

DR. CHAPMAN'S SERMON

A SUNDAY DISCOURSE BY THE NOTED PASTOR-EVANGELIST.

Subject: The Nearness of God—Alphabet of Divine Love—Not Enough of God in Nature to Satisfy Our Souls—Need of the Lord's "Nearness."

NEW YORK CITY.—The Rev. J. Wilbur Chapman's sermons continue to excite the greatest interest and to give the greatest satisfaction to that large body of American people who demand a striking discourse for their weekly reading. The distinguished pastor-evangelist has prepared the following sermon for the press. It is entitled "The Nearness of God," and is preached from the text, "Thou art near, O Lord." Psalm 119: 151.

This text is taken from one of the longest Psalms in the Bible, but it is remarkable not only on account of its length, but because of its teaching. Like the celestial city it lieth four square; the height and the depth and the length and the breadth of it are the same. There is but one theme in all the Psalms and that is the word of God, and reminds one of nothing so much as a diamond which as you hold it as the light touches it from every side it sends rays to all beholders the evidences of its beauty and of its worth, and this 119th Psalm is the make-up of the word of God, for every verse except two, namely, the 122d and the 132d refer in some way to God's word, and it is mentioned either under the figure of law, or testimonies, or word, or precepts.

The writer of this Psalm must have been inspired with the word of God as he knew it. I have heard of an old Christian who meditated his way through the Bible three times. Surely this is the secret of a wholly happy life. In 1889 at the time of great political excitement William Wilberforce made this note in his diary. "I have walked this morning from Hyde Park corner repeating the 119th Psalm, and having great comfort." Martin Luther said on commenting on this Psalm, "David must have shaken every fruit tree in God's garden and gathered fruit therefrom." Like other portions of the Scripture this Psalm has been generally named. It has been called the alphabet of divine love, perhaps because of its division, because it is separated into groups of eight verses, and each group is under a letter of the Hebrew alphabet until the alphabet is exhausted. It is really the Alpha and Omega of the word of God. In the New Testament the incarnate word or Saviour is represented as the Alpha and Omega. May it not be because the alphabet has been exhausted in displaying to us His graces, and also because in the Old Testament the alphabet has been exhausted in speaking of His glorious word? It has also been called the paradise of all doctrines, and I have been amazed to see how many are here presented. Pardon, justification, sanctification, they are all here. It also has been represented as the storehouse of the Holy Spirit, for really in no part of the Bible is He more wonderfully presented, and it has been spoken of as the school of truth, for really nothing is omitted. We might lose all the rest of the Bible, but if we had this we would know God and might find our way up to Him. Through 150 verses David has been speaking of all these things and has been talking of God, when suddenly as if he were impressed with the fact that He of whom he had been speaking was near he bursts out in the cry of our text, "Thou art near, O Lord." It is a possible thing for one to preach so profoundly that he loses sight of Him of whom he speaks; or a Sunday-school teacher to teach her lesson and almost be unconscious of the presence of Christ of whom she has been teaching. It is a good thing for us all to stop again and again and say, "Thou art near, O Lord," for He is indeed nearer to us than any earthly friend.

I. Kindred texts. There are certain texts in the Scripture which are akin to the one I have chosen, as, for example, Psalm 139: 5, "The Lord is thy keeper; the Lord is thy shade upon thy right hand." If the Lord is our keeper why need we go astray, for He neither slumbers or sleeps. Psalm 34: 18 is another text, "The Lord is nigh unto them that are of a broken heart, and saveth such as he of a contrite spirit." I am sure I am speaking for you all when I say there never has been a heartache if we have accepted our discipline as He intended, that He has not been gracious's near to us. Philippians the fourth chapter and the fifth verse, the last clause, is another illustration, and is very much like the text, "Let your moderation be known unto all men. The Lord is at hand." Paul has been speaking of peace and the joy of Christian fellowship, when suddenly he speaks out like David of old, "The Lord is at hand," and immediately he begins with this sentence, "Be careful for nothing." Of course we need be careful for nothing if the Lord is at hand, for He will bear every burden with us and help us to overcome every trial. The 23d Psalm is another beautiful illustration. It has been my privilege within the past few days to sit by the death bed of a young man who may even now be passing out into the eternity, and when I told him that the end had come for him he said, "It is a long journey to make alone, is it not?" My only answer was this 23d Psalm, "Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil, for Thou art with me," and he brushed the tears out of his eyes and said, "Then I am not afraid," nor need we be at any time, for He is always with us. We learn by contrast to admire many things. Those who have studied the paintings of Sir Noel Paton must have observed that part of their peculiar beauties, by a trick of art, in their partial ugliness. There are flowers and birds,

