

Jehovah-Jesus the Constant Companion and Faithful Friend of Elect Sinners

by Thomas Bradbury

Christ is the First, the Constant Companion, and the Faithful Friend of His elect people, and He is the Saviour and Friend of His elect people.

Scripture: Psalm 45:13, Psalm 73:25, Psalm 142:4, Isaiah 41:4, Isaiah 63:9, John 14:1, Romans 11:4, 1 Corinthians 1:27, Colossians 1:15, Hebrews 12:1

Topics: "Covenant Theology", "Christ Our Companion"

Description

Thomas Bradbury preaches on the glorious truths revealed by JEHOVAH the Spirit in Isaiah 41, contrasting the weakness of Israel with the omnipotence and greatness of Israel's God. He emphasizes the beauty of God's people in covenant relationship, highlighting their worthlessness in themselves but their beauty in Christ. Bradbury delves into the covenant ties, the faithfulness of God's chosen ones, and the power of Christ to renew and strengthen His people. He explores the concept of Christ as the First and the Last, the constant Companion who sustains His people through trials, and the faithful Friend who promises to be with them till the end.

Transcript

"I the LORD, the First, and with the last; I am He." (Isaiah 41:4)

VERY blessed and precious are the truths set before us by JEHOVAH the Spirit in the chapter which I have read this morning for our instruction and edification. These truths appear all the more glorious through being stated by way of contrast. Here we have the weakness and littleness of Israel, there we see the omnipotence and greatness of Israel's God. The people of God, seen as they are in themselves, at whatever point of privilege they may be brought, however rich and varied the experience may be with which they are blessed, however high they may soar in the covenant verities of Israel's THREE-ONE-JEHOVAH, or however deep they may dive into the profound mysteries of Divine truth, though blest with covenant relationship to the ever-blessed God, yet, in themselves, they are but weak, wayward, and worthless; in fact, nothing in His sight only as He beholds them in that covenant relationship put upon them before all worlds, and wrought in them by the power, grace, and indwelling of His blessed Spirit. As He beholds them in His everlasting covenant of grace, sees them in the varied and rare perfections of their glorious Head, they appear beautiful, fair, comely in His sight. The sigh from the anxious heart of the bride is oftentimes wafted homeward, but the voice of the Beloved is sure to whisper:

"The King's daughter is all-glorious within: her clothing is of wrought gold." (Ps. 45:13) We have very much of this relationship revealed in the chapter before us. Covenant ties are spoken of in the eighth verse: "But thou, Israel, art My servant, Jacob whom I have chosen." Why not Israel My chosen and Jacob My servant? Simply because of the reason given in 1 Cor. 1:27: "But God hath chosen the foolish things of the world, to confound the wise; and God hath chosen the weak things of the world to confound the things which are mighty, and base things of the world, and things which are despised, hath God chosen, yea, and things which are not, to bring to nought things that are; that no flesh should glory in His presence." Jacob, the supplanter, is loved, while Esau is hated and rejected.

Let us now look at the preceding context. The chapter begins: "Keep silence before Me, O islands; and let the people renew their strength." These "lets" are exceedingly precious when viewed in the light of JEHOVAH'S sovereignty. "Let there be light, and there was light." "Let the people renew their strength;" the power of Christ must rest upon them. "Let them come near;" Christ by the power of His Spirit brings them near. "Then let them speak;" as the Holy Ghost sweetly testifies of the love, blood, and beauty of our most glorious Christ our hearts "bubble up," and we must speak to and of the King. "Let us come near to judgment." Who but a covenant God in Christ can judge truly of His people's necessities and sorrows? "Who raised up the righteous man?" Abraham was a representative man raised up by God to show forth the riches of His grace, the glory of His righteousness, and the power of His faith. So the question is asked, "Who raised up the righteous man from the East, called him to His feet," to receive his commission and to hear words of counsel which Jehovah alone can give? "Gave the nations before him." Do not the nations exist for the sake of God's elect, the spiritual seed of Abraham? This next is gloriously true! "And made him rule over kings." The children of God sometimes begrudge the great ones of the earth their luxuries, and graceless politicians cry out for their rights. What is my right? So far as this wretched world is concerned, about six feet of earth which I suppose will be mine when God takes His own life out of this poor body, and as to any earthly rights He will see to them that they are mine. But if the child of God is left to strive with the potsherd of the earth in respect to place, position, or power, he, as a pilgrim, will pay bitterly as far as his peace and comfort are concerned. Ah! this is a glorious testimony! "Made him rule over kings." Look at the solitary monk who caused all Christendom to quake, that magnanimous star of the Reformation, Martin Luther; before his glance, and under his faithful testimony, earthly potentates were seen to blush and quail. And have you not heard of the unflinching John Knox, whose prayers the besotted Papist Mary dreaded more than an army of soldiers? Ah! the tried and tempted children of the living God bowing lowly at His mercy-seat are a power in the earth, though unknown to earth's great ones. "He gave them as the dust to His sword, and as driven stubble to His bow." Glorious truth! "He pursued them and passed safely," or, as you see in the margin, "in peace." "In the world ye shall have tribulation, in Me, peace." When enemies abound on every hand, when doubts and fears preveiling rise, when the devil appears to have everything his own way with us, then,

