

# IS THE CHURCH LIVING OR DEAD?

MR. EDITOR,—Correspondents at different times have referred to the various defects in our church system, and have suggested one and another improvement. In considering these letters and suggestions, which we find appearing not only in your paper, but in the organs of the Presbyterian Church everywhere, it has always occurred to me, that the respected writers did not hit upon the real source of the evil; nor on the only source of cure. Some writers have indeed pointed in the right direction. All of them, perhaps, would agree as to the evil and the cure were they considering the matter further. But for the most part, they seemed to deal with symptoms and discuss them, rather than go on to the discovery of the root of the matter. Take first, for example, what has exercised and is justly exercising a good many at present, a fruitless ministry. A church well equipped and well ministered to, yet in which there are few or no manifest conversions to God, a church in which the membership is almost if not altogether dead, a church which has no spiritual effect upon the community, and yet a church in which there is a well educated, well paid ministry. Now, in view of this frequent phenomenon, which is a wonder to many, some are suggesting a stricter Presbyterian oversight. Let the Presbytery go down and stir up the church, and the pastor, and reprove, rebuke, and exhort, as the occasion requires. Such a step on the part of a Presbytery would undoubtedly be of use, if there be a Presbytery that has it in its heart to do anything of the kind. But after all, what does that church and that pastor need? One thing only, that is the power of the Holy Spirit. Such a church and pastor are "dead" according to the Gospel view, and according to Professor Drummond, in which he expresses Scripture truth "a dead church certainly, a church having no reaction of the community, a church without propagative power in the world, cannot be other than a calamity to all within its borders. Such a church is an institution, first for making then for screening parasites; and instead of representing to the world the kingdom of God on earth, it is despised alike by godly and by godless men, as the refuge for fear and formalism, and the nursery of superstition." Such are many of our churches, in the judgment of many not wishing to judge unkindly. Only the Holy Spirit of God can awaken them and renew them. The baptism of power is what pastor and people need. Life, new life, real life, divine life, only this can save them from dying in the midst of their formalities and respectabilities. Let us remember that church members so-called, and orthodox pastors alike, go to hell the same as the sinners outside of the church, and to a deeper hell, if while they "have a name to live," they are still in reality "dead." We need no new human arrangement, there is no salvation in a better Presbyterianism, but only in Jesus Christ. When we get new life from Him, then our Presbyterianism will shine forth as a very good system; but without the presence of His Spirit, as we see it mostly now, it is a very undivine looking system, and a very clumsy human instrument.

ANGELOS.

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## SABBATH SCHOOL TEACHER.

### INTERNATIONAL LESSONS.

#### WAITING FOR THE LORD.

**GOLDEN TEXT.**—"I delight to do Thy will, O God!"—Ver. 8.

**TIME.**—Uncertain; but probably late in David's life.

**PARALLEL.**—Vers. 13-17, with Psa. 70: 1-5 and Vers. 6-8 are quoted in Hebrews 10: 5-9.

**Notes and Comments.**—Ver. 1. "Waiting patiently:" lit., "Waiting I waited:" implying constant, patient, unwearied waiting upon the Lord. "He inclined:" as though the suppliant was in the lowest depths and God in mercy bent down to hear his prayer.

Ver. 2. "Horrible pit:" or pit of destruction. There is associated the idea of a loud crash in the falling, and the continuance of uproar in the pit. "Miry clay:" mud at the bottom of the pit—such as that into which Jeremiah

sank and in which he would have perished, if not rescued by Ebed-Melech, Jer. 38: 7-13. "Set my feet upon a rock—established my goings:" the rock is an emblem of firmness and security, and the opposite of the deep pit and the yielding bottom.

Ver. 3. "A new song:" for a new mercy; the old song was not enough. "Many—see—fear—trust:" the Psalmist never forgets the effect of his own experience upon others—see lesson 5, ver. 13—and now the result of his own experience shall be that those who see what God hath done for him shall be brought to put their trust in his God.

Ver. 4. "Maketh the Lord his trust:" becomes a servant of Jehovah, in opposition to those who respect "the proud," that is, those who forsake God—think themselves sufficient for themselves, and live for this world alone. "Turn aside to lies:" not merely falsehoods of the lips, but of the life are included, as the worshipping of idols, the serving of false gods.

Ver. 5. "Wonderful works:" the Psalmist is not referring to the works of God in the sense of Psalm 119—the heavens, firmament, etc.; but to his Providences, interventions and manifestations of delivering power. "Thy thoughts:" plans, purposes toward us. "Cannot be reckoned:" innumerable.

