

A GOOD AND BAD SPIRIT

A SERMON

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“Curse You Meroz, says the angel of the Lord, curse you bitterly the inhabitants there of; because they came not to the help of the Lord, to the help of the Lord against the mighty.” Judges 5:23

AFTER what we said last Lord’s day morning upon this verse we have this morning, in the first place, to notice *the spirit of those who did come to the help of the Lord*, secondly, *their recognition of that victory which the Lord wrought on their behalf*; and thirdly, *the destiny of those that did not come to the help of the Lord, to the help of the Lord against the mighty*.

First, then, *the spirit of those who did come to the help of the Lord*. You may substitute another word for the word “help,” which will at once give an explanation, namely, the serving of the Lord. So that they were to be cursed who came not to serve the Lord under the circumstances there presented. But first, the spirit of those who did come to the help of the Lord. They were in bondage; the gospel, for so I must put it was hindered, and they were deprived of their privileges, no place to meet in; and if there had been, they must not have met. Here was the adversary in dominion over them, and they under bondage. Now there was a woman named Deborah, and she was a wise woman, a gracious woman, and she felt exceedingly unhappy to see things in such a state. Her solemn concern was for the furtherance, shall I call it, of the gospel; for the liberty of the people, for the manifestation of God on behalf of his people. And she had two things that encouraged her. The one was that the children of Israel themselves began to cry unto the Lord. That was very encouraging. They had been looking to other gods, and now they were suffering, I speak now of the nation Israel, the consequences of forsaking the fountain of living waters, and hewing out to themselves, in a way no new covenant, heaven-born soul could do, broken cisterns that could hold no water. But now they began to cry unto Jehovah. This was encouraging to Deborah. And I may just observe that there seems something remarkable even in the name and the dwelling of this woman; all seems indicative of the deep feeling of her soul. Her very name is significant; according to Cruden the word sometimes signifies “a bee;” and if that is the proper interpretation, or one interpretation, then it sets her forth as being in her mind very busy, and gathering some sweet hopes, some sweet testimonies, on behalf of Israel, that they should presently come out of the

bitterness under which they now were into the liberty God had in store for them. And her very dwelling also seemed indicative; she dwelt under a palm tree. The palm is the symbol of longevity, of fruitfulness, and of victory. And a good description is that of the Christian; for the Christian, being one with Jesus, is to live forever; and those who are thus one with Jesus are said in the 92nd Psalm to be like the palm tree; "They shall bring forth fruit in old age; they shall be fat and flourishing; to show that the Lord is upright: He is my rock, and there is no unrighteousness in him." The palm is also the symbol, as you are aware, of victory, bearing the palm of victory. And she dwelt also between Bethel and Ramah. The Old Testament saints never forgot Bethel there they had a revelation of the way from earth to heaven, as indicated by the mystic ladder; and there they had the yea and amen promises of the blessed God in and by Christ Jesus. And Ramah signifies *exaltation*, indicative of that to which she and the Israelites should come. Now the Lord was pleased to show unto her that he would work deliverance. And then she sends for Barak, and shows that the Lord had commanded where they were to go to, and how he, would draw the enemy there, and how he would give them into her hand. And they were to go with ten thousand men of Naphtali and Zebulun. Here I must dwell for a minute or two, because it will show the spirit of those that were right minded. Now there is that written of Naphtali which he should now understand his need of, and understand what to aim at. And so, the Christian, whatever there is written in the Bible concerning the Christian, whatever promises there are to those that believe in Jesus, those are the things we should seek to realize. Now it is very significant that these men were to be the children first of Naphtali, because what was written concerning him seemed to bear upon his present necessities, and to be encouraging him to seek a realization of what was written of him, first in the 49th of Genesis, Naphtali is a hind let loose: he gives goodly words." Here, then, he says, As that is my character in the Bible, so let me seek to realize that freedom. Just so with you that believe in the Lord Jesus Christ; as you stand in him free from sin, from Satan, from the curse, from death, from hell, in every way free. "He gives goodly words;" that is, just as Naphtali realized this deliverance, he would then have goodly words to give. And you will see it all through the Bible, whenever poor sinners realized the liberty of the gospel, when they realized this wonderful mercy of God, then came the good words; that is, they could speak of the Lord according to what he had done for them; they could speak of the Lord in terms and in testimonies expressive of his interposition on their behalf. Here, then, is the liberty written; and what is written, that you and I are to seek the liberty written; and what is written, that you and I are to seek. There is liberty in the gospel, and we are to realize that freedom, that we may say with Habakkuk, "The Lord God is my strength" that is, by Christ Jesus; Jesus Christ, by his mediatorial strength, has wrought the victory and established the freedom, "the Lord God is my strength, and he will make my feet like hinds' feet, and he will make me to walk upon mine high places," that is, he will make me to walk in his elevating love, and choice of my soul to eternal salvation; in the elevating victory and righteousness of the Lord Jesus Christ; in his elevating power, for God exalts by his power: he will make me to walk in his elevating promises, for by his promises he lifts us up above all that stands against us. "He will make me to walk upon my high places." This is a walk by faith. Then furthermore it is written of Naphtali, in the 33rd of Deuteronomy, "O Naphtali, satisfied with favor." And this should be our object, "Satisfy us early with your mercy." Satisfy us that we are yours; satisfy us with the manifestation of yourself unto us. And Naphtali, as you are aware, signifies "conflict;" and there will be conflict in seeking the realization of these things. "O Naphtali, satisfied with favor, and full of the blessing of the Lord, possess you the west and the south." Why, Naphtali, contrasting what he was in his present position with what was written of him, why, he would say, "Full of the blessing of the Lord!" I am a captive, and destitute. "Satisfied