"Christ is our Peace in the presence of God,"

and will be our only Peace abounding in our hearts by the power of the Holy Ghost. "He passed in peace by the way He had not gone with His feet." You and I, by feet, hands, fingers, and brains, endeavour to bring things about according to our liking, but we find trouble and anxiety, disappointment and dissatisfaction; "without are fightings; within fears." The way to glory is spoken of in that glorious description of the Good Shepherd in chap. 40:11: "He shall feed His flock like a Shepherd, He shall gather the lambs with His arm, and carry them in His bosom." That is not going by the way of their feet! Look here! "In all their affliction He was afflicted, and the angel of His presence saved them; in His love and in

His pity He redeemed them; and He bare them, and carried them all the days of old." (Isa. 63:9) A carrying God is the glory of the Gospel; a carrying, upholding, sustaining God is He who well suits those who, in weakness and weariness, cannot take a single step alone. "Who hath wrought and done it, calling the nations from the beginning?" Jehovah Himself! Before the world was, when a precious Christ was set up in covenant as the Head and Representative of grace; from the creation of the world, through the various dispensations of grace, working all things well according to the counsel of His own will. This brings us to notice the glorious description He gives of Himself in the words of the text: "I the LORD, the First, and with the last; I am He."

THE SPEAKER JEHOVAH-JESUS - "I the LORD." HIS PRE-EMINENCE - "The First." THE CONSTANT COMPANION - "And with the last." THE FAITHFUL FRIEND - "I am He." I. THE SPEAKER - "I the LORD." Who is this? None but the Christ of God in covenant relationship to His people, meeting them in all their wants and necessities throughout the whole of their earthly pilgrimage. He speaks of Himself again and again as JEHOVAH. It is truly astonishing to me how any person with ordinary intelligence can read the Bible and remain amid the errors of Socinianism or Unitarianism.

But there are thousands who profess to believe the Godhead of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ, and possess a Trinitarian creed, who are not one whit better, nay, not so honest, their profession is but a poisonous vapour at the best. "Turn with me to Isa. 48; at the twelfth verse a Person speaks: He says, "Hearken unto Me, O Jacob and Israel, My called; I am He; I am the First; I also am the Last." Notice the difference of expression between this and our text: here it is, "I also am the Last;" there it is, "I am with the last."

"Mine hand also hath laid the foundation of the earth, and My right hand hath spanned the heavens; when I call unto them, they stand up together." Now go on to the sixteenth verse: "Come ye near unto Me, hear ye this; I have not spoken in secret from the beginning; from the time that it was, there am I; and now the LORD GOD and His Spirit hath sent Me." Mark you well! this Person who says, "Mine hand hath laid the foundation of the earth, and My right hand hath spanned the heavens," also declares, "And now the LORD GOD and His Spirit hath sent Me."

