

SONGS IN THE HOUSE OF OUR PILGRIMAGE

"Thy statutes have been my songs in the house of my pilgrimage." Psalm 119 verse 54

God's people during the Jewish dispensation as well as during the Gospel dispensation are spoken of as "pilgrims and strangers" in the "present evil world." They are such, because they have heard of "a better country," whose ruler is God, and whose law is love "the perfect law of liberty." To such pilgrims the strife for wealth and vain glory, the pride, haughtiness and tinsel that everywhere prevail now, are distasteful; while the battle for wealth or position, especially when it leads to unrighteousness, oppression, slander, envy, strife and every evil work, is repulsive. Having obtained a glimpse of the perfection of divine character with its absoluteness of justice and love, it has become their ideal: and they have heard "the voice of him that speaks from heaven," instructing them that sin and evil shall not always prevail, but that the God of heaven by and by shall set up his Kingdom which will renovate and bless the world of mankind and bring in everlasting righteousness. Since they have heard this, and the more they learn to appreciate it, the more, necessarily, they are out of harmony with the contrary conditions of the present time. Hence it is that they feel themselves,

and are portrayed in the Scriptures as being, pilgrims and strangers who seek the fairer clime of the coming age.

It was in this view of matters that the Apostle declared that Abraham, Isaac and Jacob were "pilgrims and strangers on the earth," who sought a better country, a home under more righteous conditions. They sojourned in the very land promised to them, but it was not their "home;" because it was still in the hands and under the government of those who were aliens and strangers from God. They waited for the fulfilment of God's promise to give them that country under his divine blessing and laws, when it would become to them a heavenly country, a country under heavenly direction and blessing. They were obliged to wait for two reasons: first, as a test and development of their own faith and trust in the Great Promiser; and secondly, because "the wickedness of the Amorites was not yet come to the full." Genesis 15 verse 16.

Commenting on this, the Apostle declares that if they had been mindful, i.e., wishful, to have returned to Charran, their own country prior to the promise of Canaan, they might have returned to it, when they found the land of promise still occupied by other peoples, and that God was not yet ready to fulfil to them his promises. (Hebrews 11 verse 15.). But they preferred to hold on to God's promises, and chose accordingly, for the time, to be pilgrims and strangers

in the land of promise. Stephen in his discourse (Acts 7 verse 2 and 5). points out this pilgrimage and sojourn, as strangers, of Abraham and his seed waiting for possession of the promised land. Stephen says, "God gave him no inheritance in it: no, not so much as to set his foot on: yet he promised that he would give it to him for a possession, and to his seed after him."

We are to understand, accordingly, that the heavenly country for which Abraham, Isaac and Jacob and all the faithful of the fleshly house of Israel waited as "pilgrims and strangers" is after all to be earthly, in the sense of being on the earth; but it will be heavenly in the sense that its government, regulations, laws, etc., will be heavenly laws, etc., and not "earthly, sensual, devilish." Consequently, when the Apostle says that they "looked for a city which has foundations, whose builder and maker is God;" and that God "hath prepared for them a city," we must understand this promise, so far as they are concerned, to be in harmony with the other promises made to fleshly Israel.

The "city" referred to is not a literal city, but the symbolical one mentioned in Revelation 21 verse 2 and 9 through 27. In symbol a city signifies a government, and this city which comes down from God out of heaven symbolizes the Kingdom of God, his rule or government, which will be established in all the earth. This "city" or government will consist of The

Christ the "Bridegroom" and "the bride the Lamb's wife." "Then shall the righteous shine forth" the city will have the glory of God. When this Kingdom is established, the nations* shall walk in the light of it. Revelation 21 verse 24.

Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, and all the faithful pilgrims and strangers prior to the atonement, while they will not be members of the bride company nor of the new Jerusalem, the Kingdom, will nevertheless be very closely identified with it in the work of blessing the world of mankind in general. And hence it is that they are represented as waiting for this "city," this government which God will establish in the world; preferring to have their inheritance at that time, and under the blessing and bright illumination of that heavenly city or government, rather than enjoy the pleasures of sin for a season. It is in harmony with this thought that we are taught to pray, "Thy Kingdom (the Heavenly Jerusalem, the city which hath for foundations the twelve Apostles Christ Jesus himself being the chief cornerstone). come! Thy will be done on earth as it is done in heaven." This city will shine and bless the world until all the willing shall be helped and reconciled to God. Its reign will be for a thousand years, after which a new dispensation will open, under new conditions, in which mankind (perfected). will be granted the privilege of ruling themselves in harmony with the divine law.

In a certain sense then we might designate the present era, "the present evil world," to be the general house of our pilgrimage for all* The words "of them that are saved" in this text are not found in the older MSS. Very evidently they are an interpolation; because after the nations are saved, brought into harmony with God, they will no longer be "nations" (Gentiles, heathen), but parts of the one holy nation, the Kingdom of God, who love and long for righteousness; and the better condition of the future, the "new heavens and the new earth" promised as the heavenly home or condition which will be found abundantly satisfactory to all who shall attain thereto.

"OUR EARTHLY HOUSE" AND "OUR HOUSE FROM HEAVEN"

Nevertheless, the Apostle Paul (2 Corinthians 5 verse 1 through 10). writing concerning this pilgrimage and addressing specially the consecrated Church of the Gospel age, uses language which, while not out of harmony with what we have just seen, foregoing, may be nevertheless properly understood to refer to the present mortal bodies of the saints, as their houses of pilgrimage their temporary houses, while on the way to their permanent homes, the spiritual bodies which God hath promised to them that love him, and which the same apostle described to the same readers in a previous epistle. 1 Corinthians 15 verse 38 and 42 through 45.

Moreover, since we well know that very much in the Psalms was written prophetically, respecting the Christ, head and body, the overcoming Church of the Gospel age, we may well infer that the language of our text had special reference to these pilgrims of the Gospel age. The Apostle says, "We know that if our earthly house of this temporary dwelling place were dissolved, we have a permanent structure of God, a house not made with hands (not produced by human powers). everlasting in the heavens." Since the renewed earth, although it will be a permanent house for the world of mankind, will not be "in the heavens;" and since the Church when granted their new spiritual bodies in the resurrection will be thereafter everlastingly in the higher or heavenly condition, it seems but proper to construe the Apostle's language as relating to the earthly bodies and the heavenly bodies of the Church. And such an application seems to fit his discourse throughout thoroughly. It is true that in this present body or temporary house of pilgrimage we groan oppressed not only by the evil influence of the world and the devil on every hand but also and especially by the weaknesses of our own flesh. For when we would do good, evil is present with us, so that the good which we would do we are often hindered from doing, while the evil which we do not approve often obtrudes itself on us and requires to be continually resisted and overcome. As the Apostle elsewhere declares, we "which have the first fruits of

the spirit, even we ourselves groan within ourselves, waiting for the adoption, to wit, the deliverance of our body," the Church, into the glorious likeness of our Lord.

But our groaning is not with a desire to be unclothed; we do not wish to be without a body, for that at very best all down through the Gospel age would mean to be "asleep in Jesus," waiting for the resurrection morning that then we might be "clothed upon with our house from heaven," our new, perfect and permanent body, our "home." What we prefer is not to have the little spark of present life extinguished, but to have it swallowed up, absorbed into the perfect conditions of the perfect life to which we are begotten, with its perfect body.

"Now he that hath wrought us for the self-same thing is God, who also hath given us the earnest of the spirit." This perfect condition which we are to obtain in the resurrection will be the grand consummation of our salvation which God has promised; and the new mind, the new will begotten by the Word of truth, is reckoned as the beginning of that new creature, which will be perfected in the divine nature when the first resurrection shall have completed it. The holy spirit granted us in the present time is a hand payment so to speak, an "earnest" or assurance of the grand and gracious results for which we are hoping and striving, groaning and praying.

