Light for the Pilgrim Path, Vol. 2

Christ the Sanctuary and Support of His People

Isaiah 5:1-4; 6:5; 7:10-14; 8:5-17

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It is a solemn fact, but it meets us in every portion of God's word, that the *creature* breaks down everywhere: and that is not confined to any one period or time, or to those who were distinguished by greater or less favor. It is the common history -- I was going to say, lot -- of man, no matter where we look at him, irrespective of how favored or signally blessed of God; it is the same sad history all through. And it is very striking to see that it is true of men collectively as well as of man individually; that is, it is not merely true of man as man, but, what is exceedingly solemn, it is equally true of those who are brought into favor corporately. The place of blessing has never been kept by any creature. That is what is so solemn, and yet it is this we have to be established in, as to our souls. It is one of the very first grand principles of God's word, that not only has man, as a creature under responsibility, utterly broken down, and come short entirely of God's glory, but, beloved, there is another truth that is connected with it which is more humbling and solemn, namely, that man, *blest,* brought into divine favor, and surrounded with tokens and marks of sovereign mercy, fails as much in respect to the mercy as he failed with respect to his responsibility.

Now this is a great fact from God for us to be settled in, as to our souls, because, when we pass from it in its individual aspect, and look at it corporately, whether in Israel or in the church, it is the same sorrowful story. Here, in the prophecy we have been reading together, it refers, of course, primarily, and in its literality, to Israel; but then, remember that, while it is a great fact fully attested in scripture, it is impossible to have right thoughts of God's ways, if we ignore the great reality that Israel will come out again, and God's dealings with that nation be as distinct as before; yet, at this present moment, it is not *Israel,* as such, which is the subject of God's sovereign dealings in grace. That is all put in abeyance, as it were, for the time being; the hopes of the nation are to be revived, though now the daughter of Israel sleeps, and the day is coming when the tree, now seared and blasted, shall bud and blossom, and fill the world with fruit. But now God is occupied, in His grace, with another thing; and you must see how solemn it is, when we look at that other thing with which we have to do, to find that there is no difference as to the manner and way in which favor, and sovereign goodness, and mercy have been slighted, and despised, and rejected -- so much so, that the time is coming when that awful word of excision will be put into force by the Lord Jesus Christ, "Because thou art lukewarm, and neither cold nor hot, I will spue thee out of my mouth"; and that is as thorough, and as complete, and as total a rejection and repudiation of the false thing as the breaking-off and interruption of Israel's hopes were thorough and complete for the time being, and a great deal more so; because, for that which will be spued out of Christ's mouth, there is no hope whatever, no recovery for it; whereas, through grace, there will be a recovery and restoration for Israel.

But now, what I do desire to occupy your thoughts with this evening is the great moral principle which underlies all this -- simply that our hearts may be exercised in what we have left for us in that which remains of the journey. It is well for us to be able to look around, and to say, I know what I have. It is a very easy thing, in one sense, to be able to say, I know what I have *not;* but that will not help us. If I were to dwell all the evening upon what we have *not,* or what we have lost, or what has been taken from us, it might be exceedingly useful; and God gives that its place, so as to exercise consciences, and awaken up the sense of our true whereabouts; but then it would not minister comfort, or help, or vigor, or power to any one whose soul and heart longed to know whether there were any resources or reserves that could be fallen back upon, so that one could say, Well, thank God, though we are as bad as bad can be, *He* is as good as He ever was. That is what really comforts and sustains our poor hearts; and, more than that, one *grows* in the sense of it. I am convinced, the more I dwell in meditative delight and communion on that which there is in God and the Father for myself as a poor, weak, and feeble creature, the more I can dwell upon such resources of God for those who have utterly, so to speak, lost everything, and sinned away everything, the more my heart grows in adoring confidence in the One who never changes, and I have a deeper sense of what poor material for His grace we are.

I have often been struck by the words which occur in the Lord's ministry from the glory -- I mean His ministry as set forth in the churches in the Revelation: "Remember *from* whence you are fallen" -- not *to* what you have fallen, but *from* what -- a very different thing. If I say, there is where I was set, there is where His own wonderful grace gave me to rest in Himself, and that is what I have left; then I have a true measure of what I have got down to. The position of divine grace I have fallen *from* is the only true measure of what I have descended *to*. It is not, remember where you are, down in all the distance and wretchedness of the condition you have dropped into, but it is, "Remember *from whence* you are fallen," and that is deeply painful to one's heart.

