

Mercy and Judgment

Psalms 101 and 102.

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"I will sing of mercy and judgment." These are the words with which David opened the Psalm which stands as No. 101 in our collection, and in the remaining seven verses of it he gives the details of the way in which he proposed to translate these principles into action in connection with the kingdom with which God had entrusted him. Again and again he repeats the words, "I will ..." as he tells us that which he proposed.

Reading this psalm, long after his kingdom has passed into history, we may feel tempted to observe that it is fairly easy to say, "I will " do this, that and the other, but that his performance did not come up to his promise. But we must remember two things: first, that he was doubtless putting on record the ideal which he had before him, showing that he had caught the thought of God; and second, that the Spirit who inspired the psalm was leading him to write words which should have an absolute and perfect fulfilment in Christ and in His coming kingdom. With these two thoughts before us let us run our eyes over this Psalm.

It is a great point in David's favour that when he began to consider what should mark his kingdom he started with *himself*. When we propose to legislate as to other folk we cannot do better than begin with ourselves. He speaks of a *perfect* way, and of behaving himself *wisely* in it. He speaks of walking with a *perfect* heart, and of setting *no wicked thing* before his eyes. All perfection marked our Lord Jesus Christ, but in David's case it was just in this matter of getting some wicked thing before his eyes that he so grievously failed, as 2 Samuel 11 shows. Still there is the ideal, and the ideal has been, and ever will be, gloriously fulfilled in the Lord Jesus.

Once get an absolutely perfect King seated on the throne and all the other features, mentioned from the middle of verse 3 and onwards, fall into their place. He *must* hate and repudiate all that turns aside from the Divine standard: He *must* decline to recognise all who are evil. Moreover He *must* act in judgment against the slanderer and against the proud, as also against the deceiver, the liar and all who are workers of wickedness.

On the other hand He will look in mercy upon those who are "the faithful of the land," and accept service from such as walk "in a perfect way." This is the one point in the note of mercy being struck. The word "mercy" does not occur, yet we know that such people as are described in verse 5 only are found as the fruit of the mercy of God, as they themselves would be the first to acknowledge. They would all agree in telling us that they only stand in Divine favour because, "His mercy endureth for ever."

Now is it not remarkable that in a Psalm which starts by saying, "I will sing of mercy and judgment" there should be so much of judgment and so little of mercy? It certainly is, and yet there is a very sufficient reason for it. Man being what he is, judgment is a stern necessity, whilst as for mercy it can only be extended upon a righteous basis. In Psalm 101 that righteous basis does not appear. Hence judgment almost entirely fills up the picture that is presented.

What is lacking in Psalm 101 is amply supplied, however, in Psalm 102. We have only to read as far as verse 10 in that Psalm to discover that there is some great Personage, who bears the indignation

and wrath that the judgment of God entails, and when we reach verse 13 we find that mercy is to flow forth to Zion. The *bearing* of the *judgment* leads to the *extending* of the *mercy*. That is the wonderful story.

Now Psalm 102 is not merely a prophecy concerning the rejection and sorrow and judgment-bearing which marked our blessed Lord, and the mercy which as a consequence should flow to men: it gives us these things truly, but so that the recital of it comes to us as from His own lips, and we get His thoughts and feelings as He passed through it all. The heading of the Psalm is, "A prayer of the Afflicted, when He is overwhelmed, and poureth out His complaint before the Lord."

The Psalm seems to divide into four sections of unequal length. In verse 1 to 15 we hear the voice of the afflicted Messiah, relating His sorrow and anticipating the mercy which is to come. Then, verses 16 to 22, we have in a parenthetical way the inspired comment of the Psalmist. In verse 23, and in the first part of verse 24, we again hear the voice of the Messiah, completing His story by way of contrast with what has just been stated in the parenthesis. Lastly, from the middle of verse 24 to the end, we get the glorious answer which comes from the lips of Jehovah in reply to His complaint.

Time and space would fail us if we attempted to go into details, but it may be possible for us to take a rapid survey of these things.

