

Messiah's Victory Predicted and Desired

by Edward Payson

The psalmist prays for Christ's victory and triumph, asking him to gird on his sword, ride forth in glory and majesty, and conquer sinners with his truth, meekness, and righteousness.

Scripture: Psalm 45:3, Psalm 110:1, Isaiah 9:6, Hebrews 4:12, Revelation 19:11

Topics: "Christ's Victory", "Salvation Grace"

Description

Edward Payson preaches about the psalmist's prayer to Jesus Christ, the great Captain of our salvation, to ride forth prosperously with truth, meekness, and righteousness. The psalmist addresses Christ as the Most Mighty, acknowledging His power as the Mighty God and Savior. The prayer emphasizes the importance of Christ wielding the sword of grace, being clothed in glory and majesty, and riding forth to conquer sinners with His all-conquering grace. The sermon highlights the imagery of Christ going forth in glory, subduing enemies, and bringing salvation to those wounded by His arrows of conviction.

Transcript

Gird thy sword upon thy thigh, O most Mighty, with thy Glory and thy Majesty; And in thy Majesty ride prosperously because of truth and meekness and righteousness; And thy right hand shall teach thee terrible things. Thine arrows are sharp in the heart of the king's enemies whereby the people fall under thee. -- Psalm xlv. 3, 4, 5.

IN these words the psalmist, led by the Spirit of truth, addresses Jesus Christ, the great Captain of our salvation, to whom, as we learn from St. Paul, this psalm refers. In the first verse, the inspired author describes the state of his mind, when he began to pen it. My heart, said he, is inditing a good matter; I speak of the things, which I have made touching the king; my tongue is the pen of a ready writer. But before he could proceed farther, the illustrious personage, who was the subject of his meditations, seems to have revealed himself to his enraptured mind, resplendent in glory, and pre-eminent in beauty; so that, instead of speaking of him, as he had intended, he felt constrained to address him as present; and cries out in an ecstasy of admiration and love, Thou art fairer than the children of men; grace is poured into thy lips; therefore God hath blessed thee forever. The exquisite pleasure which he felt while contemplating this delightful vision, and speaking the praises of his Redeemer, naturally excited in his heart the most fervent desires, that Christ's kingdom might be extended; and that others might be conquered by his grace, and brought to know one whose presence produced such fulness of joy. Hence he cries out in the language of our text, Gird thy sword upon thy thigh, O Most Mighty, with thy glory and thy majesty; and in

thy majesty ride prosperously, because of meekness and truth and righteousness, and thy right hand shall teach thee terrible things. His benevolent prayer was no sooner uttered, than with the prophetic eye of faith he saw it answered. He saw this Lord of his affections, this object of his admiration, this subject of his praises, riding forth through the world in the chariot of his salvation, conquering and to conquer; and exultingly cries, Thine arrows are sharp in the hearts of thine enemies, whereby the people fall under thee.

My professing friends, no man was ever favored with a view of the glory and beauty of Christ, without feeling emotions and desires similar to those here expressed by the psalmist, without being constrained to pray, as he does, in our text, for the exertion and the triumph of his all conquering grace. For it is impossible to contemplate such a being, and to know the joy, which his presence gives, without ardently desiring, that others, and especially our acquaintance and friends, may share in our joys. And should he be pleased to favor any of us with such views of himself, now we are assembled professedly to pray for the effusions of his grace, and to commemorate his dying love, we shall find no language better suited to express our feelings and desires, than that which is employed by the psalmist in our text. Let us then consider the import of the language, the reasons, why he employed it, and the happy effects, which are witnessed, when the petitions contained in it are answered.

I. The first thing which deserves our attention in this prayer of the psalmist, is the appellation, by which he addresses Christ, O thou Most Mighty. He had, in the preceding verse, celebrated the preeminent beauty and loveliness of his person; Thou art fairer than the children of men. He had also noticed his grace and mercy, as a mediator, displayed in the invitations and promises, which he uttered; Grace is poured into thy lips. But as he was now about to pray for an exertion of his power, he addresses him by a corresponding appellation, and calls him Most Mighty.

The propriety of this appellation will not be questioned, when we consider that with respect to his divine nature, Christ is the Mighty God; the Lord Jehovah, in whose arm dwells everlasting strength. Nor is it less applicable to him considered as mediator. In this character he is Immanuel, God with us; and as such is mighty to conquer, and mighty to save. He is mighty to conquer; for he has led captivity captive; he has conquered sin, and death, and hell--the three most formidable enemies, that ever assailed the happiness of men, or the throne of God; enemies, who have repeatedly foiled, and who laugh to scorn all power short of Omnipotence. Nor is he less mighty to save; for he has saved millions from the most awful fate, in the most desperate circumstances. He says of himself, I am he that speaketh in righteousness, mighty to save. So say all the inspired writers. In a word, all power in heaven and earth is his; and he is able to save, even to the uttermost.