Well, now, there are two things here, in chapters 5, 6, we have read tonight. In chapter 5 the prophet brings in the nation

as guilty on the side of their own positive responsibility with respect to *favor*. God has done everything He could do; that is, He is looking back: "What could have been done more in my vineyard that I have not done in it?" I have expended all my interest and care upon it; I have done everything. And what has been the issue of that? "It brought forth wild grapes."

If we apply that principle now to Christendom -- and remember, I am speaking of the sphere of profession, I am speaking of it as responsible here upon the earth *as a whole,* not of the body of Christ; I am speaking of the house in its widest and fullest sense; because, if I speak of the body of Christ, I speak of that which Christ forms for Himself; that which He builds and that which man builds are distinct. I am not speaking of that, but of the assembly in its *house* aspect, where responsibility comes in, and -- mark this distinctly -- in connection with divine favor too; because you must have privilege to incur responsibility. There is no use in trying to convict any one of *responsibility,* if you do not prove their *privilege*. Therefore, when I look at the church in its house aspect as a privileged, favored corporation upon this earth, I see there is wonderful responsibility. Well, now, I say what could God have done that He has not done, if I look at it in that way? Can any one lay a charge against the diligent care, and the wondrous goodness, of the Lord Jesus Christ, with reference to the church, in that respect? Was not everything done? Is not the New Testament filled with the evidence of that? But now, look at the professing church for a moment. What has it produced? "Wild grapes." Man, as an individual, has done it; Israel has done it; Christendom has done it. If I look back at individuals, or at Israel, or at Christendom now, it is, "wild grapes."

That is ch. 5. I merely want to touch the leading points in it, so as to get at the subject that is really filling my own heart this evening. In ch. 6 we have another thing; and here the prophet represents the nation; and it is not that he is looking *back* here, as in ch. 5, but looking *on*. He represents the nation, and the nation is brought in as unfit for the glory of God. Every one can see how true that is of us individually. The glory of God is that which most convicts us, individually. People think there is nothing so convicting as their failures but that is a great mistake. There is conviction on that side, no doubt -- I do not question it. Of course, if you go and say to a person, You have thoroughly failed, you have forfeited every claim and title you have had, because of what you have done, it undoubtedly tells upon him. But, beloved, let me tell you this, it is a great deal more solemn for a soul to get into the presence of light that is all-penetrating, and see that it is unfit for the glory of God. It is not simply the question of what I have done; and you will find that the people who have the deepest sense of their own moral obliquity before God in the holiness of His nature, are the people who have lived upright lives; whereas, with base sinners, though, no doubt, truly and really converted to God, people who have lived uncommonly bad lives, who have plunged into every kind of sin, their sense of it is taken more from the *acts* than from the *nature,* and consequently it is not anything like so deep. Hence you will find that people of that character are more disposed to dwell upon the enormity of their crimes, their evil ways and course, and all that is true. I do not question it at all, yet it is not the same thing as when the glory of God has measured me, and I find I am vile, even at my best. It is not merely that I am bad in my badness, but I am intolerable, even in what I think is the best part of me -- the cup is found in Benjamin's sack.

That is a different thing entirely; and you will find how that is the point about which souls are very much astray. It is not that people do not know they are sinners -- not at all. Many know right well -- according to the confession they often make -- that they have done that which they ought not to have done, and have left undone what they ought to have done; but I tell you what they do *not* know -- that "in them," that is, in their flesh, "dwells no good thing." It is a wonderful thing when a man (I speak of him now individually) has found himself out in the light of the glory of God, as the prophet did here, so that he positively is brought to this, that all the respect he had for himself is gone; he then loses self-respect, and what is the measure of his conviction? Surely not his sins, but God's glory; and, beloved, it is an immense thing to have been brought, so to speak, into the presence of the glory of God in that way. What makes it so interesting here, is, that it was the glory of the Lord Jesus. The New Testament tells us that. "These things said Esaias, when he saw his glory, and spake of him" (John 12:41). This is the glory of Christ as Jehovah -- it is the glory of Jehovah. But, I say, what a wonderful thing for a creature to measure himself with that glory! What is the result of it here?

