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SOURCES OF STRENGTH

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Introduction

Our Lord is variously represented and gloriously portrayed in the Scriptures. Metaphors, similes and adjectives are all but exhausted in describing His perfections and delineating His virtues. Roses and lilies and rocks and pearls, physicians and carpenters, bread and water--and a lamb, are all made to serve the sublime and spiritual purpose of illustrating our Lord's relation to and attitude toward His people. In one of his choice lyrics, Spurgeon has given expression to this same thought:

"What the hand is to the lute,
What the breath is to the flute,
What the fragrance to the smell,
What the spring is to the well,
What the flower is to the bee,
That is Jesus Christ to me.

"What the mother to the child,
What the guide in pathless wild,
What is oil to troubled wave,
What is ransom to the slave,
What is water to the sea,
That is Jesus Christ to me."

Several centuries before the Christian era, there lived a man by the name of Joel unto whom the Word of the Lord therefore, spoke with prophetic power. Very little is known about him, but in his name we have a suggestion of spiritual value. His father's name was "Pethuel," which means "persuaded of God." He gave to his son the name of "Joel," which means "Jehovah is God." So Joel is more than a name, it is a confession of faith!

To a nation that is suffering from a fearful scourge of drought and desolation as a result of the iniquities of the people, it is to be expected, therefore, that the burden of his message should be a call--a trumpet call, positive, affirmative, assertive, insistent---a call to old men and children, to priests and people, to return unto the Lord. Moreover, this return must not be casual nor formal nor perfunctory nor nonchalant but vital and essential, from the heart, and to be accompanied by humility and supplication, and amendment of life. For only thus, he seems to say, can gloom give way to gladness, and judgment to mercy, and wretchedness to blessedness.

After a most vivid description of the unhappy condition of the nation, a condition that in some respects finds its parallel in our own land today, he holds forth a bright promise like a rainbow in the bosom of the storm, and says in the language of my text, "The Lord will be the hope of his people." In all the prophets there is a predictive element which makes their message applicable to every age.

Therefore, even though at times we may feel that the sky of our generation is overcast by the clouds of materialism and skepticism and pessimism, there is a ray of light that streams through the darkness. It is this radiant reality, "the Lord will be the hope of his people."

Hope of His People

When Alexander, later known as "The Great," succeeded his father, Phillip, he began preparations for a mighty military movement. During this preparation he began giving away many of his possessions until one day one of his generals remonstrated with him, saying, "You are giving away everything you have." Alexander replied, "I am giving away everything but hope."

The hope to which I now refer, however, is not a vague optimism nor sentimental day-dream, nor the indefinite feeling that somehow things will come out all right, but it is the expectant desire of those who have looked into the face of the Father. This is the hope that "fills with all joy and peace in believing."

The Lord will be the hope of His people--not man nor circumstance nor inventive genius nor political strategems nor "streamlined religion," but the Lord! He is the God of hope because He creates hope and sustains hope, and His character is the ground of hope.

Our hope is not in commerce. It is deplorable for a nation to lose its trade, its economic interchange with other people, and to be shut up within the walls of a bleak isolation. But it is possible for a nation to have its trade routes wide open and yet be traveling a pathway to disintegration and

decay. Some of the cruelest wars in history have been waged in the name of economics. It has even been known for missionary activities to be supported for commercial expediency and exploitation. The spirit of trade may tunnel mountains and harness cataracts, and cut highways through jungles, and make deserts fruitful, but it cannot teach men to love one another or bring that righteousness which exalteth a nation. What shall it profit a nation to gain the whole world and lose its soul?

Our hope is not in science. Scientific investigation can make and has made life more livable and enjoyable and palatable. It can relieve pain and increase comfort and prolong our days, but it cannot make wars to cease and men to love each other. It cannot cure a broken spirit nor pacify a guilty conscience, and has no power to produce that pure heart without which no man can see God.

