

They Sang His Praise They Soon Forgat His Works

by
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"Then believed they His words: they sang His praise. They soon forgat His works: they waited not for His counsel" (Psalm 106:12,13)

These are solemn words, because they record a solemn fact. They are true, not only of Israel but of God's people in all ages. They refer to that tendency in the heart of each one of us to cry unto the Lord in our trouble, and then to need the exhortation, "Oh that men would praise the Lord for His goodness" (Psalm 107:8), and even to sing His praise and then forget His works.

When God separated a people to Himself, it was not merely that He might be the God of Israel, but a God to Israel. He will not only have the people for Himself, but He will be their God, and "Happy is that people whose God is the Lord" (Psalm 144:15). This Psalm records many examples of the statement made in the text. The first refers to the deliverance from Egypt. For a brief moment we see them in the attitude of faith: "Then believed they His word, they sang His praise" (verse 12). They are on the wilderness side of the Red Sea--"THEN." The waters that opened just now for their salvation and closed again for the destruction of their enemies roll between them and the house of their bondage. They are

celebrating in their song the triumphs of God's right hand. They measure everything by it. Not only do they sing of what it has done, but by faith they celebrate victories yet to come, Exodus 15. Compare verses 12 and 13 with 15-18, and note the repeated "shall," "shall," "shalt."

Not one thing remains to be done; all is accomplished to Faith. Faith is seen thus to be the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen. And now Moses and the children of Israel are silent, and Miriam and the women are taking up the strain, but still the burden is the same (verse 21). But what is the Divine comment on the scene? "They sang His praise, they soon forgot His works." So quickly does praise give place to murmurings: "And the whole congregation of the children of Israel murmured against Moses and Aaron in the wilderness (Exodus 16:2).

Is, then, the Lord's arm shortened that it cannot save? Is His ear that heard their cry in Egypt grown heavy that it cannot hear? No! But the instrument of deliverance has been leaned on instead of the Deliverer. Yes! So really is this true that as soon as Moses is out of sight, they run with haste to Aaron, and say: "Up, make us gods which shall go before us, for as for this Moses, the man that brought us up out of the land of Egypt, we know not what is become of him " (Exodus 32:1). The comment of the Spirit is: "They forgot God their Saviour which had done great things in Egypt"! (Psalm 106:21). And so it is ever! Where there is not a living God-wrought faith, man must have something to look to that is visible and tangible — that is IDOLATRY.

Occupied with the instrument

We have another example of this in the days of the Judges. The people had gone into open idolatry, and the Lord had sold them into the hands of their enemies Yet (as in Psalm 106:8, 41-44) "Nevertheless the Lord raised up judges which delivered them" (Judges 2:16). But there was man's

"nevertheless" in verse 19; they returned to their evil ways after God's merciful deliverances, and in chapter 6 we see them greatly impoverished. The hand of Midian prevails; the Midianites were as grasshoppers for multitude, the people betook themselves to mountains, dens, and caves, the highways were unoccupied, the harvest was reaped by others, there is no sustenance left for Israel. Then the Lord raised up Gideon, He looked on him and strengthened him; He went forth with him, and delivered Israel with a great deliverance by "the sword of the Lord and of Gideon." But Israel was occupied with the Instrument! and they say to Gideon: "Rule thou over us, both thou and thy son and thy son's son also: for thou hast delivered us from the hand of Midian" (Judges 8:22). It was "thou, thou." Gideon was true to God here, but a few verses later we find him making an ephod of the gold that had been given him, and "all Israel went a whoring after it, and it became a snare to Gideon and his house."

Again, if we turn from the times of the wilderness and the days of the Judges to the reigns of the Kings, it is still the same. The history of the Kings is a dreary record of provoking the Holy One of Israel to anger, so that but a few reigns, like those of Jehoshaphat, Hezekiah, and Josiah stand out as bright exceptions. Manasseh, indeed, did repent and reform at the end of his reign, but we read of his son Amon that "he did evil in the sight of the Lord as did Manasseh his father... and humbled not himself before the Lord as Manasseh his father had humbled himself, but Amon trespassed more and more." We see the condition of things worse and worse till Baal-worship was carried on in the Temple of Jehovah, and actually the horses of the idol were stabled in the house of the Lord (II Kings 23). At this juncture Amon's son Josiah succeeded to the throne, and the history of his reign is minutely given in II Chronicles 34 and 35.

"While he was yet young," he sought the Lord (II Chronicles 34:3), and four years afterward he set about

purging the city and the land, and thus fulfilled a prophecy uttered 300 years before: "There came a man of God out of Judah by the word of the Lord unto Bethel: and Jeroboam stood by the altar to burn incense, and he cried against the altar in the word of the Lord, and said, 'O altar, altar! thus saith the Lord, behold a child shall be born unto the house of David, Josiah by name; and upon thee shall he offer the priests of the high places that burn incense upon thee, and men's bones shall be burnt upon thee" (I Kings 13:1,2). And although the messenger, the instrument employed, failed directly after delivering his message, yet the word of God could not fail. That word came to pass. The king, "Josiah by name," received a great encouragement for his work, and a solemn warning to "take heed" to the voice of the Lord, for in the midst of his labours "the Book of the Law" was found (II Chronicles 34:14). The king received it in its power, for he traced all the misery up to neglect of this blessed book (verses 19-21). He learned that the Law may be neglected, though it cannot be broken. A blessed season from the Lord was vouchsafed, and the chapter which gives the record ends with the words: "All his days they departed not from following the Lord." Ah! "all his days"!

