

## PASTOR AND PEOPLE.

## DEPRESSION.

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"My soul cleaveth unto the dust: quicken Thou me according to Thy word."—Ps. cxix. 25.

In the first part of this Psalm you find the Psalmist choosing the better part, casting in his lot with God, expressing his appreciation and choice of the Lord's Word and the Lord's ways. He finds in God's Word God's true character—the way in which he is to walk with God. Hence the great need of being a diligent student of God's Word. He is getting some understanding of it, and he perceives and feels that he has a great deal to learn. His experience is that of a man in a lively exercise of mind about the truth and ways of God, but you find him here saying: "My soul cleaveth unto the dust: quicken Thou me according to Thy word."

I. *It is not a strange experience for believers to be in this depressed condition, the soul cleaving to the dust.*—It is the expression of a man unable to erect himself into the posture in which with vigour and the feeling of competent power he may set himself to deal with the duties and privileges which he knows to be his; of a man who feels he is weary, exhausted, that there is a failure of power, whether through overdone exertion or from some other cause; of a man who feels the dryness of the weary way along which he is travelling—who feels as if he could not pursue it further—it is dusty and dry, and he is at the end of his strength; or of a man who cannot perceive the comforting presence of the refreshing influence that at other times he has felt, and which he would fain feel still. Believers find themselves in this condition. There is a great want of vigour, comfort, readiness to make progress, a sad cleaving of the soul to that from which as they believed they had found deliverance, and a want of the soul's cleaving to those things above in which they believed they had found a permanent interest, and between which and them they believed there had been formed an enduring tie.

Sometimes there may be physical causes connected with a man's state of health, and sometimes other providences of God are concerned in producing this state of things, but it is a stage in a man's spiritual history. There are many causes which have to do with it. Generally it is connected with indwelling sin. A man cleaving to the things that are less good so as to deny the right place to Him who is the soul's most good may find himself in captivity to the things that are below, and cut off for the time from the things that are above—his soul cleaving to the dust. More particularly it arises in connection with the failure of faith on the part of believers. The believer sets forth to walk in a course which he knows is to be a course of faith, saying, "I have found One in whom I am to trust; I am to trust His Word against all appearances;" and to him it appears at the beginning that he can trust God in any case. But difficulties come in his way; trials of various kinds which he did not expect are laid on him, and in consequence there is a discovery of the weakness of his faith—a feeling as if God were not altogether dealing with him as he had reason to expect, as he was entitled to expect—at all events as he expected and as he thought he ought to expect—and in connection with this spirit of doubt there comes a certain separation from God—a distance between God and him. He is thrown for the present on his own resources—on his own wisdom and strength, and when he comes to seek his true refuge and strength he is bewildered and lost—his soul cleaving to the dust. Sometimes it arises in connection with a failure on the part of the believer to realize duly his interest in God, and at other times in connection with a great variety of other trials and temptations, and for the present his strength is hidden from him; his interest in God is not realized; he feels the power and prevalence of the things that are below rather than of those that be above, and he feels his soul cleaving to the dust.

Looking at it from the side of God's providence, it is permitted by God just as a step in the believer's history; because it is necessary that the believer's history should include an enlarged acquaintance with himself; with his own insufficiency; with his own tendency to unbelief, and darkness, and sin. God calls us to a fellowship with Him in salvation, and therefore to a walk with Him in which there does come

out to us, step by step along the way, not merely God's great grace, His unspeakable wisdom, His all-sufficient power, His patience and faithfulness, and the suitability of His promises, but also in which there must become apparent to us our own short-sightedness and foolishness, our own weakness and tendencies to evil, our readiness to get into darkness, to rebel after receiving many mercies and oft-repeated forgiveness, to be unstable, untrustworthy, to walk unworthily with God—from that God is saving us, if He is saving us; and in order that we may be prepared for entering on that state which awaits God's children, we are so saved that we are led to deal with these things in ourselves now. It is frequently a part of the believer's experience to be made to see in connection with very painful experiences how much there is in him that, were it left to himself, would end in his complete ruin, and that, therefore, God has not promised to secure His people against all working of the power of evil within them, but that He proves and tries them in their walk with Him, and discovers to them how unable they are of themselves to make progress, and how much they need infinite mercy and divine grace.