Our hope is not in education. Roman Catholics have a way of saying that ignorance is the mother of devotion. It has been well replied, however, that ignorance is not the mother of anything but other little ignorances. Certainly we are interested in education, and it will be a dark and gloomy day when we lose our passionate enthusiasm for intellectual and cultural pursuits. The great colleges and universities of our land owe their very origin to the beneficence of Christian men, and are largely supported with Christian money, although, sad to say, some have departed from the Christian faith. While the Holy Spirit may have an affinity for a trained mind, and God puts no premium on ignorance, yet our hope is not in education per se. Gracian scholars wrote documents two thousand years ago that are

classics today. The Roman Forum rocked to the applause of an eloquence never surpassed. But philosophers and educators have often sown the very seeds of national corruption and decay, and frequently the most thoroughly educated have been the most thoroughly selfish and degraded. On the sophisticated altars of higher education, again and again has the truth of God been sacrificed to the pagan deities of lust, uncleanness and debauchery. Education can dispel the cloud of ignorance but it cannot dispel the thick cloud of sin---that sin which snares men and nations.

Our hope is not in the so-called "social gospel" with its emphasis on the material rather than the spiritual. To feed the hungry, clothe the naked, nurse the sick, drain swamps, and build comfortable houses for the poor is noble work, and we should maintain an active, sympathetic and practical interest in these humanitarian projects. True religion certainly must not be content to play the part of the "good Samaritan," and yet do nothing about getting rid of the robbers. True religion is objective, subjective and projective. It is doctrinal, experimental and practical. It is a doctrine to be believed, an experience to be related, and a life to be lived. "If ye know these things, happy are ye if ye do them." A religion that doesn't look out, and go out, and help out is a religion that is washed out!

Jesus had His social vision. He talked and taught of a kingdom of light and love and holiness, which would reach from pole to pole and whose music would be the glad Hosannas of redeemed millions from every tribe and every kindred. But he sought to bring in that kingdom by changing men.

He gave his attention not to reform nor to economic systems nor to political nostrums, but to the re-creation of individuals. His was inside work. Jesus was an interior decorator! He knew that moral, economic, and political maladjustments were surface symptoms--pimples on the body; while the real trouble was the heart, and he treated the heart. It is fearfully possible to become so enamored with draining swamps and clearing slums that we forget: First, a clean body does not mean a clean heart. Second, "You cannot have an honest horse race without an honest human race." Third, the soul of all improvement is the improvement of the soul."

This brings us face to face with the unchanging truth of the text. Our hope for material and spiritual recovery is in the Lord himself and a right relation to Him. It is just at this point that we have the tap-root of every perplexing and bewildering problem that confronts us in the home and in the state: not that we have gone off the gold standard, but we have gone off the God standard. We have substituted human cleverness for divine wisdom. We have depended upon the acts of Congress instead of the acts of God. We have been looking to Washington instead of Jerusalem. We have largely forsaken the fountain of water, and hewn out for ourselves cisterns, broken cisterns that can hold no water.

"God's in his heaven, all's right with the world." As a bit of pious poetry, this sounds good but it simply is not true. All will never be right with the world until the world is right with God.

The Harbor of His People

The word "hope" has been translated as "harbor" and so our text may well read "the Lord will be the harbor of His people." This suggests to our mind a sheltered place of security; a port of protection; a haven of rest. With impressive repetition the Scriptures emphasize the sweet and supporting thought that the Lord is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble.

According to the Bible, life is a race, and a pilgrimage, and a journey, and a battle. It is a shuttle in a loom, an arrow in its flight, and a tale that is told. It is a garden to cultivate a vapor that soon vanishes. It is an ocean voyage. It is no new nor strange figure to liken life unto the rolling sea with its grandeur, majesty and mystery. Sometimes calm and quiet, sometimes disturbed and anxious; sometimes peaceful and attractive, and sometimes tumultuous and foreboding, the sea is an appropriate symbol in which is reflected the various experiences and the corresponding emotions of human life. "They that go down to the sea in ships, that do business in great waters; these see the works of the Lord, and His wonders in the deep. For He commandeth, and raiseth the stormy wind, which lifteth up the waves thereof. They mount up to the heaven, they go down again to the depths; their soul is melted because of troubles. They reel to and fro and stagger like a drunken man, and are at their wits' end. Then they cry unto the Lord in their troubles, and he bringeth them out of their distresses. He maketh the storm

a calm, so that the waves thereof are still. Then are they glad because they be quiet; so He bringeth them unto their desired haven" (Psalm 107:23-30).