> Woe is me, for I am undone, because I am a man of unclean lips, and I dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips; for mine eyes have seen the King, the Lord of hosts.

Now, as I said, in ch. 5 he looks *back,* but in Isa. 6 he looks *forward,* and in both you get the nation completely set aside morally because of their condition -- they produced wild grapes. In the light of the glory of God they were discovered unfit for His presence.

Now what comes next is that which is more especially filling my heart this evening. In such a condition of things as that, has God any *reserves*? I do not say *resources,* but *reserves*. Can you say in your souls, Thank God, I know something of His reserves? Has He reserves? He has! What a wonderful thing it is to be able to say to one another, God has reserves! That is what Isa. 7 unfolds. And what is the condition of things when it is unfolded? What brings it out? A wrecked nation, whether on their own side, or in the presence of His glory; wild grapes produced under His culture, and a moral unfitness for His glory. Now what can God do for a people like that? When we come to this ch. 7, we have the virgin's Son to meet it.

> A virgin shall conceive, and bear a son, and shall call his name Immanuel.

That is where I see Christ as God's reserve. What a blessed, wondrous reality for the heart to grasp -- Christ as God's reserve! "Therefore the Lord himself shall give you a sign," saying, as it were, I take you at your lowest; you want a sign; you have not faith to trust in my simple word—you are reduced to that. It is a state of very bankruptcy; you have got into a condition of total wreck, and now you want a sign. I will give you a sign: "A virgin shall conceive, and bear a son." What a marvelous intervention of God! God, in the goodness and resources of His own nature, equal to Himself. Oh, here is

something that is beyond all human ability to command. And what I see is this -- when God works, when He brings out His reserves, He chooses the time when every avenue is closed up, every door, so to speak, shut. That is the moment when faith ought to look up, and say, God has reserves, and now is the fitting occasion for Him to bring them out. That is a great encouragement for us tonight; because you look around, and as you see the state of things, you say, "Who will show us any good?" -- many say that now, but we have reserves too -- "Lord, lift *thou* up the light of thy countenance upon us." And does He not do it as truly as He does here in this chapter before us? Think of the words, "He shall be called Immanuel." That is, Jehovah of Sabaoth becomes Immanuel, that is, God with us, in the person of the virgin's Son, and He is the great reserve of God for a state of wreck and ruin, as God depicts it here for us.

I speak of all this tonight, because I believe nothing will give confidence in God except to see what He is, and how He can act. He acts suitably to His own nature and character; and when you see that He has that in Himself, above and beyond all the misery, and wretchedness, and ruin, what comfort it gives your heart, that, in the darkest moment, faith can enable you to say, Well, we have not got beyond the mighty power of the living God; we have not got beyond the resources and reserves of God. We may have utterly broken down in every sense and shape, but still, in the darkest moment God will show that He *is* God. That is what will keep our hearts quiet, and if we have not received that, we cannot be quiet. If it is not a settled thing in our souls that God is God, and will act as such, we cannot be in repose; it is impossible, we are bound to be restless and disturbed.

But there is a spot where we can rest, if our souls can lean upon that great fact: God has reserves, and He brings them out at the time when man can only say, It is all over with us, as the godly in Israel might well have said.

And now I want you to come with me to Isa. 8 for a moment, where we see what the effect of this reserve is. That is what ch. 8 really unfolds, viz., that this blessed One, who was the virgin's Son, brought forth by God as His own precious and wondrous reserve, to fulfil all His thoughts and purposes, becomes the great *test;* and that is what you find now. Could anything be more morally applicable to the existing state of the church of God? I question if it be possible to find a scripture that will present the moral features, the great salient features, of the present condition of things under the eye of God, more distinctly than this one. I speak of the church in its widest sense. I am not limiting it now to any number of people who falsely assume the title to themselves, but as God speaks of it. And the church of God is of much wider dimension than many people think. Look at the state of it now! Look at its present condition! Could anything be more applicable to its existing state than what we find in this chapter 8, namely, that this reserve, this blessed Son of His bosom, the virgin's Son, the mighty God who became man, and did bring all the grace that was in God down into man, as well as take all the sorrow that was in man up into God, He is the One who is the great test in the condition of things here brought out. What you find, then, here, is, that there was the most perfect and thorough rejection of Gods reserve on the part of some, and there was the most blessed sustainment and comfort for the hearts of others in that One who was God's reserve.

