

Poverty: Patience: Power

Psalms 109 and 110.

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The heading of Psalm 109 does not furnish us with any information as to the circumstances under which it was written, but judging from its contents it would seem very probable that like Psalm 13 it sprang out of the terrible experiences connected with the rebellion of Absalom. Then it was that David became the victim of "the mouth of the deceitful," and was rewarded "evil for good, and hatred for . . . love." Ahithophel remarkably fitted this description in his actions, just as Shimei seemed to love cursing, and to clothe himself with it, "like as with his garment." Absalom himself, upon whom David doted, fits the words, "For my love they are my adversaries.

This identification, however, though probable, is not certain, and is of no great moment. What is important for us is to discern in the Psalm, here and there at least, the very spirit of Christ. This is certain, for in verse 8 we have words that apply to Judas Iscariot, as is put on record in Acts 1: 20. This shows without a doubt that in this Psalm we find utterances that are prophetic of Christ.

David might speak of the wicked and deceitful as fighting against him "without a cause." True no doubt in a general way. But if these words are to be taken up in the most absolute and searching way, there is only One to whom they fully apply, and He has applied them to Himself, as we see in John 15: 25. No one but He could face the crowd of His hostile critics with the question, "Which of you convicteth Me of sin?" No one ever died the felon's death of crucifixion, as He did, and yet have such testimonies as those given by the judge, by a fellow-sufferer, and by the officer in charge. Their testimonies respectively were, "I find no fault in Him." "This Man hath done nothing amiss." "Certainly this was a righteous Man." Truly in the most absolute sense they fought against Him *without a cause*.

Then there was Judas Iscariot, of whom Ahithophel was a kind of type. He spent some three years in the light of His love, and yet became His adversary, rewarding Him evil for good, and hatred for His love. There were also the Jewish crowds, egged on by the envious, scheming religious leaders to a fury of cursing and bitterness, similar to that seen in Shimei. Shimei threw stones and cursed as he came. The Jewish mob shouted, "Crucify Him!" They shouted it "exceedingly," Mark tells us; and as Matthew says, "a tumult was made."

These things come before us prophetically in this remarkable Psalm. Now why was this? We know who He was. We know something at least of His power and His glory. Why should He be treated thus? The answer is that all these things came upon Him in *the day of His poverty* — the day in which He took a place that led to His saying, "I am poor and needy, and My heart is wounded within Me " (verse 22).

It has been rightly said to us, "Ye know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that, though He was rich, yet for your sakes He became poor." It was what He *became*. Had He come to earth in order to wear the costliest of its diadems and the richest of its purple, He would still have been stooping to poverty. Rehoboam's brazen shields were but tinsel compared with the golden shields of Solomon, which he had lost. But Solomon's golden shields were but tinsel in the presence of the glory of God. So for Him to come down into man's estate at all was poverty, but to take up Manhood in poverty and need and affliction is more wonderful still.

He was truly and essentially God, yet He did not fall back upon His Divine power and glory in order to alter or mitigate the circumstances that Manhood involved. He entered into human life, taking man's place, with all its attendant circumstances and sufferings, in the fullest possible way, with this one great' exception - all was wholly apart from sin. Hence many of the expressions in this Psalm can be read as coming to us from His lips.

His *heart* was wounded — and not merely His hands and His side. Who can estimate what that means? Perhaps the Christian poet did well to stop at the more external things in saying,

"See from His head, His hands, His feet,
Sorrow and love flow mingled down."

inasmuch as these deeper things frequently carry us altogether out of our depth, and it is beyond us to turn them into a matter of song. Nevertheless the fact remains — His heart was wounded, for He felt all that rolled in upon Him with an intensity of feeling that is beyond us. He had a *Divine* capacity for feeling. Our capacity is only human, and even that in us has been marred and weakened, by the fact that we have been sinners, though now redeemed and indwelt by the Holy Spirit. In Him every *human* sensibility was carried to its highest pitch of perfection. So that on both counts the wounding of His heart must have been infinitely beyond anything that we could know.

All the evil that thus afflicted Him, to all appearances prevailed against Him, so that He had to say, ' I am gone like the shadow when it declineth" (ver. 23). Eventide draws on, and the shadows lengthen. No matter how brilliant the day, longer and longer they grow until they decline to the vanishing point. They are finally gone when the sun is set. His sun was setting. When the literal shadows cast by the three crosses on the little hill outside Jerusalem were declining, it looked as if His sun had set for ever.

