



# ***TOWARD THE MARK***

***“I PRESS TOWARD THE MARK FOR THE PRIZE  
OF THE HIGH CALLING OF GOD IN CHRIST JESUS.”***

***PHILIPPIANS 3:14***

*A MAGAZINE FOR YOUNG CHRISTIANS  
OF ALL AGES*

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Dear Reader,

**“But David encouraged himself in the Lord His God” (1 Samuel 30:6).**

In one of the darkest hours of David’s history, we find that he “encouraged himself in the Lord his God.”

The days may be difficult, for what used to be the normal way to go to school, college, and work is no longer the same. The fear, anxiety, and uncertainty fills the air, and men who are supposed to be the experts in their field admit that they do not know what to do, neither do they have a solution to what the world and all its nations are going through.

All around may be darkness; but there is light above. The path may be blocked on every hand; yet there are no obstacles on the path of faith.

There may be but little to encourage us in the ways of God. But if we truly wait on Him, we shall have no lack. Our God has made provision that as individuals we should tread the path of communion with Himself as David did in his day of distress. Nothing will justify us if we fail to do so. We may point to excuses on the right hand and on the left. But there is no excuse above. Why? Because there is One appearing there for us—able to save us to the uttermost—even we who are coming to God by Him. He is appearing there for you and I, my dear Christian friend.

Let us go to Him, let us cast all our cares upon Him, let us tell Him all our fears and desires. Let us learn to wait upon Him for direction and not to let the world influence our thinking and entice us to act like them. For we know that our God is the living God, He is the highest God that rules in the kingdom of man. What then can we say, if we are not finding in Him our peace and joy? Despite all that may be going on below, it is our happy privilege to be in constant communion with Him.

We pray that the articles in this issue help to build you up in your most holy faith and encourage you to go on for Him till He comes.

**Please keep praying for the Lord’s blessing on *Toward the Mark*.**

Yours in our soon-coming Lord,

*Emil S. Nashed*

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# TOWARD THE MARK

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***Quotations from Scripture are generally taken either from the King James translation or the J.N. Darby translation.***

## MILK

*"The truth shall make you free"*

# *IS THE CHURCH OF GOD AN ORGANIZATION OR AN ORGANISM?*

Read Exodus 18.

Exodus 18 has sometimes been used as an argument to justify a practice in the Church of appointing people to certain places of responsibility and dignity so that operations might proceed more smoothly. Does the Spirit of God have any such intention in recording the advice of Jethro, and Moses accepting this advice without question?

There was a friendly spirit between Jethro and his son-in-law, Moses. Jethro had not shared in the afflictions of Israel in their liberation from Egyptian bondage, but coming to visit Moses afterward, he found Moses sitting from morning to night to hear the causes of Israelites and to pass judgment for them. It was a most plausible alternative he suggested, one that appeals favorably to our natural thoughts. But notice that Jethro said, "I will give you counsel, and God will be with you" (v. 19). He did not suggest that God should give Moses counsel, but implied that God would be with Moses if Moses accepted Jethro's counsel. He advised Moses to appoint able and conscientious men to judge the smaller matters that arose between the people, and who could bring the larger matters to Moses.

Moses evidently considered that this was perfectly logical, and who could quarrel with this? But one fatal flaw was evident in adopting this advice. God had not commanded it, and Moses did not even consult God about this matter. Jethro could give the advice, then leave. He had not been linked with Israel in their former afflictions, and he was not to be linked with them in their wilderness trials. Moses chose "to suffer affliction with the people of God" (Hebrews 11:25), but Jethro did not.

If God intended Moses to act as he was doing, could He not give him strength for it? Certainly, He could. But this history illustrates something most serious. Moses is a type of Christ. Should believers be content to have other people settle the problems they consider small,

and only bring the great things to the Lord? No! We should go directly to the Lord with every occasion of need. The introduction of intermediaries is the legal principle of human organization. No wonder we find God introducing the law of Moses in Exodus 19, and God Himself putting Israel under a form of organization that Peter later spoke of as “a yoke...which neither our fathers nor we were able to bear” (Acts 15:10).

But even among Christians the natural tendency of our hearts is to revert to legal bondage in some way, and we fail to realize that human organization in the Church of God is legal bondage. Where some people are put in special places, then others do not need the spiritual exercise of being in the Lord’s presence to receive guidance, for they get their guidance from human sources.

