

ANTICIPATORY BLESSINGS

"For thou preventest him with the blessings of goodness: thou settest a crown of pure gold on his head." Psalm 21:3.

The word "prevent" no longer carries the meaning which it did in 1611 when this verse was translated from the Hebrew into the English and published in the Authorized Version of the Bible. When we speak of preventing a man now, we mean that we hinder him or keep him back from something. Originally it meant "to go before; to anticipate." It meant that God went before His children and anticipated their needs in His mercy. It is a sad commentary on human nature that the word should have changed so much in its meaning, and that men now usually go before one another not to help but to hinder and to hurt.

The idea in this text is that God had gone before David, had anticipated his needs, and had prepared for him the blessings which God knew that he would be needing and requesting. This was true of the whole sweep of God's providential dealings with David. God always sees the end from the beginning.

In every instance in which this word "prevent" is used in the Bible, it means to "go before, or to anticipate." In Psalm 59:10 the writer states, "The God of my mercy shall prevent me." Thus he refers to the preventient grace of God. In I Thessalonians 4:15 Paul wrote, "We which are alive and remain unto the coming of the Lord shall not prevent them which are asleep." By that he did not mean that those Christians who are alive at the time of the return of Christ would hinder those who had preceded them in death, but rather, the dead in Christ shall rise first and go with the Lord before those Christians who are alive will be caught up with Him and them.

On September 26, 1957, special observances were held in Ohio, Indiana, Pennsylvania and Massachusetts, which marked the one hundred eighty-third anniversary of the birth of Johnny Appleseed Chapman. He was remembered because of his zeal for planting and distributing apple seeds in these states while they were yet wildernesses. His reason for planting apple seed along trails was that he knew thousands of pioneers would come that way and would need the fresh fruit. He prevented those people with the blessings of goodness by going before them and providing for their welfare when they came after him.

One of the secrets of success in anything is the ability to look ahead and to prepare for developments. A good leader always thinks ahead of his followers. He foresees their needs, the burdens and the difficulties they will have to face and provides for them. The Psalmist tells us that God prevents us with the blessings of goodness. He has provided for our needs even before we have been aware of the fact that we have needs. God is always several moves ahead of us. As Christ said, God knows the things that we need before we ask Him to supply them. The preventient goodness of God is not like a blessing emerging from a disaster, but one that is available according to His goodness, foreknowledge and plans. God sows our future with blessings of goodness. Psalm 97:11 says, "Light is sown for the righteous, and gladness for the upright in heart." When we arrive at any place in our experience, we find God there already and with ample provision. The expression "prevent" can sometimes be rendered one who "comes to meet us." In other words, God is so far ahead that He has time to stop and turn around and come back again. "For thou dost meet him with goodly blessings." We have here a picture of God Who is always ahead of us -- His ample provision is always in

advance, He gives in anticipation of our need, and He answers sooner than we expect. God anticipates our need and comes to meet us with ample provision. He surprises us on our way. God's goodness has gone before us as a herald preparing the way for us, and as a provident friend making all arrangements for our future needs.

I. God Anticipated Our Material Needs.

We live in a world which God prepared. "In the beginning God created the heaven and the earth" (Genesis 1:1). He did a complete job of it before He made man. All He created is still here. It remains to serve the oncoming generations. Man was created as an adult to enjoy immediately that which God provided for him in advance. God created man with capacities and desires to enjoy what was already here. Before God created man with hunger, He had already provided food, fruits and other edibles. Before man was made with thirst water was already running from pure springs.

When God created the world into which we have been born, He decked it in beauty for the human eye; He covered it with sustenance for the human frame; and He stored it with energies that would have remained unused, but for the intelligence of men. The young of no other creature ever comes into the world as helpless as the young of the human species, but God so anticipated this fact that gentle hands and loving hearts make provision for this helplessness. In creation God went before us with the blessings of His goodness.