As we consider the first section we are almost irresistibly reminded of what is recorded in the New Testament as to Gethsemane. There it was that He lifted up His prayer as One who was in trouble. There His heart was smitten, and there came forth the voice of His groaning: there He watched and was as a sparrow alone upon the housetop. There too it was that He wept. The Gospels do not mention this touching fact, which verse 9 alludes to, and which is stated in Hebrews 5: 7. Without a question it was in Gethsemane that He "offered up prayers and supplications with strong crying and tears unto Him that was able to save Him from [out of] death, and was heard in that He feared."

It was in Gethsemane that He faced as before God, and in perfect communion with His Father, all that lay before Him, and more particularly the judgment on account of sin which He had to bear. He speaks of it in our Psalm as, "Thine indignation and Thy wrath." Jehovah had lifted Him up as the Messiah but now had cast Him down, that He might be the sin-bearer on the Cross; but before actually entering into all that the Cross entailed, He went through it all in communion with His Father while in the Garden. Indignation and wrath were before Him, but what was involved in them?

We will allow Isaiah 53 to answer this question for us. It meant that He was "wounded," and "bruised," and that "the chastisement of our peace" was upon Him. It meant that the Lord "laid on Him the iniquity of us all," that "it pleased the Lord to bruise Him," and to "put Him to grief," making "His soul an offering for sin." Hence it was that "He was cut off out of the land of the living," and that there came upon Him "the travail of His soul."

In this Psalm the Holy One is pictured as knowing right well all that was involved in the sorrows that lay before Him — that being cut off His days would be "like a shadow that declineth" — and as knowing the glory of Jehovah, who would "endure for ever." He knew too that though men might think that mercy had been forgotten, the moment would arrive when Jehovah would arise and have mercy upon Zion, and from thence His mercy be so dispensed abroad that the very heathen would be brought to fear the Name of Jehovah, and all the kings of the earth would see His glory. Mercy would be certain for men, but only if He went down under the indignation and the wrath.

Now comes the section in which the Psalmist speaks as a prophet, and gives a little summary of the blessed happenings when Jehovah turns to build up Zion in His mercy. This He will do when He

shall "appear in His glory." Then "the prayer of the destitute" will be regarded, and "the groaning of the prisoner" will be heard, and those "appointed to death" will be loosed, and men will gather together "to serve the Lord," and sound forth His praise.

The Psalmist is led to recognize that more will be needed than the extending of mercy to sinful men, for he predicts that "the people which shall be created shall praise the Lord. In Psalm 22: 31, he says, "They shall come, and shall declare His righteousness unto a people that shall be born, that He hath done this." Here it is not the people that shall be *born*, but that shall be *created*. God is going to create a new kind of person to enjoy the blessing of the millennial age and to show forth His praise. Not a physical but a spiritual creation is here in view. A new creation order of things has already come to pass for believers today, as the New Testament bears witness. But then, as James tells us, we are "a kind of first-fruits of His creatures," and this infers that there is to be a big "after-fruits" of similar creatures following, though not all are called to just the same place of blessing before God.

When Jehovah appears in His glory, this is how the glory will manifest its power upon earth. There shall be judgment as we know from other scriptures: the point here is how it will be manifested in mercy.

There follows now the short section of one and a half verses in which again we hear the voice of the Messiah Himself. He resumes the recital of His sorrows, but now as directly contrasted with all the glory and mercy which yet is to be, and in contrast too with the enduring for ever which characterizes Jehovah. His strength is weakened, His days are shortened, He is to be taken away in the midst of His days by the act of God. Jehovah endures, the hour strikes for Zion to be remembered in mercy, the glory shines forth for the deliverance of newly created men — and the Holy One of God is taken away by death in the midst of His days. Is that the last word as far as He is concerned? How could it be?

