

Acceptable Present to the Lord of Hosts

by J.C. Philpot

The present that is made to the Lord of hosts is a people, specifically the elect of God, who are chosen in Christ before all worlds and characterized by being scattered, peeled, and terrible from their beginning hitherto.

Scripture: Psalm 107:12, Isaiah 18:7, Matthew 7:3, John 17:6, Romans 3:23, Philippians 3:7, Hebrews 12:22

Topics: "Humility And Brokenness", "Righteousness In Christ"

Description

Joseph Philpot preaches about the nature of the present that is brought to the Lord of hosts, describing a people who are scattered, peeled, meted out, trodden under foot, and whose land the rivers have spoiled. He emphasizes the importance of coming to the Lord in humility, acknowledging our unworthiness and need for Jesus as our righteousness and salvation. Philpot highlights the contrast between worldly expectations and the true acceptance found in presenting our brokenness and emptiness to God at mount Zion, where Jesus is received as our all in all.

Transcript

Preached at Providence Chapel, Cranbrook, on Wednesday evening, August 19, 1846, by Joseph Philpot

"In that time shall the present be brought unto the Lord of hosts of a people scattered and peeled, and from a people terrible from their beginning hitherto--a nation meted out and trodden under foot, whose land the rivers have spoiled, to the place of the name of the Lord of hosts, the mount Zion." -Isaiah 18:7

When presents are made, there is usually a correspondence between the present and the person to whom it is given. An ample present for a beggar would be an insult to a nobleman. But especially when presents are made to kings, must the offering be worthy of the royal personage to whom the gift is made; otherwise he would consider it an affront rather than a present. And this more particularly in ancient times and eastern climates, where no one ever thinks of approaching a sovereign or man in power, without laying at his feet a suitable present. Thus the queen of Sheba, when she came to see and consult Solomon, brought the richest presents her country could produce.

The Lord of hosts is said in the text to have a present--"In that time shall the present be brought unto the Lord of hosts." And what present shall he have? Shall it be gold and silver, that object of almost universal idolatrous worship? Shall it be diamonds, and pearls, and precious stones? Shall it be noble buildings, and fretted aisles, and resounding organs, and chanting voices, and the fumes of incense? He that was born in a stable and cradled in a manger, can never look with acceptance upon such offerings as these. Shall it be

then the best that nature can present? Shall it be such as the heart of man can lay at his feet as its chief offering? Shall it be creature piety? Shall it be natural religion? Shall it be human righteousness? Shall it be anything or everything that the creature may produce?

The eye of eternal purity can never look upon the works or the words of man, except with abhorrence, for all--all are tainted, polluted, and deeply stained with original sin; and therefore, an offering entirely unacceptable in the eyes of infinite purity.

What shall he then have? What offering is fit for him, for his worth? The text tells us what the present is, that is to be brought to the Lord of hosts; what that offering is, which he will look upon with acceptance, and which he will graciously receive. "In that time shall the present be brought unto the Lord of hosts of a people scattered and peeled, and from a people terrible from their beginning hitherto; a nation meted out and trodden under foot, whose land the rivers have spoiled, to the place of the name of the Lord of hosts, the mount Zion."

With God's blessing, this evening, and looking up to him, as I am compelled, from time to time, from real soul necessity, that he would inspire thoughts, and dictate words, and crown with power what shall be spoken--I shall, in considering the subject, treat it under two heads.

I. First, show the nature of the present which is made to the Lord of hosts.

II. The place to which the present is brought, and the way in which the present is received.

I. THE NATURE OF THE PRESENT WHICH IS MADE TO THE LORD OF HOSTS. It is declared by the Holy Spirit in our text to be "a people". "In that time shall the present be brought unto the Lord of a people." You will observe, that the "people" is the present which is brought to the Lord of hosts. But what "people" is this? It is the elect people of God--those that were chosen in Christ before all worlds; as the Lord speaks so clearly and emphatically, John 17:6 "Yours they were, and you gave them to me." "All mine are yours, and yours are mine; and I am glorified in them". John 17:10 The people, then, who are to be brought as a present to the Lord of hosts, are the elect of God; that people for whom Christ died; that people whom he has formed for himself, and in whom he will show forth his praise.

