

FORTY YEARS NO. 1179

A SERMON DELIVERED ON LORD'S-DAY MORNING, JUNE 14, 1874,
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AT THE METROPOLITAN TABERNACLE, NEWINGTON.

*“For the Lord your God has blessed you in all the works of your hands: He knows your walking through this great wilderness: these forty years the Lord your God has been with you; you have lacked nothing.”
Deuteronomy 2:7.*

THE habit of numbering our days is a very admirable one. To do it rightly a man needs to be taught of God and if we have not been so taught, it is well to offer the prayer, “So teach us to number our days that we may apply our hearts unto wisdom.” Some men number their cattle, number their acres, number their pounds, but do not number their days, or, if they do, they fail to draw the inference from them which both reason and Divine Grace suggest—that we may apply our hearts unto wisdom. It is not wisdom to try to seem younger than you are, though I have known many attempt it. I have marked between census and census that the ages of certain persons have hardly increased 10 years, as I thought they would have done by the lapse of time. The age of many whom we admire is an inscrutable mystery.

What there can be to be ashamed of in advancing years I am at a loss to know, for old age commands reverence—not ridicule. Why sorrow because another year of trial is over, another year of labor ended, another milestone on the road to Heaven left behind? Instead of regretting that we are so far on the voyage to the fair haven, we may rather rejoice and make our years, at least, as many as we can. If we pretend to be more juvenile than we are, uncharitable persons may possibly attribute it to vanity—it is a pity to give them such an opportunity.

At the same time, ripe years are not to be trifled with. We have known some who have treated the fact that they are advancing in life with unbecoming levity—their gray hairs show that they are nearing the bounds of life, but they are as thoughtless as if they were yet in their minority—and so they are an incongruous miniature of the weakness of age and the frivolity of youth. It is well to keep a cheerful heart to the last hour—and no man has so much reason for doing so as a believer in Jesus! But, at the same time, it is surely time to be solemnly earnest when one has passed the prime of life. Wisdom dictates, in old age, if never before, that a grave consideration of eternal earth should be more under foot and Heaven should be more in the heart.

Every year should increase our sense of the certainty, value and nearness of eternal things. “’Tis time to live if I grow old.” Works for God among our fellow men will soon be impossible to us—let us be diligent in them while as yet our sun is above the horizon. Now, if ever, we should redeem the time, because the days are evil. In the very middle of life, when strength is in our bones and we have the most grand possibilities of vigorous service, it is well for us to be fully alive to the highest interests and purposes. We should not be spending a dreamy existence, as if we were mere lotus eaters, born into a garden of poppies to sleep all day. We have something better to do than to flit among the flowers like butterflies, with nothing particular to care about, and no eternal future within the range of our thoughts or hopes.

My purpose, this morning, is to speak as a man of 40 years to others of my own standing. But much which is spoken will be appropriate to my seniors and applicable, also, to the younger ones of my audience. Forty years of mercy suggest many thoughts concerning *the past*, teach much that will be of use to us for *the present* and, I think, should influence us aright as to *the future*.

I. First, then, let us look back upon THE PAST in the light of the text. “The Lord your God has blessed you in all the works of your hands: He knows your walking through this great wilderness: these forty years the Lord your God has been with you; you have lacked nothing.” What strikes me in Moses’ review is this, the *prominence which he gives to God in it*. Here let me note that our own retrospect of the past, will, if we are genuine Christians, have in it many bright lights of the conspicuous Presence of God, making the pathway here and there like holy ground! The ungodly man, of course,

leads a godless life—as God is not in all his thoughts, so God does not appear to him in all his ways—but to the godly, God’s hand is plain.

Look back, Believer, and note that to you the existence of God has not been a *theory*, but a fact observed and verified by actual experience. Can you not recall many occasions in which the Lord has as certainly manifested Himself to you as ever He appeared to Moses in the burning bush, or to Joshua outside the walls of Jericho, or to Solomon by night, or to the three holy children in the fiery furnace? Do you not remember that marvelous revelation of Himself to you when you were converted? What hand was that which took the rein and curbed that stubborn will of yours? Could any power less than Omnipotent have so completely turned the course of your life? Do you remember the consecrated hour when Jesus met with you, absolved you from the past and accepted you as His disciple?

