

LIFE'S SLIPPERY PLACES

When I said, My foot slipeth; thy mercy, O Lord, held me up.
In the multitude of my thoughts within me thy comforts delight my soul. Psalm 94: 18-19

One writer remarked: "Make no mistake about it -- it's a slippery world we live in!" Another writer, who is in close and constant touch with people, declared: "Millions of people in this rapid and turbulent age are wobbling badly." Perhaps, if you were to be frank, you might say: "I greatly need the ability to keep my balance, to maintain my equilibrium, to be kept from being swept off my feet."

It is to such persons that our text is addressed. The Psalmist said, "When I said, My foot slippeth; thy mercy, O Lord, held me up. In the multitude of my thoughts within me thy comforts delight my soul." He was within an inch of losing his balance, but the reinforcing help of God was made available to him.

It was a dark hour in Israel. People were not getting their rights. There was a lot of cheating going on. Men without principle or honor were having a field day. Crime was widespread and cruel. The wicked were in power and over-confident. The longer they seemed to succeed the more presumptuous and highhanded they became. They remarked, "The Lord shall not see, neither shall the God of Jacob regard it" (Psalm 94:7).

What is the righteous man to do in such tempting situations? He must look to God, says the Psalmist. He must realize who God is, what He is and what He is about in permitting the man of faith and righteous purpose to be pressured and assaulted by all of this evil.

I. Danger.

The expression, "My foot slippeth," indicates that danger is present. If a man's foot slips, he is in danger of falling. He may slip, and yet not fall; but if he does the danger is imminent. The Psalmist felt this.

The description of his danger was poetical. It was not his body, but his soul which was in danger. In other words, he was a tempted man, and was at the point of falling into sin through his temptation.

II. Distress.

Connected with his danger was distress. As a rule distress follows in the wake of danger, even though the threatened danger has been averted.

It seems that the prosperity of the wicked formed the temptation. His doubt touching the wisdom, justice and kindness of God, in permitting the wicked to prosper, may have been the sin into which he was about to fall, when the very mercy of the Lord he was on the point of questioning upheld him. He reasoned, Why should God let the wicked triumph? The people of God were broken in pieces. His heritage was afflicted. "They slay the widow and the stranger, and murder the fatherless." The hearts of good men were oppressed. The Psalmist wondered if God was wise, just and kind in permitting the prosperity of such godless people, who were guilty of such atrocious crimes. Such may have been his thoughts, and he may have been about to say, "No, God cannot be wise, or just, or kind," when, suddenly opening his eyes to the danger, he said, "My foot slippeth," and the mercy of the Lord held him up.

We should remember that it is in difficult and hazardous times that God seasons the righteous. That is why verse twelve records the exclamation: "Blessed is the man whom thou chastenest, O Lord." Frequently there is discipline in danger and distress. There is also reward in the finer character that results when the hazard has been accepted and overcome. In Hebrews 12: 5-6 we read, "My son, despise not thou the chastening of the Lord, nor faint when thou are rebuked of him: For whom the Lord loveth he chasteneth, and scourgeth every son whom he receiveth." Then, the author added: "Now no chastening for the present seemeth to be joyous, but grievous: nevertheless afterward it yieldeth the peaceable fruit of righteousness unto them which are exercised thereby "(Verse 11).

The Psalmist had been in great danger, and the thought of it filled his mind with distress. Such was his experience, and it is common to all of us. If danger is near, it will affect the mind, even though it be averted. David's danger was connected with the providence of God. We are exposed to the same danger quite frequently. We cannot understand the ways of the Lord. They are often contrary to what we would expect. Sometimes we find ourselves on the verge of doubting their wisdom, justice and love.

III. Deliverance.

The Psalmist has told us that when life is difficult and dangerous that God shields the righteous as their defender and vindicator. He said: "For the Lord will not cast off his people, neither will he forsake his inheritance" (Verse 14).

His foot slipped, but he did not fall, for the mercy of the Lord held him up. Doubtless he felt grateful for the deliverance. Our text assures us that when the going is difficult and treacherous, God steadies us. "When I said, My foot slippeth; thy mercy, O Lord, held me up."