Footnote for the May 28th Manna, 2 Corinthians 5 verse 6

"Therefore, we are always confident knowing that, whilst we are at home in the body (so long as we feel entirely contented with present conditions ourselves and our surroundings), we are absent from the Lord." If we were living near to him, "walking with God, we would not feel perfectly satisfied with present attainments, conditions, etc.; but would feel like pilgrims and strangers, seeking a better rest, a better home, "which God hath in reservation for them that love him." But this, as the Apostle explains, is true only of those who walk by faith and not by sight. "But we are confident (full of faith toward God, we rejoice to walk by faith). and are well pleased rather to be from home (homeless, pilgrims and strangers on the earth). and to be at home with the Lord" in the spirit of our fellowship.

For this cause we are striving, that whether it be by and by when we reach our home, or whether it be in the present time when we are actually away from home, pilgrims and strangers, we strive that we may be acceptable with the Lord; that we may have his favor and blessing and realize his fellowship and presence and know that we shall ultimately be accepted by him. "For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ that everyone may receive the things done in the body, according to the things he hath done whether it be good or bad." All through this pilgrimage we are standing at the bar of our Lord's judgment: he is testing

us, proving us, to see whether we love him and the things which make for righteousness and peace; and if so, how much we are willing to sacrifice for righteousness' sake. He marks the degree of our love by the measure of our self-denials and self-sacrifices for his sake, the truth's sake.

But to thus speak of our bodies as houses can be true only of the "saints," the "new creatures" in Christ. Others of mankind have not duality of nature and could not properly apply to themselves such expressions as that of Romans 8 verse 10 and 11, "If Christ be in you the body is (reckoned). dead because of sin; but the spirit alive because of (the imputed). righteousness" of Christ. The new nature of the saints, begotten by the word of truth, is only the new will, which however is thenceforth addressed as the real person, and it alone is recognized of God who knows us not after the flesh but after the spirit of our new minds Christ minds. Notice also Romans 6 verse 3 and 4. These "new creatures" have an old man or outward man that is perishing, and a new man, inward man, or hidden man of the heart who is being renewed day by day. 2 Corinthians 4 verse 16; Colossians 3 verse 9 and 10; Ephesians 4 verse 23 and 24; 1 Peter 3 verse 4.

It is written, he "giveth songs in the night," and "He hath put a new song into my mouth." It causes us no surprise to know that the saints will "be joyful in glory" and sing aloud with the high praises of God in their

mouths, when it shall be given to them to execute the judgments written (Psalm 149 verse 4 through 9); but it may strike some as peculiar that the present conditions of God's people, the condition of imperfection and physical frailty, in which we groan and are burdened, should be a condition in which songs and thanksgiving and joy should prevail with us. Nevertheless, this is the divine will, as it is the divine statement, respecting all who are truly overcomers: they are all to be joyful in the house of their pilgrimage. Respecting this joy our Lord declares "Your joy no man takes from you." "Peace I leave with you; my peace I give unto you: not as the world gives give I unto you. Let not your heart be troubled, neither let it be afraid." John 14 verse 27; 16 verse 22.

So then, while there is a measure of groaning because of some burdens on the part of those who have attained to the new life, there are also blessed joys which the world cannot give, neither take away: and these are the source and cause of the unceasing joy and "songs in the night," before the glorious dawn of the new Millennial day: these songs are inspired by the joys granted us in the house of our pilgrimage while we are actually absent from our "home."

What are our joys which no man takes from us? and which persecution and affliction and trouble can only deepen and widen and make sweeter? What joy is this? This joy is a foretaste of the blessings to come,

an earnest of our inheritance. It is inspired by confidence in him on whom we have believed: confidence that he is both able and willing to perfect the work which he has begun and which we desire shall be perfected in his own best way: confidence that so long as we are firmly holding to his gracious promises with the arms of our faith, he will not permit us to be separated from him. Who shall separate us from the love of God in Christ? Shall tribulation and persecution? Our confidence is that "no one is able to pluck us out of the Father's hand," and that "the Father himself loves" us and will not turn us away so long as we desire to abide obediently in his love. Yea, we are confident that all things are working together for good to those who love God; confident that he who is for us is more powerful than all who can be against us. Such confidence is sure to bring joy beyond the world's comprehension, and a peace of God that passes all understanding, which keeps the heart.