with favor!" Why, here am I under the oppression of the enemy, and that enemy is a thousand times stronger than I am, with his chariots of iron. And "possess you the west and the south!" Why, I am possessing nothing. I won't stand this; I won't stop in this. There is the God of Israel; there is the testimony; and those that call upon him, that believe in him, that seek him, that trust in him, he always did, he does, and ever will interpose for. I will not stop here. And so Barak had no trouble in getting up his ten thousand; they voluntarily came, went out and met the adversary; God went with them, the victory was wrought, the liberty obtained; the favor enjoyed, the blessing bestowed, the possessions restored, the people happy, and they could triumph in the name of the Lord. Now, then the gospel will go on, the cause of God will go on; we shall do. The Lord will bring us, or suffer us to be brought, or suffer us to bring ourselves sometimes into a great deal of bondage and captivity one way and the other, in order to humble us, and to prove us, and to see what is in our hearts, and to bring us into those agonies in which we shall pray the more earnestly, that he may interpose the more conspicuously, and that we may more strikingly see his interposing hand, and stand amazed at the freeness of his mercy, the sufficiency of his grace, the accuracy of his wisdom, and the faithfulness of his mind in not suffering one blessed promise to fall to the ground. The spirit, therefore, of those that did come was a spirit of deep interest in the cause of God at large. And this victory was particularly a woman's victory. Therefore, let no Christian woman think that because she is a woman, she is to be no use to the cause of God. I am proud to look back at the use that a large number of Christian women, both in giving and collecting, were in the erection and the paying for this place. Now Barak evidently had not so much faith in the Lord as Deborah had; and he said, "If you will go with me." And then said this glorious, this noble, this amazing, this honorable woman, Deborah, "I will surely go with you; notwithstanding the journey that you take shall not be for your honor; for the Lord shall sell Sisera into the hand of a woman." He will give me the victory, and he will give to Jael the wife of Heber, that miscreant, that murderer, that has murdered hundreds, perhaps thousands of the saints of God, he shall be given into the hands of Jael, the wife of Heber, and she shall be given that courage by which she shall smite the adversary dead, and that in a moment. So, it matters not how strong the instrument, if God be not there it cannot prevail; it matters not how weak the instrument, if God be there it cannot fail. Who would not be of such a spirit? My mourning and grief is that I do not partake more largely of this spirit of solemn prayer to God for my own soul's increased prosperity; and it is a matter of grief with me that I feel so little, comparatively speaking, for Zion as I do. I hope I can in my humble way say,

"My soul shall pray for Zion still,
While life or breath remains;
There my best friends, my kindred dwell,
There God my Savior reigns."