Ah, they may tell us there are no miracles nowadays, but to each Christian his own conversion is a conspicuous miracle and will ever so remain! He will never be able to forget that then he came into actual contact with the holy God and felt His hand, yes, knew it *beyond* feeling, for it was not a matter of the senses—his spirit came directly into actual contact with the Eternal Spirit and our soul was bound up in the bundle of life with the Soul of the Lord our God! With some of us, many days have passed since then, but they have brought with them fuller displays of the Divine power. In examples of communion, have we not spoken with the Lord as a man speaks with his friend, if not absolutely face to face, yet marvelously like it? Have we not had answers to prayer which we dare not tell because they are too marvelous for others to believe, though they are treasured memories to ourselves?

It would be casting pearls before swine to speak to the ungodly of the Lord’s unveilings of His face to His beloved ones! These things are secrets of the Lord which are with them that fear Him, things unlawful for a man to utter, but never to be erased from our memories! Have we not passed through remarkable circumstances in which the right hand of the Lord has been as clearly seen as our troubles, themselves? “This poor man cried and the Lord heard him.” Brought, perhaps, by our own fault into “rare difficulties,” we have seen a plain path before us in answer to prayer. Plunged into the sea, like Jonah, by our own waywardness, yet we have been carried safely to the dry land to sing, “Salvation is of the Lord.”

These 40 years we look back upon with sacred delight, tracing the wells of Elim and the fruit-bearing palms, the pools in the valley of Baca and the places of encampment in the desert! And if to nobody else, certainly to us, there is an overruling Providence and a bountiful God! We have been like Hagar in the wilderness, ready to perish, but Jehovah has shown us a well of refreshment. And we have said, “Then God sees me.” Blessed is the name of the Lord for this! Let us magnify Him, this morning, that our life has not been without dashes of Glory from His loving Presence! Our Shepherd has not left us to wander alone. Our heavenly Friend has been better to us than a brother and has manifested Himself unto us as He does not unto the world. In this we will glory. Even as Paul gloried in the Revelation which he had received, so also will we rejoice in the displays of the Divine favor which we have beheld.

In reading over the retrospect of 40 years in the wilderness which the text contains, notice, next, that a very leading point is *the blessing which God gave*. I have read this verse over a great many times to discover any allusion to the sin of Israel, but I cannot perceive any, for it begins, “The Lord your God has blessed you in all the works of your hands.” It *deals not with man’s sin*, but with God’s *blessing*. As with Israel, so with us! In our life the most remarkable fact has been the blessing of God. He has blessed as with all spiritual blessings in heavenly places. He has blessed us all ways and blessed us always. He has blessed us beyond conception, blessed us exceeding abundantly above what we asked or even thought and beyond what we can now remember! He has blessed us like a God.

Our text says He has blessed all the works of our hand. I suppose that alludes to all that Israel had a right to do. The Lord multiplied their cattle. He increased their substance. He guided them in their marches. He protected them in their encampments. There were some things in which He did not bless them. They wanted to go up into the Promised Land against His commandment and the Amalekites smote them—He did not bless them there. I thank God, this morning, Brothers and Sisters, that He does not bless the *sins* of His people, for if He did, it would bring on them the tremendous curse of being happy in the ways of evil! We have made our mistakes, and for those mistakes the Lord has laid His hand on us, armed with a rod, which has chastened us and restored us to the path of righteousness.

But in what was legitimate and right we have, some of us, to record that the Lord has uniformly blessed the work of our hands. The work of some of us has been to preach His Gospel, and if the Lord had given us a few score conversions we

would have loved Him forever. But inasmuch as He has given us thousands upon thousands of conversions, how shall we find language with which to praise Him? He has blessed the work of our hands so that a vast Church has been gathered and many smaller ones have sprung from it. One enterprise has been taken up, and then another. One labor which seemed beyond our power has been achieved, and then another and yet another! And at His feet we lay the crown. I must confess very special favor of the Lord towards me—the very stones in the street would cry out against me if I did not—He has, indeed, blessed all the work of my hands.

Brothers and Sisters, you have had a share in the blessing and have a share, also, in the praising. Sometimes the work of our hands has appeared to crumble to pieces, but then it has been rebuilt before long in a better style. Enemies have arisen and they have been exceedingly violent, only to fulfill some special purpose of God and increase our blessing against their wills. Sickness has come only to yield discipline—we have been made weak that we might be strong—and brought to death's door that we might know more of the Divine Life. Glory be to God, our life has been all blessing from beginning to end! There has been no exceptional event all along—ever since we knew Him, He has dealt out blessing and blessing and blessing—and never a syllable of curses. He has fulfilled to us the Word, “Surely blessing I will bless you, and multiplying I will multiply you.”

