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THE TWENTY-SEVENTH PSALM

THIS is a Psalm of Psalms, stimulating, fortifying, soul-uplifting. For direction, comfort, and inspiration to the persecuted and sorely beset child of God it stands peerless among its fellows.

The Ode contains the quintessence of the entire Psalter. Every line of its fourteen verses shines with a transcendent lustre, and speaks home to the heart. No one who has read its message of cheer and counsel when surrounded by the hosts of Satan, and thereby in imminent peril, can ever forget how its call of encouragement then sounds as a veritable voice from heaven to his soul.

Its design is to excite that unwavering trust in Jehovah's faithfulness and implicit reliance on the power of His gracious Presence which will ensure endurance of spirit and consequent victory over the malignant forces of evil. The service of God by its very nature entails holy warfare. The world hates those who are not of it. "All that will live godly in Christ Jesus shall suffer persecution." "We must through much tribulation enter into the kingdom." "If we suffer with Him we shall also reign with Him." Whence we have in David's militant effusion the song *par excellence* of the Christian warrior waging resistance to his enemies, who are also the enemies of Jehovah. We watch therefore with keen interest how dexterously he wields against them his two-edged sword of praise and prayer.

The title of the Psalm gives no hint of the occasion on which it was composed. The reason is obvious. Written by the sweet singer of Israel under the inspiration of the Spirit it was intended for the Church generally. It speaks to all similarly placed. To no set period or particular contingency can its exemplary instruction be confined. The saint in every age claims it as his own, and as he peruses its twin parallel strophes he notes that they have alike an individual, a national, and a Messianic interpretation.

The tenor of this warrior Psalm recalls the third. The situation and tone in both are remarkably similar. Between it and the thirty-first there is also a broad resemblance, though here an extended struggle and not a specific struggle is envisaged.

Then in the beautiful seventy-first we have a precious and longer statement of its import and joyful faith. For the better understanding of each, one does well to read the three consecutively.

The Name of Jehovah, the Holy One of Israel and the Saviour thereof, occurs twelve times in its fourteen verses ; that of God only once. This cannot be accidental since the glorious and fearful Name begins and ends the Psalm. It likewise closes the first strophe and opens the second. God is one, but He makes known His essential saving nature under this distinctive appellation. The number twelve, having reference to the twelve tribes of Israel, indicates nationality and completeness. The theme of the Psalm subjectively and objectively is altogether of salvation—all perfect and all complete through the Presence and operation of Israel's Saviour. In the New Testament the same is He who styles Himself, "Alpha and Omega", "The First and the Last", saying "I am He that liveth and was dead, and behold I am alive for evermore, and have the keys of hell and of death".

The position which the Psalm holds in the Psalter arrests attention. That determines clearly its basic interpretation. With the twenty-fifth and twenty-sixth it forms a trilogy which closely links itself to a preceding trilogy composed of the twenty-second, twenty-third and twenty-fourth. The *Selah* at the end of the twenty-fourth marks the link.

These six Psalms show a progressive doctrinal relation. The latter three have their ground or spring in the former three, for these foreshadow the Cross, Resurrection, and Ascension of the Lord Jesus Christ. The twenty-second, verses 1-21, speaks of the Cross, and verses 22-31 of the Resurrection. At this juncture the twenty-third performs the function of a *Selah*—a pause and call for reflection on what has gone before, and for attention on what is to follow. It is an ecstatic soliloquy on the glorious outcome of the prophesied Cross and Resurrection, and the accruing relationship into which thereat the trusting soul is brought with Jehovah. He is now his Shepherd-King with all that this involves in the way of blessing, protection, and eternal life. Following this becoming interlude or symphony, swell the melodious notes of the twenty-fourth which describe so triumphantly the ascent of the King of glory into the Sanctuary of His holiness. Wherefore the second trilogy assumes the

redemptive work of the Saviour with its declaration of righteousness and salvation.

Prayer, worship, and service naturally succeed this Divine salvation. The twenty-fifth Psalm, alphabetic and didactic in construction, outlines for the sinner (verses 1-7), for the saint (verses 8-14), for the servant (verses 15-21) a model prayer of great intrinsic beauty and exquisite integration, closing with a verse that makes it also applicable to the nation. The twenty-sixth portrays an object-lesson of sabbatic comportment in the House of God where the worshipper seeks justification on the pleas (1) that his eyes are ever on the Divine mercy and truth and (2) that he has separated himself from the seats and congregation of evil men which he hates, but loves instead the habitation of Jehovah's House, the place where His glory dwells. His sole desire is to compass Jehovah's altar in sincerity and publish with thanksgiving His wondrous works. The twenty-seventh in rotation affords a specimen conflict of life or death with the arch-enemy of souls. Accordingly it, with its companions, draws its inspiration, assurance, and resolute action from their foregoing trio.