Still the closing part of our Psalm breathes an extraordinary spirit of confidence. The Holy One looks up to Jehovah owning Him as His God, and fully expecting His almighty intervention on His behalf. When Jehovah has acted men will know, as He says, "that this is Thy hand; that Thou hast done it." Hence He can praise in anticipation of the coming deliverance and vindication; "I will greatly praise the Lord with My mouth . . . For He shall stand at the right hand of the poor, to save him from those that condemn his soul."

In the day of His poverty Jehovah would stand at His right hand to deliver. This is as far as the Psalm goes.

But another day was to dawn, and we are introduced to this directly we begin to read Psalm 110. Jehovah has indeed been standing at His right hand all through His toilsome pathway and even to death — save for the hour when atonement was made, of which Psalm 22 speaks — and now He speaks to Him in resurrection, saying, "Sit Thou at My right hand, until I make Thine enemies Thy footstool." He is acknowledged as Lord by Jehovah, and placed at His right hand, but it is "*until . . .*" There is a prospect before Him, and the seat He is to occupy, though high exalted, yet is provisional, until the prospect materializes. The day of His poverty is over. *The day of His patience* is begun.

To the Thessalonians the Apostle wrote, "The Lord direct your hearts into the love of God, and into the patience of Christ." (New Trans.). That is why we speak of the present epoch, during which Jesus sits at the right hand of God as the day of His patience. It has already lasted for nineteen centuries. He is at the administrative centre of the universe, being Himself in fact the great Administrator. But He *sits* there, an attitude which bespeaks not action but rest. He bides His time, which is the time appointed of the Father.. When the time arrives He will arise and act.

Now it is remarkable that all the thirty-one verses of the previous Psalm are occupied with the day of His poverty, and verses 2 to 7 of our Psalm deal with the day which will succeed the present epoch. The day of His patience is mentioned in the first verse, and then nothing more is said as to it. No details as to it are given: it is not the subject of the prophecy.

But that is exactly in keeping with what we find elsewhere. The two advents of Christ are the subject of an immense number of prophecies: the epoch between them is not. Others have used the expression, "The Church parenthesis,"

Now that we know that there is this parenthesis between the advents, we can turn back to the Old Testament and note that it contains here and there brief expressions, which if they do not exactly *announce* it, yet *allow* for it. That is the case here. No word is said to indicate what is to transpire while He sits at Jehovah's right hand, nor as to how long He is to sit there.

The Acts of the Apostles opens with Jesus called to the right hand of God, and that book goes on to show us historically how the Divine purpose for the time of the parenthesis began to be unfolded. The various epistles work out for us the constitution and charter of the church — and much else besides — after giving us the gospel foundations on which the church rests. We find that all really hinges upon Jesus being ascended to the right hand of God, since upon that depended the outpouring of the Spirit at Pentecost, and the Holy Spirit was given that He might form and indwell the church, and also be the power for all acceptable worship and service in the Name of the absent Lord.

The distinguishing features of the present epoch are that Christ sits as Man at the right hand of God, and that the Holy Spirit indwells the saints below. These two great events having come to pass, the way was clear for the revelation of the whole purpose of God concerning Christ and the church. The first verse of our Psalm, as we have noted, only refers to the first of these great things. But it is the master fact from which all else flows. It is the fact that gives character to the whole dispensation.

With verse 2 we pass into a prophecy concerning the time which **will succeed the church dispensation**. It will be, as verse 3 tells us, "*the day of His power.*"

Now as regards the day of His power we get three very striking details. First, it is to be characterized by the going forth of the rod of His power, so that He rules in the midst of His enemies. Psalm 2 told us about this rod, speaking of it as a rod of iron, by which He will subdue and dash in pieces every opponent. So, evidently, ruling in the midst of His enemies must not be supposed to mean that He permits His enemies to continue. He will step into the midst of His enemies with all power in His hands, and this will mean their utter discomfiture, their everlasting overthrow. Some details of this are given in verses 5-7 of our Psalm, where the day of His power is also called, "the day of His wrath."

There is just this difference however; the day of His wrath is a comparatively brief period, which ushers in the day of His power. Wrath will be needful for the clearing out of evil at the beginning of His millennial reign, but power will characterize every moment of that wonderful epoch which is to come.