Who can this be but the God-Man Christ Jesus? If the Three Persons of the glorious and undivided Godhead are not set forth here, who are? If the Trinity is not here, where will you find it? But the Christ of God is here! He, who in the days of His flesh declared: "The Spirit of the Lord is upon Me, because He hath anointed Me to preach the Gospel to the poor." (Luke 4:18; Isa. 61:1) When reading a portion of that blessed fifty-third of Isaiah, the Ethiopian eunuch enquired of Philip, "I pray thee, of whom speaketh the prophet this? of himself, or of some other man?"

Then Philip opened his mouth, and began at the same Scripture, and preached unto him Jesus." (Acts 8:34,35) So in the passage before us I know the same Jesus, and none other. I JEHOVAH, one with the Father and the Holy Ghost, through the continued ages of eternity; I JEHOVAH, Jesus Himself, manifesting His true, proper, and eternal Godhead in the midst of weakness, weariness, and woe. We see this when, as a thirsty and wayworn pilgrim, He rests on the old well at Sychar. A poor harlot woman comes to draw water.

He despises not nor discards the stray one, but requests a draught of water from her pitcher. In holy familiarity He confers rich grace upon her, causing her to drink deeply of the water of eternal life, from the springing well of the everlasting covenant. See! If you leave out the italics "he" in John 4:26, you have the

weary Man revealing Himself as I AM.

Again we see Him after a day's hard toiling, asleep in the sides of the ship on the sea of Tiberias,

"Tossed with rough winds and faint with fear,"

His disciples, at their wits' end, awake Him, crying, "Master, carest Thou not that we perish?" He stands! He speaks! He drops His word, His own omnipotent "Peace, be still" into the troubled elements, "the voice of Jehovah is upon the waters," "And the wind ceased, and there was a great calm." As man He sleeps, as God He works wondrously.

Just notice that marvellous scene recorded in John 18, when Judas, with the mob at his back, came to Gethsemane, to betray the Lord of life and glory, and deliver Him to death and to judgment: "Jesus, therefore, knowing all things that should come upon Him, went forth:" there we have a plain and unmistakable statement of His Divine omniscience: "And said unto them, Whom seek ye? They answered Him, Jesus of Nazareth. Jesus saith unto them, I AM." Mark! the personal pronoun "he" is in italics, therefore supplied, and thus marring the fair beauty of Divine truth. "And Judas also, which betrayed Him, stood with them. As soon then as He had said unto them, I AM, they went backward and fell to the ground." What a glorious and awful display of His Godhead this must have been, when the wicked, even His enemies, and His foes came upon Him to eat up His flesh they stumbled and fell. "In Him dwelt all the fullness of the Godhead bodily," and at this time the rays of indwelling Deity overawed and confounded His most determined adversaries. "Who can stand when He appeareth?" Only those whom the Father hath committed to His trust, whom He hath saved with an everlasting salvation, whom the blessed Spirit sweetly and experimentally unites to Him, as living members to one living Head, and for whom He will say to law, death, hell, and judgment, whomsoever they may accuse in the court of conscience, "I have told you that I AM; if therefore ye seek Me, let these go their way. That the saying might be fulfilled which He spake, Of them which Thou gavest Me have I lost none."

See how richly His Godhead breaks forth from that most precious of all names, JESUS, the simple meaning of the word is JEHOVAH THE SAVIOUR the Saviour of the elect; He who saves His people from their sins is Jehovah. This brings me to dwell upon.

II. HIS PRE-EMINENCE - "The First." The Person who speaks in this precious portion declares Himself not only I AM, JEHOVAH, God over all blessed for ever, but also "I AM, the First." Let us meditate upon this in the light of that pre-eminent position He maintains before His Father, and before and in the hearts of His people. It has a deeper, higher, and more experimental bearing than the same word has in Isa. 48, and Rev. 1. "I JEHOVAH, the First and with the last." The whole beauty of the passage hangs upon the word "with." "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God." (John 1:1) Christ, the Word of God, the Saviour and Friend of His elect people, is the First or Chief in all the ways and works of Jehovah, He is the Man of His counsel, the Glory of His covenant, the Beginning of His creation. Before the worlds were framed, when the delight of Christ was with the elect sons of men as He saw them all-glorious in the glass of His Father's decrees; then He was by the Father, as one brought up with Him, and declares, "I was daily His delight, rejoicing always before Him." (Prov. 8:30,31) Paul, by gracious inspiration, reveals Him as the "image of the invisible God, the Firstborn or Chief of every creature; for by Him were all things created that are in heaven, and that are in earth, visible and invisible, whether they be thrones, or dominions, or principalities, or powers; all things were created by Him, and for Him; and He is before all things, and by Him all things consist. And He is the Head of the body, the

