encouragement from the least intimation of divine favor; a merciful hint of Providence will encourage those whose spirits make a diligent search" [Henry, on vs. 2].

There came a point when Jochebad could no longer hide Moses, presumably because his cries were loud enough for easy detection: **"But when she could hide him no longer, she got a papyrus basket for him and coated it with tar and pitch. Then she placed the child in it and put it among the reeds along the bank of the Nile. His sister stood at a distance to see what would happen to him"** (vss. 3-4). The word translated here as **"basket"** is the word **"ark"**, as in Noah's Ark. This was Moses' Ark. As Noah was cast into the waters in his ark, with only the providence of God to guide and protect him, so was Moses.

This ark of Moses' could very easily have become his coffin, but we can infer from the care that Jochebad took in building the ark, as she **"coated it with tar and pitch"**—I say, we can infer from this that Jochebad had faith that God would somehow intervene so as to save her son. She did all she could to keep Moses safe, by making a seaworthy ark for Moses. The rest was up to God. "Duty is ours, events are God's" [Henry, on vs. 3].

This sea-voyage of Moses presents an interesting symbolic picture-lesson for all parents. Just as Jochebad showed faith in sending her son into the river, so all parents, at some point in time, must have faith and send their children out into the river of the world. We must pray, and then trust that God will take care of them. Oh yes, just as Jochebad prepared the ark with tar and pitch, we do our best to prepare our children for that journey. Even so, at some point, we put them in the river, and let the current take them where it will. "The mother whose child goes to earn her living among strangers; the father whose son must leave the quiet

homestead for the mighty city; the parents who, as missionaries, are unable to nurture their children on the mission-field, because of the pernicious moral climate; or those who on their death-beds must part with their babes to the care of comparative strangers, may all learn a lesson from the faith that cast the young child on the providence of God, even more absolutely than on the buoyancy of the Nile. God lives, and loves, and cares. More quick and tender than Miriam's, His eye neither slumbers nor sleeps" [Meyer, 27].

Jochebad received the fruits of her faith, for God took care of Moses: **"Then Pharaoh's daughter went down to the Nile to bathe, and her attendants were walking along the river bank. She saw the basket among the reeds and sent her slave girl to get it. She opened it and saw the baby. He was crying, and she felt sorry for him"** (vss. 5–6). "It was neither by chance nor accident that Pharaoh's daughter went down to the river that day, for there are no accidents nor chance happenings in a world presided over by the living God" [Pink, 18]. Who can help but see God's providence in this episode? God's providence is seen first in bringing the princess down to the river bank at the critical moment. Then also, God's providence is seen in the compassion she showed for the Hebrew child. It was a God-given compassion, no doubt. Her own father, Pharaoh, hated the Hebrew children enough to give orders to kill them.

Pharaoh's daughter rebelled against this hatred, and not only rescued Moses, but cared for him: **"This is one of the Hebrew babies,' she said. Then his sister asked Pharaoh's daughter, 'Shall I go and get one of the Hebrew women to nurse the baby for you?' 'Yes, go,' she answered. And the girl went and got the baby's mother. Pharaoh's daughter said to her, 'Take this baby and nurse him for me, and I will pay you.' So the woman took the baby and nursed him"** (vss. 6–9). Moses' sister (presumably Miriam) showed great courage here in offering to **"get one of the Hebrew women to nurse the baby."** She must have seen true compassion in the princess's eyes. As for Jochebad, her faith was greatly rewarded. She not only got to nurse her son, but she also got paid for doing so! Ah, the goodness of God!

The princess's compassion for Moses was not a temporary gift of God; it grew into an attachment to the child, so that she took Moses as her own son: **"When the child grew older, [Jochebad] took him to Pharaoh's daughter and he became her son. She named him Moses, saying, 'I drew him out of the water'"** (vs. 10). Now, it was certainly difficult for Jochebad to part from Moses a second time, but at least she knew that he would be safe in the king's household. And given that Moses would grow up in the king's household, she certainly believed (as any mother would) that great things were in store for Moses.

We can most assuredly see here the hand of God in preparing Moses for the works of service he would render later. "Many who, by their birth, seem marked for obscurity and poverty, by surprising events of Providence

are brought to sit at the upper end of the world, to make men know that the heavens do rule” [Henry, on vss. 5–10]. Moses would be given the best education that anyone of that time would get. He would become familiar with the ways and customs of the Egyptians. And he would have access to the future Pharaoh, from whom he would eventually secure the freedom of his people. “Those whom God designs for great services He finds out ways to qualify and prepare beforehand” [Henry, on vss. 5–10]. Such preparation for service, though maybe not on so grand a scale, is performed in all of our lives. As Paul tells us: **“For we are God’s workmanship, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do”** (Eph. 2:10).

