

## Defeat and Victory

Psalms 44 and 45.

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The experiences of God's saints, if considered in detail, present a picture of almost endless variety. The dispensation in which their lives are cast differ. The ages comprised in any one dispensation often differ greatly. The circumstances surrounding them in any given age are different. And even where the age and the circumstances are the same, the characters and temperaments of individuals differ. Yet, with all this, there are certain underlying features which are the same in all cases. These two Psalms furnish us with an illustration which is to the point. No saint is to be found, no matter what his dispensation, his age, his circumstances, but knows the bitterness of defeat: and none but shall know ultimately the joy of victory. Some there may be who lose ten thousand battles, but even they are victors in one battle — the last.

Psalm 44 is very obviously a Psalm of defeat. It begins with very confident expectations which are not realized, and it ends with an agonized cry from the dust for help and succour from on high. Psalm 45, with equal clearness, is a Psalm of victory. The Victor is introduced and immediately everything is changed. Both Psalms are highly prophetic and await their fulfilment at the end of the age. Yet, of course, they abound with instruction for us. If we begin by noting their prophetic interpretation standpoint we shall better be able to make a right application of them to ourselves.

In Psalm 44 we hear the voice of godly Jews, who will be a true remnant of Israel in the coming day of trouble. Right through the Psalm it is "we" and "us" with the exception of verse 6. This is striking, for practically all the preceding psalms are in the first person singular, the plural only occurring very rarely. Psalm 44 then is the voice of a company, though verse 6 lets us know that the psalm is the work of an individual, who was inspired to utter the thoughts of many. It falls quite naturally into four sections; verses 1 to 8; 9 to 16; 17 to 22; 23 to 26.

In the first section this true remnant allow us to hear how confidently they expect to *be* used of God to accomplish a great deliverance in the earth. They unbosom to us three steps by which they have attained this confidence. The three steps follow one another in a logical sequence, in which it is not easy to find a flaw. In the first place, they have heard and believed the tidings of God's mighty intervention for their fathers in the days of old. They are not of the liberal or modernistic type who believe in nothing miraculous, and hence discredit even the well attested facts of their own national history. On the contrary, they whole-heartedly accept them.

Then, in the second place, they know that the God who thus wrought in ancient times is their God today. They can say, "Thou art MY King, O God;" and He is ever the same. He is to be trusted therefore by them, just as He was trusted of old.

From this they deduce, in the third place, that victory must be on their side. In verses 5 to 8 this confidence is expressed. They do not trust in their own prowess.

They know that there is no salvation in their own weapons. They make their boast in God, and they do confidently expect to push down their enemies in the name of the Lord.

In the second section of the psalm *their failure and disillusionment* is very graphically described. Instead of victory all is defeat. They are put to shame, spoiled, scattered. They become a scorn, a

derision, a by-word, a shaking of the head among the people. The transition from verse 8 to verse 9 is very striking. From confident boasting in God and the praise of His Name they fall as with a crash into dejection and shame.

Two or three expressions in this part of the Psalm are very interesting from a prophetic point of view. In verse 16 an individual is mentioned as, "him that reproacheth and blasphemeth." In the same verse "the enemy and avenger" is spoken of. Both these expressions may refer to the coming of the "beast:" the first one clearly does so, in the light of Revelation 13: 6, 7. The second expression also occurs in Psalm 8: 2, and it may refer rather to the false prophet, the second beast of Revelation 13, who exercises the power of the first beast and avenges amongst the Jews all resistance to his authority. However that may be, we have here an unmistakable reference to the great antichristian powers of the last days; just as, in verse 9, we have reference to the armed resistance to that power which will be offered by zealous sons of Israel, many of them doubtless really godly people anxious to preserve the pure worship of God when the attempt is made to foist upon them abominable idolatry.

In Revelation 13 we are told that it is given to the blaspheming beast "to make war with the saints, and to overcome them:" and in verse 10 of that chapter a warning against armed resistance is conveyed in the words, "He that killeth with the sword, must also be killed with the sword. Here is the patience and faith of the saints." We believe that our Psalm shows that the warning is not unnecessary, and that, notwithstanding the warning, armed resistance is just what they have recourse to, in the full expectation that God will be miraculously with them as once He had been with their fathers before Jericho, and as He had been with the valiant Maccabees when Antiochus Epiphanes defiled God's holy land and temple.

