

Surprised by Grace

Sabbath Afternoon, October 4

The waiting people of God approached the hour when they fondly hoped their joys would be complete in the coming of the Saviour. But the time again passed unmarked by the advent of Jesus. It was hard to take up the cares of life that we thought had been laid down forever. It was a bitter disappointment that fell upon the little flock whose faith had been so strong and whose hope had been so high. But we were surprised that we felt so free in the Lord and were so strongly sustained by His strength and grace. —

Testimonies for the Church, vol. 1, p. 55.

The followers of Christ know little of the plots which Satan and his hosts are forming against them. But He who sitteth in the heavens will overrule all these devices for the accomplishment of His deep designs. The Lord permits His people to be subjected to the fiery ordeal of temptation, not because He takes pleasure in their distress and affliction, but because this process is essential to their final victory.

By God's mighty cleaver of truth we have been taken from the quarry of the world and brought into the workshop of the Lord to be prepared for a place in His temple. In this work the hammer and chisel must act their part, and then comes the polishing. Rebel not under this process of grace. You may be a rough stone, on which much work must be done before you are prepared for the place God designs you to fill. You need not be surprised if with the hammer and the chisel of trial God cuts away your defects of character. He alone can accomplish this work. And be assured that He will not strike one useless blow.

God has shown me that He gave His people a bitter cup to drink, to purify and cleanse them. . . . This bitter cup can be sweetened by patience, endurance, and prayer, and . . . it will have its designed effect upon the hearts of those who thus receive it, and God will be honored and glorified. It is no small thing to be a Christian and to be owned and approved of God.

His grace is sufficient for all our trials; and although they are greater than ever before, yet if we trust wholly in God, we can overcome every temptation and through His grace come off victorious. We must have on the whole armor of God and be ready at any moment for a conflict with the powers of darkness. —*The Faith I Live By*, p. 317.

Sunday, October 5

Second Chance

This is the work which the Lord proposes to do for all who consecrate themselves to Him. . . . To all who will receive instruction He will impart grace and wisdom. . . . He will reveal to them their defects of character, and bestow upon all who seek His aid, strength to correct their errors. Whatever may be man's besetting sin, whatever bitter or baleful passions struggle for the mastery, he may conquer, if he will watch and war against them in the name and strength of Israel's Helper. The children of God should cultivate a keen sensitiveness to sin. . . . It is one of Satan's most successful devices, to lead men to the commission of little sins, to blind the mind to the danger of little indulgences, little digressions from the plainly stated requirements of God. Many who would shrink with horror from some great transgression, are led to look upon sin in little matters as of trifling consequence. But these little sins eat out the life of godliness in the soul. The feet which enter upon a path diverging from the right way are tending toward the broad road that ends in death.

Whatever the position in which God has placed us, whatever our responsibilities or our dangers, we should remember that He has pledged Himself to impart needed grace to the earnest seeker. Those who feel insufficient for their position and yet accept it because God bids them, relying upon His power and wisdom, will go on from strength to strength. —*God's Amazing Grace*, p. 242.

God desires us to reach the standard of perfection made possible for us by the gift of Christ. He calls upon us to make our choice on the right side, to connect with heavenly agencies, to adopt principles that will restore in us the divine image. In His written word and in the great book of nature He has revealed the principles of life. It is our work to obtain a knowledge of these principles, and by obedience to co-operate with Him in restoring health to the body as well as to the soul.

Men need to learn that the blessings of obedience, in their fullness, can be theirs only as they receive the grace of Christ. It is His grace that gives man power to obey the laws of God. It is this that enables him to break the bondage of evil habit. This is the only power that can make him and keep him steadfast in the right path.

When the gospel is received in its purity and power, it is a cure for the maladies that originated in sin. The Sun of Righteousness arises, "with healing in His wings." Malachi 4:2. Not all this world bestows can heal a broken heart, or impart peace of mind, or remove care, or banish disease. Fame, genius, talent—all are powerless to gladden the sorrowful heart or to restore the wasted life. The life of God in the soul is man's only hope. —*The Ministry of Healing*, pp. 114, 115.

Value in Unexpected Places

Christ was the leader of the children of Israel in their wilderness wanderings. Enshrouded in the pillar of cloud by day and the pillar of fire by night, He led and guided them. He preserved them from the perils of the wilderness, He brought them into the land of promise, and in the sight of all the nations that acknowledged not God He established Israel as His own chosen possession, the Lord's vineyard.

To this people were committed the oracles of God. They were hedged about by the precepts of His law, the everlasting principles of truth, justice, and purity. Obedience to these principles was to be their protection, for it would save them from destroying themselves by sinful practices. And as the tower in the vineyard, God placed in the midst of the land His holy temple.