Most likely by the influence of the Holy Spirit, Pharaoh’s daughter gave the child a name, Moses, based on a Hebrew word: **“She named him Moses, saying, ‘I drew him out of the water.’”** (vs. 10). The name Moses sounds like the Hebrew word that means “draw out”. Interestingly, we do not know what name (if any) that Jochebad, his mother, gave to Moses. Perhaps she thought that the name that Pharaoh’s daughter gave him was quite appropriate, for whenever Moses heard his name, he would be reminded of the providence of God. Moses owed everything to God, who put in the heart of Pharaoh’s daughter to “draw him out” of the water, and have compassion on him, and take him for her own son, rather than cast him (without ark) back into the Nile, as per Pharaoh’s edict.

A great irony is that Pharaoh’s edict to kill the Hebrew boys was in a large manner responsible for the freeing of the Israelites later on. If the edict was not made, Moses would have grown up as a Hebrew, rather than an Egyptian. He would have been a Hebrew slave, rather than the son of a princess. As a Hebrew slave, he would not have been given the skills and access that he was given in the royal household. “Whilst Pharaoh was urging forward the extermination of the Israelites, God was preparing their emancipation. According to the divine purpose, the murderous edict of the king was to lead to the training and preparation of the human deliverer of Israel” [K&D, on 2:1-10].

Ah, the glorious providence of God! Moses’ ark could very easily have become his coffin. Instead, through it, Moses was given life in the Egyptian world. Though Moses was not *of* that world, he used the advantages given him in that world to prepare for the works of service to the Most High God. Yes, believer, this is our story, as well. We too have been given new life, and we too have emerged from the waters of baptism into a world that is not our true home. Nevertheless, we can use our advantages here to prepare us for works of service to our God.

Yes Lord, prepare us for that service, and guide us that we may be steered toward those works of service for which You have prepared us. We praise You that we can serve the Most High God. May we always consider it an honor. In the name of Jesus, we pray these things, Amen.



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.*

The Loss of Teachers, and Suitable Means of Grace and Salvation

Another great affliction which requireth patience is the loss of the sound and serious preaching of the gospel, by the death, or banishment, or silencing of our teachers, while our own great wants and weaknesses call for the best assistance. The soul being more precious than the body, the welfare of it is more valuable, and its loss and famine more lamentable: and we see that God ordinarily worketh according to the aptitude of means; and when He taketh away such needful means, it is a sad degree of His own forsaking us, and denying to us further grace. Alas! How bad are we under the best helps, and how dark and doubting under the most clear, convincing teaching, how cold and dull under the most warm and lively ministry! And what shall we then be, if God remove our teachers from us? May we not turn cold, and dull, and worldly, and deceived, under cold, dull, deceiving, worldly pastors? And now grow careless of our own souls, under those that are careless of their own and ours? If in the communion of wise and holy Christians, we found it hard to grow in grace, may we not fear declining when we are separated from such, and dwell as Lot in Sodom, and must converse with worldly or malignant men?

As to the sad case, 1. You may have the greater comfort, because you make not light of the affliction: and may be the more patient believingly, because you are not patient as contemptuous unbelievers. The patience of carnal men under such a loss is a greater evil than the loss itself; and the patience of faith is a greater good than the helps which you lose. Had you been so blind, and dead, and bad, as to let go the gospel, and be easily quiet and content, as long as you enjoy your honour, wealth, and ease, this had been a far greater misery than a want of teachers; as a mortal sickness

which causeth loathing and indigestion, is worse than the hardest fare with appetite and health. Thank God that you are sensible of your loss.

2. If you are true Christians you have the law and gospel written upon your hearts, whence none can by violence take it from you. You may lose the provision of your house, and the food on your tables; yea, and cast up that which you have eaten; but if it be digested and turned into your flesh and blood, it is not so easily taken from you. O bless God, that before He took away the means, He did convert you by them, and taught you effectually before He took away your teachers. When the word was digested and turned into knowledge, faith, repentance, desire, obedience, patience, hope, and love, neither men nor devils can take it from you; your heart, where it is sown and rooted, is not within their reach, unless you will give them the key, and foolishly betray yourselves. When God hath made you His habitation by His Spirit, and Christ dwelleth in your hearts by faith, and the kingdom of God and life eternal is begun within you, the loss of your outward helps will not undo you. I am not imitating them that tell you that all men have sufficient light within them, or that call you to undervalue the word written and preached, on pretence of that sufficiency, as if you need no other notice of God and Christ, but to be told that He is in you. But yet rejoice that God is within you, though all these outward means were gone: that is, that your faith and love have within you such an object to live upon as your Father, Saviour, and Sanctifier, and such an agent as the Spirit to actuate all. When they silence your teachers, burn your books, shut up your church doors, they cannot shut out the Spirit of Christ, nor deprive you of its life, and light, and love.

3. If men take away the means forementioned, they do not therefore take away all. [1]. You have all God's works to view and study: sun and stars, heaven and earth, sea and land, cities and country, fields and meadows, beasts and men, good and bad. And you are taught already by the gospel, to see not only the great Creator in all these, but also the gracious Redeemer, purchasing, upholding, and using all as delivered to him for the good of his elect.

