

# The Loveliness of Christ

Psalm 16.

Hamilton Smith.

We need every Scripture for conviction, correction, and instruction; but the Scriptures that present "the things concerning Himself" must have a special charm for the Christian. It is this that makes Psalm 16 so attractive, for it sets forth the moral perfections of Christ, the perfect Man, as He trod the path of life through this world of sin and death. How good, then, to look away from self, and the very best of our fellow-men, to contemplate this perfect Man in all His excellence — to sit down, as it were, under His shadow with great delight and find His fruit sweet to our taste.

It is reported of one, who listened to the ministry of the saintly Rutherford, that he said, "He showed me the loveliness of Christ." In his Psalm we may surely say that David, led by the Spirit, unrolls before us the loveliness of Christ.

We know that Christ is a Divine Person — the Eternal Son and, as such, was the perfect manifestation of God to man. But we also know that He was a true Man — the Son of Man — and as such, was the perfect expression of man before God. It is in this latter aspect that Christ is presented in this beautiful Psalm.

We can learn what God is only in Christ; and we can learn what man is in perfection only as set forth in Christ. In Him we see the beautiful qualities, the gracious experiences, the joy and the gladness, that mark the life of the perfect man before God, together with the fulness of joy to which this life leads. Thus Christ becomes the only standard of excellence — the perfect model for the believer. Moreover, in being occupied with Christ there is a transforming power. Feeding upon Christ as the Bread of God which "cometh down from heaven" — to trace His path through this world in all its loveliness, will, in a special way, draw out our affections to Himself. When here, the Father opened the heavens to express His delight in Christ; and He gives us to delight in the same Object in which He delights. Delighting our souls in Him we shall be changed into His likeness.

Here, then, we have portrayed in all its blessedness the inner life of a perfect Man lived before God by One who trod this path of life in perfection, and who has reached the end of the path — the right hand of God.

"Preserve me, O God: for in Thee do I put my trust" (v. 1).

This perfect life is a life of dependence and confidence. Dependence upon the power of God and confidence in the love of God. The Lord Jesus did not trust Himself or look to others — either men or angels — to be preserved from all the opposition and dangers He had to meet. Nor did He depend upon Himself, with entire dependence to God, saying, "Preserve me, O God", and He did so with entire confidence, for He said, "In Thee do I put my trust." He was entirely dependent upon God's hand of power, because He had entire confidence in God's heart of love. With unbounded confidence in boundless love He looked to God to preserve Him.

He was neither ignorant of, nor indifferent to, His enemies. He could say, "They that hate Me without a cause are more than the hairs of Mine head: they that would destroy Me, being Mine enemies wrongfully, are mighty" (Psalm 69: 4). He knew their number; He knew their strength; He knew their treachery; but He knew that God was above all His enemies, and that no one was above God, and in perfect confidence He looks alone to God. As He can say in the language of another Psalm, "As for

Me, I will call upon God; and the LORD shall save Me. Evening and morning, and at noon, will I pray and cry aloud; and He shall hear My voice" (Ps. 55: 16, 17).

And yet, in the perfection of His way, He was at times brought very low in His circumstances, and thus tested in a way, and to an extent, that we shall never know. At times He had nowhere to lay His head, and on occasions lacks even a cup of cold water. But such testings only brought out the perfection of His Manhood, for still He can say, "Preserve Me, O God: for in Thee do I put My trust." And God answered His prayer, and used a fallen woman to quench His thirst, and some unknown person to provide a pillow for His head.

Following in the footsteps of the Lord, the Apostle Paul could say in his prison, "The Lord shall deliver me from every evil work and will preserve me unto His heavenly kingdom" (2 Timothy 4: 18). Have we such confidence in the love of the Father, and of Christ, that, in the presence of enemies, dangers and desertion, we can say, "Preserve me, O God, for in Thee do I put my trust"?

"O my soul thou hast said unto the LORD, Thou art my Lord: my goodness extendeth not to Thee" (v. 2).

The perfect life is a life of wholehearted subjection to the will of God. As the perfectly subject Man He could say to Jehovah, "Thou art My Lord." Coming into the world He said, "Lo, I come to do Thy will, O God" (Heb. 10: 9). Passing through this world He could say, "I do always those things that please Him" (John 8: 29). Going out of this world He said, "Father . . . not My will, but Thine be done" (Luke 22: 42).

