

A.B. Simpson:

"Who among us shall dwell with the devouring fire? Who among us shall dwell with everlasting burnings? He that walks righteously, and speaks uprightly; he that despises the gain of oppressions, that shakes his hands from holding of bribes, that stops his ears from hearing of blood and shuts his eyes from seeing evil; he shall dwell on high: his place of defense shall be the munitions of rock; bread shall be given him; his waters shall be sure. Your eyes shall see the King in His beauty: they shall behold the land that is very far off." (Is. 33: 14-17.)

The outlook of this prophecy is from the standpoint of Sennacherib's invasion. The prophet represents the land as desolate, the city beleaguered, the ambassadors returning with bitter tears, and the hope of the nation crushed as the Assyrian breaks his covenant and turns back to renew the siege of Jerusalem. But suddenly a voice from heaven breaks upon the scene. "Now will I rise, says the Lord." God appears upon the stage and in a single night the Assyrian army is destroyed. So tremendous is the impression of this mighty miracle of saving power that the people are appalled. The "sinners in Zion are afraid," and they begin to ask, "Who among us shall dwell with the devouring fire? Who among us shall dwell with everlasting burnings?" God has appeared as a consuming fire and although it is their enemies that have perished, yet they tremble at the thought of such a God in their midst and feel as did Peter afterwards when he shrank from the Master's presence after the miracle of His power, crying, "Depart from me, for I am a sinful man, Oh Lord!"

Dr. Adam Smith, in his notes on this passage, introduces a fine figure representing a man looking at a great city fire through a colored glass which neutralizes the flame so that nothing appears but the crumbling pillars and tumbling walls and buildings, and the power that is working the destruction is invisible. But let him drop the glass and look with open face at the scene and instantly he perceives the tremendous element that is working the havoc.

So the people had been looking at the events around them as through a glass that colored their vision and all they could see was the Assyrian coming and going, the mere facts of God's working. But suddenly God had come so near that the scales had fallen from their eyes, the distorting medium through which they looked at things had dropped, and lo, they beheld the presence of Jehovah like the fire and flame, and they shrank from its terrible power, conscious of their utter sinfulness and unfitness for such holy fellowship.

The prophet answers the question. Yes, he says, it is possible to dwell with One who is a consuming fire and not be afraid of the search-light of His presence. No, it is possible to get so close to Him that our eyes shall "see the King in His beauty and behold the land that is very far off." But there are moral and spiritual conditions which must precede the vision. It is the man that "walks righteously," that "speaks uprightly," that "despises the gain of oppression," "that shakes his hands from holding of bribes," "that stops his ears from hearing of blood," "that shuts his eyes from seeing evil." "He shall dwell on high," and he shall enter into the beatific vision of the glory of Jehovah.

I. The righteous man.

Five things are predicated of this man. They refer to his feet, his tongue, his hands, his ears and his eyes. It is a very realistic picture of practical righteousness.

1. "He walks righteously." His feet are in the right path. The figure of our walk is a common one in the Bible. It describes our whole outward conduct and deportment. It would not be difficult to fill a volume with the divine picture of the path of the saint. Like Enoch he walks with God, keeping step with his heavenly Father and enjoying His intimate companionship and communion. "He that abides in Him ought himself to walk even as He walked." We are to "walk by faith." We are to "walk in love." We are to "walk worthy of the vocation wherewith we are called." We are to "walk circumspectly, not as fools, but as wise." How are we walking? What paths are we treading? What footprints are we leaving? Do we go anywhere where He does not go before us, and would not accompany us? Are we walking in the narrow path or in the broad road that leads to destruction?

2. "He speaks righteousness." His tongue is the next object of the prophet's attention. The condition of our tongue is one of the medical tests of health. This man's tongue is right. "He speaks uprightly," that is, as in the sight of God and the hearing of heaven. It is a very solemn thought that just as the phonograph records and keeps the sounds of the human voice and can reproduce our very words in after years, so perhaps yonder God has an automatic mechanism which will reproduce every utterance of our lips and furnish the records of the judgment by and by when "for every idle word that men have spoken they shall give account to God in the time of judgment." The Word of God has much to say about the tongue. It is not merely what we think and feel, but

what we say that defiles and sets on fire our whole being. The spoken word reacts upon us with fatal and corroding poison.

Let us bring our words to the divine standard. Is our tongue pure, reverent, truthful, kind, wise and touched with the fire of Pentecost? Does it belong to God? Does it speak for God? Is it anointed of God and consecrated to His service and His praise? Can we meet the test? "He that speaks uprightly." Christians little realize how much they lose by idle, vain and foolish talking. If we had conserved the strength that is wasted on empty talk, it would add years to our lives. "Let your speech always be with grace seasoned with salt that you may minister grace unto the hearers."

3. Clean hands. "He shakes his hands from the holding of bribes." The political, social and business world are reeking with corruption of every kind. The true Christian scorns all such things, refuses dishonest gain and avoids the popular methods of reckless speculation and unfair if not unlawful business and finance. It is easy to be caught in the whirl of promising ventures and brilliant commercial speculations, the alluring promise of a speedy fortune and enormous profits on trifling investments. These are temptations that beset us on every side. The true servant of Christ will always weigh every transaction not only in the light of conscience and even of human law, but in the light and the spirit of God's Word. Will our business bear the searchlight of the Scriptures and permit us to dwell with the devouring fire and the everlasting burnings, and will our books stand the inquisition of that day when the fire shall burn the wood, the stubble and the hay?