But those that have never known the bondage of sin, and guilt and wretchedness, cannot appreciate the liberty; those that have never felt their destitution, their solitude, and lost condition, could never appreciate the favor of God, the blessing of the Lord, the possession of the gospel. God alone can enable us to appreciate these things.

Then, secondly, let us look at *the spirit of recognition*. This is a most important point. When this victory was accomplished, Deborah and those with her very happily recognized the victory. But the people after a time ceased to recognize it, and, by degrees went back again, the main body of them. These were the old covenant people, there were some, of course, among them who

understood the same truths that you understand, and that looked to the same Messiah that you look to, and that were brought into the same bond of the same covenant that you are brought into. These were exceptions, of course. Now you will see all through the Bible what terrible consequences have followed a want or a cessation of this recognition of what God has done. When God brought the people out of Egypt, they recognized this, praised the Lord for it, and some of them never forgot it; they continued to think of it. And the consequence was that Moses could address to them the words we so often mention, "You that did cleave unto the Lord your God are alive every one of you unto this day." And so here we find Deborah nicely recognizing this. I may just come, while I am upon this part, to the salvation of Christ. Happy the man who, once convinced of his need of Jesus Christ, is thoroughly convinced of it from his own soul's experience, so that he receives the testimony of Christ's perfection as a matter of necessity; so that he receives the completeness of Christ's victory as a matter that he cannot be saved without. And some of you (for I must congratulate not you, but the grace of God in you) some of you have kept these testimonies, have held them fast, and have felt them to be your plea before God unto this day; so that, so far from your ceasing to recognize the completeness of Christ's salvation, the greatness of what he has done, you seem to prize it more and more; so far from turning away therefrom to the beggarly doctrines and inventions of men, your soul seems to cleave closer and closer, and ready to say, as old father Wilkinson said on his dying bed, nearly his last words, "Blessed Jesus! You are more precious to my soul than ever." Well might the apostle Paul be harrowed up in his feelings when he found the Galatians turning somewhat away from this, and bringing in human laws and human doings to make that complete which was completed at Calvary's wondrous cross. And it is a nice feeling to live this life of love of what he has done. There are persons now within the sound of my voice that have shown kindness to me in times past which I shall never forget. Nothing under heaven could make me dislike them; I shall never forget it. I carry a sense of it with me more or less every day of my life; and I could enter pretty keenly into the feelings of the apostle Paul towards the Philippians who had personally followed him up, not that he desired the gift, but still he was in need; they saw that, understood it, and out of their deep poverty their liberality abounded. God gave the apostle for the Philippian's this great promise; You, as he should say, have kindly supplied some of my needs, but "my God shall supply all your needs according to his riches in glory by Christ Jesus." I should never be able to return, live as long as I may, the kindness of some towards me; and I do love them, I am not ashamed to say it, and I shall never forget it. Let us therefore, none of us make light of the dear friends the Lord is pleased to bless us with; and the Lord give us the same spirit, that if any others should be placed as we were when these friends were so kind to us, we may carry out the same towards them; for such a spirit is of great price in the sight of the blessed God. Only think of your poor little doings, that you think nothing of being sounded out at the last in the presence of assembled worlds as evidences that you did come to the help of the Lord, to the help of the Lord against the mighty. Also, Deborah and those with her recognized what I hope you will be able to recognize, the unbounded ability of the blessed God. "The mountains melted before the Lord, even that Sinai from before the Lord God of Israel." Everybody knows that Sinai is a collection of granite mountains, rocky, rugged. and tremendous. Yet when God came, even those mountains trembled and melted, and were moved. Ah, then, let these granite rocks be as rugged hills, to set forth whether our sins or whether our troubles, let Jesus come, they will melt away. Here Deborah and those with her gave honor to their God. She sings as charmingly as Habakkuk. I have often rejoiced in Habakkuk's words, speaking of the interposition of the Lord for his people: "He stood, and measured the earth", that is, measured out the land for his people he beheld, and drove asunder the nations; and the everlasting mountains were scattered, the perpetual