It is not always easy to face life. With its diseases and hatreds and wars and calamities, it is often like surly waves and contrary winds. But filled with forebodings and anxieties, stalwart Christian mariners look away unto Jesus and, bless God, we find in Him, the Captain of our Salvation, an anchorage both sure and steadfast, fullness of joy, pleasures forevermore, and the perfection of earthly and heavenly felicity.

"O Maker of the Mighty Deep

Whereon our vessels fare,

Above our life's adventure keep

Thy faithful watch and care.

In Thee we trust, whate'er befall:

Thy sea is great, our boats are small.

"We know not where the secret tides

Will help us or delay,

Nor where the lurking tempest hides,

Nor where the fogs are gray.

We trust in Thee, whate'er befall,

Thy sea is great, our boats are small.

"When outward bound we boldly sail

And leave the friendly shore,

Let not our hearts of courage fail
Until the voyage is o'er.
We trust in Thee, whate'er befall,
Thy sea is great, our boats are small.
"When homeward bound, we gladly turn,
Oh! bring us safely there,
Where harbor-lights of friendship burn
And peace is in the air.
We trust in Thee, whate'er befall,
Thy sea is great, our boats are small.

"Beyond the circle of the sea,
When voyaging is past,
We seek our final port in Thee;
Oh! bring us home at last.
In Thee we trust, whate'er befall,
Thy sea is great, our boats are small."

---Henry van Dyke.

The Place of Repair

The word "hope" is also translated "place of repair,"
and so our text may well read: "the Lord will be the place
of repair for His people."

The glory of the Lord is seen in the magnificent pageantry
of sun and moon and stars, for "the heavens declare the glory
of God." The glory of the Lord is seen in the seedtime when
all nature is aglow with riotous color and sweet with the
perfume of flowers. The glory of the Lord is seen in the
harvest when "the frost is on the rumpkin, and the fodder's
in the shock." But the noontide fullness of His rich for-

bearance which re-creates that which is marred and broken by sin. There is no more sublime activity and energy than that which is employed in taking broken hearts and broken lives and broken homes, and making them over again.

A bird lover gave up the comforts of his home to go and live as a bird-watcher on an island sanctuary. He lived among the birds and came to know them intimately. One day, a lovely sea bird was found on the shore unable to use its wings because they had been fouled by slime. He approached the bird, which immediately fled in terror from his presence; however, he finally caught the bird which immediately tore his hands with its sharp beak. But he held it until it lay peaceful in his hands. He then cleansed every feather of the slime until the wings were free. Then he threw the bird into the air. With the blood from his hands, red upon its plumage, it soared free once more to beat its wings against the gates of the sun. The emblem of our liberty is a cross and empty tomb. All power in heaven and earth is given unto our crucified and risen Lord to make you, even you and me, over again.

"I played with my blocks, I was but a child,
Houses I builded and castles I piled;
But they tottered and fell, all my labor was vain,
But my father said kindly, "We'll try it again."

"I played with my time, what's time to a lad,
Why pour over books? Play, play and be glad.
Till my youth was all spent like a sweet summer tain,
But my father said kindly, "We'll try it again."

"I played with my soul, the soul that is I,
The best that is in me I smothered its cry.
I dulled it, I lulled it, and now, O God, the wain!
But my Father said kindly, "We'll try it again."

Oh, my brethren, the surest way forward morally and
socially and religiously is to come back unto the Lord, who
will have mercy upon us, and to our God who will abundantly
pardon.

"O God, our help in ages past
Our hope for years to come,
Our refuge from the stormy blast
And our eternal home."