The body of Christ, the Church, is not an organization, but an organism, which is vitally connected with the Head of the body and which receives its nourishment, guidance, and direction from the Head (Ephesians 4:15–16). When first instituted after the resurrection of the Lord Jesus, the Church had no human head on earth, such as Moses. Apostles were present, not as being authorities themselves, but as unitedly insisting on the sole authority of the Lord Jesus. When some Jewish believers came to Antioch and insisted that Gentile believers should be circumcised and keep the law, this was settled at Jerusalem, not by the authority of any apostle, but by the word of God (Acts 15:7–8; 17–18), which was declared by the apostles and accepted by the gathered brethren.

It was necessary to have apostles as the connecting link between the dispensation of law and that of the grace of God, necessary that such men of devoted character should be used to lay the foundation of Christianity (1 Corinthians 3:10–11; Ephesians 2:20), that is, to lay down the truth of God concerning Christ in all His relationships. Apostles themselves passed away, but they have left their writings, scriptures that are authoritative, and by which the Church of God may be guided and preserved in all her subsequent history. While they were living, apostles did appoint elders in various assemblies, and Paul instructed Titus to appoint elders in each assembly in Crete (Titus 1:5). Assemblies never did appoint elders, and there are no apostles living to do so now, nor delegates of the apostles.

However, once the Church has been established, there is no reason why believers should not be unitedly guided by the Spirit of God, who remains as a living power in the Church, as was not true under the dispensation of law. Are there no elders, therefore? By all means elders are still in the Church, but not as appointed by men. There are those who can do the work without any appointment, for God has fitted them for the work. We should certainly pray for such and appreciate their wise counsel and help.

As regards ministry of the word of God, God Himself gives gifts who are to respond to His own leading in devoted service. They do not need the appointment of men, but the power of God. If the assembly sees a spiritual gift in a saint, they should gladly encourage him. With the Spirit of God leading, there will be humility and unity. The assembly will gladly express fellowship with such a servant in the measure in which they can approve of his service.

In all spiritual service, we are therefore to depend, not in any way upon human arrangements, but upon the power of the Spirit of God. On the other hand, in Acts 6:3 the saints at Jerusalem were told to look out from among themselves seven men of good reputation to take care of material needs among the saints. These are the deacons of which 1 Timothy 3:8–13 speaks. As to caring for material things, the assembly is perfectly right to appoint those whom they can trust to do this work. But God does not allow us to choose for ourselves the ministers of spiritual things whom we desire. How good it is that God cares for us so perfectly! Yet we so little respond to this that when difficulties arise we look all around us for some human means of meeting these. Such means will be appealing to our rationalizing minds, things that have been adopted by many groups of Christians but leaving out the clear leading of God by His Spirit. How humbling it is that we are thus expressing the opinion that Christ is not enough!

It is natural to desire a thriving testimony, but if such a testimony becomes an object, then Christ has lost His place as the one Object worthy of our confidence. Let us return to our first love, and value the living power of the Spirit in the body of Christ.

L.M. Grant

## MEAT

*"Sanctify them by the truth"*

## KEYS!

The use of a key is known to all. One possessing the key of a city, gate, or door controls whatever is within and is responsible for its safety and its use. In Scripture the use of the term key is largely symbolic, though it is used in its literal sense in Judges 3:25, where the servants of Eglon king of Moab use one to open the door that Ehud had shut after he had slain their lord. A key is used to shut or open, and the Lord Jesus is presented to us in Scripture as having different keys, some of which He uses Himself, and others which He has committed to servants to be used for Him.

### **The Key of the House of David**

In Isaiah 21 we learn that Shebna, who was of the lineage of David, was over the house of Hezekiah, but, because Jehovah was displeased with him, his office was to be given to another, even to Eliakim the son of Hilkiah. Regarding Eliakim the Lord said, "And the key of the house of David will I lay upon his shoulder; so he shall open, and none shall shut; and he shall shut, and none shall open" (Isaiah 22:22). With the key of David upon his shoulder, the government of the royal house was committed into the hand of Eliakim, and he was to minister in his high position, as called of God, for the good of "the inhabitants of Jerusalem and...the house of Judah."

Eliakim in this is surely a type of the Lord Jesus Christ who, in the coming day, will order all in Jerusalem, in Judah, yea, in all Israel for the glory of God and the blessing of His people. This gives us in type what is proclaimed in the prophecy of Isaiah 9:6-7: "For unto us a child is born, unto us a son is given; and the government shall be upon his shoulder..upon the throne of David, and upon his kingdom, to order it, and to establish it with judgment and with justice from henceforth even for ever."

