

"SONGS IN THE NIGHT"

"But none saith, Where is God my maker, who giveth songs in the night?" (Job 35:10).

The book of Job unfolds in a dramatic dialogue of unsurpassed beauty and effectiveness the struggle of the human mind with the problems presented by the divine government of this world. On one side are Job's three friends contending that suffering is always the proof and penalty of guilt, and that when an apparently good man is overwhelmed with calamity it stamps him as a hypocrite. On the other side is Job, in his conscious integrity, repelling with indignation the conclusions of his friends.

Elihu, a very wise man, was greatly puzzled about the cause of Job's sufferings. He concluded that, if men are troubled exceedingly, it is because, while they are bemoaning their troubles, they do not say, "Where is God my maker, who giveth songs in the night?" He contended that, while they are looking about to see how they may escape from their troubles, they forget to look to Him from whence all help cometh. But his conclusion with reference to Job was not correct.

"Songs in the night" is one of the loveliest phrases in the whole book of Job. It reminds us that the world has its night. It seems necessary that it have one. The sun shines during the day, and men go forth to their labors. They grow weary, and nightfall comes on, like a sweet boon from heaven. The darkness draws the curtains, and shuts out the light, which might prevent the eyes from slumbering; while the sweet and calm stillness of the night permits us to rest upon the lap of ease, and there forget awhile our cares, until the morning sun appears, touches our eyelids, and bids us to arise and to proceed to the labors of the day. Night is one of the great blessings that men enjoy, and all of us have many reasons to thank God for it. And yet, to many night is a gloomy season, for we cannot see and do during the night as we can in the bright and cheerful light of day.

Man, too, like the great world in which he lives, must have night. And many nights of bewilderment, ignorance, doubt, anxiety, affliction, suffering and sorrow -- nights of all kinds which press upon our spirits and terrify our souls. But the Christian can truthfully say, "My God giveth me songs in the night."

It is evident that "night" is here used as a symbol of affliction and sufferings. The appropriateness of the symbol commends itself at once to our minds, for, though the shades of night are a relief to some, they bring to others an increase of suffering and trial. There is an untold relief in light. It seems to reanimate hope and endurance. The unclosed eyes, the unsubdued pain, and the hushed voice of sympathy and encouragement test the patience and make one recoil from the night season. Therefore, night is a fitting symbol of trial. If you are a Christian, you do not need any proof that Christian people have nights.

Just as there is not a land under the sun on which the shades of night do not fall, so there is not a human life which does not have its deep shadows of trial and its night of loss and sorrow. Sooner or later night will come to all of us. We cannot keep it away. "Man that is born of a woman is of few days, and full of trouble" (Job 14:1). While the experience of trouble is common to all, men differ widely in their way of meeting it. Multitudes meet it with groans and complaints. For relief they turn in every direction except the right one. "None saith, Where is God my maker, who giveth songs in the night?"

Concerning "songs in the night" we should note three things:

I. The Surprise.

To many it is surprising that it is possible to have songs in the nights of trial. We would expect the very opposite to be true. One sweet and solemn voice said, "Weeping may endure for a night, but joy cometh in the morning" (Psalm 30:5). There

we seem to have the words set in the right sequence -- weeping and night; joy and morning. That is the way we would expect it. Yet, our text has it the other way; difficulty in the daytime, and songs in the night.

Yes, singing in the night, though surprising, is a reality. Paul and Silas were beaten cruelly and thrown into prison, and yet at midnight they prayed and sang praises unto God. We are not surprised that they prayed. The surprising thing is that they joyfully and exultantly sang hymns of praise. That shows what the Christian faith will enable one to do in the dark experiences of life. God makes it possible for and helps His people to sing in the night. He replaces the spirit of heaviness with that of praise. A noble army of Christian martyrs, amid the flames that consumed their bodies, sang songs of praises to God, and He counted them worthy to receive the martyr's crown.

When the doctors told George Matheson that he would be blind for the rest of his life, it seemed as if the bottom had dropped out of his life. Then he resolved that he could use even that disaster in God's name. Then there came to him the words of that beautiful hymn which he penned and sung, and which we sing occasionally:

"O Love that will not let me go,
I rest my weary soul in Thee;
I give Thee back the life I owe,
That in Thine ocean depths its flow
May richer, fuller be."

When Catherine Booth was dying with cancer of the throat, and unable to speak, friends asked her if there were any hymn she wanted them to sing. She wrote: "Sing 'My Jesus I love Thee, I know Thou art mine.'" Through blind eyes Fanny J. Crosby saw the glory of the Lord, and penned more than six thousand gospel songs which set the people of God throughout the world to singing. The ministry of Robert Hall, who had to live his life in a suffering body, translated itself into a song of hope throughout England, and far beyond. Elizabeth Barrett Browning sent forth from her bed of invalidism songs of cheer and hope that have inspired and comforted aching hearts around the world.

During the financial panic of 1873 the investments and savings of a devout Christian and successful Chicago lawyer, Mr. H. G. Spafford, were swept away. To cushion his wife and four daughters from this shock he decided to send them to Europe. During the blackness of a November night, the French liner on which his family was sleeping collided in mid-ocean with the Glasgow clipper and sank in twelve minutes, carrying to death two hundred fifty persons, including the four Spafford girls.