II. *It is not characteristic of a believer to be contented in this condition.*—How should he be? If he is a believer, he has faith in the living God. The God of Scripture has become to him a known God. This God is the living God, not merely as the Creator, but as the Life-giver to souls, who can associate souls with Himself in blessed communion. How can one who believes in the reality and presence of a living God be content with a feeling of this deadness and depression, this awful contrast to the life and glory of that life-giving God? More than that: The believer has faith in the presence and power of a life-giving Christ. He believes that Christ is God and man, Redeemer, Mediator, that He is now living on high—"He that liveth and was dead, and is alive for evermore"—full of all redeeming virtue and grace, full of all the help that He needs, full of all that is necessary in order that a poor sinner may live and experience the joy and victory of life. How can any man have a believing consciousness that there is this living and life-giving Christ, this Mediator, this Redeemer, and be contented with an experience which, in so humiliating a way, contrasts with Christ and the fit state of Christ's people? The believer has faith also in the life-giving Spirit, and in the mission and work of the Holy Ghost in its peculiar power and gentleness and love. What it is perhaps he can hardly feel when his soul is cleaving to the dust, but he believes in it. He believes that God gives His Holy Spirit; that there is running from the throne of God and of the Lamb the river of the water of life that makes glad the city of God. That faith is one of the things that makes him feel his soul so depressed, because knowing that there is such salvation, he knows in some measure what his state ought to be. How can a man who believes this be content to go on with his soul cleaving to the dust? And again, the believer has the conviction and persuasion that his proper home and portion are above; that there is a heaven on high containing all elements that are pure and suitable to the life and blessedness of God, and he is on the way to it. He has chosen God's word. He has set himself to the study of it, and his trust is that, through God's mercy, he will reach the country he seeks; and with these experiences how can he be contented to lie in the dust, making no progress—at least not feeling that he is making progress? Therefore, he casts himself on God in prayer, and you find him declaring to God the condition in which he is—"My soul cleaveth to the dust"—and applying to God to meet this case of his—"Quicken Thou me according to Thy word."

III. *There is a sure refuge for the believer with reference to this case of his.*—There is life for those who feel in themselves so much that looks like death. "Quicken Thou me"—give me life, cause me to live—"according to Thy word." This cry is not merely a cry of distress. He has the Word which He can plead made known to Him. It is a sure refuge and resource. "Thy Word." What word? It is some peculiar promise he lays hold of? There are many particular promises adapting the provisions of the Gospel to the experience of believers, but we should always have regard to the root promise when we betake ourselves to God. That promise was given to Abraham: "I will be a God unto thee." How is God to be a God to us? God must be a God who is com-

municating Himself to us in life and love and blessedness. But, perhaps a believer is not sure he is a believer. Well, here is God holding Himself forth in His Word as One who has come into the world to become to those who receive Him their God—"a God unto thee"—and in the same Word God in Christ is preached to us to be "a God unto us." There is a Word for weary, needy, depressed souls to lay hold upon, to embrace, and receive this great God to be a God unto them also according unto His Word. For, be assured of this, there is something in each believer that enables him to understand that great argument of our Lord concerning the resurrection of the dead: "He is not the God of the dead, but of the living." God never gave Himself to be the God of any man, to leave that man dead. The living God becomes my God, that I living in God and God living in me to all eternity in life and love and knowledge, He may be mine and I may be His. Therefore, he whose soul cleaves to the dust is met and satisfied by that great fundamental promise; and out of an experience in itself no way good to us or glorifying to God, may come lessons good for us and glorifying to God, in so far as we learn to know ourselves and Himself, as otherwise we could not have done, so that we learn what the reality is of laying hold of God's Word and being raised out of the dust, and having restored to us the joy and strength of His salvation.

Let me say by way of application:—

1. There is great reason for hopefulness in the condition of believers even when their souls cleave unto the dust. It is not a good state. It is not a happy state. It is very often, in a large measure, an unbelieving, childish, even in some degree a rebellious state. It is a state that needs no little forgiveness. It needs much Divine forbearance, tenderness, and care. But there is great reason for hopefulness for believers even when their souls are cleaving to the dust. There is a great God to go to. There is a great Saviour in whom God has manifested Himself. There is a sure Word as it spreads itself out in a variety of promises in which God is drawing near to us, tendering Himself to us, saying, "I will be a God to thee." There is a readiness to hear and answer prayer, and to bestow blessings in answer to prayer. There is comfort for the sorrowful, refreshing for the weary, strength for the weak, life for the faint, and forgiveness of sins for sinners. These things are in Christ Jesus, and therefore there is great reason for hopefulness for those who feel that their souls are cleaving to the dust.

2. There is great reason for earnestness. It is not a fitting thing that people should be contented while their souls are cleaving to the dust. Because there is so great a God of salvation, so great a Saviour, so great a Sanctifier and Comforter, and our calling is so great, there should be earnest and instant recourse to God, with the expectation that something very different from cleaving to the dust shall presently be ours. There is no safety for us except as we cast ourselves on God, so that His strength may be made perfect in our weakness.

3. There is a sure reward for those that seek the Lord. This is a disappointing life. It is full of expectations that are not realized, and desires that are not granted. But there is one field in which that is not so. The man that seeks God, the life-giving God of the Scripture, not because he desires, but because he needs Him and cannot do without Him, who brings to Christ sins which he cannot bear himself, and spiritual wants which he cannot supply, shall not be disappointed. There is a sure reward for those that seek the Lord. He has not said, "Seek ye My face" in vain; and therefore we should seek Him with the sure expectation that He is to be found; that He hears prayer, and that this great God does those things which it befits a God to do—even the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ.

## TIMELINESS IN DUTY.

The element of time is a vital matter in many duties. Done at the right moment there is a blessing in them; delayed, they were as well not done at all. If we sleep through the hour for duty, we may as well sleep on after the hour. Waking then will not avail to accomplish that which we were set to do.

There are many applications of this principle. Whatever we do for our friends, we must do when they need our help. If one is sick, the time to show our affection and our sympathy is while the sickness con-