Although the Lord will rule over all as Son of Man in the day of His glory, Eliakim typifies only that part of the Lord's rule connected with Israel. All the glory of Israel will hang upon Him, the Nail in the sure place, the One who was "removed, and...cut down" but who, in

resurrection, fulfils all that has been foreshadowed and prophesied concerning Him in the Old Testament Scriptures.

### **The Key of David**

Though no doubt alluding to this Scripture, the passage in Revelation 3:7 has something different in view. In Isaiah 21 it is the future government of the Lord Jesus that is referred to, whereas in Revelation 3 it is the present government of the Lord in the midst of the assemblies. He is not yet ruling over the house of David—this awaits His coming to earth again—but His present place of authority over God’s kingdom is exercised among those who profess allegiance to Him. The Lord will soon come out of heaven to rule publicly over the kingdoms of the world, but He has all power given to Him now in heaven and on earth, walking in the midst of the assemblies, and acting behind the scenes in regard to this world, His government in control, not allowing the forces of evil to overstep the appointed limits.

How encouraging it is for the saints to realize that all power and authority are in the hands of their Lord and Master, and that men are limited in the evil they can do. To the Philadelphian assembly the Lord said, “Behold I have set before thee an open door, and no man can shut it” (Revelation 3:8). Whether it be a door into the exhaustless and unsearchable riches of the heavenly Christ, or a door of testimony to proclaim all that Christ has made known to us, no man can shut the door He has opened. The saints may have but “a little strength,” but it is not their strength that opens the door, or that keeps it open; it is the strength of Him who has the key of David.

### **The Key of Knowledge**

The doctors of the law in Israel had a special place of privilege as being instructed in the Scriptures of the Old Testament, but this privilege had its commensurate responsibility. They were responsible to the Lord for the instruction of His earthly people, and those to whom the Lord spoke in Luke 11 had been unfaithful to God, not having given to the people the knowledge of God contained in His word. The Lord therefore said to them, “Woe unto you, lawyers! for ye have taken away the key of knowledge: ye entered not in yourselves, and them that were entering in ye hindered” (Luke 11:52).

According to the many promises of the Old Testament, the Lord Jesus had come to His people Israel, and the doctors of the law ought to have



welcomed Him at His coming, for they knew the Scriptures that spoke of Him, as they had the key of knowledge. Instead of gladly receiving God's Christ and becoming His followers, they joined with all who opposed Him, and spoke against Him, hindering the poor of the flock who sought His company and blessing, and meriting the exposure and condemnation of the Lord in the words of Luke 11:46–52.

How highly favoured are the saints of God of this day, having the key of knowledge in Christ that opens out to them all the great treasures of the Old Testament and the New. It is in the Son of God that God has been revealed, and it is in the mystery of God that centers in the Son of God that there are hid “all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge” (Colossians 2:3). Knowing Christ, we are able to range over the Scriptures, as guided by the Holy Spirit, to see in them the things concerning Him (Luke 24:44–45; 1 Corinthians 2:12).

### **The Keys of the Kingdom**

After Simon Peter had received the wonderful revelation from the Father concerning the Person of the Son, and had received from the Son of God the revelation concerning the building of His assembly, the Lord said to him, “And I will give unto thee the keys of the kingdom of heaven: and whatsoever thou shalt bind on earth shall be bound in heaven: and whatsoever thou shalt loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven” (Matthew 16:16–19). As has been often pointed out, the keys that the Lord gave to Peter were not the keys of heaven, but of the kingdom of heaven; and Peter was to use these keys on earth, not in heaven.

Peter used the keys given to him by the Lord to let the Jews into the kingdom of heaven when he preached to them on the day of Pentecost, three thousand being converted and baptized. Simon Peter was the divine instrument to bring these converted souls under the sway of the Lord who had gone to heaven, and who ruled His kingdom from His heavenly seat. The keys of the kingdom of heaven were again used by Simon Peter to bring the Gentiles into the Christian circle when he was sent by God to make known to Cornelius, and those gathered with him, the way of salvation (Acts 10).