[2]. You have the daily use of meditation, as on all the works of God, so also on Christ and the gospel which you have learnt; yea, and of the joys of heaven.

[3]. You have daily and hourly leave to open your case to God; you have access to Him by Christ in prayer, thanksgiving, and joyful praise. If you have but an appetite, you have here a continual feast, which you may enjoy in every place; in your closet, in the fields, in a prison.

[4]. It is very likely that you may save your Bibles, and other good books, and so have God's word still at hand. It was written in Hebrew and Greek, but God hath used man to translate and unseal it to you; and you

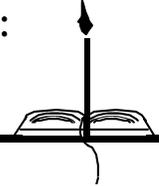
may choose your time, and choose the subject which you would read: and the writings of your teachers are usually more accurate than their speaking; and at a cheap rate you may have choice and excellent helps. And you may read them in your families, to your children and servants, and set up many teachers for one. Undervalue not these remaining helps.

[5]. And if God continue to you in the public assemblies but sound doctrine and lawful communion, do not say all means are gone. If it be but the reading of the holy Scriptures, and singing psalms, and praying, no worse than is expressed in the liturgy of this nation, it is a mercy not to be despised. It was but a little part of the New Testament which was contained in Peter's speech, which converted three thousand (see Acts 2); and but a little part which was in the words of Paul, which the Gentiles desired might be again spoken to them the next day; and but a little part which Paul wrote to any one church, when he required them to read it publicly, and to read that to one church which was written to another. Christ's own sermon (see Luke 4), and that to His disciples (see Matt 5) were but a little of what bare reading now can tell us. Ezra was put to spend much of the day in a pulpit, to read the law, and make them understand the reading: that is, when by their captivity they had lost the language in which the law was written, he was fain to read it in Hebrew, to translate it by word of mouth, and turn the Hebrew into the Chaldean tongue which they understood. This was far less than the bare reading of both Law and Gospel already translated does for you. The quantity of one or two of our chapters were received in the days of the apostles with great joy, to the conversion of many souls. And in Queen Mary's days, some poor women would hire a boy secretly in a corner to read to them a little of the English Bible, yea, of the Primer. But the full soul loathes the honeycomb, when to the hungry every bitter thing is sweet.

There are some ignorant Christians that think it enough to charge anything in worship or religion to be unlawful because it is human, the work of man. It is likely, these will not be grieved that their teachers are silenced, for they were men. And as men have written some forms of prayer, so they are men that have written the many hundred holy books that are now among us. And preaching and praying are the words and works of men. The singing psalms were turned into metre by men: yea, all your English Bibles were made English by men, and you read and hear no English words but the words of men, though they signify the word of God. The dividing of the Scripture into chapters and verses is the invention and work of men. And I think they were but men that taught you to speak and read. God worketh by man on man, as sociable, fit instruments: and if you despise all in religion that is the work of man, you will despise the word and work of God, and show that you are less than men.

(This study will continue in the next issue.)

New Testament Study: Matthew 14:1-21



The Death of John the Baptist

¹At that time Herod the tetrarch heard the reports about Jesus, ²and he said to his attendants, “This is John the Baptist; he has risen from the dead! That is why miraculous powers are at work in him.”

³Now Herod had arrested John and bound him and put him in prison because of Herodias, his brother Philip’s wife, ⁴for John had been saying to him: “It is not lawful for you to have her.” ⁵Herod wanted to kill John, but he was afraid of the people, because they considered him a prophet.

⁶On Herod’s birthday the daughter of Herodias danced for them and pleased Herod so much ⁷that he promised with an oath to give her whatever she asked. ⁸Prompted by her mother, she said, “Give me here on a platter the head of John the Baptist.” ⁹The king was distressed, but because of his oaths and his dinner guests, he ordered that her request be granted ¹⁰and had John beheaded in the prison. ¹¹His head was brought in on a platter and given to the girl, who carried it to her mother. ¹²John’s disciples came and took his body and buried it. Then they went and told Jesus.

Jesus’ fame was spreading throughout the land: “**At that time Herod the tetrarch heard the reports about Jesus, and he said to his attendants, ‘This is John the Baptist; he has risen from the dead! That is why miraculous powers are at work in him!’**” (vss. 1–2). The Herod spoken of here is Herod Antipas, the son of the King Herod who ordered the slaying the baby boys in Bethlehem in an attempt to kill the Messiah (see Matt. 2:16). Herod Antipas ruled a portion of the land that his father had ruled.