Ver. 6. "Sacrifice, not desire:" God has been good to him; what return shall he render? God does not ask the bloody or the unbloody offering; only so far as they are the outcome of a loving, obedient heart are they acceptable to Him. Ps. 50: 5-8-14; 51: 16-17. "Mine ears:" are made to hear thy word; and there is the idea of obeying that has been heard—in the quotation from this Psalm in Heb. 13: 5, this clause is rendered, (following the Septuagint): "A body thou hast prepared me:" perhaps meaning that the Spiritual opening of the ear led to the consecration of the body to God.

Vers. 7-8. "Lo, I come:" the firstfruits of obedience. "in the volume written of Me," or, "Lo, I come, with a roll or book having writings concerning Me;" and the idea is that David should show his readiness to obey the will of the Lord, especially in his kingly office, fulfilling the duties therein described. (See Deut. 17: 14-20). We must not omit to point out the typical allusion to the Lord Jesus, as applied in Heb. 10. See also Luke 24: 44; John 5: 46; "I delight:" so did the Master; John 4: 34; and so do all who are His servants, filled with His spirit.

Vers. 9-10. "I reached righteousness—not concealed—great congregations:" David was concerned for the salvation of others, and spoke of God in the gatherings of the people. The whole body of the nation was regarded as a congregation. He did not "preach" in our modern sense, but continually spoke of—made manifest. Notice the five things to which David bore testimony and see how comprehensive they are: (1). *God's righteousness:* the foundation of His government. (2). *Faithfulness:* He is the Amen—the faithful and true witness—Rev. 3: 14. (3). *Love-kindness:* His marvellous loving-kindness, Psa. 17: 7. (4). *Truth:* He loves the true and is Himself truth, Psa. 15: 2. (5). *Salvation:* the last and best of all, full, complete, and eternal redemption.

Ver. 11. We have a transition here, such as we noted in the last lesson. The Psalmist, full of joy and gladness when he thinks of God—His mercy and salvation, now looks at himself, and is overwhelmed with grief at thought of his sinfulness. His iniquities have taken hold upon him, and he prays afresh: "Withhold not Thy tender mercies:" same word as "refrained" in Ver. 9. He had not refrained, and he prays that God will not refrain from him. "Continually preserve:" the experience of David has been the experience of every believer since. We need daily mercies, new every morning, repeated every evening.

Day by day the manna fell—  
O to learn this lesson well!

Ver. 12. "Innumerable evils:" to which all are subject—the evils of life, of the body and of circumstances, sorrow, sickness, pain and poverty. "Mine iniquities" the worst of all, for it is mine own undoing. To other things I may bow and say: "It is the Lord;" but it is "mine iniquities." "Not able to look up:" as though eyesight failed through anguish. Psa. 38: 10.

Ver. 13. "Be pleased:" let it be thy pleasure, to deliver me from the ever-recurring cry of the penitent.

Vers. 14-15. "Let them be ashamed—confounded—driven back—put to shame—desolate:" these utterances which appear to breathe an evil, revengeful spirit, are, after all, more of a prayer that his enemies may be defeated in their designs than that evil should fall upon them. The expressions are to be noted: "ashamed:" Psa. 35: 4-26; "driven backward:" as a defeated and routed army; "desolate:" or astonished, struck dumb with fear, Jer. 18: 15; "a:" an exclamation of mockery and triumph at the calamities that fall upon another. Psa. 35: 27.

Ver. 16. "Those that seek:" and those who seek after God, are those who would know Him, imitate and serve Him. "Rejoice:" not only in finding Thee, but in the deliverances Thou dost give to Thy servants. "Love Thy salvation:" there is a temporal and a spiritual salvation, or deliverance. That this is spiritual we see from the earlier verses of the Psalm. "Be magnified:" praised, extolled, recognised as great and glorious. Psa. 35: 27.

Ver. 17. "Poor and needy:" as we all are, pensioners on the love and care of our God, happy if we can have the assurance that David had. "The Lord thinketh upon me:" or, as Peter gives it, (1 Pet. 5: 7), "He careth for you." "No tarrying:" our faith may rest on this, that when the right time to help us comes, God will not tarry, but will help us indeed.

#### HINTS TO TEACHERS.

**Preliminary.**—You have to teach in this lesson, truths which to some extent are the results of Christian experience, and which you may think difficult to teach, so doubt that they can be understood by your scholars. That there will be difficulty in making some points plain is certain, especi-

ally if you have not passed through the experience yourself; but if, asking the aid of God's Spirit, you teach in simple faith, with an earnest desire that the truths of the lesson may have a lodgment in the minds and hearts of your scholars, you may find that you are understood far better than you hoped, and that the lesson may be a seed of blessing to many. Let your scholars first thoroughly understand what is meant by "Waiting for the Lord," the experience of David and its happy effects. We endorse the recommendation of Peloubet to read "Pilgrim's Progress," in connection, and trace the corresponding experience of Christian and David.