With the keys there was also given to Peter the authority of binding and loosing on earth in the Name of the Lord, and in Acts 5 he binds upon Ananias and Sapphira their sin against the Holy Spirit, and this was

ratified in heaven by the immediate judgment of God upon them. What was initially given to Peter in Matthew 16 by the Lord is also given by Him to the assembly, yea to two or three gathered to His name (Matthew 18:18–20). Governmental binding and loosing of sins is shown in the case of the man who sinned at Corinth, who had his sin bound upon him according to the instructions given in 1 Corinthians 5:3–5, and who was to have his sin loosed, according to the instructions of 2 Corinthians 2:6–11.

### **The Keys of Hell and of Death**

How different was the appearance of Jesus when the Apostle John saw Him in His official glory in Revelation 1. John had known Jesus on earth in blessed intimacy, knowing the rest and joy of reclining in His bosom, but now he sees Him with “His eyes as a flame of fire...and out of His mouth went a sharp two-edged sword: and His countenance was as the sun shineth in his strength” (Revelation 1:13–16). Was it any wonder that he “fell at His feet as dead”? Once before John had been “sore afraid” in the presence of the Lord in His glory (Matthew 17:6), but then there was no sword in His mouth, and nothing of the judicial character now seen in Revelation 1.

It is the same voice that had said on the glory mount, “Be not afraid” that now says to His servant, “Fear not”; and it is the same hand that is laid upon him to still his fear that once was used to wash his feet. Having presented Himself to John as “the First and the Last,” Jesus said, “I am He that liveth, and was dead; and, behold I am alive for evermore, Amen; and have the keys of hell and of death” (Revelation 1:17–18).

On earth the Lord had said, “Be not afraid of them that kill the body, and after that have no more that they can do” (Luke 12:4). Men may take the lives of others, or even take their own lives, but only One has the keys of hell and of death; only One can both kill and cast into hell; and He only can bring out of death those who have entered there. Man has not the right to kill, not having been given this authority, saving as under divine instructions in the government of God given to Noah in Genesis 9:6: “Whoso sheddeth man’s blood, by man shall his blood be shed: for in the image of God made He man.”

Risen from the dead, the Man Christ Jesus, the Son of Man, has the authority over death and hell; and how wonderful it is that just before

He entered into death's domain to break its power, He said to the repentant thief who was about to follow Him into death, "Verily I say unto thee, Today shalt thou be with Me in paradise" (Luke 23:43). The One to whom the Father had given authority to execute judgment, and whose voice would bring out all in resurrection, and who, in resurrection would speak of His having the keys of hell and of death, in wondrous grace told the dying thief that He would open the door for him into the paradise of God.

### **The Keys of the Bottomless Pit**

The bottomless pit is evidently the place from which come the darkening spiritual influences that affect men in this world, which bring delusion and sorrow upon those who are affected by the diabolical teachings of those who are the agents of Satan. It is evident from Revelation 9:1 that Satan has not control in an absolute way to do his will, for the key of the bottomless pit is not in his hand. The star that fell from heaven was given the key for the time being, but the key did not belong to him. For a limited time this star, some great intellectual or spiritual dignitary, was allowed to bring up from the infernal regions influences that would bring delusion and trouble upon those who had not the seal of God in their foreheads.

When we come to Revelation 20:1 we see the key of the bottomless pit in the hand of the angel who binds Satan with a great chain and casts him into the bottomless pit, shutting him up and sealing his prison house. How good it is to see that the control of evil is not in the hand of Satan, the originator of sin. God, in His wisdom, has allowed evil to rear its ugly head in His fair universe, and to invade the world, but it never has been beyond God's control. There is One in heaven by whom "all things consist" (Colossians 1:17), who holds all things together to secure His will and for the good of His saints, and who only allows evil to reach to the limits that He has appointed, saying to Satan and to all the evil forces that abound, "Hitherto shalt thou come, but no further: and here shall thy proud waves be stayed."

W. Reid

## EXERCISE

*"Exercise thyself unto piety"*

### CHANNELS OF BLESSING!

“Jesus stood and cried, saying...he that believeth on me...out of his belly shall flow rivers of living water” (John 7:37–38). “The Holy Ghost in us, revealing Christ, becomes, by dwelling in us when we have believed, a river in us, and thus for others.” With this truth in mind I thought we might look at how we are to be a “channel of blessing” to others. As the hymn in the old gospel hymn books asks, “Is your life a channel of blessing?”