II. He is near. There are so many ways in which He is near to us. First: In creation. It is a great mistake, however, to think that we can find enough of God in nature to satisfy our souls, for we cannot. There is a verse written by Browning, if I mistake not, in which he says something like this:

"Earth is crammed with heaven, and every bush is on fire with God." But it is a great mistake to seek to find Him only in this way. He is near to us in providences, and as a rule for the Christian God is never nearer than when we pass through our tears than in any other way, for they are like telescopes. A friend of mine was showing me a picture the other day taken with a telescope camera, in which a mountain fifteen miles away was brought so near that you could study it in minutest detail. But He is nearest, of course, in Jesus Christ.

First: He is near as a sin-forgiving God. "There is therefore now no condemnation to them which are in Christ Jesus, who walk not after the flesh, but after the Spirit." Romans 8: 1. The thought of the judgment is something awful, but let it be remembered that the word "condemnation"

tion" is the same in the Greek as "judgment," and for those who are in Christ Jesus, whatever their sins, judgment is forever past.

Second: He is near as a promise-keeping God. "For all the promises of God in Him are yea, and in Him amen, unto the glory of God by us." II Corinthians 1: 20. There is not in all the exigencies of our lives a trial that cannot be offset by a promise of help found in the Bible and these all centre in Him.

Third: He is near as a prayer-answering God. John 16: 23-24, "And in that day ye shall ask Me nothing. Verily, verily, I say unto you, whatsoever ye shall ask the Father in My name, He will give it you. Hitherto have ye asked nothing in My name; ask and ye shall receive, that your joy may be full." This is God's own word, and if our prayers have not been answered the difficulty is with ourselves.

Fourth: He is near as a gracious Father. John 14: 9-10, "Jesus saith unto him, Have I been so long time with you and yet hast thou not known Me, Philip? He that hath seen Me hath seen the Father, and how sayest thou, then, Show us the Father? Believest thou not that I am in the Father and the Father in Me? The words that I speak unto you I speak not of Myself, but the Father, that dwelleth in Me; He doeth the works." By these words Jesus wanted Philip to know when he had seen Him touch the eyes of the blind and raise the dead and comfort the sorrowing he had had a vision of the Father in His infinite love.

III.

We have lost the sense of His nearness.

First: In Genesis 28: 16, we read, "And Jacob awoke out of his sleep, and he said, Surely the Lord is in this place; and I knew it not." After Jacob had had his day of fight and his night of dreams he awakes to say, "The Lord was in this place and I knew it not," and the reason he did not know was because he was deceitful and dishonest. If we give this the right name we shall say he was sinful, but separate us from God and hide His face from us so that He not only will not hear but He cannot see. "Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God."

Second: In Exodus 3: 5, we read, "And He said, Draw not nigh hither, but off thy shoes from off thy feet, for the place whereon thou standest is holy ground." Moses had no idea that he would see God in the burning bush, for he was not expecting Him, and let it be remembered that we have failed to see Him because our minds are not set upon Him. He is on every side of us, and if we did but look for Him we should see Him at every turn of life and every hour of the day. Your position may be very unsatisfactory to you, but it is possible for you in the most menial place to see Christ just as Paul had visions of Him constantly, and yet he was only a tent maker.

Third: In Amos 3: 3, we read, "Can two walk together, except they be agreed?" and that word "agreed" in the Hebrews is betrothal, while in the Greek is "sympathy." The reason we have lost sympathy with God is because we have disagreed with Him. If we were as indifferent to Him as one to whom we were betrothed we would have been to the claim of God there would have been no marriage, and if we were as indifferent to the wife of our home as we have been to Him there would be no happy home. Oh, that we might agree with Him to-day and keep step with Him; we would see Him constantly.

IV.

