

A HARBOR FOR HIS PEOPLE

"The Lord will be the hope of his people." Joel 3:16.

The marginal readings in the Bible are often most illuminating and suggestive. The text before us is a striking illustration of that fact; for while we can appreciate the statement that "the Lord will be the hope of his people," and rejoice in that assurance, yet the margin tells us that the Hebrew may be rendered literally: "The Lord will be the place of repair (or the harbor) of his people."

This at once suggests the picture of a vessel that has been sorely buffeted by frequent storms, finding the shelter of a haven where it will not merely be protected from the fury of wind and waves, but will be enabled to effect such repairs as have been rendered necessary by its tempestuous voyage; the Lord is compared to such a harbor, and in Him we find not only peace and rest amid all life's vicissitudes, but also the means for repairing the damage wrought by the storms we have encountered.

What a magnificent harbor we have in Him! It is sheltered by the great cliffs of His omnipotence and His wisdom. At the entrance we may always find burning, even in the darkest hours, the beacon light of His love to guide us into this safe and pleasant shelter. Once we make that harbor our refuge, we shall find calm and quietness.

I. A Place Of Safety.

As we review our experiences, we recall that sometimes on life's voyage we have encountered the rough north wind of adverse circumstances. Everything has seemed to be against us. Our plans have not matured; our hopes have been frustrated; our best efforts have met with crushing disappointment. Even in Christian service, this is often the lot of God's people, for their motives are frequently misunderstood and their characters maligned.

Or, perhaps, we have met with the sharp, biting east wind of poverty or pain or bereavement. Or, having been tempted by the fact that the south wind of prosperity has blown softly, we have launched upon some course that has proved our undoing, and have been caught in a tempest that has been like the Euroclydon of Acts 27:14. If we have escaped such gales as these, we may yet have been driven by the west wind--the breeze that comes from the land of the setting sun--when, tired out in body and mind, burdened with the weakness of old age and infirmity, we have too often forgotten to trust in the unfailing faithfulness of the eternal Lord. From whatever quarter the tempests come, however, God is "the harbor of His people" and will ever prove Himself a perfect "shelter in the time of storm" to every soul that takes refuge in Him.

II. A Place Of Rest.

A harbor, however, is more than that. Vessels go there for other purposes than to find safety from the storms. Let us take our place for a moment by the side of some great harbor that is open to the commerce of the world. Probably many ships come there to part with their cargoes and to unload the burdens they have borne across the deep. May we not see in this a picture of what the Lord would be to His own believing children? He desires that in His presence we should unbosom all our cares, bring to Him every burden, every anxiety, every grief. If we have been troubled by the strangling grip of an evil habit or oppressed by a sense of failure, our lives can be transformed if we are willing to enter this harbor and there cast upon God all that has marred our work or our testimony or has robbed us of our joy.

How good it is to know that in Him we have a Father whose love is so strong, so enduring, so infinitely tender, that He would have us bring to Him all that makes life hard and burdensome. Again and again in the pages of Holy Writ we are invited to do this. We

think, for example, of the marvelously gracious words of Psalm 55:22: "Cast thy burden upon the Lord, and He shall sustain thee"; or those of Psalm 37:5: "Commit thy way unto the Lord." We may link up these texts with the well-known injunction in I Peter 5:7: "Casting all your care (anxiety) upon him; for he careth for you." In these passages, and many others, we are called upon to unload the burdens of life--to cast upon the Lord the loads that have sometimes been almost too much for us to bear--even as ships that, entering a harbor with heavy cargoes, deposit their freight and sail away again.