Think of the home into which you were born. Was ever there a greater gift than this, which prayer and care made ready for you? Do you realize that, because of the preventent grace and goodness of God, before your eyes could focus properly, before your hands could grasp, and before you could utter an articulate cry, there was ample provision for you? Before you could express hunger there was a mother's milk; and before you could feel the cold you were wrapped in the softest clothing. You were received into the warmth of a circle of planning and praying. You came into this world a tiny and helpless baby, but God, Who had anticipated your coming, came to meet you with an abundant supply of gifts to meet your needs. "Thou preventest him with the blessings of goodness."

This world is full of untapped resources waiting to be appropriated. Food for the body, medicine for its healing, and power to light our homes and drive our machinery have been waiting until we came to the point where they were needed. Can we doubt that the hand of God made this provision? He knew what things we should have need of in the long march of civilization, and provided them. When additional needs arise, untapped resources will be discovered, for God always provides for the needs of His children.

II. God Anticipated Our Spiritual Needs.

Not only did God prepare the world into which we were born, and the parental love which welcomed us into our earthly home, and the educational elements to aid in the development of our God-given powers, and the wholesome laws to

guard our rights, but He has gone before us and provided for our spiritual needs. God's grace provided free and full salvation for us before we realized our need of salvation. That is why we rejoice when we sing:

"Jesus paid it all
All to Him I owe;
Sin had left a crimson stain,
He washed it white as snow."

Anticipating our needs, in advance God provided the grace which we need to live by every day of our Christian lives on this earth. There will never be a difficulty, a burden, or a problem in your life as a Christian but what God will provide an abundant supply of grace to take care of you.

Christian friend, doesn't it help you to know that God in His preventing grace anticipated and went before you, to the extent that even before you were born He had already planned and provided the pattern of your life? An architect plans a building on paper. He has the whole plan of that structure before even one stone is laid or one piece of timber is put in place. He knows what that building is going to look like. I may see men digging a trench for a foundation, and I know that a building is going to be erected there, but I have no idea how it is going to look. Not so, with the architect. It is thus with God. God has a perfect plan for the life of each of us. When we dedicate ourselves to the discovery of His will for us and the doing of that will, we give up our dross for His gold; we give up our second-best for God's best; and we give up our foolish and weak will for His perfect will. Regardless of what problem may arise to confront and perplex you, you need to fall back on the fact that God is back of it all, and that His preventing grace has gone before, and has anticipated and provided for you, and has made ample arrangements before that emergency arose.

In olden days, travellers who crossed the desert used to dig wells where their caravans rested and leave them open for their successors. Those who followed the same trail could depend on finding the needed supply of water for man and beast. Is not this the sort of thing that God has done through Christ? He came and did the will of God, and left the resources which enable us to meet the same experiences. He was tempted, like as we are, but He overcame them, and so can we. To those who were anxious about the necessities of life He gave the assurance by which He himself was living, that if we seek first the Kingdom of God all the things we need will be supplied.

In the hour of sorrow Christ proclaimed to those who were bereaved that He was the Resurrection and the Life, words which have banished despair from many a sorrowful heart. God with us is the source of fortitude; God on before us is the source of hope. Hope is God a little way ahead, kindling the lamps and leveling the path. Our hearts are hopeful just because He is there. In our sorrow, that familiar story which links the generations into brotherhood, there is always something of which we do not find a replica, some thing that is ours and ours alone.

Think again of the cravings of our hearts and lives; those longings that be-

set us as we journey. The measurement of life is what it hungers for -- its quest is in reality its crown. When we are young we hunger for adventure; when we are old we hunger for repose. When we are foolish we want to conquer worlds; when we are wise we want to conquer self. When we are children it is fame we covet, and we cannot picture life without success; but when we are taught a little and we learn something, we begin to see that it is so much better to be faithful than to be famous.