When Mr. Spafford reflected that his property was gone, that his companion was painfully prostrated, and that his four precious and lovely daughters were buried in the depths of the Atlantic Ocean, there came from his heart a song of trust and resignation which has blessed multiplied thousands who have heard it sung. It is as follows:

"When peace, like a river, attendeth my way,
When sorrows like sea billows roll;
Whatever my lot, Thou hast taught me to say,
It is well, it is well with my soul."

Though Satan should buffet, tho' trials should come
Let this blest assurance control,
That Christ has regarded my helpless estate,
And hath shed His own blood for my soul.

Though Satan should buffet, tho' trials should come,
Let this blest assurance control,
That Christ has regarded my helpless estate,
And hath shed His own blood for my soul.

My sin -- oh, the bliss of this glorious tho't --
My sin -- not in part, but the whole,
Is nailed to the cross and I bear it no more,
Praise the Lord, praise the Lord, O my soul!

And, Lord, haste the day when the faith shall be sight,
The clouds be rolled back as a scroll,
The trump shall resound and the Lord shall descend,
"Even so" -- it is well with my soul.

It is well with my soul,
It is well,
It is well with my soul."

II. The Source.

As a rule, it is not too difficult to sing when we can read the notes by daylight, but the skillful singer is the one who can sing when there is not a ray of light by which to read, the one who sings from his heart, and not from a book that he can see, because he does not have any means of reading, save from that book which is in his own spirit, from whence notes of gratitude pour forth in songs of praise. Nobody can produce songs in the night by himself. Songs in the night come only from God. Often God enables His children, who trust in Him, to face with fortitude and courage bitter trials which, were it not for His help, would be too heavy to bear. From His children He removes the spirit of heaviness and enables them to sing in the night.

In this matter of singing in the night, our Lord Jesus Christ set us a splendid example. Preceding His arrest in Gethsemane He gathered His disciples together and in the darkness of those terrible hours He asked them to sing a hymn.

III. The Sequel.

Songs of the night are usually about three things. Either we sing about the yesterday that is over, or about the night itself, or about the morrow that is to come. Each of these are sweet themes, when God gives us songs in the night. Most frequently Christians sing about the day that is over. They say, "Well, it is night now, but I can remember when it was daylight. Neither moon nor stars appear at present, but I can remember when I saw the sun. I have my doubts and fears at this present moment, but it is not long since I could say with full assurance, 'I know that my Redeemer liveth.'" Even though night may be a new thing to you, remember that God Who enabled you to sing yesterday has not left you in the night. He is not just a daylight God.

Christian, there is never a night so dark but what there is something to sing about. "It is of the Lord's mercies that we are not consumed, because his compassions fail not" (Lamentations 3:22). If we cannot sing very loud, still we can sing, "He hath not dealt with us after our sins; nor rewarded us according to our iniquities" (Psalm 103:10). We can acknowledge that we do not deserve the least of God's mercies, but that they come through the channel of His grace alone. We can say, "Night, thou art dark, but thou mightest have been darker. I am poor, but I could have been poorer, and could have been sick also. The stars are still shining."

There is something else of which we can sing in the night even more sweetly, and that is the day that is to come. If the night be ever so dark, just remember that it will be followed by the morning.

Songs in the night cheer those who sing them. They help to keep up your spirits. Satan does not like Christian music. When an evil spirit rested upon Saul, David played on his harp and the evil spirit went away from him. Songs in the night cleanse our minds of evil thoughts and drive away our fears.

Songs in the night cheer those who hear them. A Christian worker lay awake at night perplexed over a matter of guidance. In the early morning hours he heard a milkman whistling the hymn, "Trust and Obey." The tune reminded him of the words,

"Trust and obey, for there's no other way
To be happy in Jesus, but to trust and obey."

That was the message which his soul needed, so he decided to obey God and to take His way out of His predicament. It is very doubtful if that milkman ever knew that a poor baffled child of God heard him whistling a song of Zion; yet, by whistling that tune, he did God a great service and cheered his fellowman. Christian, when you are in trouble, sing; you do not know who will be near and will hear you. Many may be cheered and blessed by your song in the night.

Songs in the night please God. He delights to hear His children sing in the nights of their afflictions. When Harry Lauder's only son was killed in World War I, the grieved father said to a friend: "When a man comes to a thing like this, there are just three ways out of it: there is drink, there is despair, and there is God; and by His grace it's God for me." In the darkness of our great sorrows we must know that God does not make any mistakes.

Just before Honorable Franklin Pierce, the fourteenth president of the United States, was inaugurated, his only son, a lad of eleven, was killed before his parents' eyes in a railway wreck. The wreck was due to the carelessness of an intoxicated brakeman, and relatives of those who were killed, and the injured, sued the railroad company for damages. But the wife of the president-elect, who was the daughter of a former president of Bowdoin College, was a devout Christian who believed that all things are ordered of God, and she would not agree to join in the suit. Instead she got her husband to employ a noted attorney, Ben Butler, to defend the railroad company, for she believed that the death of their son in the accident was God's way of preparing her husband for the discharge of his duties in the high office of president. That was a splendid demonstration of the kind of Christian faith that is commended repeatedly in the Word of God. Thus sorrowing souls turn their adversity into good for themselves and blessings for others. Songs in the night give peace, assurance, hope and anticipation.