Again, Brothers and Sisters, in our retrospect of the past, we should notice the perfection of the Lord's sympathetic care. Observe the words—“He knows your walking through this great wilderness.” He has known our rough paths and our smooth ways, the weary trudging and the joyous marches. He has known it all, and not merely known it in the sense of Omniscience, but known it in the sense of sympathy. As David puts it—“You have known my soul in adversity.” You have tenderly entered into my griefs and woes. You have borne my burdens and my cares. What do you say, Brothers and Sisters, has it not been so? Is not that witness true—“in all their afflictions He was afflicted, and the angel of His Presence saved them”? Is not this also true—“I have made and I will bear, even I will carry”? “He bore them on eagle's wings and brought them to Himself.” Has He not often done so? And have we not to sing, today, of a dear Father's love, so tender, so considerate that we can only wonder at it, and love in return?

You have had great losses, some of you. The dearest ones on earth, for whom you sorrowed much and justly, have been removed. Heart-breaking bereavements have happened, yet your hearts are not broken—neither are you cast down with too much sorrow—because underneath you are the everlasting arms and, “as your days so has your strength been.” Before some of you many doors have shut, but God has opened others. The brook Cherith has been dried, but there has been sustenance found for you in the barrel of meal and the cruse of oil somewhere else. Let us bless the generous sympathy which has known all our wandering through this great wilderness!

But I must pass on. We have had, also, what is better than this during our 40 years—*the special Presence of God.* “These forty years the Lord your God has been with you.” Adored be His name for that! He has not been ashamed to be with us though we have been despised and ridiculed. Whenever we have prayed we have had audience with Him. When we have worked, we have seen His mysterious hand working with us. When we have trembled, we have felt the tender arms sustaining us. When we have been in bodily pain, He has made our bed in our sickness. When we have felt the fiery furnace of trial, He has kept us alive amidst the glowing coals, delivering us from even the *smell* of fire by His own Presence. The best of all is God with us, and in this sign we conquer!

Again, we have had much cause to bless the Lord for *the abundance of His supplies.* Note those four words, “You have lacked nothing.” Some things which we could have wished for we have not received and we are glad they were denied us. Children would have too many sweets if they could and then they could become ill. We have not been pampered with dangerous dainties, but we have received necessities and have lacked nothing. Walking on in the path of Providence, trusting in the Lord, what have we lacked? We have known a few pinches, even as the children of Israel lacked water for the moment, but very soon were refreshed with water from the Rock. We may have needed bread for an hour, as they did when they were wicked enough to say, “Has the Lord brought us out of Egypt that we may die in the wilderness?” but the clouds, before long, dropped with a mysterious shower of food for them! And before long Providence has supplied us, also.

Our times of straitness have been occasions for appeal to the faithful promise and we have never appealed in vain. “You have lacked nothing.” “No good thing will God withhold from them that walk uprightly.” Everything that would be, in the fullest sense, a “good thing,” God has given us! If it would be a good thing that we should never again be

tempted. If it were a good thing that the devil were buried. If it were a good thing for us to go to Heaven at once—we should have all these things! But then there are certain far-reaching purposes to be answered—and to reach them the Lord makes even evils work for the highest good in the ultimate issues of His grand designs. We ought to magnify the Lord that we have lacked nothing. Oh for a song of praise for 40 years of mercies—some of you can say 60 and 70 years of mercies! Praise Him, all you saints! “Bless the Lord, O my Soul, and all that is within me, bless His holy name!”

II. But now, Brothers and Sisters, we must take the second head, which is—forty years in the wilderness should teach us much of service for the PRESENT. I do not say that it will do so, for we do not all grow wiser as we grow older, but it *ought* to be so. Some of us were born with fools’ caps which we find hard to pull off. Folly is bound up in the heart of many a man and it takes much of the rod to whip it out of him. Experience is a noble teacher, but we are dull scholars. But, at any rate, we ought to have learned to *continue trusting in God*. After 40 years of the goodness of your Covenant God, do you mean to look to an arm of flesh, my Brethren?