More than one writer has averred that there is nothing of theology in the New Testament which does not already exist in germ in the Psalms. The assertion is true and worthy of all acceptation, but, as it stands, incomplete. The same applies as much to the Pentateuch which verily is the ground root, or genesis, of their lofty thought, sublime teaching, and heavenly doctrine.

Take the Ten Words uttered by the Divine Voice from Mount Sinai, which form the text of the Old Covenant of salvation. They are given in two tables of five in each. These comprise the basic principles of religion and ethics. So complete and comprehensive in substance and cast, so progressive in their instruction and enlightenment, and so reinforced or energised by the virtue and efficacy of the great Paschal Sacrifice are they that the Church had in them a perfect system of worshipful and moral truth which made the heart of the Pentateuch.

The Words, or commandments often so called, shine in their own light. Being a transcript of the Divine character each one finds an echo in the human consciousness. Their substance is purely spiritual; their object wholly redemptive. The chosen people taught by the Spirit of God attained to a perspicacious

understanding of their Divine import as formulated in the Tabernacle ritual. The commandments, statutes, and judgments operated conjointly as illuminating, converting testimonies of the sovereign holiness and loving mercy of Jehovah in His sin-cleaning, soul-quickening salvation. Moreover, by virtue of their inherent excellence they served simultaneously to preserve in the earth against the attack of corrupt systems of thought, a knowledge of unadulterated Divine truth.

Of this the Psalms afford convincing proof. Everywhere they shine with that supreme light which is not of earth, or sky, or sea, but from above. Most surely do they attest "how utterly false is any notion that the religion of Israel was a formal system of external rites and ceremonies" (Kirkpatrick). Full well the children of Abraham apprehended the inner and spiritual meaning of their Mosaic commandments contained in ordinances. What indeed are the Psalms but the celestial fruit of the Tree of the Pentateuch—the Tree of Life—and with what delight have saints in all ages sat down under its shadow, and found how sweet this fruit was to their taste?

Note how the warrior Psalm manifests its Sinaitic peculiarity. Is it not an epic of light and darkness through which the glory of Jehovah reveals its brightness to His covenant people? The thick clouds and threatening blackness in which He enshrouds Himself become the symbol of His Presence. It is in trial and trouble that He makes all His goodness and mercy pass by for those who call upon Him. These are the constituents of His glory. The Sinaitic revelation is ever repeating itself. "Around the history of the Church when dark clouds of persecution hover, and gloom settles down, still the Lord is there; and though men meanwhile see not the bright light behind the clouds it bursts forth in due course to the confusion of the enemies of the Gospel" (Spurgeon).

A further evidence of its Divine character is seen in its two strophes. Unitedly they evince that love and fear, the leading springs of human conduct and action, when regulated and directed by the will of God, make the co-ordinate principles of genuine religion. David's exultant love for Jehovah is seasonably tempered with his fear of Jehovah. When he rejoices it is with trembling. The fear is that of committing sin. While a knowledge of God's goodness and salvation begets joy and thanksgiving, the vision of His holiness most surely begets

solemnity and veneration. Hence he who does not fear God cannot love Him, or worship at His throne of grace in the beauty of holiness. David does not abuse the Divine love by forgetting that it is mercy—altar mercy—or lose sight of his absolute dependence on Jehovah's mercy for life, salvation, and victory. If he sings it is alike of mercy and of judgment. The two are one inseparably. Jehovah is He who is glorious in holiness, fearful in praises, doing wonders. The parallel strophes underline this blend of both elements as fundamentally requisite in the approach to the Father of all mercies, and the commendation of personal piety. "Herein lay the strength of the Hebrews' religion, that in their relation to God there was a wonderful union of the deepest awe and reverence with that most intimate personal faith and love" (Strachan, *Hebrew Ideals*).

The two concluding verses give David's signature to this pattern representation of the Divine goodness and faithfulness in times of stress, trial, and danger. Had it not been for his faith in Jehovah and his waiting on Him he should have perished.

The urgent importance of the lesson he reiterates by a repeated command: "Wait on Jehovah; be of good courage and He shall strengthen thine heart: Wait, I say, on Jehovah." Yet, how frequently is it forgotten, or only half-heartedly obeyed, despite the promise: "Offer unto God thanskgiving; and pay thy vows unto the Most High: and call upon me in the day of trouble. I will deliver thee and thou shalt glorify me" (Psalm l. 14f.).

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