

God's Ways with His People

Psalm 107.

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Part Second. EARLIER MINISTRY.

(The state of soul in which a pilgrim nearing home would like to be found was first alluded to.) Were I to say to those amongst us who are moderately-instructed Christians, In what consists joy in the Holy Ghost? what is it? you would probably say that the peculiarity of our joy is based on *faith*; the mercy of God acting in His Son Jesus Christ, and bearing on each heart with divine power. Seeing this basis, our joy is not what is in *self*, but in what is in *God*. I would add, not only so, but there is a dispensational peculiarity in the joy which we ought to have, resulting from faith, flowing out from the Resurrection Man, borne up and seated at the right-hand of God. Not only are we saved by grace, but in the peculiar way of these dispensational privileges in the Son having come forth from the Father's presence, that we might be of heaven and not of earth.

Again, as to our joy, a great deal depends upon our walk. *All* the children of the Father are blessed, but those who are not walking as before Him, lose as to joying in God. These remarks, I repeat, are in connection with the joy in which we desire to be found when the Lord appears, or when He sees that we have been left here long enough, and takes us to be "absent from the body, present with the Lord."

Connected with this subject is the sovereignty of God in relation to the use to which He puts different vessels that He forms. Four examples will illustrate what I mean: Lot, Abraham, Isaac, Jacob. In these we have two classes: first class, with respect to Lot. Lot's position was *false*; the position of Abraham was true. Lot was a righteous man; his righteous soul was vexed from day to day in Sodom. Why was he so troubled in circumstances — losing his property, his children, his liberty, everything swept away from him? Why, in the very place he had chosen, and where he looked for ease, did he find those from within to vex and trouble him? Because he was in a false position from the very beginning. He had a call, and starts with Abraham on the ground of that: he goes out, but all his after course had *self* for its centre, and he did not keep before him what God had said, "The land that I will show thee." Thus his was not the walk of faith, though he had the call. He did not hold the call; it did not characterize him all along; hence his fallen position. This always leads into suffering of a peculiar kind. Still God's mercy is shown in it; he proves how the vessel may be thoroughly wrecked down here as to testimony; works all burnt up, and yet at last, though suffering loss, he is saved so as by fire.

This wonderfully explains as to Christians in the present day. I believe there is often a mistake in calling in question whether a person is the Lord's or not, because they do not come up to the standard of our own minds. But God did not question whether Lot was a "righteous man." We want first largeness of heart to judge as God judges, and then grace to see where the failure is. It is said, "Oh! they have not light." No; that is not it. I believe that the present state of Christendom originates in this — people *have not learnt to walk with God*. Are you serving the living and true God in whom is your strength, and

from whom your joy springs? If not, the truth will not, cannot, have its power.

The cases of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob are very different to Lot's, and they end in brightness. Abraham's is a course of steady faith all through. In him God showed out how a saint could walk with Him, as a son with his father. There is a remarkable repose about it; whenever trials came he was always outside of them. He walked in the light; and as to the details of his life, they are characterized by a happy, peaceful passing on. He sees happily settled, and then comfortably withdraws from the scene. In Gen. 25 we have a few simple details which might have been given of any individual who was not the father of the faithful. He was just waiting to be removed. Thus one sees the servants of God who have served their generation. The Lord seems to say to them, "I know you; I remember your works." But old age has come — the faculties are weakened, and the Lord keeps them as it were in the hollow of His hand; but they seem generally to sink down without observation after a life, it may be, of much service. There is evidently sovereignty in that. We see it especially in connection with those living in times when the truth brought out is the truth God is dispensing specially for the time, as it was with Abraham. Abraham belonged to a set of idolaters; God lets a stream of heavenly light into his soul. He embraces the promises, and, becoming a pilgrim and a stranger, he sets out for the city of God; but he does not get it — there is the *clue* — Lot he is taken away from the scene, and he goes on spinning the thread in the glory.

ISAAC. Genesis 26 is the only chapter which gives any account of Isaac as the principal person in the scene. Before, Abraham has the prominent place, and afterwards Jacob. Even in Gen. 24 Isaac is not the chief person, though the servant (there is no evidence of its being Eliezer) is sent to fetch a wife for him. But directly we find Isaac placed in the position of being the patriarch, a few simple details are mentioned. He gets the promise renewed; he plants, sows, digs again the wells. The reason of this is, that when the true Isaac, the joy of God, comes, none could sound His person. I know the Father as I do not know the Son: "No man knoweth the Son, but the Father; neither knoweth any man the Father, save the Son, and he to whomsoever the Son will reveal Him." The Son's life here below was a revelation of the Father. Every ray that beamed from Him told out about Him who was not seen, not about Him that was seen, whatever farther revelation there may be of Him in glory.

JACOB. In Jacob we find family dealings characterized by God's mercy to him, in spite of all his trickery and artful ways. There is contention in the flesh for the things God had promised. In spite of all, God makes good all blessing connected with Christ. With Christians now God has to break down the flesh, and then what can they do? Nothing but cry to God. What marked Esau is what so often marks believers now - *flesh*, which only cares for the gifts of God so far as they minister to the flesh; or, like Jacob, they value God's gifts, but seek to take them in their own way. In due time we see God leaves the empty professor, and takes up the younger, the one on whom He had set His eye, and brings him back to the father's house. We see the sovereignty of God's love in all that. Again, God shows His sovereignty in the choice He made of Moses and Aaron to their specific services. The honour was put upon Moses altogether at first, but he breaks down; and then we see that his special service was that of mediator, Aaron that of high priest. God settles whose name shall be written in the book of life., but there is a speciality of place which He settles also. God ordered that Isaac should have the place of being the expression of the Son in communion with the family as head upon earth. In Isaac's personal history we find he fails as to his children. "Isaac loved Esau, Rebecca loved Jacob;" and there was want of fellowship between Isaac and Rebecca. This want of fellowship is almost always productive of a split in families. If the child sees partiality in parents, all confidence in their love is gone. There is nothing more important than for children to see perfect oneness of mind in the parents as to putting, their *will* in its place. The end of Isaac's course was a quiet one, and very blessed.

