

The Path of Life

Psalm 16.

Hamilton Smith.

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In the New Testament both the apostle Paul and the apostle Peter, speaking by the Holy Spirit, use quotations from Psalm 16, as being the language of the Lord Jesus (see Acts 2: 25-28; Hebrews 2: 13). We thus know, beyond all question, that in this beautiful Psalm we hear the voice of Jesus telling us of the life that He lived when passing through this world. It is this that makes the Psalm so precious to the believer.

How many and varied are the glories of Christ! Other Scriptures present His glory as a Divine Person — the Son of God, making God known in all His moral attributes. Here, however, Christ is viewed in His perfection as a Man, though never ceasing to be God, because He has become Man.

Furthermore, as the Son of Man, Christ is presented in different connections. We may think of Him, with great delight, as the One who "went about doing good, healing all that were oppressed of the devil;" feeding the hungry; clothing the naked; teaching and preaching the Kingdom of God. Then we can contemplate Him doing that mighty work on the cross, and, having learnt what He has done for us in the past, we can look up and see Him "crowned with glory and honour" — the present Object for our souls as the One who is living for us and soon coming for us. Good and needful for our souls to contemplate Christ in these varied glories; but they are not the theme of this Psalm. It does not present Christ doing a work for us on the cross, nor as our Object in the glory. Neither does it speak of His outward life or perfection before men. It presents *the inner life lived by Christ under the eye of God when passing through this world as the perfect Man*. It marks out "the path of life" through a world of death, that leads to "fulness of joy" in the presence of God.

A path leads from one place to another. It has been pointed out that there was no path in the Garden of Eden, and there will be no path in the Paradise of God. When we reach the rest that remaineth we shall need no path to leave that home of bliss, for we shall "go no more out". The path is through this fallen world where none can rest nor remain. The unbeliever treads a path that ends in death. But there is "the path of life" that leads to pleasures for evermore, that has been marked out by Jesus, Who, in taking this path has left a perfect example of the inner life lived before God that becomes His people. Good for us, then, to listen to the voice of Jesus and thus learn the blessedness of a life lived before God, and seek by grace, in our measure to follow in the path that He has marked out.

Firstly (verses 1, 2) we learn that this life is one of perfect *dependence* upon *God* as we hear the Lord say, "Preserve me, O God." As a Divine Person He could have preserved Himself, but this would have been no pattern for us. He did not preserve Himself, nor avail Himself of the aid of twelve legions of angels. He walked through this world with all its trials in entire dependence upon God, as became the position He had taken as Man. Moreover, the One on Whom He depended was One in Whom He had perfect *confidence*, for He can say, "In Thee do I put my trust." In human affairs we may be dependent upon one in whom we have little confidence. In God we have One on Whom we can depend by casting all our care upon Him, and can do so with perfect confidence knowing that He careth for us (1 Peter 5: 7). The apostle Paul, following the Lord's example, expresses his dependence, when he says, in the midst of all the trials he had to face, the Lord "will *preserve* me unto His heavenly kingdom", and shows his *confidence* in the Lord, when he adds "The Lord shall deliver me from every evil work"

(2 Timothy 4: 18).

Further, this life of dependence on God, and confidence in God, was marked by *subjection to God*, for the Lord can say, "Thou art my Lord." Having taken the form of a servant, and being found in fashion as a man, "He humbled himself and became *obedient*" (Philippians 2: 7, 8). Coming into the world He could say, "I seek not mine own will, but the will of the Father which hath sent me": going out of the world, we hear Him say, "Not my will, but thine be done" (Hebrews 10: 9; John 5: 34; Luke 22: 42). Ever seeking the Father's will, He can say, "I do always those things that please Him" (John 8: 29). With the perfect example of the Lord before us we may well make the desire of the apostle our prayer, when he says, may God "make you perfect in every good work to *do His will* working in you that which is well pleasing in His sight" (Hebrews 13: 21).

Secondly (verses 3, 4), we see in the Lord Jesus, a Man whose delight was in the saints — the excellent of the earth. The benefits of His goodness — manifested in dependence, confidence and subjection — are for the saints in whom He delights. We do well to ask ourselves, as God looks down into our hearts, Who is it that He sees we delight in? We may make a fair profession before one another, and yet too often, in our hearts which God sees, we may be "having men's persons In admiration because of advantage", and thus set a higher value on riches and social position than on spirituality and the lowly graces of the One who was "meek and lowly in heart". With the Lord, His delight is in "the excellent" — those marked by the moral excellencies of God, even though they be weak, and base, and despised in the eyes of the world (1 Corinthians 1: 26-28). Good for us to heed the word that exhorts us "Have the same respect one for another, not minding high things, but going along with the lowly" (Romans 12: 16, N.T.), and thus, like the Lord, delight in "the excellent".

Moreover, with a heart filled with fidelity to Jehovah, and delight in the saints, the Lord was wholly separate from those who were multiplying sorrows to themselves by hastening after some other object than Jehovah. Has this no warning voice for believers? We do well to remember the words with which the apostle John closes his epistle. Having reminded us that "the whole world lieth in the wicked one", he gives the warning word, "Little children keep yourselves from idols." Let us beware of allowing our hearts to be governed by any object that would come in between our souls and God.

