

The Lord's Dealings With His People

Robert Murray M'Cheyne:

There are times in the life of a believer when he is like a traveller who has arrived at some high eminence; he can look back on the way he has gone and the way he has yet to go. So this is a passage where God tells us what he has done and what he will yet do. The history of a believer is wonderful, whether we look backward or forward. If we look back, there is election in a past eternity; and if we look forward, there is deliverance and final victory. As Christ's name is "wonderful", so all the members of his body are wonderful, for they are "men wondered at".

The history of a believer divides itself into two parts - before and after conversion.

Let us consider the past history of a believer.

"Hearken unto me, O house of Jacob and all the remnant of the house of Israel, which are borne by me from the belly, which are carried from the womb" (verse 3). God follows his chosen vessels before their conversion.

Now, let us notice some of his providences; and the first before they are awakened is, in preserving them. There are some, I believe that are like John, "filled with the Holy Ghost even from their mother's womb" (Luke 1:15); or like Jeremiah, "before thou camest out of the womb I sanctified thee" (Jeremiah 1:5). But this is not the way commonly, for "we are shapen in iniquity and conceived in sin" (Psalm 51:5). We are degenerate plants of a strange vine. Now those that are vessels of mercy are kept safe. God keeps them from falling into hell. They are often brought to the brink of it, it may be by a fever, or such like; but "he sends his word and heals them" (Psalm 107:20). Others are cut down; but God spares his chosen vessels.

A second providence before conversion is, God does not take away his Holy Spirit from them. It is a wonder God does not take it away. Often they resist and grieve the Spirit, and sin against convictions. Ah, brethren! we will never know till eternity, what a mercy it was that God never took away his Spirit from us.

A third mercy before conversion is, he brings them to the place where they are awakened. Who brought Zacchaeus to the sycamore tree? It was the same hand that beckoned him to come down. Who brought the woman of Samaria to the well? The same that told her all things that ever she did. Who brought you and me to the place where we were awakened? It was he that hath "borne us from the belly, and carried us from the womb"- he who is the Alpha and the Omega.

A second part of the believer's history is the time after awakening and before conversion. Unconverted souls are Satan's property; and when Christ comes in, no wonder that Satan roars and is enraged; and so does the world - they do not like to see their companions leaving them. The tenderest parent is often enraged at his child leaving him. But let us notice what God does for them after they are awakened.

First of all, he does not let them go back. He makes them say, "I have opened my mouth to the LORD and I cannot go back" (Judges 11:35) - I will never, never go back. Ah! many are driven back like a ship before a stormy sea. Once they bade fair for Christ and for heaven; but they could not bear the tempest of hell and the rage of an ungodly world. But God's children are carried forward: they are carried by God from the belly - they are borne by him from the womb. Ah! you are not driven back by persecutions, nor by a tempting world. You can tell the world you have opened your mouth to the Lord, and you cannot - you will not go back. God help us to go forward!

Secondly, God keeps them from refuges of lies. Some set out with great anxiety, but fall asleep, and never awake till they hear the voice, "Come to judgment! Come to judgment! Come away!" Others take rest in outward forms, prayer, and ordinances. Some go farther still - they take rest in their feelings. These are refuges of lies; but chosen vessels are carried past these refuges of lies; and they are carried past the temptations of the world. It is a sweet thing to be carried by Jesus.

Another mercy is, they are carried to Jesus - to the Rock, the smitten Rock, to the wounded, bleeding bosom of Jesus. God never rests till he carries them to his Son - "I drew them with cords of love" (Hosea 11:4). It is God that does it. Oh! if any of you have been brought to the Rock that is higher than you, it is God that has done it. He does all, from election to coronation. Oh it is quite natural to be awakened, but not so to be brought to Jesus - to leave all your own righteousness, and to take the righteousness of another. Oh it is divine! None but God can make you do it. Ah! can you say, then, "In the LORD have I righteousness and strength" (Isaiah 45:24)?