Those who follow Christ through life and seek to do the will of God will find that God has been before them, providing the grace which they need in every experience. For those who follow Christ, life is not an uncharted way. The course of it is shaped by God's love and guided by His purpose. All that we need is waiting for us at the point where we need it. One of the surest proofs that the Bible is the Word of God is just the way in which it goes before us through all the changing experiences of life. It is before us in the day of triumph. It is before us in the hour of fall. In every new temptation it is there; in every joy, and in every bitter experience. Through His Word God finds us and meets our needs.

In intimate and personal ways many of us have been aware of what the Christians in previous generations called God's "prevenient grace." We had to face a difficult situation. When we came to the point where the way of duty was plain, we found that the difficulties all seemed to vanish. It was as if someone had been there preparing the way.

Or, perhaps, we went to see some friend in deep distress, in the hope that we might make God's comfort real. It was a visit from which we shrank with a feeling of helplessness, but when we made the venture we found that words came to us for which there was a listening ear. There also God had been at work before us preparing the way.

It is the same in other matters. No Christian looking back can doubt God's hand in the shaping of his life. We may not be able to see the various factors by which our paths in life have been directed. Things are happening which are now unknown to us which may change the course of life for some of us five or ten years from now. Some people would say that this is a matter of luck, either good or bad, but we who know God know that He is at work behind the scenes, for we have seen the results.

There is no other way of explaining some of the experiences of life. There were times when it seemed as if the way opened up by a kind of miracle. On the other hand, there were times when some promising road was barred. Yet in both cases, as we look back, we know that the hand of God was in it.

This is part of the meaning of those words about prayer which we often feel are mysterious. "God knows what things ye have need of before ye ask him." He is always some moves ahead. We cannot tell what the future holds and therefore what our needs will be. But God knows, and He has provided for our needs. Christ bids us to pray in that assurance. However helpless we may feel in the face of life, we should know that the strain will bring the strength. If we face life's unknown emergencies in this faith, our hearts can be at peace. It will be true of us that God "preventest" us with the blessings of goodness and grace. For those who seek above all things to be

what Christ wants them to be, and to do what He wants them to do, His grace will prove to be sufficient and waiting or available.

"I've found a Friend, O such a Friend!
He loved me ere I knew Him:
He drew me with the cords of love
And thus He bound me to Him."

III. God Anticipated Our Eternal Needs.

Our birth in this country is one of the anticipatory blessings of God. Our birth in this particular age is an indisputable proof of His goodness to us; in fact, all of His providences are the fruits of His anticipatory goodness and grace. Our blessed Lord is now preparing us for what He has prepared for us. He has prepared the place to which we, the children of God, are going, in advance of our going there. Christ said, "Let not your heart be troubled: ye believe in God, believe also in me. In my Father's house are many mansions: if it were not so, I would have told you. I go to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again, and receive you unto myself; that where I am, there ye may be also" (John 14:1-3).

The world into which we were born is not our home; it is just our temporary dwelling place. We must leave it before long, for we are just pilgrims passing through. "We need a city that hath a foundation, whose builder and maker is God." God's Word tells us that there is a heaven where many mansions are provided for us. What this world was to us before we entered it, heaven is to us now.

1. This world was unknown to us.
Before we were born we did not know anything about the homes into which we were to be introduced. How little we know about heaven! "Eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither have entered into the heart of man, the things which God hath prepared for them that love him" (I Corinthians 2:9).
2. This world has more than we can enjoy.
After all, how little of this world can we appropriate? How little of its beauties have we seen? It is likewise true of heaven, whose provisions are so rich, so varied, and so unbounded.
3. This world welcomed our coming with love.
As certainly as loving hearts received and welcomed us here, so many of our relatives, our Christian friends, those whom we have helped spiritually, and those who have helped us spiritually, and above all Christ our Saviour and Lord will welcome us into our heavenly home. It is His goodness and His grace that have gone before us, and prepared it for us.

You and I need to pause and thank God for what He has done for us, for what He is doing in our behalf from day to day, and for what He is going to do for us in the future, both on earth and in heaven. Then, we need to cry out to God and ask Him to give us sufficient grace to enable us to make our lives count for Him every day until He takes us home to heaven.