

RIGHT THINKING AND APPROPRIATE ACTING

"I thought on my ways, and turned my feet unto thy testimonies. I made haste, and delayed not to keep thy commandments" (Psalm 119:59-60).

Human experience is an abidingly interesting something. We delight to hear of the struggles and the triumphs of people. Of all human experiences there is none quite so gripping as the experience of a soul with God.

God leads one man into rest in order that others may learn the way. Our text relates the experience of a man whom God saved. How did the Psalmist come to make life's supreme discovery? How did he find his way to spiritual certainty? What road did he travel? What marked the turning point in his life? What was it that brought him to God? It was not any momentary impulse of remorse consequent on some frightful sin; or any terror caused by some sudden sense of the nearness of death; or any stress due to some affliction. What, then, started him on the quest for truth and the longing for salvation and godliness? When we ask the Psalmist what marked the turning point in his life, he tells us plainly that it was the outcome of his thinking. Speaking very plainly and pointedly, the Psalmist said, "I thought on my ways, and turned my feet unto thy testimonies." Thus he tore a page from his religious diary and revealed to us his actual experience.

I. Right Thinking.

The Psalmist said, "I thought on my ways." As there has always been, there is much wrong thinking today. It would be quite easy to find many who do not think to any purpose. If you will think a moment, you will realize that even material things must be measured and valued by their relationship to each other. For example: one point of the compass is judged by its relation to all the other points. And so a man, whose thought is circumscribed thinks of himself alone without thinking of his relation to others, cannot get a true estimate of his own worth. You may have a piece of cloth which you think is short measure. The only way to settle the question is to measure the cloth by standard rule and discover whether or not it measures thirty-six inches to the yard. Just so, if a man thinks of himself in relation to God, then he will know whether he is right or wrong.

The Psalmist thought on his ways. He ceased allowing others to think for him, and began to think for himself. He not only thought for himself, but he thought about himself. The ability to think is man's royal prerogative. All right conduct has its source in right thinking. All wrong conduct is born of wrong thinking. It is a good day in the life of any person when he is brought to do some straight thinking.

Many of life's tragedies are the results of sheer thoughtlessness. Many of the present-day accidents are due to sheer carelessness. They are born of a refusal to think. Many fine opportunities are thrown away because people refuse to think. Many trifle with their educational opportunities, fail to look ahead, and refuse to prepare for a definite task. How different their future would be if they were only willing to think!

Many people do not think on their ways. When Jonah decided not to go to Nineveh as God had commanded him, he got into a ship and paid his fare to flee from the presence of the Lord. And then he went to sleep. Soon "There was a mighty tempest in the sea, so that the ship was like to be broken," but Jonah

lay unconsciously and thoughtlessly asleep. He did not think on his ways. So often men sleep in sin, trying to flee from the presence of God, and yet unconscious of their folly. The trouble with the prodigal was that he did not think. He was beside himself. He seemed to have forgotten that he ever had a father or a well-furnished, bountifully provisioned home. But at last, when "He came to himself," he began to think on his ways. That's what we all need to do -- to think on our ways.

Our thoughtlessness works havoc in human relationships, but it is even more destructive in the spiritual realm. It is so easy to forget God. For so many the fact of God is as dim as the shadow of a dream. The Psalmist said that he thought about his ways. It is easy enough for anybody to think about the ways of others. It is much more difficult to think upon our own ways, and especially when they are not what they ought to be.

Unfortunately right thinking is too seldom exercised in regard to divine things. Long ago God brought the charge against His people that they failed to think concerning His claims and their duties. Speaking through His prophet, Isaiah, God said: "The ox knoweth his owner, and the ass his master's crib; but Israel doth not know, my people doth not consider" (Isaiah 1:3). In the same chapter he said: "Come now, and let us reason together, saith the Lord: though your sins be as scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they be red like crimson, they shall be as wool" (1:18). God submits His claims to people who are willing to think on their ways.

What led the Psalmist to think on his ways? He did not tell us, so we cannot say for certain.

1. Perhaps it was a sense of the futility of life as he was living it.

No doubt he found himself in the grip of unsatisfied hungers. Doubtless he was tortured by thirsts that the fountains on this earth had not been able to slake. In all likelihood he was driven to think by the aching void which this world could not fill.

2. Perhaps some terrible calamity had burst upon him and left his life in ruins.

Likely the treasures to which he had clung were ruthlessly wrung from his hands. Maybe the staff upon which he had leaned was knocked from under him. He wondered if there were not a hand somewhere that could help him. It may be that he was made thoughtful by having his heart broken.

3. Perhaps he had come in contact with a life of such rare spiritual beauty that had made his own life seem paltry and cheap.

Likely the day before the one on which he began to think on his ways, he considered himself as being as good or better than the average. Then, when he came face to face with this person whose life was one of beauty, he realized that it was far superior to his life, and that it possessed a peace to which he was a stranger. As he thought about it, he was driven to the conclusion that God was back of this radiant life.

II. Appropriate Acting.

Right thinking forced the Psalmist to the conclusion that he was traveling in the wrong direction. He was forced to say to himself: "Life is not counting for me as it ought to count. I am not traveling in the direction I ought to travel. I am not realizing the possibilities that I ought to realize." When one neglects to think on his ways, it is usually due to one of three things: lack of courage, occupation with other things, or the unpleasantness of it.

What was the outcome of the Psalmist's thinking? Realizing that he was an object of God's displeasure, he abandoned his evil ways, changed his course, and traveled in the opposite direction. This turning is what the Bible calls repentance. Exercising his personal freedom, and employing his own will, he promptly and immediately made "a right about face," and pursued a completely new course.

Note how complete the turn of the Psalmist was: "and turned my feet unto thy testimonies." A man may turn his eyes without moving his body. He may turn his head, and turn but little. He may turn his hand without much movement of the body. But, when he turns his feet, he turns himself completely.

If God thinks upon our ways, and He does, it surely behooves us to think upon them. Self examination and right thinking will result in appropriate acting and fulfillment of life.