hills did bow;" that is, those kingdoms that the kings themselves thought could never be moved, those mountains that the enemy thought were everlasting, why, "he beheld, measured the earth, and the everlasting mountains were scattered, the perpetual hills did bow; his ways" are in reality what the others are in presence, "his ways are everlasting," Here is the recognition, then. So, you and I, let us recognize the greatness of God's power. And may the Lord give us to climb as high as Job; he was no little way up the sides of mount Zion when he said, "Will he plead against me with his great power? No; but he would put strength in me." How do you know that, Job? Why, because I am a poor vile creature, and have no hope but in that Redeemer that at the latter day shall stand upon the earth; and if God had meant to destroy me, he would not have shown me this Redeemer, he would not have placed my hope there, he would not have let me into the immutability of his counsel; and therefore though at present I look on the right hand and on the left, and know not where to find him, Yet he knows where to find me, and when to find me, and when he comes, my heart shall indeed rejoice. Deborah, then, recognized the greatness of God's power; and in connection with this she recognized the love of God and the security of his people; for her words are a quotation from the 33rd of Deuteronomy: "The Lord came from Sinai, and rose up from Seir unto them; he shined forth from mount Paran, and he came with ten thousands of saints;" his saints are always with him, whether they see him or not; "From his right hand went a fiery law for them," for their defense. He would burn ten thousand worlds to ashes rather than one of his people should perish. "Yes, he loved the people; all his saints are in your hand; and they sat down at your feet; everyone shall receive of your words." Here, then, she recognized the greatness of God in what he had done, his unbounded power, and his love. And then I need not say how she beautifully opens up the Lord's interposition. the manner of it. By license of speech, by a kind of poetic license, shall I call it, or rhetorical license of speech, Deborah appears to me, at least, to call the people of God stars. "The stars in their courses fought against Sisera." So that as the stars are carried along in their courses independently of man, and even independently of themselves, so these people were carried along in the process of this warfare each in his sphere; they should not break ranks, nor lose a single step. "The stars in their courses fought against Sisera." And so the Lord has always had some shining stars, and will do to the end of time, and they shall move on each in his own orbit until he has reflected all the light upon the minds of others that shall fulfill his mission; then he shall finish his course, and be lost in that blaze of superior glory awaiting every one that thus lives in the light and rejoices therein. How is it that we have not long ago forgotten the mysteries of his kingdom, and joined with those that would put something else into the place thereof, or gone away after the world, and become hardened, and secularized, and I was going to say infidelized? It is because he who has begun the good work has performed it, does perform it, and will perform it unto the day of Jesus Christ. Just notice the last part of her recognition: "Let them that love him be as the sun", one of the most magnificent representations of Christ in the Bible. "Let them that love him then, those that were bent upon freedom by the interposition, presence, and power of God, not only believed but had that faith that works by love. "Let them that love him be as the sun when he goes forth in his might." I need not say that under that figure Jesus Christ is contained. When did Jesus Christ go forth in his might? First, when his own arm brought salvation unto him; and as he was completely victorious, so they that believe in him and are one with him, the victory he has wrought accompanies them. And remember that Jesus Christ can never have to meet again what he has met with once. Therefore, if he were strong enough to conquer our sins in their penal form unatoned for, if he were strong enough to conquer the curse in all its fierceness and violence, if he were strong enough to conquer Satan when Satan stood upon such vantage ground as he did, and if he were strong enough to conquer death and hell then, "ah, the victory is wrought", and he

has met with nothing so powerful since, and never will do. It is too late now to talk about a child of God being lost; it is too late now to talk about any power holding the believer fast fatally or ultimately.

“Though thousand snares enclose his feet,
Not one shall hold him fast;
Whatever dangers he may meet,
he will get safe at last.”