You have been so kindly treated by your Master and Savior, would you now leave Him for earthly friendship? Do you need a better God? Do you desire a better confidence? Merchants generally continue in that business which pays them well, for they feel that they might go elsewhere and fare worse. “Return unto your rest, O my Soul, for the Lord has dealt bountifully with you.” Plow this field, Brother, you will never reap such a harvest anywhere else. Dig in this mine—there is no such gold elsewhere, for the gold of this land is good, and its wealth brings no sorrow with it. As Boas said to Ruth, so I say to you, “Glean not in any other field.” When Noah was in the ark the Lord shut him in—may He shut you in so fast that you may never leave your confidence in Jesus. “Trust in the Lord forever.”

You have found yourselves so blessed and benefited by trusting in Him up to now, stand fast in it and be not moved away from the hope of your calling. Be not so foolish, having been in the Spirit, as to seek to be made perfect by the flesh! Having walked so far, and so safely, by faith, do not attempt to walk by sight, or by the deeds of the Law. Having found that to trust in the Lord is better than to put confidence in princes, do not fawn at the feet of the proud. You have lived well enough upon the bread of your Father’s house, do not desire the delicate morsels of those who please the flesh. Stand fast in the liberty in which Christ has made you free and shun the yoke of bondage. You should at least have learned this from 40 years’ experience of the blessedness of resting in the Lord.

Experience should also give us *greater ease in confiding in the Lord*. Divine Grace has given you, in very deed, a real second nature, and this, by use, should have grown stronger and more prevalent. Faith is an untried path when we begin, but after so many years of testing God in all sorts of ways, in all kinds of circumstances, it ought now to be as easy to confide in the Lord as it is for a child to trust in a tender parent. Is it so? I fear not. Our long-tried confidence in God ought not now to be staggered by a little difficulty, as it was at the first. When fresh-water sailors first go to sea, every capful of wind frightens them. And if the vessel lurches a little, they cry, “She will certainly roll over.” But the old sailor, who knows what a storm means, thanks God for the wind, for it will drive the ship more rapidly into port! He never minds a lurch or two—he has his sea legs by this time!

And so men who have been blessed of God for 40 years ought to be equally at ease. We should be able to say, “I do trust Him and I will. I must believe Him—why should I doubt Him?” Nothing has ever occurred, as far as I am concerned, for 40 years, which could justify me in a mistrust of my God. And if, beloved Brethren, you and I never doubt our God till we have a reason to, we shall dwell in the unbroken rest of faith! Let the roots of faith take stronger hold, that like a cedar in Lebanon it may smile at the tempest. Forty years of Divine faithfulness should teach us, also, a *surer, quicker, calmer and more joyous expectation of immediate aid in all times of strait and trial*—we should learn not to be flurried and worried because the herds are cut off from the stall and the harvest is withered, for we know from abundant proofs that, “The Lord will provide.”

Have we come to a dead lift? Let us bless God for it, for now He will make bare His arm! He would have left you to lift your load if you could have lifted it, but now your extremity has come, His opportunity has come, also. I am often glad when I feel that none but my Lord can carry me through, for I am certain of His help. If we have, still, a batch of dough in the kneading trough which we brought out of Egypt, the windows of Heaven will not yet be opened. But when the last little cake has been baked, the manna will fall around the camp. As long as we can feel the bottom of the river we have not reached the best waters to swim in. When the barley loaves and the few small fishes are all broken, then the miracle of multiplying begins. My Brothers and Sisters, watch and wait for the Lord, and *expect* Him as confidently as

you look for light at the hour of dawn. Far sooner may the sun forget his rising than the Lord forget His promise to succor His people in the hour of need. “My Soul, wait you only upon God, for my expectation is from Him.”

Forty years of blessing should teach each of us *to believe in holy activity*. “The Lord your God has blessed you in all the works of your hands.” Some people believe in God’s blessing the dreams and theories of their *heads* and their prayers are unattended by action. They believe in His blessing them when they are scheming and putting fine plans on paper, or when they meet at a conference to talk about how to do Christian work. I believe in God’s blessing the actual *works* of our hands—He waters not the seed which we *talk* of sowing, but that which we actually *scatter*. If people believed in this and just did one tenth of what they propose, it would be much better than the endless leagues of tasking and religious dissipation which threaten to become the bane of the Church. The schemes for evangelizing districts, towns, cities and the whole world, are so very numerous that there is no need to make any more—and were half the time thus vainly spent given to diligent *labor*—there would be much more of a blessing bestowed upon the sons of men!