Christ was their instructor. As He had been with them in the wilderness, so He was still to be their teacher and guide. In the tabernacle and the temple His glory dwelt in the holy shekinah above the mercy seat. In their behalf He constantly manifested the riches of His love and patience.

God desired to make of His people Israel a praise and a glory. Every spiritual advantage was given them. God withheld from them nothing favorable to the formation of character that would make them representatives of Himself. . . .

Through disobedience to God, Adam and Eve had lost Eden, and because of sin the whole earth was cursed. But if God's people followed His instruction, their land would be restored to fertility and beauty. God Himself gave them directions in regard to the culture of the soil, and they were to co-operate with Him in its restoration. Thus the whole land, under God's control, would become an object lesson of spiritual truth. As in obedience to His natural laws the earth should produce its treasures, so in obedience to His moral law the hearts of the people were to reflect the attributes of His character. Even the heathen would recognize the superiority of those who served and worshiped the living God. . . .

The children of Israel were to occupy all the territory which God appointed them. Those nations that rejected the worship and service of the true God were to be dispossessed. But it was God's purpose that by the revelation of His character through Israel men should be drawn unto Him. To all the world the gospel invitation was to be given. Through the teaching of the sacrificial service Christ was to be uplifted before the nations, and all who would look unto Him should live. All who, like Rahab the Canaanite, and Ruth the Moabitess, turned from idolatry to the worship of the true God, were to unite themselves with His chosen people. As the numbers of Israel increased they were to enlarge their borders, until their kingdom should embrace the world.

God desired to bring all peoples under His merciful rule. He desired that the earth should be filled with joy and peace. He created man for happiness, and He longs to fill human hearts with the peace of heaven. He desires that the families below shall be a symbol of the great family above. —*Christ's Object Lessons*, pp. 289, 290.

Tuesday, October 7

New Allegiance

It was a singular way of going to battle against the enemy's army—praising the Lord with singing, and exalting the God of Israel. This was their battle song. They possessed the beauty of holiness. If more praising of God were engaged in now, hope and courage and faith would steadily increase. And would not this strengthen the hands of the valiant soldiers who today are standing in defense of truth?

They praised God for the victory, and four days thereafter the army returned to Jerusalem, laden with the spoils of their enemies, singing praise for the victory won.

When we have a deeper appreciation of the mercy and loving-kindness of God, we shall praise Him, instead of complaining. We shall talk of the loving watchcare of the Lord, of the tender compassion of the Good Shepherd. The language of the heart will not be selfish murmuring and repining. Praise, like a clear, flowing stream, will come from God's truly believing ones. . . .

Why not awake the voice of spiritual song in the days of our pilgrimage? . . . We need to study God's Word, to meditate and pray. Then we shall have spiritual eyesight to discern the inner courts of the celestial temple. We shall catch the notes of thanksgiving sung by the heavenly choir around the throne. When Zion shall arise and shine, her light will be most penetrating, and songs of praise and thanksgiving will be heard in the assembly of the saints. Little disappointments and difficulties will be lost sight of.

The Lord is our helper. . . . No one ever trusted God in vain. He never disappoints those who put their dependence on Him. If we would only do the work that the Lord would have us do, walking in the footsteps of Jesus, our hearts would become sacred harps, every chord of which would send forth praise and thanksgiving to the One sent by God to take away the sin of the world. —*Conflict and Courage*, p. 218.

With the trusting faith of a little child, we are to come to our heavenly Father, telling Him of all our needs. He is always ready to pardon and help. The supply of divine wisdom is inexhaustible, and the Lord encourages us to draw largely from it. The longing that we should have for spiritual blessings is described in the words, "As the hart panteth after the water brooks, so panteth my soul after thee, O God." We need a deeper soul-hunger for the rich gifts that heaven has to bestow.

We are to hunger and thirst after righteousness.

O that we might have a consuming desire to know God by an experimental knowledge, to come into the audience chamber of the Most High, reaching up the hand of faith, and casting our helpless souls upon the One mighty to save. His loving kindness is better than life. —*Our Father Cares*, p. 23.

Conflicting Values

From Shechem the Israelites returned to their encampment at Gilgal. Here they were soon after visited by a strange deputation, who desired to enter into treaty with them. The ambassadors represented that they had come from a distant country, and this seemed to be confirmed by their appearance. Their clothing was old and worn, their sandals were patched, their provisions moldy, and the skins that served them for wine bottles were rent and bound up, as if hastily repaired on the journey. . . .

These representations prevailed. . . . "And Joshua made peace with them, and made a league with them, to let them live: and the princes of the congregation swore unto them." Thus the treaty was entered into. . . .