Church; who is the Beginning, the Firstborn from the dead; that in all things He might have the pre-eminence." (Col. 1:15-18) In the salvation, experience, and glorification of His people He is the First. With adoring gratitude the whole regenerate family of God accord to Him the pre-eminence in everything. He is the chief delight of our hearts, and when His presence, preciousness, and power are experienced within, in the spirit, if not in the words, of Asaph, we cry, "Whom have I in heaven but Thee? and there is none upon earth that I desire beside Thee." (Ps. 73:25) Who works like Him in providence? and if we look history through where do we find one to be compared to Him?

Let us notice the righteous man, Abraham, the father of the faithful, and as he is called in this very chapter, the friend of God. A man remarkable for his faith, yet as weak as water when his faith was tested. See! he goes down to Egypt, and tells his wife that she must pass as his sister. Here we see evasion, hesitancy, vacillation, something like wavering in the father of the faithful. Left to himself, where is his faith? Now let me direct you to Heb. 12:1, "Wherefore seeing we are compassed about with so great a cloud of witnesses, let us lay aside every weight, and the sin that doth so easily beset us, and let us run with patience the race that is set before us, looking unto Jesus the Author, or Beginner, and Finisher of our faith."

There is a besetting sin spoken of, what is it? Some say the besetting sin of one is drunkenness; of another, covetousness. Ah! my dear friends, the apostle is not writing about sins, but concerning the besetting sin of the whole Church of the living God down here, the accursed sin of unbelief. It is mine, and who can say it plagues them not? In this we find the necessity for the exhortation, "Take heed, brethren, lest there be in any of you an evil heart of unbelief, in departing from the living God." (Heb. 3:12) Because of this accursed sin, all God's children groan more or less.

But Paul directs our minds to the great cloud of witnesses. Why? That we may be wholly taken up with the object thereof, Jesus Christ the Beginner and Finisher of the faith of every saint whose name appears in the cloud. Here we see Abraham, Moses, Rahab, Samson, and David. Are we to look to these? No! but to the all-perfect One upon whom their faith rested. "Looking off," from the cloud, "to Jesus." If Abraham is to be our pattern, then we must tell lies. But what shall I more say?

Samson is strong, but where is his strength when in the lap of Delilah? Moses is meek, but his meekness disappears at the waters of strife. Rahab, upon whom mighty and magnanimous grace was thrust, told lies when she received and hid the spies. Are these examples whom we can fully follow? No! "Looking off unto Jesus." He is the perfect pattern. In the ranks of the elect none can compare with Him. "He is chiefest among ten thousand, and altogether lovely." Look at Him as He displays the perfection of righteousness from Bethlehem's lowly manger to Calvary's bitter cross!

Unwavering rectitude is manifested throughout His life of love and suffering obedience. He was the dependent, faithful, trusting Man, and we find no trust manifested to perfection but His, and no faith worth possessing but the faith of the Head which is communicated by the power of the Holy Ghost to each and every one of the members of His mystical body. Paul gives an account of himself, and the faith he possessed, thus: "I am crucified with Christ; nevertheless I live; yet not I, but Christ liveth in me; and the life which I now live in the flesh, I live by the faith (of Abraham?

My own faith? No such thing! But) of the Son of God, who loved me, and gave Himself for me." (Gal. 2:20) This is not like the wretched, deluded Arminian who professes to live by His own faith, and by his taking God at His word. Oh, no! I cannot do this, neither can any honest child of promise. As we look at these

things by the light which God the Holy Ghost throws upon them, we see that the faith of the Son of God was unvarying, undeviating, perfect; a faith which earth and hell combined could never move.

"By such deadly foes assaulted,
By such strong temptations tried,
Still His footsteps never halted,
On from strength to strength He hied;
What could move Him,
With JEHOVAH at His side!"