When faced with reports about the miraculous works of Jesus, Herod came to the conclusion that somehow the spirit of John the Baptist had entered Jesus, and was working through him. This was a strange conclusion for Herod to draw, especially since (as far as we know) John the Bap-

tist did not perform any miraculous works. All of us who hear of Jesus must at some point come to a conclusion about Him. We must respond in some way to the claims that Jesus made about Himself. Jesus stated, **“I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me”** (John 14:6). We must make a determination whether the claims that Jesus made are true. The miraculous signs and wonders that Jesus performed are a great testimony to the truthfulness of the claims He made. Herod should have realized this and sought to discover more about the teachings of Jesus. Instead, Herod came up with an absurd notion that Jesus was not who He said He was, but rather was possessed by John the Baptist.

In this section, Matthew tells us about the circumstances surrounding the death of John the Baptist. As we see here, John, in addition to being a great prophet, was one in a long list of martyrs for the cause of God. **“Now Herod had arrested John and bound him and put him in prison because of Herodias, his brother Philip’s wife, for John had been saying to him: ‘It is not lawful for you to have her.’ Herod wanted to kill John, but he was afraid of the people, because they considered him a prophet”** (vss. 3–5). John, to his great credit, pulled no punches concerning the law of God. No matter who John preached to, whether pauper or king, he told it like it is. “What was a king to him if that king dared to trample on the law of God? [Spurgeon, on vss. 3–4]. Herod and company saw themselves as above the law. John did not see them as being above the law. John was fearless in his demands that people repent and keep the laws of God. John preached in no uncertain terms of the unlawfulness of Herod’s relationship with Herodias. John preached this at great peril to himself. In fact, he lost his life because of his forthrightness in preaching to Herod. Oh, if only we could have the courage of John, to faithfully stand up for right, in all circumstances. We face much milder consequences for our boldness than John did, and yet we cower before weak, and powerless men.

“Herod wanted to kill John, but he was afraid of the people, because they considered him a prophet” (vs. 5). Herod, though in name ruler of the people, was a slave to his own weaknesses. It was because of Herod’s weakness as a ruler that John remained alive for a time in prison. “Wicked men do not abstain from any sin, but for worldly reasons; they do nothing for regard to God: nothing else did Herod look to but **‘the fear of the people’**” [Dickson, on 3–5].

“On Herod’s birthday the daughter of Herodias danced for them and pleased Herod so much that he promised with an oath to give her whatever she asked. Prompted by her mother, she said, ‘Give me here on a platter the head of John the Baptist’” (vss. 6–8). The depraved life of Herod and his family is clearly seen in this episode:

the party, the dance, the oath, the request for John's head. Herodias, through her daughter, requested John's head to ensure that Herod would have to execute John then and there. Her strategy worked: **"The king was distressed, but because of his oaths and his dinner guests, he ordered that her request be granted and had John beheaded in the prison. His head was brought in on a platter and given to the girl, who carried it to her mother"** (vss. 9–11). Here we have the ultimate in peer pressure: Herod kills John because of **"his dinner guests"**. As for **"his oaths"**, it would have been a virtue to break such oaths.

The king must not have been so greatly **"distressed"**, for John the Baptist was quickly put to death. "If ever there was a case of godliness unrewarded in this life, it was that of John the Baptist" [Ryle, 160]. Many would ask, "How could God let such a great man of God die so early in life?" Clearly, it was God's will that John die at that time, for John's life, since he was a faithful servant of God, was completely in God's hands. So, why would God allow such a faithful servant of His to die? John's work on earth must have been finished. John himself had a premonition (of sorts) of this. He said concerning Jesus' and his own ministries: **"He must become greater; I must become less"** (John 3:30). "John's work was ended; he had come as the herald of the Messianic reign, and that reign was now being established" [Broadus, 320]. John's ministry in some ways got in the way of Jesus'. John had followers who would not become disciples of Jesus. In fact, thirty years later, Paul met up with people who knew only of John's baptism (see Acts 18:25; Acts 19:3).

So, by His wisdom, God allowed John to be put to death. At times, we learn of faithful ministers and servants of God dying at a young age. We must not fault God for this, but realize that such deaths are allowed by God, according to His will, through His wisdom.

The Feeding of the Five Thousand

¹³When Jesus heard what had happened, He withdrew by boat privately to a solitary place. Hearing of this, the crowds followed Him on foot from the towns.

¹⁴When Jesus landed and saw a large crowd, He had compassion on them and healed their sick.

¹⁵As evening approached, the disciples came to Him and said, "This is a remote place, and it's already getting late. Send the crowds away, so they can go to the villages and buy themselves some food."

¹⁶Jesus replied, "They do not need to go away. You give them something to eat."

¹⁷“We have here only five loaves of bread and two fish,” they answered.

¹⁸“Bring them here to me,” He said. ¹⁹And He directed the people to sit down on the grass. Taking the five loaves and the two fish and looking up to heaven, He gave thanks and broke the loaves. Then He gave them to the disciples, and the disciples gave them to the people. ²⁰They all ate and were satisfied, and the disciples picked up twelve basketfuls of broken pieces that were left over. ²¹The number of those who ate was about five thousand men, besides women and children.