These are they, then, that come to the help of the Lord; these are they that are willing to make any and every sacrifice for the service of the Lord. Then we may well say, if I am not to make sacrifices for him who sacrificed himself for me, for whom am I to make sacrifices? If I am not to sympathize with this glorious cause, with what am I to sympathize? May it be our spirit increasingly, as expressed in the 137th Psalm, “If I forget you, O Jerusalem, let my right hand forget her cunning.” Now look at the meaning of that. The cunning of the right hand means the skill of the right hand; and then, if you forget Jerusalem, let my right hand forget how to earn the bread that perishes. No, further, and now Christian women especially ought to be exceedingly careful how they pray this prayer, only think of a *woman's* tongue cleaving to the roof of her mouth; so do not pray it if you cannot pray it in reality, for the next clause would tell upon you very powerfully; for it is this; “If I do not remember you, let my tongue cleave to the roof of my mouth.” So that if I were to find you dumb one of these times, I should say, Well, you have been forgetting; Jerusalem, not preferring her above your chief joy. “Rejoice you with Jerusalem, then, and be glad with her, all you that love her; rejoice for joy with her, all you that mourn for her; for I will extend peace to her like a river, and the glory of the Gentiles like a flowing stream.” You will never have to repent that you thought so much of the Lord, served him so earnestly, and were devoted to him so decisively. Such is the spirit, then, of the true Christian. See this spirit exemplified all through the prophets; see it exemplified by the apostles; but, above all see it exemplified in God himself. God himself does not exist merely for himself. He has given to us the greatest gift that could be given, namely, his dear Son; Jesus Christ did not live for himself, nor die for himself, nor suffer for himself, nor undergo what he did for himself, but it was for us; and the Eternal Spirit does not exist merely for himself; it is for us, on our behalf; he convinces us of sin, leads us to Jesus, and gives us to see that God cared for man when man cared nothing for God; that God blessed men while man was cursing God; and that God sought us when we were afar off, and enemies by wicked works, blotted out by the blood of his own Son all our transgressions, brought us to himself, received us as the father received his prodigal son, to make us happy forever. God himself is the best example of unselfishness.

Now a word or two upon *the destiny of those that did not come to the help of the Lord*. There are scriptures where there are positive faults as the reason of the Lord's disapprobation, as the reason of his cursing the people but it is not so here. These Merozoites, whether it was a town or a district is not said, where condemned not what they did not do. They were Israelites, sound in their creed, professed to love the God of Israel, and walked among God's people, heard the words of God, but did them not. Now in the 23rd of Deuteronomy you read that the Ammonites and the Moabites were not to come into the congregation of the Lord forever; but there they had committed sins; here there is only one sin, a sin of omission. There they committed two sins. “They met you not with bread and with water in the way, when you came forth out of Egypt;” which they ought to