One line of Scripture foretold the doings of the Maccabees, which took place during "the four hundred silent years" which preceded the coming of Christ — "The people that do know their God shall be strong, and do exploits." (Dan. 11: 32). Now it seems that, in the days of antichrist, God-fearing Jews will feel that they too know their God, and they also will do wonderful things. They overlook the Lord's own warning recorded in Matthew 24, to the effect that, when the abomination of desolation appears, not fight but flight is to be their action. Whatever God may have done through His people in the lesser crises of earlier days, it is plainly revealed that in the last great crisis all human instruments will be set aside and He will fight the great fight, and deal the one mighty, effectual, knock-out blow by Himself *alone*. The word is, "I have trodden the winepress alone; and of the people there was none with Me." (Isa. 63: 3).

In keeping with this Revelation 19 shows us the beast and false prophet plunged into ruin and unutterable damnation, not by God working through saints on earth, but by the revelation of the Lord Jesus in flaming fire from heaven. Saints are there, but they are heavenly saints, and they *do* nothing but merely *follow* the One who does everything.

When it has been a question of God acting in government, then again and again He has been pleased to use His people as instruments of His government. Now that it is a question of His grace being heralded through the earth, His normal way of acting is through human servants. But when it is neither grace nor government, but God executing wrath and vengeance on men in whom human sin has risen to its dreadful climax, then He acts *alone*. He has said, "Vengeance in Mine; I will repay." It is His sole prerogative. No other may share it with Him.

The third section of our Psalm is very touching. In it these godly souls, though weighed down by defeat and terrible sufferings, express *their integrity of heart, and fidelity to the Name of the Lord*. Broken and overthrown they may be, even as Job was of old, yet their faith is divinely sustained, and it

holds fast. They have been self-confident, as once Moses was, thinking that by them God was going to effect a mighty deliverance. They may not have grasped what the Divine programme really is, yet they are wholly devoted to God: killed all the day long like sheep. And in being "counted as sheep for the slaughter," approximating in likeness unto their Lord.

The forth and last section of the, Psalm is *one intensive cry for deliverance*. All hope of any success or victory on their side is gone. If deliverance is to come it must be as the fruit of God's redeeming mercy. It must be His work alone. They fully realize this now.

So much for the prophetic bearing of this Psalm. But has it any voice for us? It most certainly has.

What Christian is there, who has not tasted the bitterness of defeat? We are not face to face with antichrist, though antichristian forces are very manifestly in the world today. Still we have all the power of the world, and the flesh (that most subtle inward foe), and the devil against us; and again and again, when singly or in combination, they have come against us, we have fallen before them. We know what is right, yet we fail to perform it.

So often too, our experiences run just after the pattern of this Psalm. We begin by knowing right well how God can and does deliver. We can say that we have heard with our ears of all God's delivering power, since we listened to the "fathers" of the Christian faith. Ever since we listened to the Apostle Paul, by reading the epistle to the Romans, have we known how God commands deliverances for His people. Then we are apt to take it for granted that victory is ours as a matter of course: and then comes the disillusionment! We are shamefully defeated. Yet though broken and humbled and sorrowful, we are conscious of a certain integrity. We do not turn aside from the faith of Christ, nor do we for one moment contemplate the possibility of doing so.

Sometimes, too, the Christian is oppressed by persecution, and he remains undelivered. Then the Psalm has an even closer application. Such an application is made by the Apostle in Romans 8: 36, when he quotes verse 22. We may be living sheltered lives in these favoured lands, but many a saint in the last few years has suffered even unto death, apparently unheard.

If it be a question of the defeats we suffer when battling against the spiritual forces of evil, we shall find in verse 5 of our Psalm that which largely explains them. What they say is, "Through Thee will WE push down our enemies: through Thy name will WE tread them under that rise up against us." The idea is that we accomplish a victory by utilizing the power of God. That is not God's idea for them, and we think we may say it is never His idea for any. His power is not placed at our disposal for us to use as best we may. It is rather that we are to be at His disposal, for Him to use us. If God placed His power at our disposal it would leave us in the primary place with the responsibility of planning the campaign. NO, He has the primary place, and the plan of campaign must be His. Our places are very, very secondary — just instruments that He is pleased to use.