Meet and confer by all means, but do not think that this is a very great matter for congratulation. The real winning of souls is far better. In business you will find, as a rule, that you will not get much more than you really work for. And you will find, in the things of God, that the blessing comes to diligence, zeal, earnestness and painstaking, for God blesses the works of our hands. Men of 40, it is time for us to be fully at work! Moses was 40 years old when he went down to visit his brethren in Egypt. Then he tried to turn, to practical use, the former 40 years of education in Pharaoh’s court—and though he had to wait 40 more years—it was no fault of his.

Joshua said, “Forty years was I when Moses sent me to spy out the land.” You cannot hope to live as long as these men did and, therefore, it is time to begin earnest work, for you are in your prime and will never be more fit for usefulness. If you have not begun before, let your consecration be at its fullest today. The Lord has blessed what you have done with a right motive—will it not be well to do more? Men in trade, when they find they make gains, increase their business. And when we find God blesses us in what we do, let us do more for Him! We must not slacken our zeal—it is a dreadful thing when men begin to do less while their natural force is unabated—it looks as if their hearts were growing cold. How commonly do we hear people say, “We have served an apprenticeship at work and now we will leave the younger folks to go on.”

Just when you begin to be capable of doing the work well you leave it—and the Lord has to be served by another set of makeshifts. Man alive! Stick to your work as long as you are alive! Surely, work for Jesus deserves our most mature and best instructed years—and it ought not to be left to the mere boys and girls. The young people deserve great credit for taking to the work so heartily, but surely men and women in their prime are none too good to be enlisted, and the fullness of their strength is not too much to expect for Jesus! Brothers and Sisters, 40 years’ experience ought to have taught us to *avoid many of the faults into which we fell in our early days*. It is a great pity when advancing age teaches men to avoid their *virtues* rather than their *follies*. It is not at all unusual for zeal to grow chill as men advance in life. “Ah,” says the Brother, “I am not so hot-headed as I was.” No, Brother, nor yet so *hot-hearted*.

“Ah,” says another, “I was very zealous in my time.” Is not this, also, your time? Show us, *now*, what your boasted zeal was like, will you? We should be glad to see a specimen of it! Are you not ashamed to confess that you are backsliding in heart? Can you bear the prospect of taking your flight when your heart is in a wintry condition? As you come nearer Heaven ought you not to be more heavenly? A zeal which becomes weaker in proportion to our age looks very much like a merely animal excitement which decays with nature. The earnestness of Divine Grace defies the decline of years and it brings forth fruit in old age to show that the Lord is upright. No, we must learn not to avoid excellencies, but to avoid follies! And where we have burned our fingers once, we must not burn them again, but keep clear of what we now discover to have been excrescences, though perhaps at the time we thought them beauties.

May God grant, dear Friends, in all of us, that, as the Israelites which came out of Egypt died in the wilderness, little by little at each stopping place, so in us may the old Egyptian nature daily die and be buried. Have you ever thought of it? The march of the children of Israel could have been tracked in the wilderness by their graves—there remained a cemetery wherever there had been an encampment. Blessed be God, our march to Heaven may be traced by graves, too, for we die daily if we are in a right state and the old man is crucified with Christ, and we obey the command, “mortify, therefore, your members which are upon the earth.” Blessed shall the day be when the last “grave shall have been dug and

the last evil passion shall have been buried forever, and the new race—the new Israel—shall enter into the promised land!

Beloved, there is another thing which 40 years suggest to me. You will have observed that the text mentions twice “The Lord your God.” All through the chapter it is always that—“Jehovah your God.” Here we have mention of His Covenant relationship in which He is ever most dear to us. Shall we not, at this time, *renew our own personal covenant and take our God to be ours afresh?* We read that Isaac was 40 years old when he married Rebecca. Let us have a new wedding day, ourselves, and give ourselves over again to the Husband of our souls, even Jesus the Well-Beloved. Are you tired of your Lord, any of you? Do you wish to sue for a divorce? “No,” you say, “No, no. But would God I were more enamored of Him, and that my whole self were more completely His.” Let this be a day of re-consecration—

*“Tis done—the great transaction’s done!
I am my Lord’s and He is mine:
He drew me and I followed on,
Charmed to confess the voice Divine.
High Heaven that heard the solemn vow,
That vow renewed shall daily hear,
Until in life’s latest hour I bow,
And bless in death a bond so dear.”*

May that be the case with each one of us. May we offer ourselves anew to Jehovah this day and take Father, Son and Holy Spirit to be our God forever and ever!

