

Sabbath School Lesson #9 – Times of Loss – 25-31 May 2019

Christ would have us learn the secret of victory in times of loss. We focus on what the Lesson writer says at Sunday section: 'When faced with a chronic or terminal illness, we may experience shock, anger, despair, and may even feel like shouting, "My God, my God, why have you deserted me? Why are you so far away? Won't you listen to my groans and come to my rescue?" (Ps. 22:1, CEV). As David did, we'd do well taking our questions, anger, and pain to God.' But these words were spoken by Christ through David.

David wrote by Christ's Spirit (2 Samuel 23:1-2), as did all the prophets (1 Peter 1:10-11), although often, as in so many of the Psalms, the writers described their own experiences. But the twenty-second Psalm is unmistakably a description of Christ's experience, and yet it is most intensely human. In it every soul can read his own struggles and temptations, and discouragements, – and, if he has faith, his own victories. Let us note a few verses which show us that it comes as a whole right from the heart of Christ. Verse 1: "My God, My God, why hast Thou forsaken Me" (compare Matthew 27:46, and the connection). Verse 6: "But I am a worm and no man; a reproach of men, and despised of the people" (compare Isaiah 52:14; 53:3). Verses 7-8: "All they that see Me laugh Me to scorn; they shoot out the lip, they shake the head, saying, He trusted on the Lord that He would deliver Him; let Him deliver Him, seeing He delighted in Him" (compare Matthew 27:39, 43). Verses 16, 18: "They pierced My hands and My feet;" "They part My garments among them, and cast lots for My vesture" (compare John 19:23-24). These verses show us that the Psalm is the outpouring of Christ's soul in His most trying earthly experiences. Nevertheless it is "a Psalm of David."

"My God, My God, why hast Thou forsaken Me?" "O My God, I cry in the daytime, but Thou hearest not; and in the night season, and am not silent." These words show to us that the experience covers more than the few hours during which Christ hung on the cross; for here we read about crying day and night. It was not only the time that He hung upon the tree, that He felt forsaken, but there were many other times in His life when darkness and despair seemed about to overwhelm Him. This explains the nights Christ spent in prayer.

How many persons often think that God has really forsaken them. What a blessed comfort to know that they share that feeling with Jesus; nay, more, that it is Christ's own experience in us. There is nothing but sin that can make a separation between God and any soul, and it was just this that made Christ feel that God had forsaken Him; for the Lord "hath laid on Him the iniquity of us all." "He was wounded for our transgressions, He was bruised for our iniquities" (Isaiah 53:5-6). It was our sins upon Him, which He bore as if they were His own, that caused His "strong crying and tears." Our sins, the very same sins that cause these feelings of despondency with which we are so well acquainted. When these feelings come to us, we will remember that they came to Jesus, and we will let Him dispose of them.

Now comes a ray of hope piercing through the gloom: "But Thou art holy, O Thou that inhabitest the praises of Israel. Our fathers trusted in Thee; they trusted, and Thou didst deliver them. They cried unto Thee, and were delivered; they trusted in Thee, and were not confounded" (verses 3-5). If the soul in trouble will only hold fast to the everlasting truth that God is holy and good, and that His mercy endures for ever, he has a sure anchor. When we know that God is good, then we know that He has not forsaken us. And then comes the thought of God's goodness to men in past ages, how He delivered Noah and Lot and Joseph, and Jeremiah, and Daniel, and so many others, and that He is the same God still.

"But I am a worm, and no man; a reproach of men, and despised of the people" (verse 6). Thus the tempter seeks to deprive us of the comfort we began to receive from the thought of God's goodness to men of old. Who has not had just such thoughts? All the wealth of God's love, as manifested to the men of old is lost on us, because we feel ourselves so unworthy, because of our sins. What a comfort to know that our sins caused Jesus such feelings of worthlessness and unworthiness; and as He gained victory over them, so shall we in Him.

