

THE CHILD AND THE FATHER

"Nevertheless I am continually with Thee; Thou hast holden me by my right hand. Thou shalt guide me with Thy counsel, and afterward receive me to glory."
Psalm 73:23-24

The confidence of the child of God in his Heavenly Father is nowhere more happily expressed than in these lovely words.

When at the Divine command the Israelitish host forsook the land of Egypt, and entered the wilderness, Jehovah was pleased to guide them as a flock by the hands of Moses and Aaron, but more especially by the mysterious pillar of cloud by day and of fire by night. By this instrument He safely led them through the difficulties and perils of the wilderness and conducted them to the frontiers of Canaan; then dividing Jordan before them, He received them into the land of rest.

These circumstances afford our text a striking illustration, as they form a beautiful emblem of the Christian's journey through life, under the guiding and protecting hand of God, who at length divides the stream of death for His ransomed to pass over, and receives him into the Canaan of everlasting repose. The Psalmist had been tempted to envy the wicked; but having vanquished the temptation, he labored to turn it to an advantage by increasing in humility, in love to God, and in confidence in his care. Four phases of this confidence are here set forth.

I. God is never absent from His child.

"I am continually with Thee." Here was a man who lived with an abiding sense of the Divine nearness. To him God was not an occasional visitor, but an abiding guest.

We know that God is omnipresent; there is no place where He is not. But this may be a conviction of the understanding only, without being a stay and comfort to the soul. It is quite another thing to be able to look up to God and affirm from experience, "I am continually with Thee." The little child was terribly afraid of the dark because he was alone, but when he knew his father was there with him his fear vanished and a happy confidence took its place. It can be so with the child of God. The future may be dark, but God will be with us in the dark as in the light.

There is strength as well as consolation in the thought of God's presence. "I am continually with Thee," means the child is ever in the Father's sight. If God is with us and watching over us, we can go on with our work, whatever it may be, firmly assured that strength will be given us for whatever may come. There will be many things to bear, but we shall not be left to bear them alone or in our own strength. There will be many things to do in obedience to the Divine will, but He Who commands will be at our side, and we shall prove, as many others have done that His biddings are enablings.

II. God's hand is ever upon His child. "Thou hast holden me by my right hand."

Think of a child who has wandered into the streets and lost his way. Fear takes hold of him, and tears and distress are evident signs of his misery. But suddenly he feels a strong hand closing upon his own, and he looks up into his father's smiling face. His fears are at an end. He has no more worries. Father has hold of his hand and everything is alright again. It is our privilege to live in the happy confidence that the hand of God is upon us as His children.

This means safety for us amid the dangers of the road. There are many slippery places to be traversed before we reach home, but in these treacherous paths the hand of God will hold us up. This also means safety for us from malicious enemies, even our great Adversary, Satan.

III. God guides His child.

"Thou shalt guide me with Thy counsel."

In the Bible the guidance of God is a constantly recurring theme. Many are the examples of it. Many are the promises concerning it. To be looking for guidance day by day is one of the sure marks of a child of God, and to be found in the way of His leading is the only foundation of peace and happiness. Anyone who humbly seeks His guidance, and is willing to receive it and to follow it, will find it.

1. The psalmist confessed his need of guidance.
2. The psalmist professed confidence in God.
3. The psalmist announced his belief in God's willingness to guide.
4. The psalmist declared his willingness to be led.

Why did he want a guide?

- (1) He had had a work of grace in his heart.
(That convinced him that he needed somebody to lead him all of the way through life.
- (2) He felt that he was not wise enough to go in the right way.
- (3) He was anxious to be right and go in the right way.
- (4) He had seen many others fall because they tried to go without a guide.

Why did he choose God as his guide?

- (1) He was the best guide to be found.
- (2) He was the most accessible guide.
- (3) He was the most dependable guide.

How does God guide us?

- (1) By the general directions of His word.
If you want to know what God would have you to do, look to and study His Word. The Bible explicitly reveals "the whole counsel of God." It affords ample information on every point relative to our interest or duty; to our present or future happiness. God's Word points guilty man to the atoning blood for pardon. It opens to miserable man the richest source of consolation; and unfolds to mortal man the prospect of glory, honor, and immortality.
- (2) By the example of Christ.
A good question to guide you in your course of action is, What would the Lord Jesus Christ do in my circumstances?
- (3) By the leading of the Holy Spirit.
This is always in perfect conformity with the written Word, nor can it possibly be contradictory thereto.
- (4) By the leadings of His providence.
God holds the reins in His own hands, and regulates human affairs. He marks out the paths in which we should walk. When we get out of the way of God's appointment, it grieves, Him and injures us. He always guides safely.

IV. God will take His child home to be with Him.
"And afterward receive me to glory."

We are just as sure that the glory is to be revealed as we are that guidance is ours moment by moment. The glory seems more wonderful than the guidance, but it is not really so. The flower is more beautiful than the bud, yet the flower was in the bud, and glory is but grace developed and revealed. The glory to which we are to be received is the climax of the guidance which we daily enjoy.

The only uncertainty is as to the time, and we ought to thank God that we do not yet have full knowledge in this respect. It is enough to know that He will receive us to glory afterward. That word is a blessed one, "afterward"! after the struggles, after the toil, after the cross, after the work is done, after the temptations are over, after the pain is ended, that is when He will receive us. And notice that the arrival is called a reception. "And afterward receive me to glory." Thank God for that. There is a welcome awaiting us there. Heaven is a glorious place. It will be a glorious company that fills the mansions in our Father's house above. The fellowship and enjoyments of heaven will infinitely transcend our highest conceptions and fondest anticipations.