Talk about Samson! Jesus proves in the experience of His people that a greater than Samson is here, even Omnipotence Himself. Christ is my Samson, my Strength, without Samson's weakness. Solomon was wondrously wise, but in Christ are secured for me all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge. He is my Solomon, my wisdom, without Solomon's folly. Christ is the First in everything to me! Where is He in your estimation this morning? There are thousands to whom the name of Jesus is but a supplement to their own, and His work a kind of makeweight to their own wretched and vain endeavours. How can a precious Christ be First in the estimation of such? But none can tell the joy, the unspeakable joy, of those who are blest in His love, live by His faith, are guided by His wisdom, and kept by His power. This gives us to see the whole election of grace saved for nothing in the Lord with an everlasting salvation. Abraham's faithfulness, Mose' rashness, David's treachery and bloodshed, with poor Rahab's lies all drowned in the ocean of atoning blood. Thus surveying JEHOVAH'S matchless grace, and the chosen jewels which sparkle in His coronet, dear old Kent could sing,

There David shines without a strain;
Uriah's blood can ne'er be known;
For like a millstone in the main
Are all his black transgressions thrown.
"Rahab the harlot, loved by Thee,
Shall never sink to Tophet's flame;
When Jesus suffered on the tree,
The Book of Life contained her name.

Blessed be God! Jesus is First in love, First in faith, First in strength, First in wisdom, First in beauty, First in excellence, and those who realize this may oftentimes be in much perplexity, like poor Asaph, but, as the perplexities of the path are theirs, so will be the perfections, and their adoring hearts must "bubble up" with, "Whom have I in heaven but Thee? and there is none upon earth that I desire beside Thee."

He who leads the van, who is the First and the Chief in the experience of His people, and the All in all of Holy Writ, says, "I am JEHOVAH, the First, and with the last." This leads us to consider

III. THE CONSTANT COMPANION - "And with the last." "With the last," say you? Perhaps God may bless our waiting hearts, visit us with His salvation, and graciously pick some of you up as we contemplate His marvellous grace and condescension as couched in these precious words, "and with the last." May He grant it to be so. This is a blessed and glorious truth! He took the first martyr home to glory, so will He take the last. His elect are His special treasure, jewels in His crown, and He will see to it that every one of them are safely brought home to glory. It is a blessed privilege to be led by the Spirit of wisdom and revelation into an experimental acquaintance with the Brother born for adversity, the Friend that sticketh closer than a brother. In the days of His flesh He was pre-eminently the lowly, dependent Man. He was driven of the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted of the devil, with none but angels to minister unto Him. Behold Him in communion with His Father! Is He not the First in this respect? "And in the morning rising up a great while before day, He went out, and departed into a solitary place, and there prayed." (Mark 1:12,13,35) Ah! but this is not all! He is First in communion in the morning. He is Last in loving toil and patient grace in the evening. He constrained His disciples to get into a ship and cross over to Bethsaida, while He sent away the people. "And when He had sent them away, he departed into a mountain to pray. And when even was come, the ship was in the midst of the sea, and He alone on the land. And He saw them toiling in rowing, for the wind was contrary unto them." At this unseasonable hour, and in the moment of their deepest need and dire necessity, He carries to their troubled hearts His tranquilizing love-message: "Be of good cheer: it is I, be not afraid." (Mark 6:45,51) If we would survey the scenes of wildest desolation which His sorrowing soul experienced we must enter in spirit the dark and gloomy vale of Gethsemane. He takes with Him His three privileged disciples; but at a certain point He stops, the winepress of JEHOVAH'S anger must be "trodden alone." (Isa. 63:3) He "began to be sorrowful and very heavy." Then said He to them, "My soul is exceeding sorrowful even unto death: tarry ye here, and watch with Me. And He went a little farther, and fell on His face and prayed, saying, O My Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass from Me! Nevertheless, not as I will, But as Thou wilt." He returns to the three, they are asleep! No smile from His Father, no sympathy from His friends! Well does Hart describe this scene of intense loneliness thus:

"Backwards and forwards thrice He ran,

As if He sought some help from man."

