

THE GOODNESS OF GOD

"O magnify the Lord with me, and let us exalt his name together." Psalm 34:3.

This is a call to social worship. It is the cry of a soul possessed by the spirit of praise, and yearning to have fellowship with others in thanksgiving. "God's praises sound best in concert." The praise that lifts its voice in solitude is beautiful, but it is far more beautiful when heard in communion with the praise of one's fellows. The violin gains something from an accompaniment. Each instrument in the orchestra is enriched by the cooperation of the others. Each member in a chorus has his discernment sharpened, and his zeal intensified by the remaining members. So it is in the orchestra of praise. My own thanksgiving is quickened and enriched when I join it to the praises of others.

The Psalmist has a wooing word upon his lips. He is not abusive. He is not undertaking to prod us. He is not setting himself to the task of driving us out to church. He is resolved that he himself will go. He is bent upon having a praise service. In fact, the giving of thanks is to be henceforth a fixed habit with him. Every day is to be a thanksgiving day. "I will bless the Lord at all times," he sings happily. He is eager that we share his gratitude; so he knocks on our doors, lays eager hands upon us, and says cheerfully, "O magnify the Lord with me, and let us exalt His name together."

Why is the Psalmist so full of gratitude? Why is it that for him to open his mouth is to burst forth into spontaneous praise? It is not because his circumstances are perfect. This Psalm is thought by some to have been written by David while he was in hiding from Saul. But whether this is the case or not, the author faces the fact that circumstances are often against us. "Many are the afflictions of the righteous," he tells us frankly. He is wise enough to know that if we wait till everything is perfectly to our liking before we give thanks then we are like to wait forever.

Nor is this man grateful because of any goodness or greatness he sees in himself. He is boasting, but he is not boasting of his own achievements. We do not like boasting that is born of self-importance. Such boasting is bad taste. It is a mark of conceit. It is thoroughly offensive. But not so the boasting of this joyous singer. "My soul shall make her boast in the Lord." I could wish that we had a congregation made up of such boasters. Such boasters do not offend; they delight. They do not make us sad; they make us glad.

What is the secret of the gratitude of this singer?

1. His gratitude is born out of his own personal experience.

He claims that he has been a seeker after God. With beautiful candor he tells us, "I sought the Lord." Having sought, he reports his findings. I think we may listen to him with confidence and profit. Having tested by experience, he has a right to speak. And mark you, it is only such who can speak with authority. This is true in every field of knowledge.

Having sought the Lord, he tells us about the outcome of it. "He heard me and delivered me from all my fears." What a declaration! He had his fears. He was beset by tormenting terrors. He does not tell us what it was that caused him to fear. He may have been afraid of the loss of his possessions, or of his health, or of one dearly loved. He may have been afraid of the sins of his youth. He may have been afraid of some foul habit that had taken him captive and bound him hand and foot. He may have been afraid of death, or that which lay beyond death.

He was panic-stricken. He moved in continual trembling. He was afraid of yesterday. He dared not think of the morrow. He sought the Lord.

And what was the issue of the search? "He heard me." The term "heard" scarcely expresses the content of the Psalmist's mind. The significance of the term is more than hearing. It implies heeding and responding. Man's seeking was responded to by a sympathetic movement on the part of God. "And delivered me from all my fears." "He delivered me." That is a full-coloured and full-blooded word, abounding in strength and vitality. It suggests the idea of rescuing something out of a beast's mouth. As though my "fears" were a pack of wild beasts, and I repeatedly find myself in their jaws. The rescue is not partial. The relief is by no means incomplete. The freedom is absolute. "He delivered me from all my fears."

2. His gratitude was due to what God had done for others.

For instance, he had a friend with whom he was accustomed to share his spiritual experiences, who had been overwhelmed by a veritable avalanche of trouble. One disaster after another had come upon the poor fellow till it seemed that he had been cheated of all that makes life worth living. In fact, he was so beaten down by this besieging army of troubles that he was no longer able to pray. He could not put his agony into words. He could not voice the tragic needs of his perplexed soul. What did he do in this desperate plight? He cried unto the Lord, and the outcome of that pathetic cry was this, "The Lord heard him, and saved him out of all his troubles."

Then, he had other friends whose faces had lost their radiance and wore the settled gloom of worry and care. There were peevish, fretful, envious, sensual, and sad faces. But to all of these a marvelous change had come; the gloom and the night had passed and a glorious dawn had transfigured them. So with gratitude he sings, "They looked unto him and became radiant." They were made to sparkle. They were brightened up and made cheerful. Depression gave way to buoyancy. Melancholy yielded to cheerfulness. They became the optimists.

"This poor man cried, and the Lord heard him, and saved him out of all his troubles." He opened a way out of the tight place. He led him out of straits into freedom. He gave him a sense of space. "Thou hast brought my feet into a large place."

What had this singer learned?

Speaking out of his own heart-knowledge of God, he could say this: God is good. To many today it seems trite to say that God is good, yet no discovery could be more gladsome. He had discovered too that God is near. That, too, is a marvelous discovery. How distant we often feel He is as we stagger under our burden of weariness and loneliness! But this man had come to realize that God is always near, that He is always within the hearing of our voices and within reach of our groping hands. This is true amidst all circumstances of life. It is especially true when the skies grow gray and the road stormy.

He also discovered that God is always adequate. Joyously he says, "I have constantly found Him sufficient." He was never failed me; He has never once let me down. When all other sources of help have failed, I have found Him abundantly adequate for every need.

Our Lord is abidingly eager to submit Himself to the test of experience. Does He really hear prayer? There is only one way to be sure of it. Try Him. Is He able to give strength in temptation? Try Him. Can He really give victory over sin? Try Him. Does He really comfort in sorrow? Try Him. Those who have tried Him have found Him sufficient. "O taste and see that the Lord is good: blessed is the man that trusteth in him." Psalm 34:8.