



Fire and Ice Sermon Series

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Whom Have I in Heaven but Thee?

by Edward Griffin

“Whom have I in heaven but thee? and there is none upon earth that I desire besides thee.” Psalm 73:25.

This Psalm was composed by Asaph, one of the three chief singers whom David had appointed in the house of God. The good man had experienced a severe trial from the infirmities of his own heart; which trial, together with the manner in which he was relieved, is described in this beautiful Psalm. He had been “envious at the foolish when” he “saw the prosperity of the wicked,” and had indulged in unworthy complaints against divine providence. “They are not in trouble as other men, neither are they plagued like other men. Their eyes stand out with fatness; they have more than heart could wish.—Verily I have cleansed my heart in vain and washed my hands in innocency; for all the day long have I been plagued and chastened every morning.” This temper of uneasiness and distrust arose so high, that in a retrospect upon it he acknowledges, “My feet were almost gone, my steps had well nigh slipped.—So foolish was I and ignorant; I was as a beast before thee.” The manner in which he obtained relief from this agitation, was by repairing to the sanctuary of God, where the light of divine revelation shone. Here he discovered, as through a window which opened into eternity, the awful end to which the wicked with all their prosperity were hastening. Here also he learned the final rewards of the righteous, and saw the mysterious inequalities of divine providence cleared up. The glory of God’s faithfulness and truth so opened on his soul, and the comparative emptiness of all earthly things, that with more than recovered spirits he exclaimed, “Thou shalt guide me with thy counsel and afterward receive me to glory. Whom have I in heaven but thee? and there is none upon earth that I desire besides thee.”

My object will be, in the first place, to explain more fully how we are taught to feel by this example of Asaph,—how such a temper will operate and what effects it will produce; and in the second place, to suggest some reasons which urge to such a temper.

I. I am to explain more fully how we are taught to feel by this example of Asaph,—how such a temper will operate and what effects it will produce.

The Psalmist in these words expressed supreme delight in God as his all sufficient and only portion. “Whom have I in heaven but thee?” The only heaven I wish above is but to see thy face. Let others form confused ideas of the upper world, and desire it as a place where something is to be enjoyed, they know not what: but I know what a heaven I desire. Could I ascend to the highest heavens and find the presence of my God withdrawn, it would be no heaven for me. The only reason I pant to ascend above the sun and all these ruinable worlds, is that I may bask in the sunshine of his smiles, and forever behold the source of light without one envious cloud between. Let me but sit at his feet and gaze upon his lovely face, and cry, with unutterable wonder and gratitude, “My Lord and my God,” and I ask no more. Let me but take some humble station in his glorious kingdom, where I may sit and read his name, where I may view his infinite happiness and glory and see his beloved kingdom blest, and my soul will be filled.

” And there is none upon earth that I desire besides thee.” How is this? Was it then a matter of indifference to Asaph whether his friends lived or died,—whether he enjoyed the comforts of life or perished with hunger? This was not literally and precisely his meaning. But what he intended may, I conclude, be summed up in the following ideas. First, that there was nothing among all the charms of earth which could prevent him from wishing to depart and be with the Lord. Secondly, while continuing on earth, he desired nothing besides God in a comparative sense. His soul was at that moment so filled with the supreme excellence and glory of Jehovah, that all earthly things were put out of view. Thirdly, he desired nothing besides God in that he coveted nothing which he considered distinct from the emanations of God. Did he desire food and raiment and friends? He desired them chiefly as divine goodness expressed, as God existing in his outward bounty.

Such a temper of supreme delight in God will operate in unreserved and universal submission to divine providence. While God is more beloved than all other objects, the withholding or removal of every thing besides him will not awaken a spirit of unsubmission and rebellion.

While the Christian has such supreme delight in God, he will not be inordinately leaning on friends or wealth or any worldly object for enjoyment. No high expectations will be formed except those which centre in the supreme good. Lightly valuing the things of time and sense, he will scorn the restless pursuits and unsatisfied desires of the covetous; and holding the commands of God in supreme veneration, he will practice deeds of liberal charity.