But the Holy Spirit in the text describes the CHARACTER of the people who are thus brought. The text does not speak of the people of God merely as elect, merely as redeemed, merely as quickened by the blessed Spirit; but the Holy Spirit has selected certain marks, which are stamped upon this people, and which distinguish them from all other people upon the face of the earth. And here we see much beauty and much wisdom. If there were no description in the word of truth of the characters of God's people, many of the Lord's family would lack evidences and testimonies that they belong to the election of grace.

Many of the Lord's people fully and firmly believe that there is an election of grace, but they are often tried in their minds as to whether they are personally and savingly interested in this election. They do not cavil and fight against God's sovereignty, and the doctrines of grace as revealed in the word of truth; their minds are bowed down to receive them, and they firmly believe them to be "the truth as it is in Jesus."

But the trying point with many--shall I say, the majority? of the Lord's people is--their own personal, individual interest in these precious doctrines. These are the points which often try their minds; not whether God has an elect people, but whether their names, as individuals, are in the Book of Life. And therefore, that we may be able to distinguish them, and that they may be able, as the blessed Spirit shines

upon their evidences, to trace out in their own hearts some decisive marks that they are of the Lord's family, the Holy Spirit has described their character, and pointed out those peculiar things which are to be found in them, and in them alone. These we shall, this evening, with God's blessing, endeavor more fully to enter into.

1. The first mark given of this people who are brought as a present to the Lord of hosts is, that they are scattered. Now, if we look at the election of grace generally, this word is most true of them. They are a scattered people. Look at this present congregation. Is it not made up of people from many different towns and villages? Cranbrook alone has not contributed its population to the large assembly that fills this chapel. It is then literally true, that the Lord's people are a scattered people; dispersed far and wide; dwelling in the towns and villages where God has placed them, that they may be so many living testimonies for God's truth, and witnesses of God's grace.

But there is something deeper than that. The Lord's people are not merely scattered as regards their local habitation, but they are scattered in an experimental sense; and this we shall see better, by viewing their state as contrasted with the case of formal, dead professors--their religion lies all together; their piety, their holiness, their goodness, their strength, and their wisdom lie all in one heap; and the more they accumulate, and the more they get together, the more collected and compact is their strength, their wisdom and their righteousness.

But not so with the Lord's family. God's children differ completely from them in this point, that they are scattered internally, as to their own feelings, and as to the experience of their own hearts, just as much as they are scattered locally up and down this ungodly world. They are "strangers, dispersed" in their feelings, as well as strangers dispersed in the midst of a wicked and crooked generation. Jas 1:1 1Pe 1:1,2

Whence springs this scattering? Have you not seen sometimes on a barn floor the wheat and chaff lying together in one confused heap; but the barn doors are thrown open, a strong wind blows through, and what is the immediate consequence? A scattering--the strong breeze blowing through begins to scatter what before lay together in one confused heap. Is not this true spiritually and experimentally in the hearts of God's people, through the gales of the Spirit? The Lord himself compares the operations of the Spirit to the wind.

When these breezes blow upon the heart, is not their effect immediately to scatter? Here was a man, before the Lord was pleased to work upon his soul with power, dead in sin or dead in a profession. There was no scattering then going on in his heart; there was no separation then in his soul of that which was of God and that which was of man, that which was of flesh and that which was of the Spirit.

But when the Lord the Spirit begins to blow upon a man's heart, immediately a scattering takes place. His righteousness, which before he had got together with great pains, and looked upon in the same way as a miser often views his accumulated treasure--when the anger of God was made manifest in his conscience, and the breadth and spirituality of his holy law were revealed with power, this righteousness which he had so painfully and so laboriously accumulated was scattered to the four winds of heaven.

His wisdom, in which he once so gloried over other men; his clear knowledge of the doctrines in the letter, his acquaintance with God's word, and the good opinion that he had of himself as a wise and understanding man--no sooner does the breath of the Lord begin to blow upon the sinner's conscience, than all this wisdom is scattered before the wind; all his head knowledge, all his empty profession, all the

vain confidence which he once got together, and once could build upon, are scattered and dispersed, and he stands before God a perfect fool.

His prayers which once he could repeat so collectedly, his thoughts which were so little confused, and his hearing which from time to time he could give with such attention, when the breath of the Lord begins to blow upon the heart, all become scattered. His prayers, instead of being collected forms, are now broken fragments of sighs and cries; his hearing, instead of being a matter of criticism, becomes this, 'O that the Lord would apply one word to my poor heart!'