But the case is desperate. "All they that see Me laugh Me to scorn; they shoot out the lip, they shake the head, saying, He trusted on the Lord that He would deliver Him; let Him deliver Him, seeing He delighted in Him" (verse 7-8). "Many there be which say of My soul, There is no help for Him in God" (Psalm 3:3). Despised of men, and taunted by Satan

because of our sins, we are tempted to think that there is no help for us in God. But let us never forget that Jesus had the same experience. He was esteemed as "stricken, smitten of God, and afflicted." 'But He had no sin to trouble His conscience,' says the one who is unwilling to take the comfort of Christ. Indeed He had our sins, and they rested upon Him just as if He Himself had committed them; for Him "who knew no sin" hath God "made to be sin on our behalf" (2 Corinthians 5:21). "He was tempted in all points like as we are" (Hebrews 4:15). It is impossible that any man can be more oppressed and cast down because of sin than Christ was, and when we remember that it was our sins that caused it, we will allow Him, as He intercedes for us, to carry out His own experience in us to the full.

Trouble may come from every quarter, yet the Lord holds fast to the goodness of God. "But Thou art He that took Me out of the womb; Thou didst make Me to hope when I was upon My mother's breasts. I was cast upon Thee from the womb; Thou art My God from My mother's belly" (verses 9-10). Sinners are we, and unworthy to live? Yes; but nevertheless we do live, as it is by the power and grace of God that we have lived to this moment. "It is of the Lord's mercies that we are not consumed, because His compassions fail not. They are new every morning; great is Thy faithfulness" (Lamentations 3:32, 23). God has "no pleasure in the death of the wicked; but that the wicked turn from his way and live" (Ezekiel 33:11).

Now comes a cry for help in the sorest need: "Be not far from Me; for trouble is near; for there is none to help. Many bulls have compassed Me; strong bulls of Bashan have beset all round. They gaped upon Me with their mouths, as a ravening and a roaring lion. I am poured out like water, and all My bones are out of joint; My heart is like wax; it is melted in the midst of My bowels. My strength is dried up like a potsherd; and My tongue cleaveth to My jaws; and Thou hast brought Me into the dust of death. For dogs have compassed Me; the assembly of the wicked have enclosed Me; they pierced My hands and My feet. I may tell all My bones; they look and stare upon Me. They part My garments among them, and cast lots upon My vesture. Be not far from Me, O Lord; O My strength, haste Thee to help Me. Deliver My soul from the sword; My darling from the power of the dog. Save Me from the lion's mouth; for Thou hast heard Me from the horns of the unicorns," or wild oxen (verses 11-21).

In these verses we have the condition of Christ, not only when He hung on the cross, but in His life before that time, and especially when He was in the desert "with the wild beasts" (Mark 1:13), tempted by the devil. He prays to be saved from the lion's mouth, and so may we, for our "adversary the devil, as a roaring lion, walketh about, seeking whom he may devour" (1 Peter 5:8). It is because of sin that beasts are wild and ferocious; and Satan is the originator of sin; all fighting and devouring, whether by man or beast, is the working of Satan. So that the fierce wild beasts that surrounded Christ in the wilderness, threatening to devour Him, were a vivid representation of the devil, who was seeking His soul's ruin.

In the desert of temptation Christ was made to suffer as no other being has ever suffered. He was weak in body, threatened by the wild beasts, and surrounded by Satan and his hosts; for "the assembly of the wicked" enclosed Him. He was brought to the last extremity. "From the horns of the wild oxen Thou hast heard Me." Nothing could more graphically express the sorest need; one could not be exposed to greater danger; on the point of the wild oxen's horns, one would think that there was no hope for life, that he was indeed wholly forsaken; but from just such a perilous position the Lord cried for help, and was heard.

In the miserable condition, seemingly utterly forsaken by the Father, surrounded by wild beasts and demons, with every ray of hope seemingly excluded, He says: "I will declare Thy name unto My brethren; in the midst of the congregation will I praise Thee" (verse 23). There is where victory lies. "The name of the Lord is a strong tower." His name is, "Merciful and gracious, longsuffering, and abundant in goodness and truth, keeping mercy for thousands, forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin" (Exodus 34:6-7). In times of loss, when one is in trouble due to sin, let him declare that name, and he will find help. Jesus said: "In the world ye shall have tribulation; but be of good cheer; I have overcome the world" (John 16:33). Christ overcame by holding fast to the fact that God is love and a mighty Deliverer. Read the remainder of the Psalm, and you will see that from this point there is no more darkness nor mention of trouble. All trouble is lost in a song of praise. But all these words of praise are uttered while in the condition described in the preceding verses. That is the secret of victory.