Let us next consider the import of the petition, which the psalmist presents to this Most Mighty of beings. It is, in brief; that he would exert his might, or the power of his grace, for the conversion and salvation of sinners. For this purpose, he prays,

1. That he would arm himself with the necessary weapons; Gird on thy sword. Christ has a sword of justice, and a sword of grace; a sword of justice, to cut off incorrigible offenders; and a sword of grace, to subdue his chosen people, and make them willing in the day of his power. It is the latter, which the psalmist here wishes him to gird on; and this is his word; for, says the apostle, the sword of the Spirit is the word of God. Agreeably, when St. John beheld him in vision in the midst of his churches, he saw a sharp two-edged sword proceeding out of his mouth. It is with propriety, that this word is compared to such a weapon; for the apostle informs us, that it is quick, or living, and powerful, and sharper than any two edged sword, piercing even to the dividing asunder of the soul and spirit, and of the joints and marrow, and laying

open the thoughts and intents of the heart.

It must be observed, however, that this description of the word of God, is applicable to it, only when Christ girds it on, and employs it as his sword. Of what use is a sword, even though it be the sword of Goliath while it lies still in its scabbard, or is grasped by the powerless hand of an infant. In those circumstances it can neither conquer, nor defend, however well suited it might be to do both, in the hand of a warrior. It is the same with the sword of the Spirit. While it lies still in its scabbard; or is wielded only by the infantile hand of Christ's ministers, it is a powerless and useless weapon; a weapon, at which the weakest sinner can laugh, and against which he can defend himself with the utmost ease. But not so when he, who is Most Mighty, girds it on. Then it becomes a weapon of tremendous power, a weapon resistless as the bolt of heaven. Is not my word like a fire, and a hammer, saith the Lord, which breaketh the rock in pieces? It is indeed; for what can be more efficacious and irresistible, than a weapon sharper than a two-edged sword, wielded by the arm of omnipotence? What must his sword be whose glance is the lightning? Armed with this weapon, the Captain of our salvation cuts his way to the sinner with infinite ease, though surrounded by rocks and mountains, scatters his strong holds and refuges of lies, and with a mighty blow, cleaves asunder his heart of adamant, and lays him prostrate and trembling at his feet. Since such are the effects of this weapon in the hand of Christ, it is with the utmost propriety, that the psalmist begins by requesting him to gird it on, and not suffer it to be inactive in its scabbard, or powerless in the feeble grasp of his ministers.

2. The psalmist petitions Christ to go arrayed in his glory and majesty; that glory and majesty, with which he then saw him to be clothed. Feeling himself deeply impressed and affected by the view of this glory and majesty, he could not but hope that the displays of it would produce similar effects upon others. As if he had said, Lord, thy glorious perfections and awful majesty subdue, overwhelm, dazzle, and delight me, and fill my soul with admiration, reverence and love; go then, I beseech thee, and display them to others; and they will feel constrained to submit to thee, as I have been, and to acknowledge that thou art fairer than the children of men, the chief among ten thousand, and altogether lovely.

But in what do the glory and majesty of Christ consist? I answer,--glory is the display, or manifestation of excellency. Now Christ is possessed of excellencies or perfections of various kinds; he has some excellencies, which belong to him as God; some, which belong to him as man, and some, which are peculiar to him as God and man united in one person. Of course, he has a threefold glory: This glory, as God, consists in a display of the infinite perfections, and excellencies of his nature.

This glory he possessed with his Father before the world was. His glory as man, consists in the perfect holiness of his heart and life. His glory as God and man united in one person, the mediator, consists in his perfect fitness, or suitableness to perform all those works, which the office of mediator requires of him. This is the glory of which St. John speaks, We beheld his glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth. This is the glory in which Christ appears, when he goes forth to subdue sinners to himself; and this, therefore, is the glory which is meant in our text.

If it be asked, in what this glory more particularly consists, I answer,--it consists in a fullness or sufficiency of every excellence and perfection necessary to qualify him for the all important office of mediator between God and man; every thing, which is necessary, either to satisfy the justice and honor of God, or to excite and justify the utmost love, admiration, and confidence of man. Now all this Christ possesses in perfection. He possesses every thing necessary to satisfy the justice and secure the honor of God; for he has once and again declared, by a voice from heaven, that in him, or with him, he is ever well pleased.

