

Whom Have I in Heaven But Thee?

Psalm 73:23-26

Judica Sunday March 22, 2015

Beloved of the Lord..... One of the hard parts about being a Christian is those times we experience real and strong doubts within, even unbelief. These doubts are evil and sinful, and we need to repent of them and believe through Christ these sins are also forgiven, but we can never entirely purge doubt out of us, though we know well the love of Christ. When we struggle then with doubt and other sins, we get frustrated and discouraged, sometimes also depressed or greatly saddened. It's one thing to strongly wish and desire we didn't do this or that sin anymore, but a greater trial is to struggle with doubt.

Though it is hard we must still remember "such are common to man", namely other Christians have dealt with the same temptation. Likewise we pray "Lord I believe, help Thou mine unbelief." When it comes to helping a fellow Christian, one small thing to keep in mind is this: Christians need to know their suffering is no different from other Christians. When we find other Christians are having the same problems we do, there is a certain level of comfort there, because then we don't have to deal with the other temptation, which says, "You are different". Indeed we are not. Who, for example, cannot relate to the words of the Apostle Paul who said, "The good that I would I do not, but the evil I would not, that I do". Likewise "O wretched man that I am, who shall deliver me from this body of death?" This brings us to Luther who had his struggles also, for his temptation was sadness and despair. In a very candid way Luther wrote of his own sadness, "All sadness is devilish because Christ, in whom we believe, has come to console us and to have mercy on us. Therefore the Holy Spirit must be called upon in times of sadness. He is our defense and defiance against death and dangers. If you feel sadness because of death, say: 'I shall not die but live'.....But dear God, this article of faith will not enter into the heart. That is the reason why so much sadness come to us. I am often angry with myself that although I have delivered so many lectures, have preached and written how this temptation is to be overcome, yet I cannot root out sadness when I myself am tempted." (This is Luther, E. M. Plass, pg. 230) To put this another way, Luther believed, but he didn't believe as strongly as he wanted to. He was a true Christian naturally, whose saving faith was in Christ, but he still found much sin within, and that was frustrating to him and discouraging.

Throughout your life dear Christian understand because you are flesh and blood this is going to happen within you. You are no different from any other Christian. The level or strength of your temptations will fluctuate according to God's wisdom and your need, but in time of temptation the Holy Spirit will remind you where true strength shall be. This is when you pray, "Whom have I in heaven but thee? and there is none upon earth that I desire beside thee. My flesh and my heart faileth: but God is the strength of my heart, and my portion for ever."

These words were written by Asaph, the Holy Spirit being the divine Author. Asaph was essentially King David's Choir Director, a Levite employed in the work of the church. He wrote Psalm 50, and most of Psalms 73-83. When it came to trials and temptations, Asaph was no different from Luther or any other Christian. He struggled with sadness and despair. In Psalm 77 Asaph declares, "I cried unto God with my voice.....In the day of my trouble I sought the Lord.....my soul refused to be comforted....I remember God, and was troubled: I complained, and my spirit was overwhelmed!" Now in verse 23 he writes, "Nevertheless I am continually with thee: thou hast holden me by my right hand." This means in spite of all his struggles Asaph was still with the Lord in faith. Neither the devil nor the unbelievers had been able to destroy trust in God, neither could they separate him from the love of God. Yet he gives the glory for his keeping the faith to God who was daily holding Asaph by the hand, not literally but figuratively. Here we would do well to return our thoughts to childhood, when we were little children. There was a day when we were so small we had to reach our hand up higher than our head to hold our father's hand. And when a father holds the hand of his most little child, and they walk from place to place, the father must walk slow and with purpose, lest the child stumble and fall.

Therefore dear believer, no matter your age, you are still a little child in God's sight, and you still need to be led and guided by your heavenly Father. Some days will be good and easy, and other days rough, but you must daily trust He is wiser than you, stronger than you, and He knows exactly where to go. When you go through those dark feelings of fear and despair, do not allow yourself to be led by your feelings, but trust God and His Word. That is the first commandment after all, to trust in God above all things, for you cannot trust yourself. "Thou shalt have no other God's before Me. What does this mean? We should fear, love, and TRUST IN GOD ABOVE ALL THINGS", so you must trust Him more than these feelings and reason. These are far lower than your Father's wisdom, guidance, and good counsel. What would we say of a little two or three year old child who said, "Dear father, I feel this path to the right is better than that path to the left, please take me there?" Yet the Father well knows that way appears easier, but in truth that path will not benefit the child. When it comes to trusting God above all things, when you are in a state of fear, you must let go of your problems and worries and give them to the Lord in prayer. Give it to Him in prayer, let it go, and then trust He will take care of it, and He will. In this path He has given you, also remember WHO it is that is holding your right hand, leading and guiding you daily. And above all things you must remember His heart is filled only with grace for you, love and tender mercies, for Jesus' sake. Also the selfless sacrifice of Christ on the cross holds and secures firmly the heart of your Father in your favor, so it is filled with a boundless and immeasurable love for you which cannot be changed, as the Bible says, "Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, and cometh down from the Father of lights, with whom is no variableness, neither shadow of turning." Jms 1:17 Your heavenly Father therefore will never do any harm to your soul which He loves most dearly. He adopted you, after all, when He baptized you with holy water, namely His grace which came in the Word connected to the water. Indeed when we are thinking rightly according to faith, we are quite happy God is leading and guiding us, for it is certain we cannot guide ourselves.

