

"Out of the depths." "Into thy rest."

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Psalms 130, 131, 132.

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A very rich vein of spiritual instruction runs through these three Psalms. As is so often the case in the Psalms, the instruction is of an experimental sort. We find ourselves face to face not with doctrine but with the spiritual experiences of David, which were real afflictions, but which qualified him to ultimately take up that which from the outset of his career had been his great objective. We shall not go straight through the three Psalms, but begin by drawing attention to the opening part of Psalm 132.

David is brought before us and all his afflictions. In thinking of him we are apt to remember mainly his successes of a military sort by which he lifted his nation into a leading position. After that perhaps we remember his great sins. But here his afflictions are to be called to remembrance, for it was by means of them that God disciplined his soul and made of him the sweet singer of Israel.

Now David's afflictions, as verses 2-5 make manifest, were in some way connected with a resolution, which he formed in his earlier years, that his chief object should be to give God His rightful place in the midst of Israel His people. To find out "a place for the Lord" became the master passion of his life. The historical books — "Samuel and Chronicles — inform us that when he had won his successes he wished to build the temple and was forbidden to do it, but we have to travel right on to this Psalm to discover that he cherished this desire from a very early period of his career — that it was in fact the secret purpose which governed his life. The fact here disclosed is very illuminating. It sheds light on a great deal in David's history, and goes a long way to explain how it came to pass that God acknowledged him as a man after His own heart.

There have been other conquerors beside David in the world's history, but each of them has been animated by ambition, either personal or national. With all of them the cry has been either, "A place for myself," or "A place for my *nation*." David stands quite alone in having as his cry, "A place for *the Lord*." In the midst of his afflictions he took the solemn oath that he would give himself no rest until that place was found.

This is indeed a striking picture. Here is David, not as yet the powerful and successful warrior-king. He is only the shepherd-lad, who though anointed of God is being persecuted and harried by Saul, chased as a partridge upon the mountains. Under such circumstances one could very well understand him praying for a quiet life, and vowing almost anything if only he might have a snug little house and a comfortable bed whereon he might safely give sleep to his eyes and slumber to his eyelids. Nor would it be surprising to hear him vowing that he would find out a place for the Lord, if only such peaceable surroundings might be his. But what would have been so natural for him was not at all what he did.

No. In the midst of these afflictions and distresses he was not thinking primarily of himself at all. He was thinking of what was due to the Lord. It was Saul who was thinking of a place for himself, and as a result was bent upon destroying David. And David was all the while thinking about the Lord, consumed with desire because the ark of the testimony - which was the throne of the Lord in the midst of Israel — had gone into captivity to the land of the Philistines, and now that it had been returned by it panic-stricken captors, had gone into some obscure resting-place, no one seemed very much to care or know where. But somebody cared. David did.

This place for the Lord that David took an oath to find was evidently connected with the ark, for it is referred to in the little preposition "it" twice repeated in verse 6. Ephratah in that verse apparently stands for Bethlehem, and "the fields of the wood" for Kirjath-Jearim. This being so the little verse sheds a flood of light on the matter. When but a lad at Ephratah, before ever he became famous, he heard of the ark and its vicissitudes, and he realised that if God was to have His right place in Israel the ark, which was His throne, must be recovered and formally reestablished. As soon as he was firmly seated in the kingdom he went to Kirjath-Jearim to bring it up to Zion, as 2 Samuel 6 records. In verse two of that chapter the ark is said to be "called by the name of the Lord of Hosts that dwelleth between the cherubim." David knew that in finding a place for the ark he was in effect finding a place for the Lord.

It is one thing however to have a right objective even as David had; it is another thing to be in the right spiritual state for its accomplishment. This fact is evident as we read verses 1-10 of 2 Samuel 6, and is strikingly illustrated in the earlier Psalms which are before us. The afflictions which David endured were certainly permitted and perhaps even designed and sent of God, in order that he might gain the needed spiritual education. They are mentioned specifically in the first verse of Psalm 132, but affliction is also mentioned in the first verse of Psalm 129, and we find that Psalm and Psalms 130 and 131 are taken up with either affliction or what affliction is designed to effect in the souls of those who come under it.