He is near and He will preserve. Psalm 37: 23-25, "The steps of a good man are ordered by the Lord; and He delighteth in his way. Though he fall, he shall not be utterly cast down; for the Lord upholdeth him with His hand. I have been young, and now am old; yet have I not seen the righteous forsaken, nor his seed begging bread." It is written in the Bible and God's word is always true. Psalm 121: 3, "He will not suffer thy foot to be moved; He that keepeth thee will not slumber." We may not be conscious of His nearness, but He is near, just the same. We have some time been in a dark room all alone, nothing about us. We have touched the electric button, when suddenly we realized that the furnishings of the room are on every side of us. We were not conscious of them, but they were near, and we have lost consciousness of God, and yet if we had but time to illumine the place where we live we would see all about us the evidence of His presence, peace, pardon, love, joy. Oh, that we might live in the furnished room of God, for He is near protecting us, defending us, keeping back the pestilence, and so turning aside the arm of death from us. Trouble may come very near, but it cannot overthrow us. In Psalm 27: 2, there is a graphic description of this, "When the wicked, even mine enemies and my foes came upon me to eat up my flesh, they stumbled and fell." The Psalmist has a vision of the enemy coming fiercely against him, just about to lay his hand upon him when suddenly he stumbles and falls. Then in the 12th chapter of Acts there is a picture of Peter sleeping between the two soldiers. Herod is just about to lay hands upon him to bring him when suddenly the chain snaps and he is free. This is just like God. Trouble almost breaks our hearts, but not quite; reproach is almost dethroned, but not altogether. He will not suffer us to be cast down and utterly forsaken.

V.

What a help. If we could only get into the way of saying over and over, "Thou art near, O Lord," we should be greatly strengthened. First: It would keep our lives pure, for we would not so frequently be lost to sin if we were conscious of His nearness.

Second: It would strengthen us in the hour of temptation, to suddenly pause and say over and over, "Thou art near, O Lord," for He would immediately give us the strength to escape.

Third: It will greatly help us in trial to say, "Thou art near to me, O Lord."

It would greatly assist in the transformation of character if we but realized His nearness. Moses saw Him, and his face shone; Paul had a vision of Him and never was the same again.

It will greatly help us when the need comes, for He will then be near.

One of my friends in preaching to the soldiers in the time of the war visited a hospital, and was asked by a nurse if he would not when he had finished his service cross over to an adjoining hospital and minister to the comfort of a dying boy. He agreed to come and finished his service with the soldiers by joining with them in singing, "Jesus, Saviour, Pilot Me." When he reached the second hospital tent the nurse told him that the young soldier was dead, and he died, she said as you sang the last hymn. While you were singing it he said it with you, and this was the hymn:

"When at last I near the shore,
And the fearful breakers roar,
'Twillt me and the peaceful rest,
Then while leaning on Thy breast,
May I hear Thee say to me,
'Fear not, I will pilot thee!'"

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Mrs. MARY GORMAN CLARK.

I have been suffering from headaches ever since I was a little girl. I could never ride in a car or go into a crowded place without getting a headache and sick at my stomach. I heard about Ripans Tablets from an aunt of mine who was taking them for catarrh of the stomach. She had found such relief from their use she advised me to take them too, and I have been doing so since last October, and will say they have completely cured my headaches. I am twenty-nine years old. You are welcome to use this testimonial.

Mrs. J. BACKMISTERS.

I want to inform you, in words of highest praise, of the benefit I have derived from Ripans Tablets. I am a professional nurse and in this profession a clear head is always needed. Ripans Tablets does it. After one of my cases I found myself completely run down. Acting on the advice of Mr. Geo. Bower, Ph. G., 588 Newark Ave., Jersey City, I took Ripans Tablets with grand results.

Miss BESSIE WHELAN.

Mother was troubled with heartburn and indigestion, caused by a good many years. One day she saw a testimonial in the paper endorsing Ripans Tablets. She determined to give them a trial, was greatly relieved by their use and now takes the Tablets regularly. She keeps a few cartons Ripans Tablets in this house and says she will not be without them. The heartburn and sleeplessness have disappeared with the indigestion which was formerly so great a burden for her. Our whole family take the Tablets regularly, especially after a hearty meal. My mother in fifty years of age and is enjoying the best of health and spirits; also eats hearty meals, an impossibility before she took Ripans Tablets.

ANTON H. BLAUKER.

Reading some of the testimonials in favor of Ripans Tablets, I tried them. Ripans Tablets not only relieved but actually cured my youngster, the headaches have disappeared, bowels are in good condition and he never complains of his stomach. He is now a red, chubby-faced boy. This wonderful change I attribute to Ripans Tablets. I am satisfied that they will benefit any one (from the cradle to old age) if taken according to directions.

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