We go from an account of Herod’s depraved birthday feast, to an account of a glorious feast hosted by our Lord. This glorious feast occurred as an indirect result of Herod’s feast, for “when Jesus heard what had happened, He withdrew by boat privately to a solitary place. Hearing of this, the crowds followed Him on foot from the towns” (vs. 13). Upon hearing of John the Baptist’s death, Jesus tried to withdraw “to a solitary place”, presumably to grieve for His good friend. Yet, Christ was not allowed to rest. This was one of His great trials when He was on earth. He was a tireless servant of men. This He chose to be most of the time. But even when He desired solitude, He was recruited into service by the crowds. Nevertheless, far from being angry with the crowds for interrupting His solitude, Jesus “had compassion on them”: “When Jesus landed and saw a large crowd, He had compassion on them and healed their sick” (vs. 14).

Jesus’ disciples anticipated a problem: “As evening approached, the disciples came to Him and said, ‘This is a remote place, and it’s already getting late. Send the crowds away, so they can go to the villages and buy themselves some food’” (vs. 15). Their solution was to “send the crowds away”, and yet, would Jesus ever send anyone away who seeks Him?

“Jesus replied, ‘They do not need to go away. You give them something to eat’” (vs. 16). Jesus gives His disciples a command: “You give them something to eat.” Jesus’ message to the disciples is that they should tend to the needs of the people. This particular command is one that the disciples could not carry out in their own power. They needed Jesus’ help to work through them, so that they may tend to the needs of the people. Our Lord chooses primarily to carry out His work through His people. He supplies the power; we do the footwork.

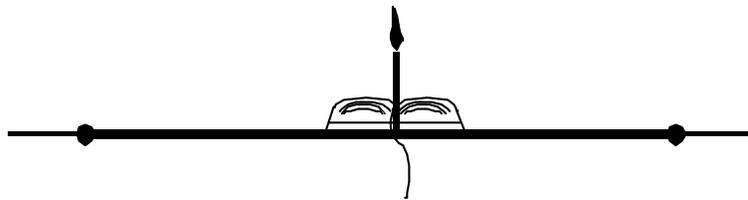
The disciples found some food: “‘We have here only five loaves of bread and two fish,’ they answered” (vs. 17). We are told in the Gospel of John that the loaves and fishes belonged to a boy (see John 6:9). What

child-like faith the boy had in bringing his food to share with all the people!

Jesus accepted the boy's gift: **"Bring them here to me,' He said. And He directed the people to sit down on the grass. Taking the five loaves and the two fish and looking up to heaven, He gave thanks and broke the loaves. Then He gave them to the disciples, and the disciples gave them to the people. They all ate and were satisfied, and the disciples picked up twelve basketfuls of broken pieces that were left over. The number of those who ate was about five thousand men, besides women and children"** (vss. 18–21). Jesus used the meager offering of the boy, and turned it into a meal for more than five thousand people. Our Lord often does this: takes a meager offering of money or talent or time, and turns it into something great.

And make no mistake, this was a great display of our Lord's power. Some would have us believe that no miracle occurred here, that the boy's sharing inspired the crowd to share food with each other. But such an explanation does not fit the text, for Jesus **"gave thanks and broke the loaves. Then He gave them to the disciples, and the disciples gave them to the people."** It was the boy's food that was given to the people, supplemented in some miraculous way by the creative power of our Lord. The event was undoubtedly miraculous. "It was a thing that no magician, impostor, or false prophet would ever have attempted. Such a person might possibly pretend to cure a single sick person, or to raise a single dead body, and by jugglery and trickery might persuade weak people that he succeeded; but such a person would never attempt such a mighty work as that which is here recorded. He would know well that he could not persuade ten thousand men, women, and children that they were full when they were hungry: he would be exposed as a cheat and impostor on the spot" [Ryle, 162].

There is some significance, I believe, in this miracle, in that it was a miracle that supplied ordinary needs, rather than extraordinary ones. Jesus showed compassion, not only for those who needed healing from physical maladies, but also for those who needed their daily bread. Our Lord is a help, not only to those who are in desperate situations, but also to His faithful followers, toiling day to day in this world, serving Him faithfully year after year.





A Topical Study: Self-Examination

A Discourse of Self-Examination, pt. 3 by Stephen Charnock (1628-1680)

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).

(We continue this study. In this issue, Mr. Charnock speaks on the application of this verse.)