Sensible that prosperity gives and adversity takes away only those things which are least desirable, neither by prosperity nor adversity will he be greatly moved. Ever assured that God, the supreme good, is safe, he will dismiss all anxieties respecting future changes, and come what will, he will “rejoice evermore.” Calmly resigning the management of all affairs into hands dearer than his own, he passes his days in unruffled serenity, and knows not the distrusts of jealousy nor the uneasiness of unbelief. Having a greater regard for the divine will than for any earthly comfort which that will can bestow, he has learned “both how to abound and to suffer need,” and “in whatsoever state” he is, “therewith to be content.”

The result of this supreme love to God will be faith, trust, self-denial, obedience, and an unreserved consecration of all that we are and have to him, to be disposed of according to his pleasure, and to be employed in his service, how and when and where he is pleased to appoint.

II. I am to suggest some reasons which urge to such a temper.

The infinitely wise and benevolent God is worthy to be the object of our supreme delight. There is more in him to be desired and to be rejoiced in than in all created beings and things. The whole creation has drawn all its glories from him. And can it be supposed that he has imparted more beauty and excellence than he possesses? When our eyes rove abroad over the charming scenes of nature, and traverse the wonders which shine in the heavenly orbs, we may well exclaim with the half-inspired Milton, “How wondrous fair! Thyself how wondrous then!” In God there is every thing which can satisfy and transport the immortal mind. What is the world to him; its pomp, its splendors, “and its nonsense all?” What are the treasures of India and all the glories of Greece and Rome, compared with the fruition of that God whose smiles fill heaven and earth with gladness? Possessed of him, the imprisoned beggar, with all his griefs, is rich and happy; devoid of him, kings and emperors are poor and wretched. Let every earthly comfort depart, yet while we can enjoy the immortal source of blessedness, we are blessed still, we are blest indeed. While walking out with Isaac to meditate at the evening tide,—while beholding that glory which Moses saw on Horeb and on Pisgah,— while worshipping him whose faithfulness and truth were seen by Abraham on Moriah, and whose glories appeared to John in Patmos,—while overcome with the magnificent majesty which rushed on the view of Habakkuk,—while melting away in the sweet ecstasies of David in sight of the mercy and faithfulness of his heavenly Father,—while triumphing in him who was announced by the songs of Bethlehem and by the joys of Simeon’s bursting

heart,—while from our streaming eyes we pour forth gratitude to the Sufferer of Gethsemane and Golgotha, and ascend to heaven with him who ascended from Olivet,—O how poor and worthless do all mortal things appear.

The claims of God to our supreme affection are further supported by his exceeding great and unnumbered mercies. He is the God of all our revivals, of all our deliverances, and of all our comforts; the God of our fathers and the God of our children. Innumerable mercies, distinguishing us from most of our fellow men, mercies affecting to angels,—have filled our lives. He supported us in our infancy, he led us through all the windings of our youth; his watchful eye has continually been upon us in riper years. Through all our days he has nourished and brought us up as children. He has been with us in six yea and in seven troubles, and brought relief to our distresses when every other helper failed. From countless dangers has he delivered us. He sent his Son from his bosom to bear our sins in his own body on the tree. From what an abyss of pollution and wretchedness have some of us been raised by his pardoning love. He has bestowed upon us the invaluable gifts of his word and ordinances. By his unspeakable grace we have enjoyed the sight of his word revived,—sinners plucked as brands from the burning, and brought to unite their young hosannas with the praises and joys of their fathers. Where shall we end the enumeration? More numerous are his mercies than the stars which look out of heaven. Has the world, have any of our friends, has all creation done for us what our God has done? Surely if kindness and mercy can engage our hearts, we lie under the most pressing obligations to say from our very souls! “Whom have I in heaven but thee? and there is none upon earth that I desire besides thee.”