Consider, for instance, how life sometimes presents us with situations in which our thinking tends to lose its footing. Look at the wrong ideas some people have regarding the learning process. They have been told that the mind is largely "set" by the time of adolescence. They have been told that the ability to learn is pretty much done for after the age of forty-five or fifty. So, arriving at middle age, they resign themselves to the hardening of the intellectual arteries. They lose the zest of wonder. They drop the spirit of inquiry. They fear to tackle any new tasks. They have reached one of life's slippery places, and they need God to steady them. They need a new intellectual drive and a new mental grip. God would have all such persons read, think, inquire and venture on some new mental quests. He does not want anybody to grow stale in the intellect. He has given him. He does not want anybody to lose the spirit of wonder or the impulse of curiosity.

Another area of life in which we need the steadying of God lest we lose our footing is in the sphere of our moral sensibilities. How often somebody says, "Let your conscience be your guide!" Sounds fine, doesn't it? But let's be on our guard. Suppose conscience itself has begun to slip! How safe a guide, how trustworthy a guardian, is conscience then? Many don't seem to know what time it is in the domain of right and wrong or, what is even more important, in the zone of what is really Christian and what isn't. The reason is they have not checked their consciences lately to see if they line up with the mind and spirit of Christ.

A young woman had grown up in the church. She had a conscience that had been trained to react in terms of what Christian living is supposed to be. She reached her slippery place when an offer was made to her to join a troop of singers who neither

worshipped nor obeyed Christ. God's steadying hand was held out to her when her friends advised her against going on the road with these performers.

She did what any of us can do. She declined the help of God, brushed aside the counsel of friends and signed her contract. Two years later, in a railway station, she met her pastor. In the conversation that followed it came out that she had taken on most of the ways of her companions in the troop. On the self-defensive, she boldly insisted, "I'm just as good as I've ever been." But before long she dropped the mask of pretense. She admitted that she had developed habits that were humiliating to her. She said, "I guess that's why I stay up late and drink more than I should. "Then she added, "I'm afraid to go to bed with my conscience."

That young woman is typical of many others. Their moral sensibilities have grown weak and wobbly. God has tried to steady them and keep them on their feet, but they have refused His help.

A third area in life where we often require the steadying of God is in the sphere of our enthusiasms. It is a dangerous and treacherous hour in the life of a Christian when his ardor begins to cool and discipleship becomes a lusterless routine.

Pale saints never scale Satan. Lukewarm Christians are no recommendation of the compassionate Christ. When the fire of devotion goes out of a man's soul, he is easy picking for Satan's forces.

The writer attributed his deliverance to the mercy of the Lord. Thus he reproached himself and magnified God's free and matchless grace. With reference to the nature of his deliverance, he stated that he was held up, not lifted and carried away. His surroundings remained the same. The slippery path was both in front of and behind him. God simply sustained him.

IV. Delight.

Just as the danger was followed by distress, so the deliverance was followed by delight. He said, "Thy comforts delight my soul." In the wake of his deliverance there came the soothing, comforting and soul-gladdening influence. The feet were not only established firmly, but a new song was put in his mouth. The agitation of his heart was calmed. The shock was allayed. The troubled mind found peace.

David did not tell us what those divine comforts were which delighted him. We do not need to know. Perhaps it is better for us not to know, for if we needed comfort nothing might have the power of satisfying us unless it were of the same nature as that which delighted the Psalmist; whereas, God, who knows exactly what is best for us, may see fit to apply to us a very different remedy. But whatever the comforts were, they had the desired effect. They delighted his soul.

When you are suddenly plunged into despondency, you are not to surrender to that mood. Instead, you are to recognize it rather as a slippery place, where indeed you could easily fall, but where God's faithfulness is to be counted on to see you through.

Listen to these words: "Pray for me! Sometimes God doth visit me with His comfort: sometimes I am so afraid I could creep into a mouse-hole. So God cometh and goeth. Pray for me!" Who wrote that? Bishop Hugh Latimer, the English churchman who in 1555 was burned at the stake in Oxford for his devotion to Christ and to conscience.

Moods do come over us and have a down-dragging effect upon our morals. The one thing we must not do is to surrender to them. For the sake of Christ and others we must not give up and surrender. When Paul and Silas, flogged and pain-wracked, were languishing in the prison at Philippi, they might have given up to discouragement and depression. Over that emotionally slippery place God steadied them. So, we read: "At midnight Paul and Silas sang praises." What else do we read? "And the prisoners heard them!"

Christian, somebody's watching! Somebody's listening! Let God steady your steps! Let Him give you the stamina to stand, and a song while you are standing!