Let us consider the future part of a believer's history.

"And even to your old age I am he; and even to hoar hairs will I carry you: I have made and I will bear; even I will carry, and will deliver you" (verse 4). Here you may observe three particulars.

Who is it that offers to carry them even to old age?

It is "I am he" — "He". It is the very same being that has brought us hitherto that will carry us on till he sets us down in glory. Ah! it is a sweet truth - "And even to your old age I am he; and even to hoar hairs will I carry you." The future history of those of you who are come to Christ is unknown to yourselves. God in mercy hath hid it from us; but he hath carried us through the worst already; and do you think that he that hath carried us thus far will let us slip now? Ah no! "And even to old age I am he; and even to hoar hairs will I carry you! I have made, and I will bear..." Let us notice some of the believer's trials, while journeying through the wilderness.

Temptation. It is when you are brought to Christ that you feel temptation. But, ah! you can then say, "Rejoice not against me, O mine enemy! When I fall, I shall arise; and when I sit in darkness the LORD shall be a light unto me" (Micah 7:8). Never, till a man is brought to Christ, does Satan rage and put forth such wily temptations: "Simon, Simon, behold, Satan hath desired to have you, that he might sift you as wheat" (Luke 22:31). As long as you are away from Christ the devil will let you pray, read the Bible, and come to the house of God, and let you think you believe; but, when Jesus comes and draws you to himself, then temptations begin. Many a believer is like to fail in the day of adversity; but, beloved, fear not. There is one who hath made and will bear - who will carry, and deliver you.

There are afflictions. Ah! there are many, many afflictions, beloved, between you and the better land. There are the afflictions of a poor, frail, dying body. There are also soul afflictions - darkness, desertions, doubting, fears. And there are family afflictions. But ah! there is a hand engaged to carry us through. It matters not the rugged mountains, if the sheep be on the Shepherd's shoulder.

The time may be long. Some may have a short fight and a sure victory - but a step to the crown. Others of you may have long, long to tarry here. This sweet promise is to you - "And even to old age I am he", etc.

Let us consider how he will carry us.

"Through faith." They are "kept by the power of God through faith unto salvation" (I Peter 1:5). It is by faith you first found peace to your soul; so by faith you will be carried to the end. You came empty at first, and you found Christ; so you must come to the last. You came hell-deserving, undone, and closed with him as the Lord your righteousness; so you must come to the last. You came weak, and you found strength; you came poor, and you were made rich; so you must come to the last.

Consider why he will carry us.

Because he hath said it. And hath he said it, and will he not do it? It is impossible for God to lie. God will carry you. He hath pledged his word he will do it.

He will carry us because his honour is engaged. If we were suffered to drop from the Shepherd's shoulder, then all in heaven - all in hell - would hear of it; but, ah! no. Though we sin every day, yet he pardons us every day - he blots out all our iniquities.

Another reason why he will carry us is, because he loves us. Ah, beloved, he loves us better every day. It was said of Jesus, "He increased in wisdom and stature, and in favour with God and man" (Luke 2:52). So it is with all that are united to him. If, when we were enemies, God loved and Jesus died for us, how much more now, being reconciled by the death of his Son! Ah, yes! he will love us - "I have made, and I will bear; even I will carry, and will deliver you."

I would now apply this subject.

To you that are bold, and have no fears - no doubts. Ah! rejoice with trembling. Believer, you are carried by the same hand. The nailed hand of Jesus is underneath you. Walk softly.

To you that are fearful, fear not: your Redeemer is strong. He that brought you to Christ will bring you safe to glory. He, from his throne, will put the crown upon your head - the crown of victory. He will do it - "I have made, and I will bear; even I will carry, and will deliver you." Greater is he that is for you, than he that is in the world" (1 John 4:4). "Fear not, little flock: it is your Father's good pleasure to give you the kingdom" (Luke 12:32). May God bless his Word. Amen.