It is when we realize this that we cease from ourselves, our plans, our efforts, and cast ourselves wholly upon God, in keeping with the cry that fills the closing verse of the Psalm. This is, of course, the lesson of Romans 7. It is when we cease from ourselves, and our eyes are turned to Another who is outside ourselves that deliverance comes. For so long as our attitude is, "How shall I deliver myself?" difficulties and defeat dog our footsteps. When at last our cry becomes, "Who shall deliver me?" then we discover the delivering power of Jesus Christ our Lord, and of the Holy Spirit, who is "the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus."

As we commence reading Psalm 45, it is as though we have been transported into a new world. Excellence, splendour, victory, blessing, fill the whole scene. The agonised cry that concluded the

previous Psalm is suddenly exchanged for a heart which is bubbling over with good matter, and a tongue which utters praise with the flowing ease of a ready writer. What has brought about this change?

The answer is simplicity itself. The Christ of God, who acts *for* God and yet *is* God, has appeared upon the scene. As part of the heading of this Psalm appear the words, "A song of loves," or more accurately, "A song of the Beloved." We know who the Beloved is, seeing we ourselves are "accepted in the Beloved" (Eph. 1: 6). Well, the Beloved, in whom we are accepted is going to appear in His glory. Everything hinges upon that. He will execute judgment. He will accomplish deliverance in victorious power. And He will do it by Himself alone.

In verses 3, 4 and 5, He is pictured as He comes forth to lay low every enemy. It is very similar to the picture presented in Revelation 19. He is everything and man is nothing - it is, "Thy glory," "Thy majesty," "Thy right hand." His arrows never fail of their target. The people fall under Him, and victory is achieved.

The Divine Victory however will not merely be a display of power: it will also be a vindication of those qualities and features which please God. He will ride prosperously in His majesty "because of truth and meekness and righteousness." His victory will mean the establishment of these excellent things. The world, as we know it, is full of untruth and pride and unrighteousness. These former things must pass away and a new order of things be brought in.

When the saints of the coming time of tribulation pass through the sad experiences of Psalm 44, they will be under the oppressive domination of "him that reproacheth and blasphemeth . . . the enemy and avenger." These men, who are elsewhere designated, "beasts," will in their characters sum up all the evil that is found in them. In them Satan's lie will find its embodiment. In them human pride will rise to its climax. All their actions will be characterized by "the deceivableness of unrighteousness." These things are plainly seen if we read 2 Thessalonians 2. When the Lord Jesus appears in His majesty He will "consume with the spirit of his mouth . . . and destroy with the brightness of His coming" these evil men, and the whole system of things that they dominate, with a view to bring in an order of things wholly according to God.

We too are waiting for His coming. But while we wait for Him, and for the public display of the glory of God, it is not God's thought that we should be overcome by evil of the world without or of the flesh within. We have already noted how our spiritual experiences often run very much on the lines indicated in Psalm 44: we have now only to point out how victory for us lies exactly upon the lines which are celebrated in Psalm 45.

The world is full of programmes, for fallen man is very fertile in ideas.

One and all however combine in this feature — they SHUT CHRIST OUT. The Divine programme is very simple and effective — BRING CHRIST IN. Now a great many of our spiritual struggles proceed on exactly analogous lines. We want to be in the enjoyment of victory; so we resolve, and try, and pray, and seek God's help, and yet realize we are very ready to bring Christ in, if it be a question of the forgiveness of sins and our fitness for heaven; yet are not so ready to bring Christ in, if it be a question of practical sanctification and holiness and victory. Yet there is no other way to the desired end.

We have already alluded to the end of Romans 7. We refer to it once more, coupling with it the closing verses of Romans 8. In the last verse of chapter 7 Jesus Christ our Lord is brought in. Through Him God delivers the wretched man who is utterly sick of himself and all his struggles. In the last verse of chapter 8 the delivered man finds himself in the embrace of the love of God "which is in Christ Jesus

our Lord." That is it. God's delivering power is *through* Him: His enveloping love, from which nothing can separate us, is in Him. Christ is all.

BRING CHRIST IN — that is the way of victory. Let Christ be enthroned in the heart's deepest affections, let Him dominate the thoughts, the aspirations, the life of service, and all must be well. It is simply impossible to overthrow Him. He is victorious always and everywhere. He rides prosperously in His majesty through hearts and lives, though even of the feeblest character in themselves, if simply yielded up to Him.