He is alone! But soon, loneliness must be still more lonely: "Then all His disciples forsook Him and fled." Yet still more desolate is the feeling of His heart, when, from the wild isolation of Calvary, He cries, "My God, My God, why hast Thou forsaken Me?" Why was all this? "Though He were a Son, yet learned He obedience by the things that He suffered, and being made perfect!" What an astounding truth! Made perfect! He who was perfect God, and perfect Man, learns in the school of human suffering how to perfectly sympathize with His poor, weak, despised brethren in all their temptations and tribulations.

Now let us notice particularly that word of the text "with" "And with the last." This has reference to the glorious covenant engagements of our Surety on the behalf of His elect people, and His identification with them in all their afflictions and disappointments during their sojourn in this wilderness world. The exigencies and extremities of the flock of slaughter are the opportunities of the loving Shepherd. See! There is a man who could stand before all Israel and confront and confound the whole host of Israel's internal enemies. In a moment his strength gone. Alone in the wilderness of Beersheba he longs to die; but there the ANGEL JEHOVAH, the First, and with the last, sustained Him. He arose and went to Horeb, and in the cave poured out his soul in bitterness and loneliness: "I have been very jealous for the LORD God of hosts; because the children of Israel have forsaken Thy covenant, thrown down Thy altars, and slain Thy prophets with the sword: and I, even I only, am left; and they seek my life to take it away." Now

was this the case? Not really; but fearfully so in his soul's experience. He was alone, desolate, forsaken "the last!" The experience of the Psalmist was his: "I looked on my right hand, and beheld, but there was no man that would know me: refuge failed me; no man cared for my soul." (Ps. 142:4) But the constant Companion was by his side ready to save and nigh at hand to bless. "What saith the answer of God to him? I have reserved to Myself seven thousand men who have not bowed the knee to Baal." (Rom. 11:4) Ay! and JEHOVAH the covenant God of Israel will be with His own though they may come to the conclusion that true religion is dying out of the land; though they may "wander in the wilderness in a solitary way;" though

gathering clouds around I view,

And days are dark and friends are few,

On Him I lean who not in vain

Experienced every human pain:

He sees my wants, allays my fears,

And counts and treasures up my tears."

Paul knew something of this, as he describes in 2 Timothy 4:16-18, "At my first answer no man stood with me, but all men forsook me: I pray God that it may not be laid to their charge. Notwithstanding the Lord stood with me, and strengthened me; that by me the preaching might be fully known, and that all the Gentiles might hear; and I was delivered out of the mouth of the lion." There we see isolation, desolation, yet blessed support in and deliverance therefrom. The constant Companion was true to His promise, and by the gracious encouragement Paul received from His presence and counsel, he was enabled in the riches of assurance to say, "And the Lord shall deliver me from every evil work, and will preserve me unto His heavenly kingdom: to whom be glory for ever and ever. Amen."

Desolation and desertion are oftentimes experienced by the tried pilgrims of Zion. The Psalmist could say, from a feeling heart, "My spirit is overwhelmed within me; my heart within me is desolate." Not a soul to commune with, not one to whom he could speak in his sadness and sorrow. Do you know what it is to feel alone in a crowd?

Jesus! my sorrow lies too deep

For human ministry,

And knows not how to tell itself

To any but to Thee."

Here the soul knows what it is to be "the last," and also the blessedness of His companionship and counsel who is ever true to His word "with the last."

John, with his brother James, ask the Lord, or rather, with a stroke of wisdom much to be admired, they, knowing the power of a woman's tongue, get their mother to ask, that they might sit one on the right and the other of the left hand of our Lord in His kingdom. It is very remarkable that James was the first apostle who was taken to glory, being slain by the sword of Herod Agrippa, and John was the last to enter the

halls of the glorified. Does not that look like sitting on the right hand and on the left of the King? Requests are sometimes strangely granted. But John is not only the last of the apostles, he is banished to the lonely, rocky isle of Patmos, simply for the testimony he gave to the love, blood, and beauty of his gracious Lord. He is the last in order of time, he is the last in his soul's experience. But is he left? No! He "is in the Spirit on the Lord's day;" he hears a voice; he turns: the constant Companion is with him, blessing him with glorious and gracious revelations of present grace and future glory. Yes! the blessed One of our text forsook not His persecuted disciple. He was there, "the First and with the last."