Doing only the Father's will, all that He did was perfectly good. He "went about doing good." There was also Divine goodness toward man, perfectly expressed in the Son of God. But the goodness of which this Psalm speaks is the goodness of Christ as man towards men, and though perfect in its place, does not rise to the height of Divine goodness. So the Lord can say of this goodness, "My goodness extendeth not to Thee."

Only as we are subject to the Father's will shall we do good as we pass along our way. When converted, the first question asked by the Apostle Paul was, "What shall I do, Lord?" (Acts 22: 10). Hitherto he had done his own will; now he submits to the will of the Lord. The proud, overbearing Pharisee becomes the lowly man in subjection to the Lord.

"To the saints that are in the earth and to the excellent, thou hast said, in them is all my delight" (v. 3).

This perfect life is a lowly life that finds its delight with God's poor people. The perfection of Jesus in all His lowly grace is seen in the place He takes in association with the poor of the earth. "Hath not God chosen the poor of this world rich in faith, and heirs of the kingdom which He hath promised to them that love Him?" (James 2: 5).

Are believers lowly and of little account in this world? Then let them remember that the Lord delights to associate with such, for we read, "Though the LORD be high, yet hath He respect unto the lowly, but the proud He knoweth afar off" (Ps. 138: 6). To indulge the pride of the flesh and boast in birth, and worldly position, is to separate ourselves from the excellent of the earth and put ourselves "afar off" from God. The word to each one is, "Go along with the lowly" (Rom. 12: 16).

However feeble, however failing, however poor, they are the excellent of the earth, and in them God finds His delight. Are we lowly enough in our eyes, and have we so learnt our own nothingness that we can associate with God's poor people and find our delight where He finds His?

"Their sorrows shall be multiplied that hasten after another: their drink offerings of blood will I not offer, nor take up their names into my lips" (v. 4).

The life of the perfect Man is a life of separation from evil. The Lord refused every object that would come in between the soul and God. The devil bid high in the endeavour to turn the Lord from the separate path. He offered Him "all the kingdoms of the world" if He would but worship the devil. The Lord's reply was, "It is written, thou shalt worship the Lord thy God, and Him only shalt thou serve" (Luke 4: 5-8). A very little bit of this world is too often sufficient to ensnare our souls, and thus we turn aside to seek some passing satisfaction in the things of this world, only to find that we multiply to ourselves sorrows. The Lord refused the idols of this world. He would not take up their names into His lips. The word to us is, "Little children keep yourselves from idols" (1 John 5: 21).

"The LORD is the portion of mine inheritance and of my cup: thou maintainest my lot. The lines are fallen unto me in pleasant places; yea, I have a goodly heritage" (vv. 5, 6).

The LORD is the portion of this life and of the inheritance that lies outside this world. Not only was the Lord entirely separate from the world, but the LORD was His portion in another world. Moreover, as He passed along His way to the eternal inheritance the LORD filled His cup in His daily path. The cup is the actual present enjoyment of the future heavenly portion. With the LORD as His heavenly portion, as well as the source of His present joy, He can say, "The lines are fallen unto me in pleasant places: yea, I have a goodly heritage." As to circumstances, He was indeed the man of sorrows and acquainted with grief. It is not, however, the circumstances of which the Psalm speaks, but of the inner life lived in the circumstances. The life was lived in the sweet enjoyment of the love and support of the Father, and such experiences turned the roughest paths into "pleasant places."

In the dullness of our way we little realise what the joy of a life must be that is lived in relationship with the Father and the constant enjoyment of all that the Father is. We shall know the fulness of the joy of this life in a day to come; but the Lord Jesus knew it without a cloud as He trod the path of life through this world.

"I will bless the LORD who hath given me counsel: my reins also instruct me in the night season" (v. 7).

This perfect life is a life in which the LORD is the Counsellor and Guide. It is written that, "It is not in man that walketh to direct his steps" (Jeremiah 10: 23). And again we read, "In all thy ways acknowledge Him, and He shall direct thy paths." It is not merely that we refer to the Lord in some great emergency, but that we habitually wait upon the Lord in the details of life, great and small. Acknowledging Him, we shall find that He guides us: then shall we be able to say, "I will bless the LORD, who hath given me counsel."

"I have set the LORD always before me: because He is at my right hand I shall not be moved" (v. 8).

The perfect life has only one object — the Lord Himself. Christ walked on earth with singleness of eye. He set Jehovah before Him as His only object. In such a life there is nothing of self, and no room for self-will.