**Topical Analysis.**—(1) Waiting and deliverance, Vers. 1-5. (2) The true thankoffering, 6-10. (3) A prayer for deliverance from sin within and enemies without, 11-17.

On the first topic show what "waiting for the Lord" means. It is not folding our hands and expecting God to do everything for us; nor is it a waiting for a more convenient season, that we may turn and give ourselves to Him; not a car less nor an indifferent waiting. But it is a *waiting with working*; that is, we must strive to do our part in the blessing we are asking from God, be it temporal or spiritual; it is a *waiting with faith*. David believed in the "faithfulness" of God, that as He had promised, so in His own good time He would perform; in our short-sightedness we think our time and our way the only way for God to act on our behalf, but He has many ways of working, and a thousand years are with Him as a day; 2 Peter, 3: 8. Then it must be a *prayerful waiting*. David cried unto the Lord, and so when the Apostle Peter was imprisoned and was to be brought forth to death, prayer without ceasing was made by the church unto God for him; Acts, 12: 5. The waiting may be long; it may be very trying, but in God's own time, to the patient, faithful, prayerful waiter, help, deliverance will come. It will come, perhaps, in an unexpected manner. The three Hebrew youths did not know how deliverance was to come from the furnace of the king, or whether it would come at all, but this they did know, that the God whom they served was able to deliver them. Peter knew not how deliverance was to come from the sword of Herod, but God sent His angel to lead him out of prison, and deliver with a great deliverance. Moses knew not how the children of Israel were to be delivered from the hand of Pharaoh, but the command was to "stand still," to wait, and in His own way God sent deliverance. It will also sometimes come at an *unexpected time*, but at some time or other, in some way or other, God will help His people and deliver them from the pit and mire, from the evils that compass about, and from those who seek the soul to destroy it. Waiting for the Lord, then, is just a quiet resting on Him; an assurance that He can and will help us, and do for us all that we need.

On the second topic teach what is the true thankoffering. Not alone outward forms of service and worship, although these have their place. God had instituted "sacrifice and offering"; it was through these that He was to be approached; but David would say that these of themselves were nothing. God did not ask for them alone, just as the prophet says: "Who hath required this at your hands, to tread my courts—incense is an abomination unto me"; and so were they, not because they were wrong in themselves, they were eminently right, but because "your hands are full of blood;" Isa. 1: 11-15. What then is required? *Open ears*, that is a devout hearing of the will of God; the *law in the heart*, having received it by the hearing of the ear, to keep it in the heart as the spring of life and action; a *delight to do the will of God*; not only to hear, to prize, but to practice, and with delight, the will of God; and finally, a *speaking of it to others*, telling publicly of the faithfulness of God and of His Salvation. These are the upward steps of the true thankoffering. Teach that every instance of the mercy of God, temporal mercies or spiritual deliverance, should be acknowledged in this scriptural way.

On the third topic, show that we have enemies spiritual and mighty: Satan, who like a roaring lion goeth about seeking whom he may devour, 1 Peter, 5: 8; the servants of Satan, men who are doing his work in the world, knowingly or ignorantly; the restless and implacable foes of all that is good; yes, there are men and women doing the devil's work who would be terribly hurt if you told them so, but none the less, really and surely are they doing it. Against all these we need the protecting care of God, a constant and lasting deliverance, not only against these, but against the "iniquities" within us, the proneness to do evil continually, the forgetfulness of God, and worldliness of our hearts. We need constantly to pray, and in pleading for deliverance from them say, "Make no tarrying, O my God."

#### INCIDENTAL TRUTHS AND TEACHINGS.

"They also serve who only stand and wait."—*Milton*.  
"Learn to labour and to wait."—*Longfellow*.  
The only comfort at times is in patient waiting.  
He who trusts in himself is in danger, he who trusts in God is safe.

If we do our part we may rest assured that God will do His part in our salvation.

The least of God's servants is not beneath His notice.  
To the Sunday school teachers this lesson comes with special interest and encouragement. Sow the seed, commit it to God, and wait His divine work.

**Main Lesson.**—God will deliver and bless those who trust in Him.—Psa. 33: 18-19; Prov. 3: 25-26; 2 Kings, 6: 10; Psa. 32: 38-40; Acts 18: 10; Romans 8: 38-39.

The bishop of Down says that since more murders, more outrages, and more crimes are committed by the drunkard than by the dangerous lunatic, he does not see why the former are to be allowed to remain at large, a terror to the well-conducted.

The oldest clergyman in the English Church is said to be Rev. Bartholomew Edwards, rector of Askill. He is ninety-six years of age. Perhaps the next oldest is the Rev. Richard Moore, vicar of Lund, in the Fylde of Lancashire. He has just completed his ninety-fourth year. He was ordained in the year of Waterloo.