In the case of Jacob we have the channel of testimony brought out. Here are the two natures — the world acting on his heart, the flesh, and that which corresponds with the Spirit in us; not, however, in the same way in which we have since the revelation of Christ. The conflict between the two natures *then* was the result of the supplanting of the first Adam by God.

It was difficult for a Jew to understand the conflict which was going on. God begins with us in seating us in Christ in heaven. In Jacob there is the old nature at work continually. God met with him outside, and brought him in; but still he went on as before. When on his way back to the land he ought to have had full rest of soul; but we find him arranging all in his mind, as if he had no God of resurrection as *his* God. Why thus? Because he was acting from the old nature; and hence it is that there must necessarily be a pulling down from us which there would not if walking in the Spirit. If God had permitted Jacob to go on, it would have been putting His sanction on those ways; but Jacob finds, after all, that what was in his own heart was not enough for himself. God pulls him to pieces, and makes him to know that with all his arrangements he cannot tranquilize his own poor timid heart. When he really got close to God, it was quite another thing. Then he learnt *what he was*; before it was all his family circumstances, etc., — that occupied him. Just as it constantly is with us when we are out of God's presence, planning, scheming, etc., God lets us down into ourselves just to show us what we are; and when we get to our wits' end, what do we find there? Nicely ordered plans? No; we have found utter weakness; but we have found *God* there. There is the "brook," and we do not know how to get over it. But we have found God meeting us *there*, and carrying us over to the other side; but it has been like Jacob halting upon the thigh. If you have learnt the gospel, you know God is now measuring *Christ*, not *man*. But still the old nature is always showing itself, especially if there is any energy of character; and God cannot give the blessing till He has broken down the flesh, and made you go crippled all your days. One cannot carry one's vessel full of grace, unless one has been content to be accounted by one's neighbours the chief of sinners.

When I look upon young Christians I feel for them exceedingly. I know that they *must* learn this lesson as to the flesh, but I do not know *how* God will teach it them. Young Christians have not learnt experimentally that the flesh is a bad thing. They have not been in prominent places, set upon a pinnacle, and the flesh, they may argue, has not come out in them as in Peter, in David, and others. If wise, they may learn what they are in the presence of God from the testimony of the word, from looking into the wounds of Jesus. It is learning it *inside* the sanctuary, otherwise you must learn it *outside*. As for aged saints, and those who are established, I know that I find it uncommon hard, when perhaps I have been in communion with God, to have to say, Well! must I then go on still with this horrid heart of mine? Yes; and as one goes on, the worse one finds the flesh to be. Jacob had to learn what halting flesh was all his days, even when he went before the king. You must learn more and more of the evil of your flesh, as you learn more and more your portion in Christ.

In connection with these four characters we learn that every one has his especial time of trouble. *Lot* had his first wrench out of the world in being sent from his country; but he found that he had got under the government of God — of Him who would not allow him to go on quietly, and sitting down to rest where he chose. (The flesh is always inclined to sit down in the wrong place.) God was going to destroy that place, and *Lot* must be roused out of it. *Abraham* has two troubles — his wrench out of his country (and it is not pleasant to leave all); and then, through going down into Egypt, he had *one* experience of the same kind that *Lot* *always* had — he sold his wife, and lost his honour. (If God says "Give," and you say "Take," there is unbounded joy, as *Abraham* found it at mount *Moriah*. If God lays His hand upon the vine, and the fig tree, and the flocks, and asks if you are satisfied to have it so, and you reply, "Yes;" then you rejoice in the Lord, and joy in the God of your salvation.) Both these

troubles of Abraham were at the beginning of his course, both the wrench from the world, and the bitter experience he had as to the flesh. With Jacob they came at the end of his course. In all this there is the moral sovereignty of God seen in His making the vessels. There may be many ships leaving the port, and perhaps only one out of the many reaches the harbour without damage. One comes in at one time, another after a storm which may overtake it at any part of the voyage. It seems as if a soul must be left to itself, "*alone*" with God, to show just what it is, and to be weaned from everything but God. God there communicates to the soul from Himself what he would not get elsewhere; and all this is connected with God's forming a vessel for Himself. God not only puts you in Christ, and purges you that you may bear more fruit, but He also has to form your character. A parent might witness in his children improvement in certain ways that had been unpleasant, and yet see that the spring in the character was untouched; another time he may be able to get at the root of those things which grieve him. This is what God does; He at last met Jacob in himself, then the springs are touched, the flesh is crippled. I may be at the close of my pilgrimage, and I may have been brought through the process, and still God may have to retouch the vessel in some points. There is great joy in seeing that, *little* as we are, we have a connection with all His plans in His eternal counsels from the beginning, and with all His glory hereafter. There is not a single minute thing which touches any one of us, which is not thus connected with Him. There is rest of heart in seeing Him thus above, below, around; God is never taken by surprise, never taken aback, never startled. He counter-works. He brings out blessing according to His own counsels, notwithstanding all the horrible way in which Satan works things around us.