Now what is the question of the present hour? Are our hearts really exercised about it? What is the spiritual outlook? Let us ask ourselves what is the great question of the moment. One word answers that question. It is a matter of *Christ*. Be assured of it, it is so. It always was, from the moment that Christ came here; from the moment that the blessed One was here revealed in all His blessedness, the whole power of Satan was put forth to bring into contempt this reserve of God amongst those who professedly accepted it. So it is now. Let us refuse most positively the wile of Satan now, who, by his agents and dupes, would, if possible, shift -- at least to sight -- the great question of the hour from its true issue. It is an insidious, deep plan of the devil to conceal himself and his acting. The whole question now that is agitating men's minds generally, and the church of God too -- not any portion of it, but the whole -- is, as to whether the Christ of God is to be pre-eminent, whether He is to have the whole and complete sovereignty, and be bowed down to, in every particular. That is the question now, and I believe you fail to perceive the solemnity of the hour, if you do not see that. If it is a mere personal matter, or a mere difference of judgment, or disputation about this point, or that, though they have their importance in their place, if it be only that which you see at present around you, you have failed to take in the real question of the moment. We are in danger of losing sight of what the whole object and aim of the enemy at this juncture is about, and that is to set aside, if he can, the Lord Jesus Christ from His absolute sovereignty over the affections, hearts, ways, manners, tone, and temper of His people. Every question resolves itself into that, and our God would have us awake, as it were, and in individual exercise of heart before Him.

Let me ask you affectionately tonight, and let me say it to myself as well as to you, can you sit down in your own room, and close the door, as it were, upon yourself and God; can you, as in His very presence, in all the light of it on your soul, say to your own self, Is there a corner in this heart of mine where He does not reign supreme? That is where the real exercise should be found. People may talk about *settling* things, and it is, no doubt to some, very interesting work; but who can settle *hearts?* and it is *hearts* that need to be settled. If you could get hearts settled, if the condition of soul in His saints was regulated by His grace, how simple what I have been speaking of, and then how easy all would be, and owning the entire, complete sovereignty and sway of that blessed One in our hearts, all questions would then be easily and quickly solved; the occasion would only manifest Christ supreme, and it would be -- oh, what a triumph of His grace! -- over every rival claimant, either for affection or subjection, it would then be truly in us all,

> "A heart submissive, meek,
> My great Redeemer's throne,
> Where only Christ is heard to speak,
> Where Jesus reigns alone."

It is the *individual* condition of those who compose the corporate thing, the *individual* state of soul in which the saints are found, and the place that Christ has over their affections and hearts, that determine everything; and therefore it is of the first

moment to be exercised in our hearts about it. Let me put it, therefore, to us all this evening: Is Christ all? I do not care to inquire what you are, either *to* Him, or *for* Him, that flows from what He is as known in grace and truth objectively; but what He is in all His own beauty and fragrance, in His personal blessedness, as an object worthy of supreme occupation, as Lord and Christ, worthy of the heart's subjection, glad and willing, too, to own His will and ways, sanctified to His obedience, thus delighting in the Father's delight. Oh, what blessedness! Now all this is the simple result of our individual state of soul, with reference to Christ, because it is simply a question of Him.

Let us just look at it here for a moment in Isa. 8. What is sought for, instead of Him here? What is accepted instead of God's reserve? Mark it well. Look at v. 9:

> Associate yourselves, O ye people, and ye shall be broken in pieces; and give ear, all ye of far countries, gird yourselves, and ye shall be broken in pieces . . . Take counsel together, and it shall come to nought," &c.