His strength which once he could bring forward to support himself against temptation, to overcome sin, and to crucify the flesh--when the breath of the Lord begins to blow upon the soul, he finds to be perfect weakness.

The vain hopes, which once he could gather together, all are scattered when the wrath of God is made known in his conscience, and the purity of Jehovah is revealed in his soul; and all his confident expectations are dispersed when the breath of the Lord blows upon his heart, and scatters them to a thousand pieces.

So that the Lord's people who are brought as a present, and laid at the feet of Jesus, the Lord of hosts, are not merely a scattered people as regards their habitations, dwelling separate from the world, separate from professors, and separate from evil, as God the Spirit enables them; but in their feelings, in their experience before God are they thus scattered and divided, so as to be unable to get anything together that they can look upon with pleasure and admiration.

2. The next mark that is given of this people that are brought as a present to the Lord of hosts, is, that it is a "peeled" people. There is one text in the Scripture which I think is a key to this expression. Some of you will, perhaps, remember the promise made to Nebuchadnezzar by the mouth of the prophet Ezekiel, Eze 29:18 where the Lord tells him that he would give him Egypt in recompense for the hard service he served at Tyre, when "every head was made bald, and every shoulder peeled;" that is to say, his soldiers had been so long engaged in the siege of Tyre that their very heads had become bald through the number of years, and they carried such heavy burdens upon their shoulders, they so wielded the mattock and shouldered the spade, that the very flesh of their shoulders peeled off and became raw.

This, I think, is the Scripture key to the expression in the text, "of a people being peeled." It is as if the blessed Spirit would bring before us a heavily burdened people. If you were to carry a burden a considerable distance upon your shoulder with a stick, would not your shoulder soon become raw, and the flesh peel off? Thus the expression seems to point out the burdens which the Lord's people have to carry, so heavy and so long, that their very flesh peels off through the load.

For instance, there is the burden of sin; and wherever the Lord takes a soul in hand, he makes it feel more or less of the burden of sin. There is also the burden of unbelief and infidelity, that many of the Lord's people have so long and so much to groan under. There is the burden too of a hard heart- a dark, stupid, stony, unfeeling heart, that will not relent and melt down at the footstool of mercy. There are also many temporal, as well as spiritual burdens which the Lord's people have to carry; afflictions in providence, afflictions in body, afflictions in circumstances, afflictions in family. All these make up so many burdens that they have to bear upon their shoulders.

But the word "peeled" directs us to this idea--not merely that they have burdens, for we may carry a burden upon our shoulders for a time, and that burden not peel the skin off; but it points to the length of time during which it is carried. A little burden, comparatively speaking, carried on the shoulder for a long time, will cause the skin to peel. And thus the Spirit seems to guide our thoughts to the duration of time during which the Lord's people are burdened; that they have to carry them so far, and have to carry them so long, that spiritually they are, as a man is naturally, "peeled" by the weight they endure, and the time they carry it.

How many burdens have you had to carry during the time you have made a profession of godliness? If they are heavy, and you have carried them long, they have produced a peeled shoulder. The Lord aims, by laying burdens on, to bring us to his feet.

I have thought sometimes spiritually of an old punishment, which was in force in this country. If a prisoner refused to plead guilty, he was taken to a dungeon and stripped, he was fastened down on his back, and a weight was placed upon his chest. If he still continued obstinate, the next day an additional weight was placed. If on the third day he continued perverse, and the plea of "guilty" still refused to escape from his lips, an additional burden was put upon him; until at last, if he persevered in his obduracy, burdens were added until his chest was crushed to pieces.

This may show, in a spiritual point of view, how the Lord deals with his people. He puts a burden upon them--that burden does not at first bring them down. He puts on another--that they carry for some time in their own strength. But the Lord's purpose is to bring them down, to force the plea of 'Guilty, guilty!' out of their lips. And thus the Lord brings our sins to mind; lays upon our consciences, from time to time, our secret iniquities; allows powerful temptations to seize, harass, and distress our souls; all to bring us to this point, by putting burden upon burden, at last to force the cry and plea of 'Guilty, guilty!' out of our lips.

