

growth in grace. And when the christian moreover remembers that he possesses these blessings in a world that is in rebellion against God, and enjoys security though a thousand enemies are ever ready to break into the fold, not sparing the flock—he will enter into the meaning of the Psalmist, when speaking of these things, he says: “*thou preparest a table before me in the presence of mine enemies; thou anointest my head with oil; my cup runneth over.*”

But I remark, in the *fourth place*, that the Psalmist teaches us that the Lord does not leave his servants when removed from the benefit of the ordinances of his appointment, they reach the gloomy valley which separates the world that is seen from that which is unseen—“*A Land of darkness like darkness itself, and of the shadow of death without any order, and where the light is darkness.*” It is true that none of us have experienced that the Lord can support us in this region—for none of us have yet passed through it—the valley of the shadow of death still lies before us—with a dark cloud resting over it. No appeal therefore, can be made to the believer’s experience that the Lord is a faithful shepherd in conducting through it. But then from the experience of God’s care of his people in the past, they confide in him for the future. Has God then at first called his people out of darkness. Has he instructed them by means of his word and the ordinances of his house.—And has he delivered them from many temptations and troubles. Are they conscious of having enjoyed the protection of the shepherd of Israel during all the time that they have been upon the earth, and is it true that whom he loves he loves unto the end? And are they afraid his power should fail, or his love wax cold at that hour when their distress excites his compassion, and their helplessness needs the support of his arm. It cannot be so. The faith of believers confirmed by the experience of numerous past deliverances and mercies, and clinging to the faithful promises of God remains unmoved in the midst of death—even as the feet of the priests of Israel of old, stood unmoved in the midst of Jordan—and they view death not in the manner the ancient Heathen viewed it, as the entrance into regions of weeping and unmitigated sorrow. But they see it only as a dark valley stretching in gloomy grandeur along the horizon of visible things—and they say with the Psalmist “*Though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death I will fear no evil for thou art with me, thy rod and*

*thy staff they comfort me;*”—“*thou wilt shew me the path of life, in thy presence is fulness of joy, at thy right hand there are pleasures for evermore.*”

Such then, my friends, are the blessings which belong to believers, even to those who learn to forsake their sins and receive Christ as their Saviour and Lord. But then it is to be remembered that all men do not partake of these blessings, for there are many who live unmindful of the great salvation. It were well, therefore, that the privileges which the pen of the sweet singer of Israel has so simply described in this divine song, might awaken such to a due estimation of their value. In this song we are not called upon to give heed to any deep argumentation, demonstrating that it must be well with those who have turned unto the Lord, and are walking in his fear and love. It is not a process of reasoning which is here employed to carry our convictions, by proving that under the government of God, it must be well with the righteous. It is a more interesting argument. It is the utterance of a grateful soul, testifying with all sincerity, its sense of the mercy and kindness of its God and Saviour. The Psalmist would wish to excite within us a holy emulation to seek after the same God—for here to use his own words, “*he makes his boast in the Lord that humble souls hearing thereof may be glad.*”

“*Choose ye this day whom ye will serve,*” he seems to say to us, “*but as for me and my house, we will serve the Lord.*” He praises God that others may join in his song of praise. Like a faithful servant he brings to us a good report of his Master’s house—bringing before us nothing but the liveliest images of peace security and joy. And when he tells us that God acts towards him the part of a tender shepherd and bountiful friend—that “*the valley of the shadow of death,*” so terrible to others brings no terrors to him—that futurity, which fills other men with fear, is contemplated by him with a confidence which rejoices in the anticipation of fresh manifestations of the divine goodness and mercy, and that the “*House of many mansions*” which Christ has prepared for his people, is to be his sure dwelling place for ever. Surely my friends, such a view of the Psalmist’s happy condition should incite all of us to seek earnestly that his God may be our God—that we may thereby be begotten to the same experience and lively hope that “*surely goodness and mercy shall follow us all the days of our lives, and our dwelling place shall be in the House of God for ever.*”—Amen. R.