He also possesses every thing necessary to excite, encourage, and justify the highest love, admiration, and confidence of sinful men; for in him all fullness dwells, even all the fullness of the Godhead. There is in him a fullness of truth, to enlighten sinners, and lead them to believe in him; for in him are hidden all the treasures of divine wisdom and knowledge. He has also a fullness of grace, to pardon, sanctify, and save them; for the riches of his grace are unsearchable.

Now the display or manifestation of this infinite fullness of grace and truth constitutes the glory, in which the psalmist wished Christ to appear. He wished him also to appear in his majesty. The difference between majesty and glory consists in this; glory is something, which belongs either to the person or the character of a being; but majesty is more properly an attribute of office, especially of regal office. This office Christ sustains. He is exalted to be a Prince as well as a Savior; he is King of kings and Lord of lords; and it is principally in his character of a king, that he subdues his enemies, and dispenses pardon.

The psalmist, therefore, wished him to appear in this character, arrayed in his awful majesty, that while his glory excited admiration, and delight, and love, his majesty might produce reverential awe, and lead sinners to submission and obedience.

In the next place, the psalmist prays, that being thus armed with his powerful sword, and arrayed in his glory and majesty, Christ would ride forth through the world, conquering and to conquer. In thy majesty ride prosperously. There is in these words an evident allusion to the manner, in which monarchs were, in those days, accustomed to go forth to battle. Arrayed in dazzling armor, and adorned with all the ensigns of royal dignity, they ascended a splendid chariot and rode forth at the head of their armies, to assist friendly, or subdue hostile nations. In a similar manner the psalmist wishes Christ, the Captain of our salvation, to go forth, to deliver his people and destroy his enemies; and in the same word prays for and predicts his success.

A most striking description of him, as going forth in this manner, we have in the revelation of St. John. I saw heaven opened, said he, and behold a white horse, and he that sat upon him was called faithful and true; and in righteousness doth he judge, and make war. His eyes were as a flame of fire, and on his head were many crowns: and he had a name written, which no one knew but himself. And he was clothed with a vesture dipped in blood, and his name is called the Word of God. And the armies of heaven followed him, clothed in fine linen, white and clean. And out of his mouth goeth a sharp sword, that with it he should smite the nations; and he shall rule them with a rod of iron; and he treadeth the winepress of the fierceness and wrath of Almighty God. And he hath on his vesture and thigh a name written, King of kings and Lord of lords. With a similar view of our Redeemer the prophet Isaiah was favored, when he cried, Who is this that cometh from Edom, with dyed garments from Bozrah; this that is glorious in his apparel travelling in the greatness of his strength? It is I, the Savior answers, I, that speak in righteousness, mighty to save. Such is the glorious personage, whom the psalmist here addresses, such the manner, in which he wished him to go forth to war.

II. We proceed now to consider the reasons, why the psalmist wished the Savior to go forth prosperously, and the cause, in which he wished him to engage. Do this because of truth, and meekness, and righteousness. This passage may be taken in two different senses, and it is rather doubtful which was in the mind of the psalmist. He might perhaps intend the truth, meekness, and righteousness of Christ himself; for all these qualities belong to him in the highest degree. He is the Amen, the Faithful and True Witness, the way, the truth, and the life; and when he goes forth to battle, righteousness is the girdle of his loins, and faithfulness, or truth, the girdle of his reins.

Meekness is also an eminent characteristic of Christ. Learn of me, says he, for I am meek and lowly in heart. Nor is he less distinguished for righteousness. We have seen in the passage already quoted, that he is one, who speaks in righteousness; and that in righteousness he doth judge and make war; and the prophet Isaiah informs us, that as a king, he shall rule in righteousness, and with righteousness judge the poor. If we suppose this to be the meaning of the psalmist, we must understand him as assigning, in these words, the reason why he wished and prayed for the success of the Savior in his glorious expedition. Mayest thou ride prosperously, because thou art true, and meek, and righteous; and therefore, deservest the victory. Or,

2. By meekness, truth, and righteousness, the Psalmist might mean these qualities in the abstract; and if this be his meaning, we must understand him as specifying the cause in which he wished Immanuel to engage. He saw that meekness, truth, and righteousness, were in a great measure banished from the world; that the few, who loved and exercised these virtues, were despised and oppressed, and that error, falsehood, violence, and injustice almost universally prevailed. In a word, he saw what the prophet so feelingly describes and laments. Men, says he, sin in transgressing and lying against the Lord; speaking oppression and revolt, conceiving and uttering from the heart words of falsehood. And judgment is turned away backward, and justice standeth afar off; for truth is fallen in the street, and equity cannot enter. Yea, truth faileth, and he that forsaketh evil maketh himself a prey. For this wretched state of things the psalmist saw there was no remedy but in the success of his arms, whose kingdom consists in righteousness, and peace, and joy in the Holy Ghost, and whose design it is, to save all the meek of the earth. Hence, as a lover of goodness, and a friend to mankind, he wished and prayed that the great Deliverer might ride forth prosperously, diffusing truth, and meekness, and righteousness through the land.

