



The Burning Bush—Online article archive

“Refreshing rain in a weary wilderness”



The synopsis of a sermon preached by Rev. Ivan Foster in Kilskeery Free Presbyterian Church on Lord's Day evening, May 25th, 2003.

“Thou, O God, didst send a plentiful rain, whereby thou didst confirm thine inheritance, when it was weary,” Psalm 68:9.

This psalm is filled with references to the wilderness journeys of Israel in the days of Moses. It begins with the cry that signalled that Israel was on the march again. “Let God arise, let his enemies be scattered: let them also that hate him flee before him,” Verse 1. Compare this with Numbers 10:33-36. “And they departed from the mount of the LORD three days’ journey: and the ark of the covenant of the LORD went before them in the three days’ journey, to search out a resting place for them. And the cloud of the LORD was upon them by day, when they went out of the camp. And it came to pass, when the ark set forward, that Moses said, Rise up, LORD, and let thine enemies be scattered; and let them that hate thee flee before thee. And when it rested, he said, Return, O LORD, unto the many thousands of Israel.” The march of Israel through the wilderness was a wonderful picture of the pilgrimage upon which every child of God is presently engaged. A study of the Bible’s record of the period of the wilderness wanderings will always repay the Christian.

Consider our text.

I. THE CHRISTIAN IS ON A JOURNEY TO HEAVEN

The text is set in the context of Israel’s journey to the promised land.

1. The marching Israelites, like the Christian, were once slaves. “God setteth the solitary in families: he bringeth out those which are bound with chains,” verse 6. Israel in Egypt is a perfect picture of the state of every unconverted person. You may argue that point and deny that you are a slave, my unconverted friend, but God says you are. You are a slave to sin and Satan. Hear these words of Christ as He announces His commission from His Father. “The Spirit of the Lord GOD is upon me; because the LORD hath anointed me to preach good tidings unto the meek; he hath sent me to bind up the brokenhearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives, and the opening of the prison to them that are bound,” Isa 61:1. When He began His ministry, the Saviour turned to these words in the book of Isaiah and told the people in the synagogue in Nazareth: “This day is this scripture fulfilled in your ears,” Luke 4:21. On another occasion He said; “And ye shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free,” John 8:32. Jesus Christ came as the great Emancipator for man is a slave to sin. The Hebrews marching to Canaan could have shown the marks of their slavery upon their backs, marks left by the Egyptian lash. Likewise, every converted sinner bears the marks in their life of their former days in sin when they were ruled over by the lusts of the flesh.

2. The deliverance of the sinner was a direct intervention of the Lord. The Lord Himself undertook the task. “. . . He bringeth out those which are bound with chains,” Psalm



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68:6. Salvation is the work of God and not of ourselves. The Hebrews did not organise their own escape from Egypt. No, it was the Lord who brought them out on the night the Passover lamb was slain and its blood put upon the doorposts and lintels of the Hebrew homes. What a picture that event presents of the death of Christ upon the cross accomplishing deliverance for His people! There is still deliverance for all those who will place themselves beneath the protecting, saving blood of Christ.

3. The Saviour leads the way to heaven. "O God, when thou wentest forth before thy people, when thou didst march through the wilderness," Psalm 68:7. The Lord Jesus is the Good Shepherd Who leads His people to heaven. Of Christ it is said ". . . the sheep hear his voice: and he calleth his own sheep by name, and leadeth them out. And when he putteth forth his own sheep, he goeth before them, and the sheep follow him: for they know his voice," John 10:3-4. Again, the same truth is stated in John 10:27. "My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me." So it is for each child of God today. They are following Christ through the wilderness of this world on their way to heaven.

II. THE MARCH TO HEAVEN IS A WEARY ONE

Christians get weary on this path.

1. Because of the terrain we pass through. We are passing through the wilderness, verse 7. The word wilderness means "waste place." There is little to comfort the child of God in this world. It is a place of tribulation. The Saviour warns His people of this in John 16:33. There He says, "In the world ye shall have tribulation." Literally, the word means "under pressure." The apostles also repeated this warning. "For verily, when we were with you, we told you before that we should suffer tribulation; even as it came to pass, and ye know," 1 Thessalonians 3:4. "Yea, and all that will live godly in Christ Jesus shall suffer persecution," 2 Timothy 3:12.

2. Because of the burdens that must be borne. Of all the people in the world at that time, Israel's lot was the most difficult. While other nations had their settled life, their farms and dwellings, their security and comforts, the Israelite carried his possessions on his back and dwelt in the burning wilderness in tents. They were surrounded by enemies who frequently sniped at them. "Remember what Amalek did unto thee by the way, when ye were come forth out of Egypt; how he met thee by the way, and smote the hindmost of thee, even all that were feeble behind thee, when thou wast faint and weary; and he feared not God," Deuteronomy 25:17,18. Christians are still sniped at and misrepresented by the world. The witness of the Christian is the greatest benefit that society enjoys and yet the gospel is a hated message and the messengers are despised. As Christ was opposed and that without reason, so this world detests the believer. That makes the world a weary place.