When once that cry comes out of our heart, then the Lord puts forth his hand, and takes the burden off the breast. But until that cry comes out of the very depths of a broken heart--until it comes with simplicity, humility, and godly sincerity from a contrite spirit--burdens will be put on, until at last the soul cries, 'God be merciful to me a sinner!'

Some of the Lord's people seem to require heavier burdens than others. There is in some, an unyielding spirit; in others, a self-justifying temper; in a third, a proud, rebellious, perverse disposition; in a fourth, lightness and frivolity of mind; so that, some of the Lord's people seem to require heavier burdens than others. But whether we require heavier burdens or lighter, to one spot, to one point, must every child of God come--to bow down, as a poor guilty sinner, at the footstool of mercy, there to receive the manifestations of mercy to his soul. As we read, "He brought down their heart with labor--they fell down; and there was none to help." Now comes the effect--"then they cried unto the Lord in their trouble, and he saved them out of their distresses". Ps 107:12,13

3. The next thing said of this people is, that it is "from a people terrible from their beginning hitherto." The word "from" means, I think, the same thing as the word "of," as though it ran thus--"In that time shall the present be brought unto the Lord of hosts of a people scattered and peeled, and of a people terrible from their beginning hitherto." In other words, it is a mere repetition of the preceding preposition "of." And that this is the meaning of the expression, seems to me clear from the second verse of the chapter--"Go, you swift messengers, to a nation scattered and peeled, to a people terrible from their beginning hitherto." Not a people taken out of a people, but this being the character of all that people.

But in what sense is this peculiar people, thus brought as a present to the Lord of hosts, "terrible from their beginning hitherto?" The words seem to my mind to bear this spiritual meaning--the Lord's people who have clearly a work of grace upon their souls are a terror to their neighbors. The very world can see something in them, that distinguishes them from the great mass of mankind. The very professor can see something in those who distinguishes them from others. And though they hate the image of Christ in them, though they abhor to see the features of grace, yet there is that in them, which makes them terrible to empty professors, because of the conviction in their conscience, that they are destitute of those things which they see in them.

Those that are dead in sin, and those that are dead in a profession, are no terror to their neighbors. A man may have the soundest doctrines in his head, but if his life be worldly, inconsistent, and ungodly, he is a terror to nobody; the Lord's people justly shun him, the world deservedly scorns him, and professors cast out his name as evil. But wherever there is a real work of grace upon the heart; wherever the blessed Spirit has touched the conscience with his almighty finger, and planted the fear of God as a living principle within; wherever there is a separation from 'the world buried in sin or in profession', a living in the fear of the Lord, in uprightness of heart, simplicity, and godly sincerity--every such man, be he in a town or be he in a village, is a secret terror to all, and more especially to those who have a name to live while dead.

If you can be as the great majority of professors are; if you have a Sunday religion, that you can put on when you take your Sunday clothes from the closet, no one will be afraid of you. But if you have a religion in your heart, lip, and life, carried out in your walk and conversation, you will be one of those people who have been "terrible from their beginning hitherto." The Lord points this out as a characteristic mark of his people, distinguishing them from those who have the form without the power--that "from their beginning," from the very first implantation of divine life in their soul, from their first convictions, from their first cry and sigh, from their first separation from the world, from their first profession of the truth in the power of it, they were a terror.

And not only so, but "hitherto," up to the very time when they are brought to the footstool of mercy as a present to the Lord. They are terrible in conviction, and they are terrible in consolation. They are terrible when under the law, and they are terrible when under the gospel. They are terrible when almost a terror to themselves, and more terrible when the image of Christ is seen more clearly and distinctly in them.

Let them speak of convictions; their very convictions carry with them a weight of evidence which is a terror to those who have never felt convictions. Let them speak of consolations; their very speech, thus "seasoned with salt," is a terror to those who have never felt any genuine consolation. Let them speak of their trials, exercises, fears, doubts, sinkings, and misgivings; they are a terror, if they are on this dark side. Let them speak of the whispers of loving-kindness and tender mercy; let them speak of smiles from the Lord, and the manifestations of his favor; they are a greater terror on the bright side than they were on the dark. And thus the Lord's people have this mark stamped upon them, that they are terrible from their beginning hitherto.