II. The Use.

1. If this be *our duty* to examine ourselves, then *the knowledge of our state is possible*. If we are to examine ourselves, we may then know ourselves. Reflection and knowledge of self is a prerogative of a rational nature. We know that we have souls by the operations of them. We may know that we have grace by the effects of it, if we be diligent; as we may know by the beams of the sun that the sun is risen, if we shut not our eyes. Grace chiefly lies in the will, and it discovers itself in actions. The more raised any being is, the more active it is. The being of a God is known by the effects of His power in the world, and the being of faith is known by the operations of it in the heart and life. Though gold and that which is gilt be like in appearance, yet the true nature of each of them may be discerned by the touchstone. Hypocritical grace is like true grace, but it is not the same. Sincerity may be known. If we cast but a glance upon our hearts in any word or action, we may know whether we mean as we speak or do, or whether we have any by-ends in it. The discerning of habitual sincerity, is not so easy as the knowledge of an integrity in a particular act:

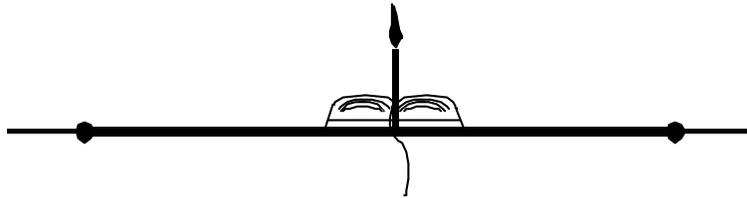
Yet if we keep a due watch over the motions of our hearts, and the actions of our lives, as they come upon the stage, and consider what their ends are, it will not be so difficult to know ourselves. 'Tis impossible a man's will should steal by him in all the actions it produceth, and a man be ignorant and insensible of it. The spirit and conscience of a man may know such things as are in it; both the habits it hath, and particular motives to this or that act: "**The spirit of a man that is in him, knows the things of a man**" (II Cor. 2:11; AV). If men would be more inward in conversing with their own hearts, they might have an acquaintance with the concerns of their souls, as their sense hath with outward objects. There can be no sufficient reason given why the understanding should not as well know the acts of the soul and will, as the acts of the sense, and the motions of the body. We know our particular passions, and the exercise of them. There is no man that fears a danger, or loves an amiable object, but he knows his own acts about them, as well as the object of those acts. If a man have faith and love, why should he not be as able to know the acts of faith and love, as to know the acts of his particular affections? This is easy, if we did live more with ourselves, and oftener exercise that prerogative of reflection, which we have above beasts. 'Tis difficult indeed in regard of our corruption: as the Law is said to be weak, not in itself, it was able to answer the end for which God appointed it, and man by the endowments of His Creation was able to observe it; but it became weak to make men happy, and man impotent to conform to it "**through the flesh**" (Rom. 8:3), by the entrance of corruption. 'Tis the same corruption of man which renders this knowledge of himself difficult. He lives too much abroad out of his own soul, and too little within, other wise there is no doubt but he may know his own will, and the habitual inclination of it.

2. *How foolish is the neglect of this duty!* How many ramble about the world acquainting themselves with their own hearts, or considering whether Christ be in them? What advantage can there be in the knowledge of other things, if we know not whether there be any operations of grace in our own souls? How few give themselves the opportunity of a serious retirement? How unreasonable is it to rest satisfied with ungrounded hopes of heaven, to call ourselves citizens of Jerusalem above, and have no copy of our freedom to show, nor any living witness in us to bear testimony for us? 'Tis against nature to desire to be in any company rather than our own, to endeavor to know everything in the world rather than ourselves, which is the first object of knowledge: should that reason which God hath given us, more excellent than the nature of the beasts, be employed about examining everything but ourselves?

III. *Use of the Exhortation.*

'Tis our highest advantage to know what should become of our souls in eternity. Is it a small thing to be within the verge of the wrath of God?

And is not the knowledge of this necessary if we be in such a case, that we may avoid it? Or is it a small thing to be an heir of heaven? Are justification, adoption, acceptation, small privileges, faith, love, repentance, small graces? Is not the knowledge of them necessary, that we may have the comfort of them? May not some convenient space of time be every day spent in this? May I not say as Christ to His disciples, "**Can you not watch one hour?**" Can you not spare one hour for so great and necessary a work? Let us enter therefore into the bosom of our heart, and see whether we have a true faith, such as Abraham's: whether it be such a lively faith that hath freed our souls in part from the mud of our corruptions; whether it be a faith resting upon Christ for salvation, without giving indulgence to the least offence to Him; such a faith that purifies the heart, reforms the life, enflames the soul with a love to God, causing us to rejoice in Him, and in any further degree of conformity to Him; whether it engenders in us a serious desire, and a suitable endeavor to obey Christ; such a faith that relies upon His promises without slighting His precepts.



A Song

Let not the sluggish sleep
Close up thy waking eye,
Until with judgement deep
Thy daily deeds thou try:
He that one sin in conscience keeps
When he to quiet goes,
More venturous is than he that sleeps
With twenty mortal foes.

-- William Byrd (1543-1623)

A Study in Psalms: Psalms 57



Psalm 57 - David in the Cave

For the director of music. To the tune of "Do Not Destroy".
Of David. A *miktam*. When he had fled from Saul into the cave.