The name of David does not appear as part of the heading of either Psalms 129 or 130, but their contents seem to point to him as their human author. How many times was he afflicted from his youth up! Much afflicted indeed, yet never did his adversaries prevail against him. What he could say as to his troubles Israel also will be able to say, for in this respect his life epitomised their national history, and they will never be out of affliction until they humble themselves and make a place for the Lord by enthroning Him in Zion, in the person of the once-rejected Jesus. Again and again through the centuries nations have plowed and made long furrows upon the back of Israel and looked like prevailing against them. They have never done so however. They have been like hammers smiting an anvil, and like an anvil Israel has outlasted her persecutors, and will outlast those who smite her to-day. As verse 5 shows, all those who hate Zion will be confounded and turned back.

David's afflictions increased until he was brought into the depths — not merely of trouble but of *repentance*. If the first three verses of Psalm 130 be attentively read, it will be seen that here we have the language of a repentant man, who knew he could not stand in the presence of the Lord as the marker of iniquities. The confession of personal sin and unworthiness is found in this Psalm, and in that it strikes a much deeper note than Psalm 25: 22. There we find a prayer. for redemption from all *troubles*, whereas our Psalm ends with the confident expectation of redemption from all *iniquities*.

The spiritual journey that David took, and which we are going to note, began in the depths of repentance, to which no doubt he was helped by the depth of afflictions. We look back into the depths from whence he emerged when his journey began, and we do so feelingly for our spiritual journey began in just the same place. If we have never been in the depths of repentance we have never as yet started on the journey at all. "Out of the depths" is the beginning of the story for each one, who have ever travelled that road which leads to so excellent a finish.

The next thing we meet with in this Psalm is *forgiveness* (verse 4), and thus it ever is in the history of souls. Repentance on our side becomes a door of entrance into the forgiveness which God bestows and the very forgiveness that we receive induces a *reverential fear* of Him from whom the forgiveness comes. It has sometimes been supposed that full and free forgiveness must produce

carelessness and license; and so indeed it might be if we were forgiven apart from repentance, and apart from a righteous basis for forgiveness being laid in the work of redemption. But there is no forgiveness apart from these two things, and the Psalm makes it manifest, for it begins with repentance and ends with redemption.

Out of the depths — not only of affliction, but of repentance — the Psalmist came, and into forgiveness he stepped; only he could not enjoy it in quite the full and assured way that is possible for the believer to-day. He realised the forgiveness of specific iniquities, but he could not have his conscience once and for ever purged and made "perfect," as is stated in Hebrews 10: 1-4. He lived about a thousand years too early for that: he had to look on with hope to the "good things to come."

The language of the latter part of the Psalm exactly fits in with this. The Psalmist is in a waiting attitude, and hoping in the Word of the Lord. He calls upon Israel to hope in the Lord, because there is mercy and plenteous redemption with Him; but he adds that He *shall* redeem, not that He has done so. Mercy, expressing itself in redemption, does indeed lie at the basis of the forgiveness which is preached in the Gospel to-day, but we know redemption by the blood of Christ as an accomplished fact, and the full forgiveness we have received induces in our souls that fear of God which is such a very healthful thing. We fear lest we should grieve the love which has brought us so full a forgiveness.

Then again, there are certain fruits which are produced by the fear of God, when once it has really taken possession of our hearts. One of the first of these fruits is *humility*. Now this is exactly what meets us when we commence reading Psalm 131. We cannot really entertain the fear of the Lord without the Lord becoming the central and controlling object of our hearts. For so long as self is the central object we are bound to be haughty folk, though we may imagine ourselves to be humble.

Viewed prophetically, Psalm 131 looks on to the day when Israel humbled and born again will at last take their true place before the Lord. Their tendency all through the ages has been to look upon themselves as the head and front and centre of everything, and from this sprang the Pharisaic spirit which was so strongly condemned by our Lord. We can see the tendency working in those who really did fear the Lord, for instance in Luke 24, where the two going to Emmaus betray their inmost thought in saying, "We trusted that it had been He which should have redeemed Israel" (verse 21). Again we see it after the resurrection, in Acts 1, when the disciples anxiously enquired, "Lord, wilt Thou at this time restore again the kingdom to Israel." They had to learn that the Christ is the Centre of all God's thoughts, and that their business was the simple and humble one of being His witnesses, even to the uttermost parts of the earth.