4. Another mark stamped upon them is, that they are "a nation meted out." The word "meted" means measured. "With what measure you mete, it shall be meted to you again" Mt 7:3. The present brought to the Lord in the text, is a people inwardly "meted out" in their hearts. How are they measured? Is it not by the Lord himself setting up a just balance in their souls? Are not the Lord's people measured out in their own experience before God? Depend upon it, if we have never been measured up in our feelings before God, the Lord himself has not put a just balance into our soul.

But what is this meting out? It is when the Lord is pleased to bring us to the bar of judgment; then are we measured. It is when the Lord is pleased to send home some powerful passage of his word to the heart; then there is a meting out. When we hear the experience of God's people and find our own fall short of it; then there is a meting out. When we see our deficiencies, feel our shortcomings, have a sense of our imperfections, remember our backslidings, and mourn over our continual idolatries; then there is a meting out. When we look at what the Lord does for others--the sweet smiles, the heavenly testimonies he bestows upon his people, and feel ourselves to come short in these things; then there is a meting out. When we see some of the Lord's people walking closely with God, having much of his manifested favor, living a consistent life, a life of devotedness to the Son of God, and putting us to shame by their uprightness, consistency, and inward close communion with Jesus; then there is meting out.

And this ever will be the verdict of a tender conscience. A man who has nothing but a name to live while dead--the doctrines of grace in his head without any tender feeling in his soul--is never measured up, never meted out. He has no tender conscience, no godly fear, no sense of God's purity and holiness, no trembling at God's word, no discovery of God's holy law, no knowledge of his own wickedness and sinfulness before him.

But the Lord's people carry in their bosom that fear of God which is "the beginning of wisdom." The Lord's people have in their breast a conscience made tender and alive. And this conscience that the Lord's people have, falls under the power of truth, bends before the word of God, submits to that which is commended to their heart and comes with divine weight, authority, and power attending it.

Thus the Lord's people, from time to time, are "meted out," by having their experience brought forth and tested by God's unerring word; by having, from time to time, deep exercises whether what they hope God has done for their souls is in strict consistency with the experience of the saints, whether their hopes and expectations are really such as will meet with the divine approval.

And this is the intent, and this is the profit, of a heart-searching ministry. God from time to time send such ministers among you! The child of God, whose conscience is tender, when he hears a heart-searching ministry, does not sit in criticizing judgment. He looks inward. He wants to know whether the sentence of conscience is in his favor; whether he has a sweet testimony, that he himself has passed through these vital things in his soul. Where he falls short, he desires the Lord will accomplish what he has not fully experienced. What he has experienced, he blesses God for; where he is a deficient, he cries, "What I know not, teach you me."

Thus under a heart-searching ministry, he bares his bosom, and compares the work of God as traced out in the ministry with what God has done for him. Where it is lacking, he feels a fear; where there is a mark, he feels a sweet hope. So that the Lord's people are distinguished from all people on the face of the globe, by being thus experimentally "meted out" by the Spirit of God shining with divine light into their heart, and holding up this balance, in which are weighed up their thoughts, words, and actions, their profession and possession, in the court of conscience.

But those that are dead in sin, or dead in a profession, know nothing of this weighing up. They are offended by an honest testimony. They rise up in resentment and rebellion against those who "take forth the precious from the vile". They cannot bear to hear the teachings and operations of God the Spirit upon the heart set forth, for they are condemned thereby. One whose conscience is made tender in God's fear, desires to hear the operations of the Spirit traced out, that he may have some testimony that God is with

him of a truth. And if he can find his experience sweetly unfolded, if light be cast upon his path, blessed sensations spring up in his heart of thankfulness to God, that such feelings have passed through his soul, and he praises God, that ever he has looked upon him in mercy and love.

But all others resent it; they cannot bear to hear the life-giving power of the Spirit insisted upon, because it unmasks their hypocrisy, and shows the emptiness of their profession.

5. "And trodden under foot." This is another mark of the Lord's people, who are brought as a present to the Lord of hosts--they are "trodden under foot". How scorned, despised, and contemned are the Lord's people! This is the mark and stamp the Lord the Spirit has fixed upon them. By this they are known from others--they are "trodden under foot", despised by men, rejected and cast out, as their Master was before them; "trodden under foot", as too contemptible to be thought of, as though they were the very dung and off-scouring of the earth. Let a man be ever so respectable, as it is termed, in life, if he has the grace of God in his soul, he will be "trodden under foot".