¹Have mercy on me, O God, have mercy on me,
for in You my soul takes refuge.

I will take refuge in the shadow of Your wings
until the disaster has passed.

²I cry out to God Most High, to God,
who fulfills His purpose for me.

³He sends from heaven and saves me,
rebuking those who hotly pursue me; *Selah*
God sends His love and His faithfulness.

⁴I am in the midst of lions;
I lie among ravenous beasts—
Men whose teeth are spears and arrows,
whose tongues are sharp swords.

⁵Be exalted, O God, above the heavens;
let Your glory be over all the earth.

⁶They spread a net for my feet—
I was bowed down in distress.
They dug a pit in my path—
but they have fallen into it themselves. *Selah*

⁷My heart is steadfast, O God,
my heart is steadfast;
I will sing and make music.

⁸Awake, my soul! Awake, harp and lyre!
I will awaken the dawn.

⁹I will praise You, O Lord, among the nations;
I will sing of You among the peoples.

¹⁰For great is Your love, reaching to the heavens;
Your faithfulness reaches to the skies.

¹¹Be exalted, O God, above the heavens;
let Your glory be over all the earth.

The occasion of this psalm was **“when [David] had fled from Saul into the cave.”** There are two instances (that we know about) of David fleeing into caves from Saul. He fled into a cave at Adullam (see I Sam. 22:1–5), and at En-gedi (see I Sam. 24:1–22). We do not know which instance this psalm refers to. In any case, for David to flee from his ruthless enemies to a cave must have been frightening. For, if Saul and his army had found David, it would have been easy for them to seal the entrance, and subject David to a slow, painful death by starvation.

David well knew the desperateness of his situation. He prayed: **“Have mercy on me, O God, have mercy on me for in You my soul takes refuge. I will take refuge in the shadow of Your wings until the disaster has passed”** (vs. 1). David repetition of the phrase, **“Have mercy on me,”** reflects his desperation. Being trapped in a cave, surely there was no one else for David to **“take refuge”** in but God. Could the flitting shadow of bat wings on cave walls have inspired David to take **“refuge in the shadow of [God’s] wings”**?

Certainly, even were David not in a cave, the proper place at all times in which to take refuge is our God. “The only refuge of a man in trouble is the mercy of the Lord; be it sin, be it misery, be it peril, or pressing evil; in mercy only is the relief of one and all sad conditions: and in this case must a soul double its petition in the Lord’s bosom” [Dickson, 340]. And in this life of trouble, we will have plenty of opportunities to seek the refuge of God. “While life lasts we shall never be done crying for mercy. Whether it be famine, pestilence or war, whether it be foes without, or fears within, whether it be at sea or on land, whether it be in sickness or health, in life or in death, our great need is mercy. Yea, we shall need it at the day of Judgment. Nothing but mercy can protect us from human malice or diabolical rage, from personal vindictiveness or legal injustice, from sin in life, from despair in death, or from hell in eternity” [Plumer, 596].

Though in a desperate situation, David had faith that God was at work: **“I cry out to God Most High, to God, who fulfills His purpose for me. He sends from heaven and saves me, rebuking those who hotly pursue me; God sends His love and His faithfulness”** (vss. 2–3). It truly takes a man of faith to be able to say, while trapped by his enemies in a cave, that God **“fulfills His purpose for me.”** We must all realize that God is at work, even when we are in times of trouble, even when we are beset by cruel enemies.

David describes his enemies: **“I am in the midst of lions; I lie among ravenous beasts—men whose teeth are spears and arrows, whose tongues are sharp swords”** (vs. 4). “It is no new thing for good men to have barbarous foes, who would, if they could, swallow them up” [Plumer, 597]. It is interesting that, of all the weapons in Saul’s armory, David speaks of the ammunition spewing from the mouths of his enemies, presumably referring to malicious slander and gossip being used to turn the people against David. “Malicious men carry a whole armoury

in their mouths; they have not harmless mouths, whose teeth grind their own food as in a mill, but their jaws are as mischievous as if every tooth were a javelin or an arrow” [Spurgeon, on vs. 4].

David, in his prayer, turns from focusing on his own safety, to more important considerations: **“Be exalted, O God, above the heavens; let Your glory be over all the earth”** (vs. 5). “But pious minds in the midst of their greatest sufferings turn with alacrity from themselves to God. Thus our Lord Jesus in His agony cried, ‘**Father, glorify Thy name,**’ (John 12:28). So here the type of Christ forgets his discomforts or cheerfully submits to them, asking that thereby the Lord may be honored” [Plumer, 595].

Interestingly, as David focuses on God’s glory, rather than his own safety, he begins to see his prayers being answered: **“They spread a net for my feet—I was bowed down in distress. They dug a pit in my path—but they have fallen into it themselves”** (vs. 6).