Let us look at this in another light. Can we not each ask the question, How is it that the Lord saves me? Why me! the chief, the most wretched sinner out of hell? I have rebelled against His authority, discarded His love, and would have posted headlong to hell but for His gracious interposition. Even now, in the face of affection, and love unailing, I am oft forgetful of Him; therefore, the last for a precious Christ to notice, yet, He gives me to know that I am dear to Him as the apple of His eye; He reveals Himself to me and in me as my Friend and Fellow; He refreshes my soul with the sweet music of His Name, and with a blessed foretaste of the glorious home He has provided for me up yonder. But see! He hangs upon the accursed and bloody tree, in compassion He beholds His own who in sorrow are witnessing the tragic event of that dreadful moment. Who shall be the first to enter glory with Him? His mother? No! though the wretched old Pope would have had it so, no doubt. His beloved John, who leaned on His bosom and drank in so much of His spirit? No! But the very last that poor nature would pitch upon, the last that we should imagine! This magnanimous grace suits a wretched rebel like me. He looks! and His look darts life, light, love, and liberty, down to the very heart's necessities of the most abandoned wretch in creation. The thief, the reviler, the blasphemer, is the favoured one; he cries, "Lord, remember me when Thou comest into Thy kingdom. And Jesus said unto him, Verily I say unto thee, Today shalt thou be with Me in paradise." From the curse, and death, and sin, the Friend of sinners wings His flight with the dying thief to the realms of eternal blessing and life and glory. Was He not true to His nature, His Name and His promise? "I JEHOVAH, the First, and with the last; I am He."

You and I who know something of these glorious things, are sensible of the ebb and flow in our soul's enjoyments. Sometimes the Divine life is at a very low ebb, and we almost come to the conclusion that we have no part or lot in the matter of JEHOVAH'S grace, the presence of the loved One of our hearts is not experienced, pardon not enjoyed, nor the sweets and consolations of the Gospel brought home by the power of the Holy Ghost. That sweet verse, by Miss Steele, is applicable to such a state:

When sins and fears preveiling rise,

And fainting hope almost expires,

Jesus to Thee I lift mine eyes,

To Thee I breathe my soul's desires.

See! That is the smoking flax! Not a spark seen, no warmth experienced, Satan, sin and the flesh appear to hold everything their own way, and the enemy of souls is about to drag the soul to destruction, when JEHOVAH-JESUS, "the First, and with the last," sweetly reveals Himself. Ay, He is with, what appeared to be, the last dying gasp for life, the last spark of love, and with His soft South wind, the gentle breathings of His Spirit, He fans the soul into a flame of desire and longing, and away it soars upon wings of meditation and the thoughts of love to the land of life and endless joy where Jesus is supreme.

But the tents of Kedar and the sojournings in Meshech must be known and felt, and the dark valley of the shadow of spiritual death must be trodden, still His Word holds good, and the experience of the child is, "Thou art with me, Thy rod and Thy staff they comfort me." (Ps. 23:4) O glorious rod of sovereign purpose and grace, brilliant with jewels, glistening with exceeding great and precious promises!

IV. THE FAITHFUL FRIEND - "I am He." Thy faithful covenant-keeping God. I am with thee throughout all thy wanderings and waywardness. None shall triumph over thee, and all that I have purposed concerning thee, that will I accomplish. Through every temptation, trial and tribulation, I will safely conduct thee, and prove to thee that thou hast been "borne by Me from the belly and carried from the womb," and that "even to your old age I am He; and even to your hoar hairs will I carry you; I have made, and I will bear; even I will carry, and will deliver you." (Isa. 46:3,4) Yes, blessed be His holy name, through life even to the last breath, sigh or groan; through death, to His glory home, He will be with His own.

Unchangeable His will,

Whatever be my frame;

His loving heart is still

Eternally the same;

My soul through many changes goes,

His love no variation knows.

May the Lord add His blessing, for Christ's sake! Amen.

Source: <https://sermonindex.net/speakers/thomas-bradbury/jehovah-jesus-the-constant-companion-and-faithful-friend-of-elf-ect-sinners/>

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