III. A Place Of Supply.

While some vessels come into the harbor to unload, others make for port in order to take fresh cargoes on board. In this respect also, the Lord is "a harbor for His people." Our God has a rich cargo waiting for each of us. What is it that we are needing especially in our Christian life? Do we lack the gift of power? It is to be found in Him, and it is waiting for us if we are willing to receive it. "Ye shall receive power after that the Holy Spirit is come upon you" (Acts 1:8). This is the promise of our Lord. It is as applicable to each of us as it was to the apostles of olden time. "He giveth power to the faint; and to them that have no might he increaseth strength" (Isaiah 40:29). Even when we are most conscious of helplessness, we may really be most strong, for He says to us as He did to Paul of old: "My strength is made perfect in weakness" (II Corinthians 12:9); so that we may respond even as the Apostle did: "When I am weak, then am I strong" (II Corinthians 12:10). If, therefore, we have learned the secret of dwelling in Him Who is Himself omnipotent, and of being filled with the Spirit Who is the source of power, we shall have but little reason to lament the absence of strength, even though we realize that it is not our own that we possess, but His.

It may be that it is the gift of joy of which we feel the need. Perhaps we are naturally of a disposition that does not readily lend itself to a manifestation of joy. Or we may be so compassed by worries and anxieties, by weakness or weariness, that we have but little heart to rejoice. Yet we know that it is the rejoicing Christian that brings the most glory to the name of the Lord. Can we have joy notwithstanding life's sorrows and perplexities? Is it possible to have our hearts filled with praise when our circumstances are peculiarly difficult and trying? Surely it is. If "days are dark and friends are few," there is always the certainty of the unchangeable love of God. One of the Lord's servants met another whose face betrayed anxiety and unrest. He set the unhappy one thinking by suddenly asking the question, "Have you enjoyed God today?" Ah! there is the secret of Christian joy--the finding of it in God Himself, in all that He is to His children, and in His faithfulness, His tenderness and His love. If our lives are sad, let us remember that God is "a harbor for His people," where we may be filled with true, abiding joy. Let us seek the harbor where our emptiness may be filled with all the fulness of God.

IV. A Place Of Repair.

Let us glance at the alternative marginal reading: "The Lord will be a place of repair for His people." The words, "place of repair," mean a place where restoration takes place. Adopting this meaning, we find in the text the utmost encouragement. On our voyage homeward, we encounter many strange and stormy experiences. Either through the fault of others, or because of our own mistakes and weaknesses, our hearts are often bruised and our hopes blighted. Through lack of knowledge of the seas of life, we fail to understand the dangers by which we are surrounded, or to prepare for the sudden storms that overtake us. Instead of seeking safe anchorage, we go right on. As a result, we suffer serious damage. When we set to work to examine ourselves, we soon discover that love and faith and hope all stand sorely in need of repair. We recognize that we are worrying instead of trusting, grumbling instead of rejoicing, repining instead of

resting. Under these circumstances, we shall do well to make for our harbor, for in God alone can we find our strength renewed, our faith quickened, our hopes restored and our peace re-established.

In the light of this typical but poetical description of God as "the harbor of His people," or "the place of repair," it is not surprising that the translators of the Authorized Version should have adopted the phrasing, "the Lord will be the hope of His people," for that summarizes the whole position admirably. Whether we think of Him as a haven to which we can go for shelter from storm and tempest, or as a harbor where we can unload our burdens, or as a harbor where we can be filled with all spiritual blessings, or as the place where our spiritual life may be repaired--He is still our one and only real hope. Happy is the man who turns to Him in every time of weakness and of need, for He will never fail those who put their trust in Him.

The Soul's Harbor

"The Lord will be a harbor,
When clouds o'erspread the sky,
Where we may cast our anchor,
When waves are tossing high;
There we can dwell securely
Within that haven blest;
The storms may roar around us,
But we have perfect rest.

"A harbor, yes! a harbor
The Lord will be indeed,
Amid life's wild commotion;
'Tis what our spirits need;
To that well-sheltered haven
At all times we can fly
For safety and for comfort,
A refuge ever nigh.

"Until we reach the harbor
On yon eternal shore,
Where all earth's storms are over,
And we go out no more,
There shall we cast our anchor
In love's unfathomed peace,
Where sin can never enter,
And earthly sorrows cease."