1. A channel, to be effective, requires a point of intake. In the above text we are given such information: “He that believeth in me.” This is where everything must begin, for it is quite useless for anyone to aspire to be a channel of blessing for others unless he has experienced the blessing for himself. It may seem unnecessary to say this, but the fact is that there are hundreds of men and women in Sunday Schools and other work of this kind who have not been converted. Before the blessing can flow out, it must be received into the heart. “Out of his INWARD PARTS shall flow rivers of living water.” It is not in him that the source of blessing is located but in the One in whom he has believed. “He that believeth on ME,” is what is vital and indispensable. So, we have to begin with this truth that a real channel of blessing to a needy world must be a CONVERTED person. It was with this truth that the Samaritan woman, in John 4, had to begin: “The water that I shall give him shall be in him a well of water springing up into everlasting life.” A true channel must be a person who has received eternal life. In John 7 the Lord Jesus speaks of the outflow to others, but it must have its initial inflow, as reported in John 4.

2. To be of real service a channel must be fully CONNECTED to the source of supply. There may seem to be little difference between this point and the first thought, but there is a distinction. The fact that I have been converted does not, in itself, make me an effective channel. Many young Christians are encouraged to “give their testimony,” and while sometimes useful, at times this has the effect of making them occupied, unhealthily, with themselves and their own experience. The living waters are not in me or in my experience; they are found in Christ, by

the Spirit, and the connection must be firmly made there. In the Vine allegory told by the Lord Jesus in John 15, He said to his disciples: “Without ME ye can do nothing.” The word translated “without” means apart from or separated from. If the tendril of a vine becomes severed from the stem it will wither and die; it has no life on its own, but lives and bears fruit only as it is livingly part of the vine and drawing its sap from that source. So far as effective service is concerned, no one can be a channel of blessing unless he is vitally in union with the Source of blessing and is engaged in bringing help from that source to those who need it. A believer’s witness for the Lord could only be effective if fully and firmly linked with Him in his own life and service.

3. A channel’s real purpose is to CONVEY supplies to a point of delivery. Believers have not been blessed to sit and “hug their blessing to their own bosom,” but to be channels of blessing for others. In another figure Paul tells the Corinthians that God has “shone in our hearts for the shining forth of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ” (2 Corinthians 4:6). He has graciously directed that precious light into our hearts that we might be lights for Him in a dark and needy world. Not all of us have the same function or the same abilities. Some will be used by the Master in one form of service and some in another. Although Moses and Aaron were both typical men, they also lived their individual lives as believers and were different in their service. So, also, were David and Solomon and many others. In this way we, too, have our particular form of service: “To every man his work.” Whatever the Master of all the work has planned for us to do, that is our responsibility. As channels the important thing for us is to convey whatever is committed to our trust to the point of delivery. As we take in, we are to pour out. We cannot give out what we have not taken in; but, there is also the other side of the truth: What we have received on behalf of others is our responsibility. We must deliver it. The apostle Paul tells the Corinthians how he accomplished his service as a channel. In the first epistle (11:23) he refers to what he had received from the Lord and how he delivered it to them; then in chapter 15:3 he again mentions that he had delivered to them what he had received of the Lord for them. In the first instance the source is emphasized. It was the Lord who communicated to him what he was to

convey to the saints. In the second instance, it is the fact that he faithfully delivered the message that is underlined.

4. Then, a channel must be CLEAN if it is to convey the substance that goes through it unpolluted. None of us would seek to pass himself off as sinless. Indeed, it has been remarked that the most devoted of believers have been most conscious of failure. That being accepted, we cannot, nevertheless, be channels of blessing to others if our own lives are tainted by sinful practices. We are to be clean. Even under the law it was ordered: “Be ye clean that bear the vessels of the Lord” (Isaiah 52:11). Perhaps this text could be paraphrased as, “Be ye clean that are channels for the Lord.” If we are to be effective as channels of blessing, we must be free from the pollutions that are common in the society around us and are accepted in the world today as almost normal.

5. A channel of blessing would have to be CLEAR of any blockages if it would be useful. There are many things which may not be classed as sinful, perhaps, but which are hindering elements. What I mean is that undue attention to hobbies, leisure activities, business matters and other interests, could be thought of as hindering the outflow of blessing, while not being actually evil. It is right, of course, that we should attend to many of these matters, but UNDUE emphasis on something may prove to be a blockage. Each believer has to examine these things for himself and make the necessary decision on whatever adjustment may be needed, to keep the channel clear.