Thirdly (verses 5, 6) in contrast to those who hasten after some worldly object for the gratification of the flesh the Lord can say, "Jehovah is the portion of mine inheritance and of my cup." The inheritance is the lasting portion of the believer to which we are going on; the cup speaks of the experience of which we taste in passing through the circumstances of life on the way to the inheritance. The Lord, as He passed through this world, looked on to the joy that was set before Him and thus experienced the sustaining grace of Jehovah amidst all the circumstances of life, however trying and sorrowful. He did not look for support and comfort from those around Him, but found His support in the unchanging love of the Father. Thus He was maintained, and could say as He passed through this world, "The lines are fallen unto me in pleasant places;" and, as He looked to the end of the path, He can add, "Yea, I have a goodly heritage."

Fourthly (verse 7), in this path of life, the Lord, as the perfect Man was counselled and instructed by Jehovah. In another passage, the Lord, speaking as the Servant, can say of Jehovah, "He wakeneth mine ear to hear as the instructed" (Isaiah 1: 4, N.T.). The Lord draws a distinction between the counsel of God and the instruction. He can say, "*the LORD* hath given me counsel," but "*My reins* also instruct Me." The counsel speaks of all that God has purposed, made known in His word. To learn the counsel of God we need to have the opened ear to hear as learners, or as those who are "instructed". For the knowledge of His counsel we need "every Scripture", which we know is "given by inspiration of God,

and is profitable . . . that the man of God may be perfect . . . thoroughly furnished unto all good works" (2 Timothy 3: 16, 17). The reins speak of the secret thoughts that govern our practical lives. When these thoughts are formed by the counsel of God, and set free from all outward influences, as suggested by the quiet of the night seasons, we shall be instructed as to the path of life through this world. In Christ all was perfect. His thoughts were entirely governed by the word of God, and free from every influence of the world around.

Fifthly (verse 8), the word of God will ever lead to God, Himself. So Christ, as a Man on earth, can say, "I have set the LORD always before Me." Good for us when the written word leads our hearts to the living Word; when we search through all the Scriptures, not simply to gain a better acquaintance with the letter, but to seek for "the things concerning Himself". Then, indeed, Christ becomes our Object. With Christ there is no failure, for He can say, "I have set the LORD *always* before Me." With ourselves this may be true *sometimes*: who but Christ could say "always". Yet to have Christ before us as our Object is surely the secret power for treading the path of life, and the measure of our spirituality. The result of having Christ before us is blessedly set forth in the words that follow, for Christ can say, "Because He is at my right hand, I shall not be moved." Setting the Lord *before us*, we shall find that the Lord is *with us*. He cannot fail those who make Him their object. If He is with us, He will maintain us, so that, however trying the circumstances, whatever the insults and opposition we may have to meet, we shall not be moved. Alas! too often a trifling circumstance, not to mention the deliberate insults of opposers, may move us to speak and act in the flesh, only to reveal how little we have the Lord before us. The apostle Paul could say, "For me to live is Christ." Having Christ as his Object, he could also say, when faced with "bonds and afflictions", that "None of these *things* move me" (Philippians 1: 21; Acts 10: 23, 24).

Sixth (verses 9, 10) with Jehovah *before Him* as His Object, and *with Him* at His right hand, the Lord could tread the path of life with gladness in His heart, even though that path led through death and the grave. He went into death in the sure and certain hope that Jehovah would not leave Him in the grave. Having been through death He has destroyed its power for believers so that if we are called to pass through death we shall find that the One who has already been through death is with us. With the Psalmist, we shall be able to say, "Though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil: for Thou art with me."

Seventhly (verse 11), we learn that the path of life through this world of sorrow and trial, will lead to the presence of Jehovah, or, as the Christian can say, to the Father's house, there to find ourselves in the presence of Christ, to be with the One who was with us in the path, there to find "fulness of joy", and "pleasures for evermore". In the world around we see men abandoning themselves to "the pleasures of sin", which are but "for a season". The believer, who treads the path of life, may, indeed, meet with manifold trials, but they too, are only "for a season". But the "light affliction which is but for a moment, worketh for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory" (2 Corinthians 4: 17, 18)

This then is the path of life, as unfolded in this beautiful Psalm, and marked out by One who has trodden the path in perfection. Let us ever remember that the life of which the Psalm speaks is the *inner life* lived with God. One has said, "It is important to remember that there is an inward divine life which dwells and joys in God, having nothing to do with circumstances, though enabling us to go through them" (J.N.D.).

To sum up the perfections of this life, as presented in this Psalm, we learn that it is,

(1) A life that is dependent upon God, confident in God, and subject to God;

- (2) A life that delights in the saints and is separate from sinners;
- (3) A life that has the LORD for its portion;
- (4) A life that derives its instruction from the LORD;
- (5) A life that has the LORD for its object;
- (6) A life that death cannot touch;
- (7) A life that leads to fulness of joy and pleasures for evermore in the presence of the LORD.

Such then is the blessedness of the inner life lived before God and with God, and without which the outward life before men, even though it may make a fair show in the flesh, will only be the form of godliness without the power. May it then be the desire of our hearts to follow in the path that the Lord has marked out for His own, and that thus living this inner life there may be found in us that which is well pleasing in the sight of God through Jesus Christ (Hebrews 13: 21).