Setting the LORD before Him, he found the LORD was ever at hand to support Him. Moreover, being at His right hand to support, nothing moved Him from the path of life.

Such is the path open to the believer. Alas! we have to own how little we know of its blessedness; and yet, if day by day, we set the Lord before us as our one object: to serve Him, to please

Him, to do His will, shall we not find that He will be at our right hand to support us? And being supported, we shall not be moved, or turned aside, by any trying circumstances, opposition, slights or sufferings we may be called to meet.

"Therefore my heart is glad and my glory rejoiceth: my flesh also shall rest in hope. For thou wilt not leave my soul in hell, neither wilt thou suffer thine Holy One to see corruption" (vv. 9, 10).

This perfect life has its joy and gladness, though not like the joy of this world that depends upon outward circumstances. The Lord says, "My heart is glad," not necessarily, My circumstances are bright. The joy is in the heart; even as David can say, "Thou hast put gladness in my heart, more than in the time that their corn and their wine increased" (Ps. 4: 4). The world's joy is in prosperous circumstances, the corn and the wine. The Lord could say to His disciples, "These things have I spoken unto you, that my joy might remain in you" (John 15: 11).

The Lord's joy remains even in view of death; for His confidence is still in God, "Thou wilt not leave my soul in Sheol; neither wilt Thou suffer Thine Holy One to see corruption." Christ is indeed the "Holy One," but believers are "holy and beloved," and, as such, can know the blessedness of the life of Christ as man. They, too, can look on with confidence, knowing that God will not leave the soul in death nor the body in corruption.

"Thou wilt show me the path of life; in thy presence is fulness of joy; at thy right hand there are pleasures for evermore" (v. 11).

This life is a life lived in the light of the glory to which it leads. Every path has a destined end. "The path of life" leads into the presence of the LORD where there is fulness of joy and pleasures for evermore. In all the opposition the Lord Jesus had to meet — the contradiction of sinners, the insults and reproach from the religious world, the ignorance and forsaking of His own — He endured in the light of the glory before Him. As we read, "Who for the joy that was set before Him, endured the cross, despising the shame, and is set down at the right hand of the throne of God." The word to us is, "Consider Him that endured such contradiction of sinners against Himself, lest ye be wearied and faint in your minds."

Alas! we often break down in the presence of contradiction and insult; we grow weary and faint under the pressure of a long, drawn-out trial, because we lose sight of the glory at the end of the road — the joy that is set before us. Instead of quietly enduring insults and shame, too often we return evil for evil, and railing for railing. We may attempt to justify our strong words and our hasty acts, but the one test is, would Jesus have acted as we did? Would Jesus have said what we said?

If then we would think and speak and act as the Lord Jesus did, when treading the path of life — if in any measure we would experience the blessedness of the lovely life marked out by Christ — let us tread the path, "Looking unto Jesus" in the glory — the end of the path, let us "Consider" Jesus as He trod the path of life. Then it may be the transforming power of the loveliness of Christ will, even now, change us into His image "from glory to glory."

Moreover, let us remember that the grace that enabled the Lord to tread the path of life is available for us; for, from His place in the glory, He still serves us as our Great High Priest, to succour, sympathize and sustain us as we seek to follow in His steps in the path of life that He has marked out for us. Whatever we may have to meet, whatever we may be called upon to endure — opposition, insults or desertions — let us remember the word, "Be strong in the grace that is in Christ Jesus" (2 Tim. 2: 1).

Such is the loveliness of Christ as He trod the path of life, lived in all its beauty before God, and

marked out for His people to follow. A life of dependence upon the Father's hand of power, confidence in the Father's heart of love, and subjection to the Father's will. A life of lowliness that finds its delight with God's poor people — the excellent of the earth. A life of separation from evil, finding in the Lord its future portion and its present cup of blessing. A life guided by the counsel of the Lord, and which has the Lord as its one Object, and has the Lord ever-present to support. A life of secret joy and gladness that ends at last in the presence of the Lord, where there is fulness of joy and pleasures for evermore.

The Lord is Himself gone before;  
He has marked out the path that we tread,  
It's as sure as the love we adore,  
We have nothing to fear nor to dread.  
For the path where our Saviour is gone  
Has led up to His Father and God,  
To the place where He's now on the throne,  
And His strength shall be ours on the road.  
And with Him shall our rest be on high,  
When in holiness bright we sit down,  
In the joy of His love ever nigh,  
In the peace that His presence shall crown.