6. A channel of blessing should be CONSTANT. There is no need for it to be conspicuous, but great blessing is often experienced where dependable Christian service is carried on quietly before the Lord and for His glory. I was told by a friend who lived for long in Kenya that a local water supply suddenly ceased. The supply had been maintained by a ram (a kind of pump that is actuated by water power alone) that had been installed so long before that no one knew where it was located. So, it became necessary to trace the supply pipe to the small fall where the ram had been installed years previously. It had faithfully, and unseen, continued its valuable work. It was found that a washer had become worn, and when this was replaced, at little cost, it resumed its useful work. Faithfulness to a commitment is a valuable part of service. In stewardship, this seems to be a prime necessity. “It is

required in stewards that a man be found faithful.” Occasional or intermittent service is not so valuable as constancy in work.

7. A Christian who seeks to fulfil a function as a channel of blessing needs to have COMPASSION. Any work of this kind is demanding; it takes time, effort, and one has to be engaged in it wholly. Nothing that costs less is as effective. There can be no doubt in anyone’s heart that the Lord Jesus gave His blessed service in this way, more fully, of course, than anyone else could serve. We read, “Jesus...was moved with compassion toward them, and he healed their sick.” Again and again we can see how His tender heart was touched by man’s sad condition and how He served in that spirit. A service which is cold, heartless, and devoid of feeling, will certainly fail.

John Barnes

### **SEARCH THE SCRIPTURES!**

1. Who was the great king that confessed to the Lord that he was a little king?
2. What is the name of the left pillar in the temple that Solomon built?
3. What is clothed better than Solomon in all his glory?

## REST

*“Shall I not seek rest for thee that it may be well with thee?”*

### *“GOD...A VERY PRESENT HELP”*

#### *Psalm 46*

Two truths of great practical importance for believers of every dispensation are brought before us in this beautiful Psalm. In the presence of the upheavals and conflicts of a godless world, we are reminded, first, that God is “a very present help in trouble.” Second, in order to realize, and obtain, the present help of God, our part is to “be still” and know that God is God (verses 1 and 10). Only faith can enter into these truths. Flesh can lean upon an arm of flesh; but flesh can neither trust in God, nor “be still” and wait for God to act.

Verse 1 presents the great theme of the Psalm—God, our refuge, strength, and present help in trouble. Verses 2 and 3 the trouble and confusion of the world through which we are passing. Verses 4 to 11, the means whereby God sustains the faith of His people so that they are enabled to “be still” and prove God to be “a very present help.”

#### **The Present Help**

(Verse 1). We do well to notice the little word “our” in the opening verse. It is true that God is a refuge; but believers can say, “God is our refuge.” The world has those to whom it looks for protection, and guidance, in the time of trouble. Believers have in God their refuge from the storms and distresses of life. Moreover, God is our “strength” in weakness, and “a very present help in trouble.” The better and more exact translation is, “a help in distresses very readily found.”

To realize, however, that God is “a very present help,” calls for the exercise of faith, for His present help is not always immediately apparent. Sometimes we have to wait for the manifestation of His present help. Our natural tendency is to endeavor to extricate ourselves from trouble by our own efforts, and God may, for our blessing, keep us waiting until we have learnt that we are utterly without strength to meet the trial, and there is nothing left for us but to “be still” and learn that God is God.



Was it not thus, in the gospel day, that the Lord dealt with Martha and Mary when faced with the sickness of their brother? They were in sore trouble, and in their distress the Lord was their refuge. They rightly turned to Him and spread out their trouble before Him. They said, “He whom Thou lovest is sick.” The Lord was indeed “a present help,” though His help was not immediately forthcoming. Having received the urgent appeal of the sisters, we read that “He abode two days still in the same place where He was.” Apparently, He was doing nothing. He waited until death closed all hope in human efforts, and there was nothing left for the two sisters but to “be still” and learn that God is God.

This was indeed a trial of faith. Martha’s faith was not equal to sitting “still,” for we read that “Martha, as soon as she heard that Jesus was coming, went and met Him;” but Mary “sat still in the house.”

Then we see how graciously the Lord revealed Himself to Martha as “a very present help in trouble.” Martha said, “I know that he shall rise again...at the last day.” The Lord replied, “I am the resurrection.” Then Martha’s thoughts travel back to what had been counseled in times past as to the Lord, for she said. “Thou art the Christ, the Son of God, which should come into the world.” Her faith believed the great things the Lord will do in a day to come, and she believed in the Lord as connected with all the counsels of God in times past, but her faith was not strong enough to “be still” and believe in the Lord as the great “I am”—the present help in trouble.