The second detail we find is that in the day of His power His people will at last be willing. When first He came to His own things, His own people received Him not. Nor do they receive Him to-day. Individuals of Israel's race do so, as they ever have done; witness to which is borne in John 1: 12, 13. His people as a nation still reject Him. But in the day when the Lord intervenes from heaven to overthrow His enemies and theirs, a mighty work of grace shall take place in their hearts. Space forbids our going into details of this, but the prophecy of Zechariah may profitably be turned to. The early part of Zechariah 14 tells us about the intervention in judgment from heaven. The latter part of Zechariah 12

graphically describes the profound repentance that will be produced in the hearts of the people — produced individually in every one of them, when they at last behold Him whom they pierced intervening on their behalf — valid collectively because wrought individually.

The terrible stubbornness and pride, which have always characterized that nation, will collapse as with a crash in all their hearts, and a new nation from a spiritual standpoint will be born in a day. The "spirit of grace and of supplications" will rest upon them. They will see things in a new light, and be willing at last.

Verse 3 is a little obscure in our Authorized Version. In Darby's New Translation it runs, "Thy people shall be willing in the day of Thy power, in holy splendour: from the womb of the morning shalt come to Thee the dew of Thy youth." It seems therefore that the whole verse shows how the last scenes in our Lord's life are going to be exactly reversed. Then His people shouted for His death. They covered Him with unholy ridicule and dishonour. The youth of Israel departed from Him into a dark night of retribution for themselves. In the moment prophetically contemplated in this verse, He comes forth in power and splendour, and the youth of Israel — spiritually young at least, for they have all just been born again — flock to Him at the dawning of the millennial day.

The third detail we find in the fourth verse. The One who said to Him, "Sit Thou at My right hand," has also said to Him, "Thou art a Priest for ever after the order of Melchizedek."

A substantial part of the Epistle to the Hebrews is occupied in unfolding what is contained in this short verse: Hebrews 5 to 8, with the exception of a somewhat lengthy parenthesis. It is evidently a statement of the utmost importance. It is, in fact, one of the key verses of the Bible.

One thing which stands out very clearly in Hebrews is that the priesthood of our Lord after the order of Melchizedek is an accomplished fact today. It is not something only to be brought about in the day of His power. This being so we might wonder that it should be set in this Psalm in connection with the day of His power rather than the day of His patience. We believe this is because though He is today a Priest of Melchizedek's order, He is not at present exercising functions after Melchizedek's pattern. This is shown quite plainly in Hebrews, where all the functions of His Priesthood are shown to be after the pattern of Aaron.

It was the Aaronic priesthood that had to "have compassion on the ignorant, and on them that are out of the way," that had to "make propitiation for the sins of the people," that took the place of "a minister of the sanctuary." Melchizedek was concerned with none of these things. He united the function of king and priest. He was priest of "the Most High God" — the millennial name of God. He brought forth bread and wine for the refreshment of the victor. He blessed the Most High God on Abram's behalf, and blessed Abram himself, the man who had the promises.

Now when the day of His power arrives, the Lord Jesus will act after the pattern of Melchizedek. First of all He will, "strike through kings in the day of His wrath;" and in this He will be acting somewhat after the pattern of Abram. Then He will bring forth refreshment for the weary world, and abundantly bless those who are "of faith" as Abram was. He will also bring to pass an order of things in which the earth shall be filled with blessing and praise to God.

Being after the order of Melchizedek, His priesthood abides for ever. There shall be no cessation in the outflow of blessing to men or the upflow of blessing to God. All will be secured to eternity. We need not wonder that this priesthood in contrast to the Aaronic order has been constituted with the oath of God. We may remember that the blessing of Abraham was confirmed by an oath. Here we see that the Priesthood upon which the blessing hangs was confirmed by an oath; and so we may apply to it also

that word that when "He [God] could swear by no greater He sware by Himself." The Melchizedek priesthood of Christ is of supreme importance.

The day of His poverty is over; never to return. The day of His power is approaching and may be upon us very speedily; still it is not here yet. The day of His patience is NOW; and we are in it. He sits at the right hand of God, a Priest after the order of Melchizedek; and it is good for us that He at present extends priestly grace, like Aaron did, in view of our infirmities.

He never fails. He will carry us through to the end.