have done. Why ought the Ammonites and Moabites to have done so? Because there was some relation existing, as you know, between them and Israel. And what did they do? "They hired against you Balaam." He will not hearken to any one against you. There are plenty of backbiters and slanderers, and they may do you a deal of harm among your fellow dying worms; but they will not hurt you with the Lord. He would not listen to Balsam; "but the Lord your God turned the curse into a blessing unto you, because the Lord your God loved you." There, then, is a positive sin. And so, with that restless man Gideon; he could not rest, could not be happy though he was much discouraged at the first, presently on he rushed. He was of no importance among men; as he himself said, "Behold, my family is poor in Manasseh, and I am the least in my father's house;" I am afraid I shall make a poor concern of it. Oh no, the Lord is with you, that will put it right. So, after he had wrought the victory, and come past Succoth. he said to the men of Succoth, my poor soldiers are faint; give them just a few loaves of bread, and a little water; they will be very thankful. You! who are you? building your new chapel, and going on like that. We are not going to give you any bread and water, no. Very well; when I return, as I will, "then I will tear your flesh with the thorns of the wilderness and with briers." They laughed at that. Well, laugh at it. Then he came to Penuel; My men are very faint; they are the Lord's servants; just give them a little provision. Who are you? We will not give you anything. Very well; when I return, I will destroy this tower, and I will put you to the sword; I will make you feel it. And so, he very soon completed the victory, returned to Penuel, down came the tower, and he slew the men of the city; he came to Succoth, took the elders, and tore them with thorns of the wilderness. "Curse you Meroz, said the angel of the Lord, curse you bitterly the inhabitants thereof; because they came not to the help of the Lord, to the help of the Lord against the mighty." But in this case, it was the sin only of omission. It appears, then, that the antitypes of these Merozoites are those people that get among the people of God, who have a sound creed, and it will be well for them when they come to die if that sound creed is not like a bag of gold round the neck of a drowning man, sinking them into hell the more rapidly. They get among the Lord's people; they turn God's own truth against him. They say, God loves his people with an everlasting love; he will have them; I need not trouble myself. God's elect must be saved; I need not trouble myself. God's sheep shall never perish; oh, I need not trouble myself about the cause of God. He that has begun the good work will carry it on; I need not trouble myself. And thus, they make God's goodness a reason why they should be evil; thus, they make the testimonies of God a reason why they should care naught for the cause of God, why they should care naught for the welfare of Zion. O my hearer, remember that is the way to damnation, for all shall be damned, though they receive the truth, if they do not receive the love of it, "that all might be damned that received not the love of the truth," and love wherever possessed is *practical*. And they also made that a reason why they did not come which ought to have been a reason for their coming, "to the help of the Lord *against the mighty*." Why, the mightier the foe, the more it will show your faith in the Lord. See the 11th of the Hebrews, see what the saints had to encounter there. What warriors were they, what heroes, what conquerors, what shining stars, what mighty energy in them! They cared nothing for all the attractions of the world. if they might but have the Lord with them. They preferred deserts, the caves and dens of the earth, to the honors of this world at the sacrifice of the liberty of the gospel and fellowship with God. There is not much doubt that these Merozoites were like those we read of in the New Testament, one had bought a yoke of oxen, another had married a wife, like many professed Christians now, they get secularized and carnalized, and feel it a pain in any way to help the cause of God. Why, there are professors in our day, if the cause of God cost them one tenth of what their backbiting meetings and midnight carnivals cost them, they would curse the cause of God as bitterly as they themselves, dying in that

state, must be cursed. "Faith without works is dead." What is the good of it? Why, it is only a name. Tell me you love me, and not show it! Tell me you are my friend, and do nothing to demonstrate your friendship! I will believe your words when I see your works, but not before. Our congregation may be divided into three classes in this matter. First, those that have done to their very uttermost, and made great sacrifices both for the cause here and by helping others; and I know some who during the erection of this chapel worked early and late to get a few extra shillings to give to the dear Surrey Tabernacle, as they called it; and they never repented it. The second class are those that do pretty middling, but not what they could do. They have given, but with some degree of hard-heartedness. Then, the third class, and happy I am to say the fewest, are the drones, that have done nothing though they had it in their power. So that if you all belonged to the first class, why, you would build a dozen more chapels before I die. This chapel has been built and paid for by about three-fourths of the people here; I am not far out in saying that. So, then, see the difference between the spirit of intense interest in eternal things and the spirit of selfishness. Now, in conclusion, I will just say that some of the people of God get a little bit wrong, and taunt others that are in trouble, tell them it is their own fault. Now let us be careful how we do this. We are not out of the world yet. Some of the people of God sometimes get into a bad spirit upon this point, but the Lord will bring them right at last. I will just read you a verse or two from the 5th chapter of Job, and then a verse or two from the last chapter. In the 5th chapter Eliphaz taunted Job about his family and about his losses: "I have seen the foolish taking root, but suddenly I cursed his habitation. His children are far from safety, and they are crushed in the gate, neither is there any to deliver them. Whose harvest the hungry eat up, and takes it even out of the thorns, and the robber swallows up their substance." I do not wonder at Job calling such persons as these forgers of lies physicians of no value; miserable comforters, with a vengeance, they were. Thus, was poor Job taunted. Now do you think the Lord will take any notice of that? Turn to the last chapter of Job, and you will find that as Eliphaz was the first to taunt Job, Eliphaz was the first to be called to order. It reads thus: "And it was so that after the Lord had spoken these words unto Job, the Lord said to Eliphaz the Temanite, my wrath is kindled against you, and against your two friends for you have not spoken of me the thing that is right, as my servant Job has. Therefore, take unto you now seven bullocks and seven rams," oh! but how expensive all these.