Man's "nevertheless"

Yes, it is the same lesson still; the Lord Himself detects it, He sees the heart, and He has recorded what He saw in Jeremiah 3:6,10. Treacherous Judah "hath not turned unto Me with her whole heart, but feignedly, saith the Lord." Hence we read: "After all this... Necho King of Egypt came up to fight against Carchemish... and Josiah went out against him" (II Chronicles 35:20). Listen to Necho's words: "What have I to do with thee, thou King of Judah?. I come not against thee this day, but against the house wherewith I have war, for God commanded me to make haste; forbear thee from meddling with God who is with me that He destroy thee not" (verse 21).

Hark what the Scripture says: "Nevertheless Josiah would not turn his face from him... and hearkened not unto the words of Necho from the mouth of God" (verse 22), with fatal result. Oh, how solemn! how instructive! We are not told all the reasons, and how far, like Uzziah, "he was marvellously helped till he was strong. But when he was strong his heart was lifted up to his destruction" (II Chronicles 2:15,16). Like ungodly Ahab he disguised himself in the battle, but no disguise will hide us from God's eye, no shelter will avail us, and like another Ahab he is struck down by an arrow.

Sad! Solemn! and instructive lesson! Yet he was taken away from evil to come, and great lamentation was made for him (II Chronicles 35:25). Let us draw near and listen to the mourners. "The breath of our nostrils, the anointed of the Lord, was taken in their pits, of whom we said, 'Under His shadow we shall live among the heathen'" (Lamentations 4:20). Ah, it is the same lesson still. Israel served God "all his days," but at heart they were the "same generation." In the light of Josiah they walked, and not "in the light of the Lord." Upon "the breath of his nostrils " they lived, not on the words which proceeded out of the mouth of God. Under the shadow of Josiah they thought to dwell, and not under the shadow of the Almighty. These things happened of old, they are "written for our admonition." Like a bell swinging to and fro over the sunken rock, giving warning to the mariner, that hard by where he is passing others have made shipwreck, they sound in our ears: "Take heed, lest there be in any of you an evil heart of unbelief in departing from the living God."

The Christian life

No one is really a Christian, but he who has received the Word of God "with the Holy Ghost and with power." He who has done this has turned to God from every idol, and is entitled to know that the blood of Christ has cleansed from all sin; and in Him who is now at the right hand of God he has been brought nigh. But the Christian life down here is not merely a

fresh direction given to religious instincts or to the fleshly activities of man. It is not the holding of certain views or the taking of certain vows; pledges, or badges, or the shaping the conduct after a certain course, but it is the having to do with God in Christ, believing God, obeying God, fearing God, walking with God, worshipping God, serving God, joying in God. In short, "setting the Lord always before us," and setting the heart and conscience before Him. All ministry of the Word is for this end, and is healthful only as it subserves it.

The days in which we live are marked by the same character as of old: "They sang His praise, they soon forgot His works." God is forgotten, the instrument is too much thought of; man is glorified, the creature is exalted as though the saint has anything which he has not received. See what godly jealousy was manifested, by that faithful pastor, Saint Paul: "Let no man glory in men" (I Corinthians 3:21). "These things, brethren, I have in a figure transferred to myself and Apollos... that ye might learn in us not to think of men above that which is written, that no one of you be puffed up for one against another" (I Corinthians 4:6). "The Lord gave... God giveth" (I Corinthians 3:5,7).

To lean on the instrument is the very essence of idolatry, for it displaces God. It is natural for us to do so because it is ever irksome to the flesh to be directly, continually, and absolutely depending upon God. When the stripling David returned from the fight, the women sang his praises (I Samuel 18:7); but they were no true daughters of Miriam, their song was not "The Lord hath triumphed gloriously, "but "Saul hath slain his thousands, and David his ten thousands"; and we read that "Saul eyed David from that day forward" (I Samuel 18:9).

While we may see in this Saul's envy and jealousy, we must note that it became David's "thorn in the flesh," the Divine antidote for man's praise, and though a "messenger of Satan," it ministered the love of God. There is but ONE on whom we may safely depend, only ONE under whose "shadow" we may

dare to dwell. Of that One, the voice from the excellent glory has testified as the cloud hid Moses and Elias: "HEAR HIM" (Luke 9:33-35). What do we know of all this? Are we dwelling under His shadow, occupied with Him ? Or are we taken up with instrumentalities, doctrines, observances, ceremonies, things about Christ instead of with Christ? Oh, to be occupied with Christ Himself! May God bless His Word to our hearts, reveal Christ to us in it, and open our ears to HEAR HIM!