Let a minister only contend for the teachings and operations of the Spirit upon the heart, he will be "trodden under foot". Let a child of God come forward, in simplicity and honesty of soul, to speak of the Lord's dealings with him, he will be "trodden under foot". All will despise him, except the people of God, who will feel sweet communion with him. All will pour contempt upon him, scorn his profession, and hate his religion, because he makes the creature nothing, and makes God all in all; because he feels and says, that he has nothing but what God gives, knows nothing but what God teaches, feels nothing but what God inspires, and brings forth nothing but what God creates.

This is a sound most irksome to human ears. They can listen with approbation to the dignity of man and the doings of the creature. But the dealings of the Holy Spirit with broken hearts and contrite souls, the riches of Christ's grace to the poor and needy, they despise, and ever will despise; and the more a man has of the likeness and image of Christ in his soul, and the more he is manifested as one of God's own family, the more will he be "trodden under foot".

But this is not all--there is a keener stroke than this. You and I can bear the contempt of man, if we have the solemn approbation of God in our soul. We can bear the sneer, jeer, and scorn of mortal worms, who shall die, and whose breath is in their nostrils, if we have a testimony in our souls that the Lord is our God.

But to come to this painful point--to be "trodden under foot" by ourselves; not merely to be "trodden under foot" of other men--that we can bear; but to be "trodden under foot" of ourselves; to see and feel ourselves to be beyond description, the vilest of the vile, the filthiest of the filthy; to feel ourselves dung indeed before God, the off-scouring of all things, everything hateful and loathsome before his pure and holy eyes--this is trying.

But it is these feelings that make us also tread upon all that nature so highly prized before. We tread upon our own wisdom, our own strength, our own attainments, our own qualifications; we tread upon them all, as base and despicable in the eyes of a heart-searching God.

But what is more cutting still, many of the Lord's people have to fear, deeply and painfully to fear, lest they should be also "trodden under foot" by God; feeling themselves so vile, base, abject, and despicable, as to fear lest the divine foot should trample them into hell.

Thus there is a three-fold meaning in this "trodden under foot"--"trodden under foot" of men--"trodden under foot" of ourselves--and sometimes fearing lest we should be "trodden under foot" of God--and the last the keenest and most cutting stroke of all.

6. "Whose land the rivers have spoiled." They had a land then once, and a beautiful land it was--if not in reality, at least in imagination. Upon this land they could look, as a wealthy land-owner sometimes walks up and down the length and breadth of his estate; or as Nebuchadnezzar contemplated the city he had built for himself with self-complacent admiration.

Who of us has not had a land that he has admired and idolized as his own estate? his property, his children, his reputation, his worldly prospects, his fancied paradise, the little Eden set up in imagination, though he never had it in possession? But this "land the rivers have spoiled".

We cannot enter into the full force of this expression, because the rivers in our country are so different from the rivers in Palestine. There torrents rush with violence from the mountains, and carry devastation before them. The rivers in our level country rather fertilize than destroy; but in that mountainous country they come down with such force, and bring with them such a series of stones, mud, and earth, that instead of fertilizing, they spoil the land over which they rush. This, then, is the figure the Spirit has used--"whose land the rivers have spoiled"; that is, these unexpected mountain streams (for they come down suddenly) rush upon the land, and spoil its smiling produce, so laboriously and assiduously cultivated. The fields were expected to bring forth a rich harvest, but now the rivers have spoiled them.

Has it not been so with the land in which you once so delighted? When you were young, you looked forward to a life of happiness; you were to be married, and you and your family were to enjoy an imaginary paradise. But your land the rivers have spoiled. Some dear object of creature affection has been torn from your embrace; and thus the land that once smiled like the garden of Eden has been spoiled by the sudden rolling down of a mountain river.

Perhaps you had been calculating how you would get on in life, laying your plans, and drawing your schemes, expecting to be very comfortable and respectable in worldly circumstances. Alas, the river has rushed down, and spoiled and desolated the land!