III. To enforce his petition, the psalmist predicts the certain success, which would attend Messiah, if he thus rode forth to battle. Thy right hand shall teach thee terrible things; that is, thou shalt know experimentally what terrible things thy power can perform. Hence the church is represented as saying, By terrible things in righteousness shalt thou answer us, O God of our salvation. By these terrible things are intended,

1. The destruction, with which he shall overwhelm his incorrigible enemies. This destruction the prophet Isaiah described, when he saw him in vision returning from battle and victory. Why, he exclaims, art thou red in thine apparel, and why are thy garments like his, that treadeth the wine vat. Because, he answers, because I have trodden the wine press alone, and of the people there was none with me; for I have trodden them down in mine anger, and trampled them in my fury, and their blood is sprinkled upon my garments, and I have stained all my raiment. This was fulfilled, when he so terribly destroyed his incorrigible enemies, the Jews, agreeably to his own predictions. It was fulfilled when he no less terribly overthrew pagan, persecuting Rome, and other nations, that conspired against his church. It is still fulfilled in the destruction of all, who obstinately reject his offered grace, and refuse to submit to his authority; and it will be still more signally fulfilled in the awful day, when he shall say, Those mine enemies, that would not have me to reign over them, bring hither and slay them before me.

2. There are also many terrible things which attend, or rather precede, the conquest of those, whom he makes willing to be his people in the day of his power. He sends his spirit to convince them of sin, of righteousness, and judgment; sets his terrors in dreadful array round about them; causes the flaming curse of his broken law to pursue them, pierces the conscience, and cleaves asunder their hearts with his sharp two edged sword, beats down their fancied strength to the earth, and often brings them to the very verge of despair, before they submit, and cry for mercy. That these are terrible things indeed to the

awakened sinner, none who have suffered thus need be told; and such are the terrible things, which the right hand or power of Christ performs, when he rides forth to battle, as the Captain of salvation.

Lastly. 'While thus beseeching the Redeemer to ride forth prosperously, and predicting his success, he seems suddenly to have seen his prayers answered, and his predictions fulfilled. He saw his all conquering Prince gird on his resistless sword; array himself in glory and majesty; ascend the chariot of his gospel, display the banner of his cross, and ride forth, as on the wings of the wind, while the tremendous voice of a herald proclaimed before him, Prepare ye the way of the Lord; exalt the valleys, and level the hills; make the crooked ways straight, and the rough places plain; for, behold, the Lord God comes; he comes with a strong hand; his reward is with him, and his work before him. From the bright and fiery cloud which enveloped his chariot, and concealed it from mortal eyes, he saw sharp arrows of conviction, shot forth on every side, deeply wounding the obdurate hearts of sinners, and prostrating them in crowds around his path, while his right hand extended raised them again, and healed the wounds which his arrows had made; and his omnipotent voice spoke peace to their despairing souls, and bade them follow in his train, and witness and share in his triumph. From the same bright cloud he saw the vengeful lightnings, flashing thick and dreadful, to blast and consume every thing that opposed his progress; he saw sin, and death, and hell with all its legions, baffled, defeated, and flying in trembling consternation before him; he saw them overtaken, bound, and chained to his triumphant chariot wheels; while enraptured voices were heard from heaven exclaiming, Now is come salvation, and strength, and the kingdom of God, and the power of his Christ. Such was the scene, which seems to have burst upon the ravished sight of the entranced prophet; transported with the view, he exclaims, Thine arrows are sharp in the hearts of thine enemies, whereby the people fall under thee.

