

THE LORD IS MY HELPER

"Let your conversation be without covetousness; and be content with such things as ye have: for he hath said, I will never leave thee, nor forsake thee. So that we may boldly say, The Lord is my helper, and I will not fear what man shall do unto me." Hebrews 13:5-6.

The gist of this text is used in different connections. It was spoken first to Jacob, a man of trials. Having fled from his father's house leaving his overly-fond mother and angry brother, Jacob laid down to sleep with a stone for his pillow, the earth for his bed and the heavens for his canopy. After he awoke from his sleep, God spoke to him saying, "And, behold, I am with thee, and will keep thee in all places whither thou goest, and will bring thee again into this land; for I will not leave thee, until I have done that which I have spoken to thee of" (Genesis 28:15).

The next instance in which we find this same promise is the one in which Moses spoke to the people of Judah by the Word of God. "Be strong and of a good courage, fear not, nor be afraid of them: for the Lord thy God, he it is that doth go with thee; he will not fail thee, nor forsake thee" (Deuteronomy 31:6).

After the death of Moses, Joshua assumed the responsibility of leading the Israelites. He felt extremely unequal to the task, but, when called upon to do his duty, he led them in a military campaign. From God, he received the assurance of His presence. "There shall not any man be able to stand before thee all the days of thy life: as I was with Moses, so I will be with thee: I will not fail thee, nor forsake thee" (Joshua 1:5). As always, God kept His Word. By a series of startling miracles the Israelites defeated all of their enemies and took the Promised Land.

Approaching the end of his life, David gave Solomon definite instructions about building the temple, and then told him that God would neither leave nor forsake him. "And David said to Solomon his son, Be strong and of good courage, and do it: fear not, nor be dismayed: for the Lord God, even my God, will be with thee; he will not fail thee, nor forsake thee, until thou hast finished all the work for the service of the house of the Lord" (I Chronicles 28:20).

I. Conversation Without Covetousness.

"Let your conversation be without covetousness." In connection with this wording, we need to remember that 346 years have slipped away since the King James Version of the Bible first appeared, and words used in it have undergone gradual modifications of meaning. This is true of the word "conversation." Today it is generally limited to mean the speech of the lips, but when the King James Version was made the word meant one's whole manner of life. Certainly the Greek word so translated here must not be restricted to the speaking of the lips. It comes from a verb meaning to turn; and in our text it means that our "turn of mind," our mental attitude, our disposition, is to be away from covetousness. This word "conversation" as used here means the whole of life, including the thoughts, words and actions.

We must be without covetousness within, for if that vice reigns in the soul it is sure to reign and rule in the life. Oh, how that old serpent "covetousness" cuts its fangs into human hearts! How it poisons life with its venom! How its trail of slime makes ugly many an otherwise

beautiful character! God save us from it! God save us from the love of money! This great and crying evil is expressly forbidden in the commandment: "Thou shalt not covet." In spite of that, we are frequently sinning in this direction; we covet what some have and what others wear. Covetousness may show itself by a perpetual desiring and craving of that which we do not have.

II. Contentment Amid Circumstances.

"Be content with such things as ye have." Covetousness must be rooted out of the life before contentment can dwell within. Just as there is a vice to be shunned, so there is a virtue to be sought. Being content with our present circumstances does not mean that we are to be unconcerned about present evils which we can help to remedy. Nor does it mean an indifference to self-improvement. Let us remember, however, that true self-improvement does not mean merely a bigger income, a higher position, a newer car or a better home, but a greater love to God, a clearer perception of His will and ways, a truer likeness to the character of Christ, a truer fulfilling of just that place and purpose in this present life which God has had in His heart for us to fill. This is the real, the true and the only ultimately worthwhile self-improvement. Contentment is to take joyfully all that comes to us from God's hand, and to acquiesce trustingly in the will of God when things are taken from us.

The Hebrew Christians, to whom the words of our text were addressed, had undergone fierce persecutions in which their worldly goods had been confiscated. They had been plundered and reduced. They had little or nothing left. Instead of glory they had received contempt. Instead of raiment they had rags; instead of silver, brass; instead of plenty, scarcity. These are the people to whom the Lord said, "Be content with your present circumstances." How we smart because we do not have the possessions, the advantages and the successes of another!

Contentment is the feeling that enables one to make the best of a situation and not to pine over that which is unavoidable in it, nor fret over the hardships which it entails. When our Lord bids us to be "content with such things as ye have," He does not advocate indifference, indolence or unambitious stupidity, but rather such contentment as expresses itself in industrious fidelity.

We need to be warned against the opposite of contentment--a discontent that expresses itself in constant complaining and fault-finding, that spends its energies in murmuring against the difficulties and hardships of a situation, without embracing the opportunity at hand to relieve or to remove them. We live the noblest and work the best when we have learned the secret of contentment. It is supposed by most people that they could be content if they were not exactly what they are and where they are, but the precept exhorts them to be content amid their present circumstances.

III. Companionship With Christ.

"I will never leave thee, nor forsake thee." The realization of the companionship of Christ will enable us to have conversation without

covetousness and contentment amid the circumstances of life.

What was it that God said? He said, "I will never leave thee, nor forsake thee." To whom did He say it? He said it to Joshua eight or nine centuries before it was recorded in our text. However, we must remember that God's promise is not exhausted by one nation or by one individual. His promises are timeless. They live on from age to age, with a message for all who have the same need. This promise is now ours in Christ.