There is indeed a colon in the middle of verse 24, but no full-stop. without the further light which the New Testament sheds we should certainly have read all the rest of the Psalm as being *the address of the Messiah to Jehovah*. We should have taken it for granted that it is Jehovah who is to endure for ever, who of old laid the foundations of the earth, and will at last fold up as a vesture and change both the heavens and the earth, being Himself the Same. In the light of the New Testament we find that the rest of the Psalm is *the address of Jehovah to the Messiah*; but that on the other hand we were indeed right in seeing Jehovah in the closing verses, *for the Son is Jehovah equally with the Father*.

Hebrews 1: 8-12, is very explicit on the matter. " Unto the Son He [God] saith, . . . Thou, Lord, in the beginning hast laid the foundation of the earth; and the heavens are the works of Thine hands . . . Thou art the Same, and Thy years shall not fail." In the light of this, the change of Speaker evidently comes in the middle of verse 24. Jesus, the humbled Man, speaks of being taken away in the midst of His days; whereupon the voice of God reminds Him that His years are throughout all generations. These words are specially striking if compared with verse 12. There it is the Messiah who speaks to Jehovah, and says, "Thy remembrance is unto all generations." Here it is Jehovah speaking to the Messiah and saying, "Thy years are throughout all generations." "From everlasting to everlasting Thou art God," *may be said with equal truth of them both*. Not till Christ became incarnate did the truth as to the Father and the Son come into view, but here we find a foreshadowing of it.

The humbled Man, who prayed and wept in Gethsemane, whose days were like a shadow that declineth, is the Son and the Creator, and He will endure beyond all these lower created things. When the present heavens and earth are worn out, when they have served their purpose, they cannot remain for they have been defiled by sin. They will be like a worn out garment which is laid aside and changed for another. " The heavens and the earth, which are now, by the same word are kept in store, reserved

unto fire" (2 Peter 3: 7). Thus they will pass away.

Our Psalm does not advance to that of which Peter goes on to speak, saying, "We, according to His promise, look for new heavens and a new earth, wherein dwelleth righteousness." He will bring in the new just as surely as He will remove the old. The new heavens and the new earth will also be the work of His hands. Creation, redemption, new creation, all are brought to pass by Him.

And He who does all this is the Same, whose years have no end; It has been pointed out that "The Same" is really a name of God. It occurs elsewhere in the Old Testament, though translated differently - Isaiah 41: 4 and 46: 4, are cases in point, where, " I am He," is really the same expression. Every creature is changeable: only the Creator does not change. "Thou art the Same," is said of the Son in Hebrews 1, and He is none other than, "Jesus Christ the Same yesterday, and today, and for ever," as stated in Hebrews 13.

But though it cannot be said of any creature, "Thou art the same," it can be said that, The children of Thy servants shall continue, and their seed be established before Thee." There is "a seed" who serve Him, as we have been told at the end of Psalm 22, and they and their seed shall abide. This will have its fulfilment in the millennial age, but it also has a fulfilment now. At the present moment we may identify these servants and their seed with "the men which Thou gavest Me out of the world," and "them also which shall believe on Me through their word," (John 17: 6 and 20). We come in amongst those that have believed on Jesus through the Apostles' word. Linked up as we are with the One who is the Same, we shall abide for eternity.

If David could say prophetically, "I will sing of mercy and judgment, how-much more reason have we to say the same as we look back in retrospect. We can see how his words have been fulfilled, and how the very One, who presently will execute judgment in the earth, is He who once has borne judgment on behalf of others, so that mercy may flow forth in righteousness. We know too that the very One who once acted in creation has come forth into Manhood to stand on man's behalf; and that His Manhood was so real that He could speak of His strength being weakened in the way, and of His days being shortened by the suffering of death.

And we know not only that He shall continue, but that also we, who believe in His Name and are called to serve Him during this time of His rejection, shall continue, and be established before Him and His Father for ever. What we do not get in the Psalm is an unfolding of the relationships that have been established and in which we continue. These could not be made known until Christ had come and accomplished the work of propitiation and reconciliation.

It was perfectly evident however, even in the days of David, that the One who would pass through death and remain beyond it as THE SAME, would be able thereby to secure for Himself servants, who doing the will of God would themselves abide for ever.