But it would have fared better with the Gibeonites had they dealt honestly with Israel. While their submission to Jehovah secured the preservation of their lives, their deception brought them only disgrace and servitude. God had made provision that all who would renounce heathenism, and connect themselves with Israel, should share the blessings of the covenant. They were included under the term, "the stranger that sojourneth among you," and with few exceptions this class were to enjoy equal favors and privileges with Israel. The Lord's direction was—"If a stranger sojourn with thee in your land, ye shall not vex him. But the stranger that dwelleth with you shall be unto you as one born among you, and thou shalt love him as thyself" (Leviticus 19:33, 34). . . .

Such was the footing on which the Gibeonites might have been received, but for the deception to which they had resorted. It was no light humiliation to those citizens of a "royal city," "all the men whereof were mighty," to be made hewers of wood and drawers of water throughout their generations. But they had adopted the garb of poverty for the purpose of deception, and it was fastened upon them as a badge of perpetual servitude. Thus through all their generations their servile condition would testify to God's hatred of falsehood. —*Conflict and Courage*, p. 122.

The submission of Gibeon to the Israelites filled the kings of Canaan with dismay. Steps were at once taken for revenge upon those who had made peace with the invaders. Under the leadership of Adonizedek, king of Jerusalem, five of the Canaanite kings entered into a confederacy against Gibeon. Their movements were rapid. The Gibeonites were unprepared for defense, and they sent a message to Joshua at Gilgal: "Slack not thy hand from thy servants; come up to us quickly, and save us, and help us: for all the kings of the Amorites that dwell in the mountains are gathered together against us." The danger threatened not the people of Gibeon alone, but also Israel. This city commanded the passes to central and southern Palestine, and it must be held if the country was to be conquered.

Joshua prepared to go at once to the relief of Gibeon. The inhabitants of the besieged city had feared that he would reject their appeal, because of the fraud which they had practiced; but since they had submitted to the control of Israel, and had accepted the worship of God, he felt himself under obligation to protect them. He did not this time move without divine counsel, and the Lord encouraged him in the undertaking. "Fear them not," was the divine message; "for I have delivered them into thine hand; there shall not a man of them stand before thee." "So Joshua ascended from Gilgal, he, and all the people of war with him, and all the mighty men of valor." —*Patriarchs and Prophets*, p. 507.

Thursday, October 9

Surprising Grace

By marching all night he brought his forces before Gibeon in the morning. Scarcely had the confederate princes mustered their armies about the city when Joshua was upon them. The attack resulted in the utter discomfiture of the assailants. The immense host fled before Joshua up the mountain pass to Beth-horon; and having gained the height, they rushed down the precipitous descent upon the other side. Here a fierce hailstorm burst upon them. "The Lord cast down great stones from heaven: . . . they were more which died with hailstones than they whom the children of Israel slew with the sword."

While the Amorites were continuing their headlong flight, intent on finding refuge in the mountain strongholds, Joshua, looking down from the ridge above, saw that the day would be too short for the accomplishment of his work. If not fully routed, their enemies would again rally, and renew the struggle. "Then spake Joshua to the Lord, . . . and he said in the sight of Israel, Sun, stand thou still upon Gibeon; and thou, Moon, in the valley of Ajalon. And the sun stood still, and the moon stayed, until the people had avenged themselves upon their enemies. . . . The sun stood still in the midst of heaven, and hasted not to go down about a whole day."

Before the evening fell, God's promise to Joshua had been fulfilled. The entire host of the enemy had been given into his hand. Long were the events of that day to remain in the memory of Israel. "There was no day like that before it or after it, that Jehovah hearkened unto the voice of a man: for the Lord fought for Israel." "The sun and moon stood still in their habitation: at the light of Thine arrows they went, and at the shining of Thy glittering spear. Thou didst march through the land in indignation, Thou didst thresh the heathen in anger. Thou wentest forth for the salvation of Thy people." Habakkuk 3:11–13.

The Spirit of God inspired Joshua's prayer, that evidence might again be given of the power of Israel's God. Hence the request did not show presumption on the part of the great leader. Joshua had received the promise that God would surely overthrow these enemies of Israel, yet he put forth as earnest effort as though success depended upon the armies of Israel alone. He did all that human energy could do, and then he cried in faith for divine aid. The secret of success is the union of divine power with human effort. Those who achieve the greatest results are those who rely most implicitly upon the Almighty Arm. The man who commanded, "Sun, stand thou still upon Gibeon; and thou, Moon, in the valley of Ajalon," is the man who for hours lay prostrate upon the earth in prayer in the camp of Gilgal. The men of prayer are the men of power. —*Patriarchs and Prophets*, pp. 508, 509.

Friday, October 10

For Further Reading

Daughters of God, "Rahab," pp. 35, 36.

To Be Like Jesus, "When in Trial, Review God's Great Mercy," July 21, p. 215.