The same tendency works in us to-day, especially in those of us who have minds of a restless and enquiring order. Then it is that we are exposed to the danger of intruding into those things which we have not seen, vainly puffed up by our fleshly mind, or even of being led away as a prey by some man who approaches us with philosophy and vain deceit. Colossians 2 warns us against these things, declaring them to be "after the tradition of men, after the rudiments of the world, and not after Christ." All the truth that we need, and that we are capable of receiving in our present mortal condition, has been made known through the Apostles and is recorded in the Scriptures. We do well to rejoice in all that has been revealed to us, and we do equally well to resolutely refuse to exercise our minds in great matters which have not been revealed, and which consequently are too high for us.

In verse 2 David shows us that in his case the humbling process had been followed by a *weaning* process. Formerly he had been like an unweaned child, frequently yearning for the object of its desires, and fretful because unsatisfied. Now his soul was even as a weaned child. He was delivered from the fascinations of former days, and he "behaved and quieted" himself accordingly, or as another

translation has it, he "restrained and composed" his soul. His fretfulness was all gone, and even if he did not gain all that he desired he was marked by calmness of spirit.

Thus too it will be for Israel in the coming day. They will be weaned from the love of the old evil things that have ensnared them all through their history, but that will only come to pass when they "hope in the Lord from henceforth and for ever." When they find in Jehovah the Object of all their desires the old desires will fade away.

How often, alas! as we pass through this attractive and ensnaring world, we are like fretful children. The Christian who can pass through it like a weaned child, restrained and composed in soul, is all too rare a sight. If we are unweaned and fretful, let us at least stop making excuses for ourselves. There really is no excuse. Christ is enough. We sing fairly frequently,

Jesus, Thou art enough,

The mind and heart to fill.

and it really is so. If He henceforth and for ever becomes to us the object of our faith and love and hope, we shall not be fretting ourselves over former pleasures which now are left behind. We shall be satisfied.

Now we come back to Psalm 132. David was humbled and weaned from his old loves, finding his hope in the Lord, and this reinforced the resolve he had made to find out a place for the Lord. Ultimately he found a place for the Ark in Zion, where he pitched a tent for it, as a provisional measure, while waiting for the building of the permanent house. David, as we know, was not permitted to build the temple: that was a work committed to the hands of Solomon, his son and successor. As a consequence of this the words, "Arise, O Lord, into *Thy rest*; Thou and the ark of Thy strength" could not be uttered historically until Solomon dedicated the temple, when he used just those words (see 2 Chr. 6: 41-42).

Now it is a remarkable fact that when at the end of his career David recounted the dealings of God with him, and the word that had reached him from the Lord forbidding his building the house and assuring him that his son should accomplish that work, he told the people, that it had been said, "Behold, a son shall be born to thee, who shall be *a man of rest*; and I will give him rest from all his enemies round about: for his name shall be Solomon." (1 Chr. 22: 9). This shows us that the man who accomplished David's cherished desire and built the house and said, "Arise, O Lord, into Thy rest," was himself "the man of rest." The Lord entered into His rest, and Solomon entered into rest also. The two things go together in this case, at least in figure.

The two things will go together, not in figure but in fullest reality, when the millennial age is reached. Then at last the Lord will enter into His rest and Israel will enter into a full rest also. It is just the same in principle also for the believer today. When the Lord has His rightful place in the affections, the soul reaches a rest which otherwise would be quite unknown. And not only rest is enjoyed, but also the *blessing* of which the rest of the Psalm speaks, and also the *unity* and the *worship*, of which the two succeeding Psalms speak, will be realised.

Therefore, we believe, without doing any violence to the proper interpretation of these Psalms, we may see a picture of a happy experience which is really Christian. Out of the depths do we come when we cry to the Lord in true repentance, for at once a full and free forgiveness may be known by us; a forgiveness as regards all our iniquities, and which reaches us in mercy and as based upon a plenteous redemption. It is a forgiveness moreover which induces in our hearts that reverential fear of God which preserves from sin, inasmuch as it promotes within us humility of a genuine sort. It weans us also from

old loves, so that they dominate us no more.