Have we not to confess that, too often, this is our difficulty. We can believe in the power of God put forth in times past and that His power will be manifest in days to come, but we are slow to believe that God is so truly “a very present help” that, when there is no duty to be fulfilled, we can “be still” and wait for His help to be made manifest.

### **The Trouble**

(Verses 2, 3). The second and third verses describe the trouble that necessitates a “refuge,” requires strength, and calls for “present help.” The world, in which the godly man finds himself, is in turmoil and upheaval. The waters roar, and the mountains shake with the swelling thereof. Often in Scripture the sea, in its restlessness, is used as a symbol of the nations in a state of turmoil (Isaiah 5:30). Today, can we not hear the roar of the waves as, in every part of the world we see the

nations in a state of upheaval, revolution, and conflict? As a result, ancient constitutions that have existed for centuries, and established forms of government that seemed as stable as the mountains are being overthrown by the rising violence and increasing corruption of men. Little wonder that men's hearts are "failing them for fear and for looking after those things which are coming on the earth" (Luke 21:26). But, says the Psalmist, "Therefore will not we fear," for "God is our refuge, and strength, a very present help in trouble."

### **The way in which the faith of God's people is sustained in trouble**

What then is the secret that strengthens the people of God to pass through the terrifying conditions of the world without "fear"; that, in the presence of change and upheaval, enables them to "be still," and realize that God is "a very present help in trouble"?

(Verses 4–6). First, God sustains the faith of His people by unfolding to them the secret of His purpose. In this passage the purpose of God is brought before us in the river and the city of God: "There is a river, the streams whereof shall make glad the city of God."

Through all time, with its changes, upheavals, and conflicts, there flows the river of God's pleasure. No power of the enemy, no violence and corruption of men, no failure of the saints, can thwart God in carrying out His deep eternal counsels. Dispensations come and go; empires rise and fall; every testimony that God commits to the responsibility of men breaks down in their hands. But, overall, and through all, God is carrying out His purpose for the glory of Christ and the blessing of His people, earthly and heavenly.

Secondly, all the blessing that God has purposed for Christ and His people centers in the city of God. The Psalmist looks beyond the desolations of the actual Jerusalem of his day, and looking by faith into the future, He sees the city according to the counsels of God. There rises before his vision a city of gladness, a "holy place," a city that "shall not be moved," with God dwelling "in the midst of her." So, too, in the presence of all the turmoil and confusion in the world by which we are surrounded, and the corruptions of Christendom, the believer walks in the light of the heavenly city. We see "the New Jerusalem"—a city of gladness where all tears will be wiped away, where there shall be no more death, neither sorrow, nor crying, neither shall there be any more pain. We see, too, that it is a holy city into which nothing that

defiles will ever enter; we see that it will not be moved, for it is a city that hath foundations. Above all, we see that “God is in the midst of her,” for we read “the throne of God and of the Lamb shall be in it.” Thus, our faith is sustained by the river of God’s pleasure, and “the city which hath foundations, whose builder and maker is God” (Hebrews 11:10).

Thirdly, the Psalmist sees that though the nations may rage against God’s city, yet “God shall help her, and that right early.” There is a better, and more beautiful, translation that reads, “God shall help her at the dawn of the morning” (Darby). So, again, our privilege is to “look beyond the long dark night and hail the coming day.” On every hand we see the nations raging, the kingdoms of the earth being overthrown—the waters roar and are troubled, and the mountains shake; but, even as the Psalmist could say, “He uttered His voice, the earth melted,” so we wait to hear the voice of the Lord when He shall say, “Arise, my love, my fair one, and come away.” Then indeed “the dawn of the morning” will come, the day will break, “and the shadows flee away.”

(Verse 7). Fourthly, amidst the deepening shadows of the night, until the dawn of the morning, we can say with the Psalmist, “The LORD of hosts is with us; The God of Jacob is our refuge.” The LORD with all power at His disposal, and the God of grace that can take up and bless a poor failing man like Jacob, is with us, and our refuge. When the day dawns we shall be with Christ in the glory of that day; in the meantime, He is with us as we pass through the sorrows of the night. He “died for us that, whether we wake or sleep, we should live together with Him.” Seeing “He hath said, I will never leave thee nor forsake thee...we may boldly say, The Lord is my helper, and I will not fear what man shall do unto me” (Hebrews 13:5–6).