But let us now hear God's Word on the matter, straight from God's mouth. Psalm 18:30 As for God, his way is perfect: the word of the LORD is tried: he is a buckler to all those that trust in him. Second Samuel 22:31 As for God, his way is perfect; the word of the LORD is tried: he is a buckler to all them that trust in him. Psalm 4:5 Offer the sacrifices of righteousness, and put your trust in the LORD. Psalm 34:22 The LORD redeemeth the soul of his servants: and none of them that trust in him shall be desolate. Psalm 37:3 Trust in the LORD, and do good; so shalt thou dwell in the land, and verily thou shalt be fed. Psalm 37:5 Commit thy way unto the LORD; trust also in him; and he shall bring it to pass. Psalm 73:28 But it is good for me to draw near to God: I have put my trust in the Lord GOD, that I may declare all thy works. Psalm 125:1 They that trust in the LORD shall be as mount Zion, which cannot be removed, but abideth for ever.

Whatever path then God chooses for us, we must become a child again by faith, hold His hand firmly by faith, and accept the path saying "Lord Thy will be done." They are all good paths, and not one is bad for our soul and eternal salvation. If He afflicts you, that is your path for the moment. Even sheep do not always walk in green pastures, but sometimes they have to cross a road, or a barren patch or a rocky field to get to the other side. Yet in God's Word each sheep can find green grasses to eat, even in the midst of that rocky field. The Means of Grace are those green grasses, and even if you live far away from church, "the word is very nigh unto thee, in thy mouth, and in thy heart" Deut. 30:14 This "Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us, (and we beheld his glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father,) full of grace and truth." This Word gives us eternal life. Jesus, the Word, also takes us by the hand and His Word promises us, "Fear thou not; for I am with thee: be not dismayed; for I am thy God: I will strengthen thee; yea, I will help thee; yea, I will uphold thee with the right hand of my righteousness." Is. 41:10 This Word also teaches us to sing, "From God shall naught divide me, For He is true for aye, And on my path will guide me, Who else should often stray. His right hand holdeth me; For me He truly careth, My burdens ever beareth, Wherever I may be."

As for the path that is set before us, Asaph writes "Thou shalt guide me with Thy counsel, and afterward receive me to glory." This is a bit different, because earlier God is taking us by the hand and leading us, but here it is God's counsel which guides "me" or "you" or "Asaph", or "any believer". Being redeemed and set free from sin, we have many choices and decisions to make in our life, and we are free to do so by faith and the guidance of God's Word. We should do all things by love, for the glory of God, and love for our neighbor in order to edify or help them, but never hurt them. Indeed on matters which God has neither commanded nor forbidden two Christians put in the same situation can do two different things, each being guided by a certain passage in their mind, but neither sins and both do a good work in God's sight because it came from faith and love though they handled the situation different from the other. Let us be careful then of becoming superstitious Christians who are always trying to guess where God is leading and guiding, rather than making our decision and choice based upon God's Word without fear and worry. Faith breaks through the wall and finds no reason to look back, for we are seeking God's glory, and that better world to come. We know afterward God will receive us in glory.

Therefore “Whom have I in heaven but thee? and there is none upon earth that I desire beside thee.” Who else can help us but our True Love above in heaven? Where else can we go, when our world falls apart by sin, death, and the devil’s destruction? Don’t we lift up our eyes to heaven and pray? Don’t we sigh in prayer and say “Lord I am tired and weary. How much longer must I live here, when you dwell above waiting for me? Help me, give me strength to bear each cross and take away my worries. I give my burdens to Thee. I let go and leave them in your gracious hands. I will lift up mine eyes unto the hills, from whence cometh my help. My help cometh from the LORD, which made heaven and earth. He will not suffer thy foot to be moved: he that keepeth thee will not slumber. Behold, he that keepeth Israel shall neither slumber nor sleep. The LORD is thy keeper: the LORD is thy shade upon thy right hand. The sun shall not smite thee by day, nor the moon by night. The LORD shall preserve thee from all evil: he shall preserve thy soul. The LORD shall preserve thy going out and thy coming in from this time forth, and even for evermore. Psalm 121

And so it is, beloved of the Lord, “My flesh and my heart faileth: but God is the strength of my heart, and my portion for ever.” Who trust in God, a strong abode, In heaven and earth possesses; Who looks in love to Christ above, No fear his heart oppresses. In Thee alone, dear Lord, we own, Sweet hope and consolation, Our Shield from foes, our Balm for woes, Our great and sure Salvation. Amen.