III. A great deal more might be said, but we have not time and, therefore, we must go on to the third head, which concerns THE FUTURE. Having come so far on our journey as to have reached 40 years, we are bound to feel a powerful influence upon us as to the future. How? I will borrow our remarks from the context. Read in the second chapter, second verse, “And the Lord spoke unto me, saying, You have compassed this mountain long enough: turn you northward.” What way was northward, then? Why, toward Canaan! Forty years wandering up and down in the wilderness is enough, now turn your faces towards Canaan and *march heavenward.*

Beloved Friends, it is time we all had our faces turned heavenward more completely. We have not always had our conversation in Heaven as we should have. Some of our faculties have been taken up with inferior things and we have looked towards Egypt. But we have compassed this mountain long enough—it is time, now, that we concentrate all our powers and turn them all straight away to the Zion which is above, and to the innumerable company of angels, and to the spirits of the just made perfect! Our window should now be opened towards Jerusalem! Forty years of the world, why it is 40 years of banishment! And, as we are soon to have done with it, let us up and away to the hills of frankincense!

They tell me that when sailors, years ago, used to go to India, they would give as a toast when they left, “To our friends astern.” But when they had reached half way on the voyage they changed it—it was, “To our friends ahead.” When we get to 40 we may reckon we are probably more than mid-way on our voyage. We are bound, therefore, to remember our friends ahead. We have a large company waiting for us of dear ones that have gone before us. Indeed, the aged have a majority of their friends on the other side of the Jordan. Let us salute them—

*“Even now by faith we join our hands
With those that went before,
And greet the blood-besprinkled bands
Upon the eternal shore.”*

Let us pledge our friends ahead and, from now on let us forget the things that are behind and press forward to that which is before—leaving earth and earthly matters more and more—and yielding ourselves more fully to the cords which draw us towards the celestial country. Let us begin more fully that holy, happy, praiseful life which is akin to that of Heaven! Is not this a good suggestion? The time past may suffice us to have worked the will of the flesh, now let us cry, “heavenward, ho!” Pull up the anchor, spread the sails and let us go away to the fair country where Jesus has gone before us!

The next thing we should learn is *indifference to this world’s heritage.* The next verse says, “You are to pass through the coast of your brethren, the children of Esau, which dwell in Seir, and they shall be afraid of you; take you good heed unto yourselves, therefore: meddle not with them; for I will not give you of their land, no, not so much as a foot breadth;

because I have given Mount Seir unto Esau for a possession.” Esau sold his heritage and had his mess of pottage—let him have it— you keep the birthright and never think of putting your spoon into his mess. The world is for worldlings. What do you want with it? God does not intend you to have your portion in *this* life—why do you lust after it? He has appointed a better rest for you—are you not content to have it so? Perhaps the Israelites would have liked to have taken Edom. “No,” says God, “Edom is not yours. Canaan is yours. Go on—do not meddle with Esau’s cities.”

When you see worldlings very happy in their mirth, do not envy them! Let them have their portion. I never envy a horse his oats and his beans—he likes them and I could not eat them—why should I wish to be a dog in the manger? There are pleasures in this world for men of the world. Poor things, let them have them. As for you, you do not need them and cannot enjoy them! Let them alone and do not meddle with them. If you can bless them, do so, but by no means allow them to imagine that you envy them, for your position is infinitely better than theirs. Better to be God’s dog than the devil’s darling. The bad estate of the ungodly is far below our lowest condition. When we consider their end, any little envy which might arise at the sight of their prosperity will turn to horror at their doom.

Let us learn from the past to cultivate *independence of spirit*. “You shall buy meat of them for money, that you may eat. And you shall also buy water of them for money, that you may drink.” They were not to plunder the country, or make imperious demands. Neither were they to act as paupers and beg anything from Edom. What they needed they were to pay for in good money. The Edomites, no doubt, thought them a mob of escaped slaves, as poor as poverty itself, half starved and miserable. They were to let them see that they were nothing of the kind. They were to pay in full for all they had. It is a grand thing when a man can exhibit the princely independence which Abraham showed towards the king of Sodom. That little potentate said, “Give me the persons and take the goods to yourself.” “No,” says Abraham, “not I, lest you should say, I have made Abraham rich, I will not take a thread or even a shoe lace from you.”