And, my friends, permit me to add, that similar scenes, though on a smaller scale, are witnessed by the eye of faith in every place, through which Christ now rides invisibly in the chariot of his salvation. Then the sword of the Spirit, the word of God, which, in the feeble hands of his ministers, had long seemed like a sword rusting in its scabbard, or grasped by an infant, becomes a weapon of resistless energy. Then the arrows of conviction, which had been vainly aimed, and feebly sent, are guided between the joints of the harness, and sinners feel them quivering in their hearts. Then the obdurate and incorrigible enemies of Christ are either laid low by the stroke of death, or blasted and seared by the lightnings of his vengeance, and left like a withered oak, on which the bolt of heaven has fallen, to stand naked and barren, till the appointed time for cutting them down and casting them into the fire! Then truth, and meekness, and righteousness, which had long seemed dead, revive, and ignorance, falsehood, and unrighteousness, are compelled to fly. Then the bonds of sin are burst; Satan is unable to retain his captives; death and the grave lose their terrors; joyful acclamations are heard in heaven, celebrating the return of penitent sinners; and crowds of those, whom, Christ's arrows have wounded, and his right hand healed again, are seen flocking around his chariot, shouting the praises, and extolling the triumphs of their great Deliverer; while those, who, like the psalmist, have been praying and waiting for his appearance join in the song, and exultingly cry, Thine arrows are sharp in the hearts of thine enemies, whereby the people fall under thee.

And now, if such are the blessed effects of Christ's presence, when he rides forth prosperously, who, that ever saw his glory, can forbear exclaiming with the psalmist, Gird on thy sword, O Most Mighty, and in thy majesty ride prosperously! And are there not now special reasons to hope that this prayer will be answered? Nay, that Christ has already begun to answer it? Has he not begun, in more than one heart, to give power and energy to his long inactive sword? Has he not begun to show himself in his glory and majesty to some of his mourning, waiting people among us?

Has not the voice of his herald been heard exclaiming, Prepare ye the way of the Lord, make straight in this desert a high way for our God? Do not some parts of this town begin to shake under the weight of his thundering chariot wheels, and do not his arrows of conviction begin to fly thick around, causing some of the people, who have hitherto been his enemies, to fall before him? Do not some of you, my hearers, already feel these arrows sharp in your hearts, and does not his word, which has long assailed you in vain, like a sword that had lost its edge, now begin to cut deep, to wound your consciences and lay open your hearts?

Yes, my friends, we know, and you know, that these tokens of the approach of his presence begin to be seen and felt. Yes, let his church hear and be glad; let his enemies hear and tremble; he comes, our Prince, our Savior, our Deliverer comes, riding gloriously in the chariot of salvation; comes to bless his people with peace; comes to do terrible things, and make bare his omnipotent arm. And how do you intend to meet this majestic Prince, the King of glory, this illustrious conqueror, should he visit you?

Will you meet him as an enemy or as a friend? Will you fall under his arrows of conviction, or be blasted by the lightnings of his vengeance? Alas, at present many of you can meet him only as enemies. His mark is not instamped on your foreheads; his protecting blood is not sprinkled upon the doorposts of your houses, to prevent the entrance of the destroying angel. There is no altar for prayer erected in your families, to distinguish you from the heathen, who call not upon his name, and upon whom, we are told, his fury will be poured out.

Nay, you have not even a seat at his table, to serve as a visible token that you acknowledge him for your friend. Soon will many of you crowd away from him, though one would think you should tremble lest he meet you at the door and ask, why you thus fly from the table of your Maker and Redeemer. But though now his enemies, it is not too late to become his friends. One great object, on which he goes forth in his chariot of salvation, is to convert his enemies into friends. O, then, seek to be found in this happy number.

Cry to him in all the anxiety of alarm, Lord, bend thy course towards me, plant one of thy sharp, but salutary arrows in my flinty heart that I may fall under thee, and become one of thy people in this day of thy power. And let those, who already feel his arrows in their hearts, beware how they endeavor to extract them, or permit any hand to do it but his own. To those, who will apply to no other physician, he will in due time return to heal their wounds, and speak peace to their consciences.

But remember the time is short. Soon will the Savior be gone and then he that is unjust, must remain unjust still, and he that is filthy, must be filthy still. Now, in a peculiar manner, is the accepted time, and day of salvation. And we, my christian friends, how shall we receive our Prince and Savior, should he visit this place? What shall we, what can we render to him, who has remembered us in our low estate, and returned to visit us with his salvation? What indeed, but that offering, which he prizes above all others, a broken and contrite heart?

Bring to him such a heart. Show him the scars, which his arrows of love formerly made in it. Remind him and yourselves of the memorable time, when he came to heal the wound, and speak peace to your consciences. Let every heart which he has thus wounded and healed, prepare him room. Let every voice, which he has tuned to join in the hallelujahs of heaven, be now heard celebrating his perfections, and praying for his speedy and universal triumph.

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