When, too, you began to think about religion, you thought you would cultivate your heart, bring forth faith, hope, and love, and all the fruits of the Spirit, by due attendance on the means of grace. But this land also the rivers have spoiled. Look at your worldly schemes now--look at your heart, and the image it presents now. The once fancied fertile land--the mountain rivers and torrents have flowed over it, and covered it with earth, dirt and stones. Has it not been so? Have you not felt that the rivers have spoiled it? that your earthly paradise, your fancied Eden, is devastated? Are you not now distressed in soul, cast down in spirit, tempted by Satan; and those very things from which you expected to reap a rich harvest of joy and consolation have now become a plague and torment to you?

Who would have thought that SUCH A PEOPLE AS THIS should be presented to the Lord of hosts--a people that nobody else would take? Who would not have thought, viewing the subject in a natural light, that the Lord would take the rich, the noble, the learned, the respectable, the well-educated, the pious, the religious, and the holy; those who have never sinned against him, like the elder son in the 'Prodigal'? Who would not think, that if the Lord looked upon any people at all, he would look upon such? But the Lord's thoughts are not our thoughts, nor his ways our ways. The people whom he takes as a present to himself, are a people universally despised and hated, and by none so much despised and hated as by themselves.

My friends, can any of you find these marks meeting in your soul's experience? Here we have the inspired word of God giving us a spiritual description of the people who are to be brought as a present to the Lord of hosts. Let me read once more their character--"In that time shall the present be brought unto the Lord of hosts of a people scattered and peeled, and from a people terrible from their beginning hitherto--a nation meted out, and trodden under foot, whose land the rivers have spoiled."

As I have gone through the text, so far as the Lord has enabled me to trace out the marks the blessed Spirit has given, has there been a solemn echo in your soul? has there been a secret "Amen" in your heart's experience that you, through mercy, are one of the people thus experimentally described?

II. As these, then, are to be brought as a present unto the Lord of hosts, where is this present to be received?--"to the place of the name of the Lord of hosts, the mount Zion." There it is the present is to be brought; and this casts a light upon the reason why the Lord accepts this people. It is only in mount Zion that they can be accepted; that is, in the gospel, which mount Zion signifies.

It is out of Zion that the law was to go forth, and the word of the Lord from Jerusalem; it was in Zion that the Lord commanded the blessing. Here her saints shout aloud for joy; here the great mystery is unraveled; here the enigma is solved. The holy God could not look upon this people with acceptance viewed as they are in nature's rags and ruin. But when the blessed Spirit brings this people, with all their guilt and wretchedness to mount Zion (as the Apostle says), "But you are come unto mount Zion, and unto the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, the general assembly and church of the first-born, whose names are written in heaven,"--when the blessed Spirit brings this people described by these characters, "scattered, peeled, meted out, and trodden under foot, whose land the rivers have spoiled"--brings them all poor and needy, brings them all tatters and rags, brings them all wretchedness and ruin to mount Zion, there they receive a precious Jesus into their heart, in the sweet, unctuous teachings of the Holy Spirit.

Thus coming to mount Zion, God can receive them as a present, all broken and shattered though they are, because he receives them in the Person, love, blood, and righteousness of his dear Son. And this solves the mystery. How could you and I, all filthy and defiled as we feel ourselves to be--how could we dare to present ourselves before the footstool of omniscient purity in our native rags and creature ruin? We cannot; we dare not. But when there is a spiritual discovery to the conscience of "the Mediator between God and men, the Man Christ Jesus", faith receives the atonement; the soul feels Jesus near, dear, and precious; there is a sweet melting sensation under the dewy teachings of the blessed Spirit whereby he is received into the heart and affections as "of God made unto us wisdom, righteousness, sanctification, and redemption".

And thus the Father indeed can smile upon this wretched people, and thus indeed can the present be acceptably brought to the feet of the Lord of hosts at mount Zion. Jesus presents them to his Father, clothed with his righteousness, washed in his blood, without spot, or blemish, or any such thing.

Thus have I, however feebly, endeavored this evening to describe the character of the Lord's people as a present made, and the way in which this present is received.

What are we presenting from time to time when we come before the footstool of mercy? When we visit a throne of grace, what do we lay down there? Our own righteousness? our promises? our vows? our resolutions? what we have been? what we intend to be? Can we insult the Majesty of heaven by going to his feet, and offering him this? No; we cannot; we dare not.