No, Brothers and Sisters, if a man has been helped of God to live for 40 years, lacking nothing, and has walked uprightly, surely it would now be a scandalous thing if he were to do anything whatever which would be questionable as to integrity, or might savor of confidence in man. He is, indeed, a man of God who has learned to walk uprightly and no longer leans upon the creature, nor practices policy to win his way. “Ah,” said a minister to me, “if I were to preach in your bold style I should lose some of my richest people and offend the rest.” And if he did, would he not have an easy conscience? And is not that worth more than money? The minister who cares for any man’s opinion when he is doing his duty is unworthy of his office!

The servant of God must not be the servant of men. The only man whom God will bless is he who fears no man’s face and resolves that whether he offends or pleases, he will clear his soul from the blood of all men—

*“Fearless myself, a dying man,
Of dying man’s esteem,
I preach as though
I might never preach again—
A dying man to dying men.”*

Have the Israelites lived for forty years on manna, and shall they bow before the Edomites, and like paupers cry, “Please give us bread”? No, the favored feasters at Heaven’s table can afford to say, “We will pay you, we will owe you nothing.” God give you independence of spirit, my Brethren! Many have forgotten what it means—they will do anything for the sake of custom, or credit, or to get into society—and if they grow rich they can no longer attend a Non-conformist place of worship! For the sake of being patted on the back by *nobodies* they give up their fathers’ religion and renounce their principles, if, indeed, they ever had any!

Once again, after 40 years in the wilderness God would have His people learn *generosity of spirit*. The Edomites were very much afraid of the Israelites, and would, no doubt, have bribed them to let them alone. But Moses, in effect, says, “Do not take anything from them. You have no need to do so, for you have never lacked anything and God has been with you. They are afraid of you, you might take what you pleased from them, but do not touch even the water from their wells without payment.” Oh, that we had a generous spirit, that we were not for oppressing others in any degree whatever, feeling that we have too much already given us by God to be needing to tax any man for our own gain! The spirit of *freedom from murmuring* should be in us after 40 years of blessing!

Jarchi tells us that this exhortation meant that they were not to pretend to be poor. You know how many do so when it is likely to save their pockets. When the tribes came to the Edomites they were not to say to them, “We are poor people

and have no money. You must not charge too much for the water, for we cannot afford to pay you at full rates.” No, no, no! It must not be! Supplied by the infinite God, the children of Heaven dare not pretend to be poor! Yet we find professors doing this all the time! If they have a very good business year, they say, “We have done very middling.” And if trade is rather dull, they cry, “Things are at a dreadful pass! Trade is decreasing, we cannot make a living at all.” Very seldom do I meet with a man who cheerfully confesses, “the Lord is blessing and prospering me and I am perfectly content. I want for nothing but more Divine Grace with which to bless the Lord all day long.”

This is the kind of talk for Christian men! They are princes, let them speak a princely language. To grumble and complain is like a rich man’s putting on old and slovenly garments that he may deceive by the presence of need and escape from bearing his due share of the public burdens. The Holy Spirit enables the Believer to boast in the Lord and glory in His name. I am not going to give my Master a bad name. He has treated me infinitely better than I ever expected or deserved! He is a good God. I feel it to be a good thing to live, since He has accepted me in Christ—and a blessed thing to be on earth—because the Holy Spirit enables me to serve Jesus. I am not going to stand here and find fault with my Lord, or represent myself as a poor miserable wretch, oppressed by a hard taskmaster. My Lord has been good and only good, to me! And I will praise and magnify His name. Where we are poor let us confess it, but where God, in His infinite Grace has made us rich in Christ Jesus, let us glory in it!

Lastly, we ought, for the future, to show *more confidence in God* if we have had 40 years of His love—we should have more confidence in working for Him that He will bless us, more confidence as to our personal weakness that He will strengthen us, more confidence as to the unknown future that through the great and terrible wilderness He will be with us—and that through the last cold stream He will still be our companion! We should have more confidence that we shall behold the light of His Countenance and more confidence as to the supply of all our needs, for as we have lacked nothing, so all things shall be freely supplied till we cross the river and eat the old corn of the land. To gather all up in one word, “Bless the Lord, O my Soul, and all that is within me, bless His holy name!”

Would God you were all His people! Would God you all trusted Him for all things, for those who do so shall find good. The Lord bless you, for Christ’s sake. Amen.

PORTION OF SCRIPTURE READ BEFORE SERMON—Deuteronomy 8.
HYMNS FROM “OUR OWN HYMN BOOK”—PSALM 23 (VERSION III), 152, 214.

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