1. The Promiser.

Think of the One Who made this promise. It is God speaking for Himself. "He is faithful that promised" (Hebrews 10:23).

David Livingstone opened Africa to trade, to missionaries and to the gospel of Christ. He was in such constant danger, and he endured so many privations that only an iron will and strong faith enabled him to press on through the almost insuperable difficulties until he had accomplished his purpose and made contact with the heathen tribes across the continent. Livingstone said, "I was enabled to go on because I had the word of a perfect Gentleman, never known to break a promise, that He would be with me always." The promise to which he referred was that of Christ in the Great Commission, "Lo, I am with you alway, even unto the end of the world."

2. The promise.

"I will never leave thee, nor forsake thee." The force of that promise all lies in that one letter, "I." Take that particular "I" away and the promise will lose all of its significance and be left meaningless. It is the pledge of the presence of One Who is able to perform to the very limit all that He promises. What a comfort to lean upon such a promise!

There is a two-fold thought in this promise. The two parts of the promise do not mean the same thing. The Holy Spirit did not use tautology in the Word of God. He never wasted words. So in these two parts you have two wonderful truths. In the first expression the Lord assures us that He will never withdraw His guiding hand, and in the second part of the promise He tells us that He will never withdraw His protecting presence.

(1) He will never withdraw His guiding hand.

Both in the Hebrew and in the Greek the word which is employed, and which is translated "leave," means the withdrawing of a hand that sustains. "I will never release My grasp. Nothing shall ever come between My hand and thine." This promise covers all time, all space, all circumstances and all contingencies. He said, "I will in no wise fail thee." When a person becomes a Christian God takes hold of his hand, and He will never let go of it until He leads him into glory.

What a glorious thought that God holds our hands and leads us all along the way! Burdens come, but we find that they are but His gifts, and that He gives us strength to bear them and that we are sustained by His own strength. This thought alone should help us to conduct ourselves and carry us on as true

soldiers of the cross. Nothing can come into our lives unless He either sends it or permits it. The reverse is also true, that nothing can be taken out of our lives unless He takes it out or permits it to be taken out. Chance and fate are eliminated from our lives. Why be afraid of tomorrow when God holds the key to the great unknown? Nothing can take the hand of the Christian out of His. He will never let us go.

"From the day when I was saved by grace,
All along the way in the Christian race,
Until the day when I see His face
He'll never, never let go my hand.

Though sorrows come as I tread the way
And deeper darkness instead of day
Obscure my path, there is one bright ray,
He'll never, never let go my hand.

If I feel weak, as I face the foe,
And dark is the path my feet must go,
In the fiercest fight -- 'tis sweet to know
He'll never, never let go my hand.

The hand that guides, is the hand that made
The universe that ne'er will fade,
And since my debt by Himself was paid
He'll never, never let go my hand.

Perhaps, through the grave I'll be called to go
Perhaps, I'll see Him appear below.
But until that day -- one thing I know
He'll never, never let go my hand.

He'll never, never let go my hand.
He'll never, never let go my hand.
Every step of the race till I see His face
He'll never, never let go my hand."

- (2) He will never withdraw His protecting presence. "I will never leave thee, nor forsake thee." The Lord has promised never to leave us behind in any place or state. "I will never forsake thee." No greater calamity can be contemplated than that of being forsaken. To be forsaken is tragic. "Forsaken" implies an utter loneliness, helplessness, friendlessness and hopelessness.

Our Lord has fulfilled this wonderful promise again and again to the same person, as well as to multitudes of others. He will never cease to love His own. He will never leave them destitute of support. He will never let them plunge into the depths of despair. He is the most bountiful of all providers and the most powerful of all protectors. His resources will never run out in the day of stress and strain. No matter where we may be, He will be with us in all circumstances. He will not drop us or leave us behind when we grow old and are worn out. God will never forsake His children.

In no single instance, nor in any particular, nor for any reason will the Lord withdraw His presence from you. No negotiable securities can be comparable in value to this declaration of the Lord, "I will never leave thee, nor forsake thee." It is put very strongly. In the original language there are five negatives. It is impossible for the English language to convey the whole force and full weight of the Greek. I do not know of any way to give the force of these five negatives except by the free rendering, "I will never, never leave thee; I will never, never, never forsake thee." In our language two negatives nullify each other and make a positive; but here, in the Greek, they intensify the meaning. A more emphatic and absolutely final guarantee could not be given in any language. What a priceless gem we have here!

The same idea is expressed in the verse of the old song:

"The soul that on Jesus hath leaned for repose,
I will not, I will not, desert to its foes;
That soul, though all hell should endeavor to shake
I'll never, no never, no never forsake."

Having thought upon what "He hath said," let us now see what "we may say" in consequence. We may boldly say, "The Lord is my helper." This word "helper" has an appeal all its own. It comes from a Greek word which is a compound of two words or verbs, the one meaning "to cry" (for help), and the other meaning "to run." So, the compound word gives the picture of one ready to run at the cry of another. Such is our tender-hearted Lord toward His loved ones.

He is an almighty helper. "Who is like Him in all the world?" When friends cannot help, when power cannot help, when riches cannot help, God can and will help His people. The Lord is also a constant helper. He is not a fair-weather companion only. When the dark hour comes, when the storm beats upon us, when the grievous blow falls, He is the Friend that "sticketh closer than a brother." He is also a present helper. He is equal to every challenge and need. "The Lord is my helper, and I will not fear what man shall do unto me."