3. Because of the weakness we show. Our rebellion against God makes our journey all the more wearisome. Indeed, it was the sin of the Israelite that prolonged his stay in the wilderness. Their refusal to believe that God could deliver them from the Canaanites, who occupied the promised land, resulted in their being punished by wandering in the wilderness for forty years while that unbelieving generation died. Were we but to maintain obedience, then how different would be our journey! Our pilgrimage to heaven would be that



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experience depicted in the Song of Solomon 8:5. “Who is this that cometh up from the wilderness, leaning upon her beloved?” What a picture of sweet comfortableness! So it would be for us, were we only obedient and submissive to Christ.

III. WE ARE CARED FOR BY THE LORD DURING OUR JOURNEY

“Thou, O God, didst send a plentiful rain, whereby thou didst confirm thine inheritance, when it was weary.”

1. He confirms us. The word means “establishes”. He comes with refreshment for the soul when He sees us weary and tired. We in this part of the world have little idea how welcome rain is to the wilderness traveller, dwelling as we do in an area where we think we get far too much rain!

2. This He does for we are His inheritance. He purchased us with His own blood. “Take heed therefore unto yourselves, and to all the flock, over the which the Holy Ghost hath made you overseers, to feed the church of God, which he hath purchased with his own blood,” Acts 20:28. The wanderers are God’s purchase, His heritage. “But ye are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, an holy nation, a peculiar people; that ye should shew forth the praises of him who hath called you out of darkness into his marvellous light,” 1 Peter 2:9. How precious to God is that peculiar, that purchased people, bought with Christ’s own blood!

3. Our weariness prompts His attention. “In all their affliction he was afflicted, and the angel of his presence saved them: in his love and in his pity he redeemed them; and he bare them, and carried them all the days of old,” Isaiah 63:9. The Good Shepherd went out into the wilderness to search for the lost sheep, touched by the dangers, the weariness that the sheep would have been enduring. Dear Christian,

Jesus knows all about your struggles;

He will guide till the day is done.

There’s not a Friend like the lowly Jesus,

No not one, no not one.

IV. THE CARE THE LORD BESTOWS IS BOUNTIFUL

It is likened unto rain. What a picture of God’s grace! This verse particularly encouraged my heart regarding the need for revival in the church today. I said to myself, “Surely God knows the weariness there is amongst His flock as they are borne down with trouble and sin and strife. Surely, He will visit us with refreshing showers in order to confirm us again.” Ought we not so to pray for revival today? Consider God’s blessing.

1. It comes directly from heaven. It came down without man’s assistance or man’s mediation. Man can neither start it nor stop it!

2. It is enjoyed by all. All may avail of the showers of grace. It falls upon the wicked as



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well as the good. "That ye may be the children of your Father which is in heaven: for he maketh his sun to rise on the evil and on the good, and sendeth rain on the just and on the unjust," Matthew 5:45. May God visit His church again with blessing that will be enjoyed by all.

3. It is highly effective. Nothing refreshes nature like the rain. The gardener will tell you that no hosepipe can water plants as well as the rain from heaven. Nothing can refresh the people of God as the rain of revival grace. The gimmicks, well intended or not, which men are prone to introduce as alternatives for the power and grace of the Holy Ghost, are very poor substitutes indeed.

4. It is given abundantly. It is a "plentiful" rain. As Christ fed the five thousand and there remained twelve basketfuls over, so is His supply still today. He can more than meet the needs of His people at this hour. Christian, look to Him and no other.

5. It was timely. "When it was weary." At just the right time God will move to the aid of His people.

Encouragement

What an encouragement this is for us to pray for such an intervention. Is not the church weary? Is there not a groaning under the burden and heat of the day? Indeed, is there not a danger of many becoming discouraged and seeking another way through this world and forsaking the Lord? I believe there is and therefore we should plead with God for the rain that He has been pleased to send in former times of weariness.

Blessed thirst

May Christians seek that "thirst" which will prompt God's intervention with rain from heaven, of which the prophet Isaiah spoke: "I will pour water upon him that is thirsty, and floods upon the dry ground: I will pour my spirit upon thy seed, and my blessing upon thine offspring: And they shall spring up as among the grass, as willows by the water courses," Isaiah 44:3-4.

Pentecost

May God be pleased to grant to His people an experience of the fulness of grace like that enjoyed on the day of Pentecost. "And on my servants and on my handmaidens I will pour out in those days of my Spirit," Acts 2:18.