What is the meaning of that? Take the literal scripture, what does it mean? It is this -- that man will turn to human sources, will turn to *man* in some shape or other. Look at the thing now. What is it marks the state of professing Christianity to-day? *Babel,* that is, man without God. He is sitting in his tower, contemplating his own greatness, and name, and either ignorant of, or indifferent to, that which is to come upon it all. What is Christendom but that? And what is that greatly-desired good, so much longed after by some, to obtain which, it is proposed to surrender everything distinctive? Is it not to be carried into an unholy unity on the shoulders of compromise? Is not this just the counterpart of what is going on outside in the world? And, dear friends, that which is prominent in the age is always the snare of the saints of God, if they are not watchful; it is solemn, what is true in the age in which we live, and that which gives it its character, is that which is leavening the professing church of God at this present moment, and it is this very thing which will creep in, and eat like a gangrene, until it characterizes even that which ostensibly bears the name of God in profession before men. It has always been the case; the very thing that arose, and swelled, and worked destruction in the world, was always the snare of the people of God. It was so with reference to Israel. What was *its* snare? They would be like the nations around, and they gave up God, and turned to human resources. That is what you get here, in this chapter now before us.

What brings all this out is God's *reserve,* which is a contemptible thing in the eyes of man. People scoff at the thought that you must have nothing else but Christ -- that you must not have human system, human ways, human learning, and intelligence; and this grows up, under the devil's care, so stealthily and insidiously, that at last it overpowers everything, and all that is spiritual dies out, because all that is carnal has come in. But Christ remains the great test of it all -- the test by which everything must, and will, be judged.

And now one word as to the immense comfort that is brought out here in the midst of this condition of things. I ask my brethren's special attention to it. Mark what you have here in v. 13: "Sanctify the Lord of hosts himself." Oh, how He delights in that word, "himself." I am struck with it in the Old Testament, as well as in the New.

> Sanctify the Lord of hosts *himself,* and let *him* be your fear, and let *him* be your dread; and he shall be for a sanctuary, but for a stone of stumbling and for a rock of offence to both the houses of lsrael, for a gin and for a snare to the inhabitants of Jerusalem. And many among them shall stumble and fall and be broken, and be snared and be taken. Bind up the testimony, seal the law among my disciples; and I will wait upon the Lord, that hideth his face from the house of Jacob, and I will look for him" {Isa. 8:13-17}.

Now what we have here is this: that when you get a condition of things as here pictured and manifested, whether corporately or individually, this blessed One who is refused and rejected -- perhaps not in so many words, but still rejected, if He is not supreme in the hearts of His people -- I say this blessed One becomes the stay, and solace, and cheer, and sanctuary, and hiding-place of the hearts that turn truly to Him. Is not that exactly what is true to-day? If we turn to the New Testament, we shall find the same thing complete; just look at Rev. 3, and is there not an exact counterpart of what we have been considering in the prophecy of Isaiah this evening? Mark it. See v.7 of this chapter. In the terrific state of departure, even Laodicea, the last state, too, of the church, we have that which alone can keep and maintain souls from it, even the blessed grace of His own Person thus made known: "These things saith he that is holy, he that is true, he that hath the key of David, he that openeth, and no man shutteth, and shutteth, and no man openeth." Well may we say, How blessed! and when we consider that condition of things, what do we find? Why, God's reserve! "These things saith he that is holy." Thank God for that! Thank God there is such an One faithful and true, "he that is true." Everything here may be in misery and wretchedness, but still there is a most complete, a most perfect and most blessed exhibition of His own Person for the hearts of the faithful. And He is the sanctuary for His people to-day, "the holy, and the true." He will never give His people up, let foolish people rave as they will; and not only that, but He is the One who embodies in His own blessed, wondrous, gracious Person all that the heart could possibly claim, all that the affections could really look for, all that is necessary and needful in the midst of such a condition of things. I say, beloved friends, faith *wants* more than ever, and the heart *delights* more than ever, to turn to the Person of the Christ as God's reserve. You may say everything is broken to pieces, but has Christ failed? Is He changed? "He shall be for a sanctuary." What a wonderful thing! Now I ask you, Have you found it? Can you say you know God's reserve? You know what it is, and how all is sure and safe in Him. This it is which alone strengthens faith. If I see what Christ is -- and when I say "see" Him, I do not mean in the sense of observation, but "see" in the sense of my soul as real apprehension of Him by faith -- when faith lays hold upon what Christ is as God's reserve for the most bankrupt condition of things, I say, "Thank God, there is a sanctuary for me." He is "the faithful witness, the first begotten from the dead, the prince of the kings on the earth."

Oh, beloved, the Lord, in His grace, lead every heart here to have good courage, and good cheer too; and not only this, but to be deeply exercised -- the deeper the better -- so that we