(Verses 8, 9). Fifthly, the Psalmist sees that in due time God, Himself, will deal in judgment with all the evils of the world; and after the “desolations” of judgment, He will bring in the blessings of the reign of Christ, when wars will cease unto the end of the earth. Men, by their own efforts and wisdom, through leagues, and pacts, and conferences, are seeking to bring about universal peace and introduce a millennium of prosperity without God and without Christ. The Christian who sees that his blessing is bound up with the city of God, and who knows that

God will deal with the evil of this world, refuses to be linked up with man's futile efforts to end the world's unrest.

Thus, that we may be delivered from all fear, in the presence of so much that would make the natural heart tremble, we are instructed in the secret purpose of God that cannot fail. We see by faith the city of God shining before us in all its glory and beauty; we wait for the dawn of the day; and, in the meantime, we have the Lord with us to deliver us from every fear, a refuge from every storm. Furthermore, we know that in due time God will judge the wickedness of men and bring in universal peace.

(Verses 10, 11). Only as these great truths are held in living faith in our souls shall we be able to "be still" in the presence of the world's unrest, even as the Lord, Himself, could sleep in the storm. Our danger is that, in the presence of the increasing evils of the world, we may get over-occupied with events and lose sight of the city of God, and thus be tempted to join with men in their efforts to combat the evil. To act thus is to leave God out and seek to meet the evil by human wisdom and human power. If such efforts had any measure of success it would only lead to the exaltation of men. Our part is to "be still," and wait for God to act for His own glory, for God has said, "I will be exalted among the heathen, I will be exalted in the earth."

Only as we are "still," shall we be kept in the blessed realization that the Lord is "with us," "our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble."

Hamilton Smith

## **ANSWERS TO SCRIPTURE SEARCH!**

1. Solomon (1 Kings 3:7)
2. Boaz (1 Kings 7:21)
3. The lilies of the field (Matthew 6:28-29)

## **NOTHING!**

This story is about nothing—nothing at all. That is what you brought into the world with you when you were born. Just nothing...zero. There was a smart young man in Italy who, after finishing his engineering degree, started an IT business and became phenomenally successful. He added a great deal of money to his first zero and became a rich man with many zeros after the number one, an expensive car, and much more. He also had in his car one little New Testament that the doorman at the luxury hotel handed him with the car keys. He was leaving a successful meeting where he got a very profitable business contract. So, as he got in his car, he stuffed the Bible in his glove compartment because he did not know what to do with it. Think of that! The eternal Word of God, showing the way to everlasting joy with the answer to all the sins and sorrows of life and death...and he did not know what to do with it! He knew how to handle money and how to make more, how to get a beautiful house, and how to meet important people, but he did not know God's simple way of salvation. How poor can a rich man be? Then came Covid-19. He contracted the virus, though he did not know it, he just felt extremely sick and drove himself to the emergency room of the nearest hospital. As he was getting out of his car, he reached in the glove compartment to get his wallet and ID, and his fingers came up with that little New Testament. As he was waiting to be admitted, he opened it for the first time, and the page had that verse about "nothing": "*We brought **nothing** into this world, and it is certain we can carry nothing out*" (1 Timothy 6:7). I felt as if I had been struck by lightning!" he said later. He realized that if he died, all his possessions would be reduced to zero. Nothing would be left for eternity; not a single penny of all his riches would still be there after he died.

But after death there is something that would still be his. His sins! These you cannot get rid of after death. They must be gotten rid of before death or they are yours forever, through the endless ages of eternity. Will you please, at this moment, picture this awful truth—standing before God in your sins! However, the awful debt of my sins has been paid by the One who loves me and died for me on Calvary. His precious blood cleanses from all sin now, and this cleansing is forever. After I am gone, everything I own will be left behind for someone else. But Jesus is mine forever. I cannot lose Him because He cannot lose me. When God looks at me, He sees Jesus, now and forever. What about You? The rich man recovered after a few rough weeks at the intensive care unit in the hospital. He got home and began reading the Bible during quarantine. He asked the Lord Jesus to forgive his sins and accepted God's free gift of salvation by believing on the Lord Jesus Christ. Will you also receive this loving Savior as your own?

"The wages of sin is death," but the good news is, "the gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord" (Romans 6:2).

"Behold, now is the accepted time; behold, now is the day of salvation" (2 Corinthians 6:2).

"For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life" (John 3:16).

"Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved" (Acts 16:31).