And such joy, produced by the true gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ received into an honest heart, naturally and properly awakens the "songs in the house of our pilgrimage." "Mid all the tumult and the strife, I hear the music ringing, It finds an echo in my soul, how can I keep from singing."

The word "song" has a wider meaning than simply a musical cadence: it is used in the Scriptures and elsewhere to indicate a joyful message of any kind. For

instance, we say, referring to the gospel, the knowledge of the divine plan, "Thou hast put a new song into my mouth, even the loving kindness of our God." And it is a fact that those who have tasted that the Lord is gracious, those who have received the joy which no man can take from them, those who have tasted of the grace of God in Christ, will not only rejoice and literally sing musical songs with their lips, but they will also rejoice to have their entire lives a song of praise and thanksgiving unto God. The song will bubble over on every proper occasion, wherever hearing ears are found so fully will the cleansed, justified and consecrated heart appreciate God's goodness and so greatly will it desire to "Tell the whole world these blessed tidings And speak of the time of rest that nears."

Wherever Christians find themselves without this joy of the Lord, and where they have no song in the house of their pilgrimage, they have reason to fear that there is something wrong, that the connections between their own hearts and the Lord are not full and complete. If they are unacquainted with this joy and these songs, it is because they have either never fully accepted the Lord as their portion, and consecrated themselves to his service, or else because certain false doctrines have so terrorized their minds and so completely enslaved them to fear that trustful joys are impossible to them. Such should at once take the proper steps either to make their consecration to the Lord complete,

so that he can put his spirit into them as members of his body, and give them the "seal of adoption," and cause them to know the joys of his salvation; or, if fully consecrated and hindered from joy and songs through false doctrine, they should diligently search the Scriptures and find the Lord's message, "Their fear toward me is taught by the precept of men." Isaiah 29 verse 13.

IN THE CLOUDY DAY

It is true, nevertheless, that our Christian experience is not always of a kind calculated to produce an exuberance of spirit: it is doubtless to our advantage that sometimes there are dark hours such as our dear Redeemer experienced when he said, "My soul is exceeding sorrowful even unto death." Such experiences no doubt draw us nearer to the fountain of comfort, of joy and peace, and are blessings in disguise, and amongst the "all things" which are working together for our good. But even in the very midst of trials and difficulties, and while cast down so that the songs do not abound, we may nevertheless in all conditions and at all times realize God's love and care and so firmly hold on to the Lord, with the hand of faith, that we would in the darkest moments be able to realize the joy of our Master's sympathy and love and help, and thus have the joy which no disaster of the present time can interrupt.

Despondency and loss of these joys and songs may sometimes result from ill health: in which case, if the illness be the result of selfish gratification, we have room for a lesson and reform; or it may seem to be the result of unselfish fidelity to the service of the truth, along the lines of duty, and if so, as soon as this is recognized, our joys and songs will return. In illustration let us remember Paul and Silas praising God in the prison of Philippi, while their backs were still lacerated and bleeding.

Footnote for the May 29th Manna, John 14 verse 27, John 16 verse 22

It should be the aim of the Lord's people to cultivate this joy and the conditions favorable to it, daily. The condition of our hearts has much to do with it; for this joy is not wholly dependent upon the head, our knowledge of the divine Word and plan. Its possession and increase depend chiefly upon the heart the center of our affections. If we set our affections, our hearts, on earthly things and seek for joy through the various gratifications of the flesh, the lust of the eye and the pride of life, etc., we will thereby quench to some extent the spirit of the new mind and correspondingly decrease the joys of the new mind. On the contrary, the more we overcome the world, the flesh and the devil, the more we seek to do the will of our Father who is in heaven, the more we seek for the fellowship and communion of our dear Redeemer, the more we seek

to do those things which are pleasing in his sight, so much the more will we have of the joy and peace which no man takes from us and which trials, difficulties and persecutions can only make the more sweet and precious.

And the more we have of this new mind, and the closer we are in sympathy with the Lord, the more we will desire to sing heartily "The old, old story of Jesus and his love." "How happy and blessed the hours, Since Jesus I always can see! Sweet prospects, sweet birds and sweet flowers Have all gained new sweetness to me."