4. Sanctified ears. "He stops his ears from the hearing of blood." We have no more business to listen to evil than to speak it. A righteous man or woman will refuse to hear scandal, gossip and evil speaking. It is perfectly proper when some malodorous story is brought to you by a gossiping friend to refuse to listen unless the accuser is willing to have his victim in your presence. You will always find this a sure preventive and you will never be troubled a second time. The injury that is done to character and reputation in this sinful way is not half so great as the injury done to the people that listen to it and that perpetuate it with their scorpion tongues. It is a blessed exemption to have one's mind and memory free from these defiling streams of uncharitableness and sin.

5. Sanctified eyes. "That shuts his eyes from seeing evil." There are many things to which the servant of the Lord should be blind. One of them is his own virtue. Another is the evil of his brethren, and a third is the vanity and the folly of the world. There are evil things that hypnotize. It was by a look that David was led into his great crime. "Turn away my sight and eyes from viewing vanity," was the wise petition of the Psalmist. "Let your eyes look right on and let your eyelids look straight before you; ponder the path of your feet and let all your ways be established," was the equally wise direction of the sage of Jerusalem.

Beloved reader, how does your life stand this five-fold test? How can you abide the devouring fire and everlasting burnings when all your ways shall pass under the searchlight of heaven?

II. His blessing.

This righteous man has great and mighty promises.

1. Exaltation. "He shall dwell on high." We need the New Testament to interpret this promise. It is more than moral sublimity, more than lofty aspiration, more than a high aim and a noble purpose. It is what the apostle describes in Ephesians 2: 6, "He has raised us up together and made us sit together in heavenly places in Christ Jesus."

It is a great spiritual transformation that links our life with Christ upon the throne and makes us citizens of heaven. There is our homeland. There we belong more truly than to any place on earth. There are our affections. There our friends are going fast. There is our future and everlasting home.

Are we claiming this high place? Are we walking with our feet on earth but our heads and hearts above? Are we keeping in close touch with the loved ones that have gone, not through the sinful attempts of spiritualism, but by loving fellowship with Jesus Christ with whom we can ever have communion and know that those we love are with Him there? Are we looking at our trials as we shall one day look upon them from on high and truly dwelling above?

2. Security. "His place of defense shall be the munitions of rocks." The righteous man who dwells on high in union and fellowship with Jesus Christ is impregnable. "If God be for us who can be against us?" "Who is he that will harm you if you be followers of that which is good?"

There is nothing that we need fear while we abide in Him. We do not have to fight our battles, but take refuge in our Savior and see Him conquer. Oh how safe they are who have found their dwelling "in the secret place of the Most High," and "abide under the shadow of the Almighty." Of such it is true, "The Lord will preserve you from all evil; He shall preserve your going out and your coming in from this time forth and even forevermore."

3. Sufficiency. "Bread shall be given him; his water shall be sure." God's blessing includes all temporal things. He does not promise us the bread of idleness nor the bread of luxury, but sufficiency, and the records of faith have no richer story than the providence of God in common things in answer to His people's believing prayers.

4. A larger vision. "Your eyes shall see the King in His beauty; they shall behold the land of far distances." The spiritual vision is characterized by a life of holiness and obedience. "I know more than all my teachers," David could say, "because I keep Your statutes." There is such a vision of Jesus possible to the soul as will make Him more real than all persons and things and give to the heart such utter satisfaction and rest that we never again can want anything else. The historical Christ apprehended by the intellect is one thing, the living Christ known, realized and loved by the heart is another. The vision does not add to His beauty, but it makes Him real to us and from that hour all other attractions fade and all other delights pale before the vision of His love.

"I have seen Jesus and I'm weaned from all beside,
I have seen Jesus and my wants are all supplied,
I have seen Jesus and my heart is satisfied,
Satisfied with Jesus."

But the vision takes in the whole horizon. "They shall behold the land of far distances." He will reveal to us not only His beauty, but all that inheritance of blessing which He has for us. "The riches of the glory of His inheritance in the saints and the exceeding greatness of His power toward us who believe." There is a land of promise for every saint just as real as the hills and valleys of ancient Canaan and just as large as our faith is able to take Him.

Most people have such a limited range of vision, but God promises to give us wider horizons when we see all the fulness of His purpose for us, and all the glory of our destiny as the redeemed children of God, and the years of His kingdom and glory that lift us above the lesser attractions of the world and sin, and we press on to apprehend all for which we have been apprehended of Christ Jesus. Shall we ask Him to open our eyes and show us the vision of the "land that is very far off"?

And then the prophet adds, "Your eyes shall see Jerusalem a quiet habitation, a tabernacle that shall not be taken down." God will give us the vision of His work and its blessing and prosperity, and then send us forth to make it real.

5. The glorious liberty of God's fulness.

"There the glorious Lord will be unto us a place of broad rivers and streams wherein shall go no galleys with oars, neither shall gallant ship pass thereby."

This is a very fine figure of the fulness and the freedom into which the Holy Spirit brings the surrendered heart and life. God becomes to us a glorious Lord, and life becomes not a hard struggle like the fight of the toiling rower making his way with strenuous effort through the opposing waves, but like a vessel borne on by the mighty current, making our life spontaneous, victorious and sublime.

Beloved, do we know Him as the glorious Lord? Have we found our place in the mid current of this mighty river of His love and power, and is our life not a desperate endeavor. but a glorious liberty of love and power? Let us grasp the vision and let us rise to meet it.