In the last section of the psalm, David does something that we would all do well to do when we are faced with affliction. David forgets his own problems and gives himself totally over to the praise of God: **“My heart is steadfast, O God, my heart is steadfast; I will sing and make music. Awake, my soul! Awake, harp and lyre! I will awaken the dawn. I will praise You, O Lord, among the nations; I will sing of You among the peoples. For great is Your love, reaching to the heavens; Your faithfulness reaches to the skies. Be exalted, O God, above the heavens; let Your glory be over all the earth”** (vss. 7–11). “Faith does not free us from trial, but it does enable us to triumph over it. Moreover, faith lifts us high above the purely personal sense of pain, and creates a passion for the exaltation of God among the nations” [Morgan, 104].

David’s giving of himself over to the praise of God was not an easy thing to do. It was something he had to will himself to do. He says twice, as if to convince himself, **“My heart is steadfast... my heart is steadfast.”** He then verbally slaps himself: **“Awake, my soul!”** “Our natural powers are dull and sluggish in God’s praises, and so they must be aroused by self-exhortation” [Plumer, 595]. He uses his musical instruments (and God-given musical talent) to help himself enter into praise: **“Awake, harp and lyre! I will awaken the dawn.”** He resolves to praise God everywhere, in every way: **“I will praise You, O Lord, among the nations; I will sing of You among the peoples.”** Then, finally, not surprisingly, after making great efforts to enter into praise, David give us words that have helped God’s people through many generations to enter into the praise of God: **“For great is Your love, reaching to the heavens; Your faithfulness reaches to the skies. Be exalted, O God, above the heavens; let Your glory be over all the earth.”**

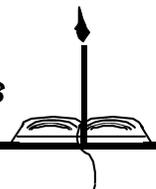


A Meditation: The Spiritual Chemist

A Meditation Upon a Glass Without a Foot by William Spurstowe (ca. 1666)

That which chiefly renders this glass of little or no esteem is not the *brittleness* of it, which is common to every glass, but an *inaptness* for use and service through a particular defect, in regard it hath only a capacity to receive what is put into it, and no ability to retain it unless some hand, or other foreign aid supply the place of a natural foot. In the hand it is useful to convey drink to the thirsty, or a cordial to the patient; but as soon as it is out of the hand, through mere weakness it falls and spills the liquor, if not ruin itself. O how lively doth this imperfect glass resemble the best condition of believers on this side of heaven, who in themselves are not only *brittle*, and so apt to be irrecoverably broken; but are also totally unable to retain either grace or comfort with which Christ is pleased to fill them, unless He bear and hold them always in His hand? And O how great is the care and love of Christ, to preserve such frail creatures to life, and to honor such weak instruments in His constant service? Who can think upon this goodness of Christ, and not be transported with raptures and ecstasies in the deep admiration of it? Who can believe that sure salvation that is in Him, out of whose hand no man can pluck us, and not passionately desire it? Is it not better with us, than it was with us in Adam, who had feet to stand upright, but no hand which might preserve him from falling? Freewill hath made many servants, but hath it ever made one son? Are not all that are saved children of grace? Let others then magnify nature's power, and like sick men talk confidently of walking, when upon trial they cannot stand: I shall always desire to have a due sense of my own emptiness and weakness, and to make this my daily prayer, that Christ would always fill me with His grace, hold me by His hand, and use me ever in His service.

FOR MEDITATION: Two Christmas Poems



The Nativity

Among the oxen (like an ox I'm slow)
I see a glory in the stable grow
Which, with an ox's dullness might at length
Give me an ox's strength.

Among the asses (stubborn I as they)
I see my Saviour where I looked for hay;
So may my beastlike folly learn at least
The patience of a beast.

Among the sheep (I like a sheep have strayed)
I watch the manger where my Lord is laid;
Oh that my baa-ing nature would win thence
Some wooly innocence!

-- C. S. Lewis (1898-1965)

Nativity

*Immensity cloistered in thy dear womb,
Now leaves his well-beloved imprisonment,
There He hath made Himself to His intent
Weak enough, now into our world to come;
But Oh, for thee, for Him, hath th' Inn no room?
Yet lay Him in this stall, and from the Orient,
Stars, and wisemen will travel to prevent
Th' effect of Herod's jealous general doom.
Seest thou, my Soul, with thy faith's eyes, how He
Which fills all place, yet none holds Him, doth lie?
Was not His pity towards thee wondrous high,
That would have need to be pitied by Thee?
Kiss Him, and with Him into Egypt go,
With His kind mother, who partakes thy woe.*

-- John Donne (1573-1631)

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Let not our hearts be busy inns,
That have no room for Thee,
But cradles for the living Christ
And His nativity.
Still driven by a thousand cares
The pilgrims come and go;
The hurried caravans press on;
The inns are crowded so!
Here are the rich and busy ones,
With things that must be
sold,
No room for simple things
within
This hostelry of gold.
Yet hunger dwells within these
walls,
These shining walls and
bright,
And blindness groping here and
there
Without a ray of light.

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