If we have a discovery of God's holy character; if we have a sense of our guilt and ruin before him--as the text describes God's people--we shall come poor and needy, having nothing and being nothing, lying low at the footstool of mercy, deserving God's eternal displeasure, and yet looking up to the Mediator between God and man, and embracing, as the Spirit gives faith and power, the crucified Jesus, as all our salvation and all our desire.

But how different this is from the ways and works of man! "Make yourselves better, reform your lives, lop off the branches of sin, give up bad habits, forsake old companions, make yourselves new hearts." Is not this the language of the day? Do not these words sound from a thousand pulpits? And what is the fruit of all this lip labor? To make the proud prouder, and the hard harder; to drive farther from God those who are already far from him.

The Lord the Spirit does not teach his people thus. He teaches the people of God what they are; he leads them to the hole of the pit whence they were dug, makes them feel their ruin and wretchedness, and shows them, and that effectually, what they are--guilty, vile, lost, perishing, and undone. Thus he opens a way to receive Jesus, as of God made unto them all he is to the church.

When I feel my helplessness, it makes me come unto him on whom help is laid. When I feel my poverty, if I see his boundless riches, it makes me highly prize them. If I feel my guilt, and the blessed Spirit reveal his blood, how suitable to my guilty conscience! If I see my nakedness, how suitable is his glorious righteousness! If I feel sinking, how suitable to have the everlasting arms upholding my drooping soul! These are the qualifications that the blessed Spirit works in the hearts of God's people; which are not required once only, but are continually needful; for only so far as these qualifications are wrought and brought forth in our hearts, can we see any glory, any beauty, any preciousness, or any suitability in Jesus.

Have then you and I ever felt him precious? I hope I have at times felt him precious to my soul. But when has it been? When we have been wise, holy, righteous, religious, and doing something for him? No; not so. When we were poor and needy; when smitten with guilt and shame; when bowed down with the guilt of sin; when sunk into the ruins of self; when we had nothing and were nothing but rags and wretchedness. Then it is that the Lord of life and glory makes himself precious to the perishing sinner by opening up the riches of his dying love to the broken and contrite heart. This is the way, the only way, to grow up as he is; and this is the way, the only way, to grow up into Christ when received.

My friends, your own wisdom, your own strength, your own righteousness, your own religion--away with it! It is not worth a straw in the things of God. But the deeper you feel your need, the more suitable Jesus is. The more empty, the more room to be filled; the more stripped, the more room to be clothed; the more cast down, the more room to be raised up.

And thus, when opened up in the Spirit's light, we see what a suitable present this is for the Lord. Is it not a monarch's highest boast and prerogative to be free and bountiful? Is not this glorifying to the regal dignity of the Son of God--to receive nothing, but to bestow everything? What! shall I give him my righteousness as an equivalent? Shall I present him my good and holy life to purchase his dying love? It is worthless. But when I come as having nothing and being nothing but a mass of depravity and rags, and he is pleased to discover to my needy, naked soul his suitability and preciousness, what a sweet union there is between a poor sinner and a complete Savior, between a broken heart and a precious Jesus, between a soul in its feelings of guilt and shame and him who is mighty to save, "God over all, blessed forever."

Do you hope--do any of you hope--that you will one day face to face see the Lord as he is? that you are among this present which is to be brought to the Lord of hosts, to appear on mount Zion, with eternal glory on your heads, when sorrow and sighing flee away? Is this your hope? Do you look up sometimes with a good expectation that you will one day be safe before the throne? But can you find any mark I have described, in your experience? To know this, is to know the whole case--for if you are received and presented on mount Zion here below, you will be presented hereafter and stand on mount Zion above.

It is a mercy to feel any marks of grace written by the finger of God upon your heart and conscience. It is not because you are very holy, very spiritual, very consistent, though these are good when they come from the work of the Holy Spirit, and are his blessed fruits and graces. But we are not to bring these things, and lay them at the footstool of mercy, as though we could exchange them for "gold tried in the fire". No, the Lord will teach us that we are indeed poor and needy; that we are nothing and have nothing; that what we have is his gift, and what we are is his work.

Have I then had this evening a witness in some hearts, that they do know these things by vital experience? However tried, tempted, and cast down they may be, may God give them this sweet consolation that all their trials and exercises are for this one purpose--to lay them low and keep them low--to bring them a present to the Lord of hosts, and to endear him to their hearts in his covenant grace and dying love.

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