From the truth and faithfulness of our divine Benefactor, we have full assurance that if we get divorced from all our idols and wed ourselves to him alone in holy trust and service, he will make ample provision for our support and comfort,—he will abundantly recompense our fidelity and renunciation of the world. We have no occasion to apply to any other comforter, to any other protector, to any other guide, to any other portion. He will be to us such a portion as will fill and satisfy our souls.

He will be all that we need and all we desire. We shall be blest beyond all previous conception. We shall be full; can need no more and can hold no more.

It is one of the lamentable marks of human weakness that men are so habituated to recede from the eternal centre of rest and to wander abroad in quest of enjoyment. Dependence is withdrawn from God and placed on other objects, which may not be obtained, or if obtained are ever liable to be lost again. The

mind, thus torn from its centre and following deceitful meteors, rambles, it knows not whither,—is ever pained with uncertainty and trembling with dubious fears lest the objects in which centre all its desires should be lost. In proportion as men thus place their hopes in the creature, they find themselves the prey of restlessness and misery. To forsake the fountain of living waters for broken cisterns, is a sure prelude to disappointment and vexation. Ah when will we be wise? When will we dismiss all our vain dependencies and make God our only rest and portion? When will we thus obtain that happiness which we have long sought in vain? Could we look with indifference on all the shifting scenes beneath the sun, on prosperity and adversity, on loss and gain, and make the sincere appeal, “Whom have I in heaven but thee? and there is none upon earth that I desire besides thee,” how happy might we be even in this vale of tears.

Knowing the claims which he had to our supreme affection, God has asserted those claims in his holy word, and strictly commanded us to love him with all the heart, and in comparison with him to hate father and mother, wife and children, and even life itself. And as he is infinitely the greatest and best of beings, this supreme regard to him is his due. It is perfectly right and fit, and what we owe to him, to make him the object of our supreme delight to rejoice that he holds the throne, to resign ourselves with all our interests to his disposal, to feel that we have enough and abound while possessing him, even though every thing else be taken away, and under all our trials and disappointments, to be quiet as a child that is weaned of its mother. It is infinitely unreasonable to set up any private interest in opposition to the interest of the universe,—the interest and wishes of God and his kingdom. Of what consequence is it for infinite wisdom and love to sit upon the throne if they may not govern the world? What does it signify for us to proclaim our joy that the world is under divine direction, if we will not submit and consent to be governed?

Such supreme delight in God and his government had Enoch and Noah, and Abraham and Moses, and David and Daniel and Paul. Not one of them could receive the divine approbation and enter into rest on easier terms. And on no easier terms can we enjoy the friendship and protection of Asaph’s God in the present life; on no easier terms can we enter the portals of the heavenly city. But the sure reward of thus choosing him for our portion, will be the unfailing friendship and enjoyment of him in the present life, and when all these perishable worlds shall be blended in one common grave. Then shall they who have chosen him in preference to all others be everlastingly united to their glorious centre, and shall plunge into that ocean of glory which they have chosen for their all, and lose themselves in him. Then shall they know how wise their choice who prefer the

immortal God to the husks that were made for the flames. Then with what hearty sincerity and bursting joy will these eternal notes go round, “Whom have I in heaven but thee? and there is none upon earth that I desire besides thee.”

Let this assembly pause for a moment, while each one solemnly inquires with himself whether he has chosen the God of Asaph for his only portion and supreme delight, or whether his affections and hopes still linger among the vanities of this lower world. Do our souls stand ready, at the word of God, to break away from every scene of this enchanted ground, and leaving the world behind, to soar to regions from which all worldly things are forever excluded? Do we, like Simeon and Paul, pant to ascend to the full possession of the supreme good? Why do we wish for heaven? Is it that we may live forever at home with our God, and after a long and tedious separation, be forever united to the centre of our souls? Is it this, or is it some other heaven which is the object of our imagination and desire? And can we sincerely appeal to the Searcher of hearts, “There is none upon earth that I desire besides thee?” Have we a solemn conviction that we have chosen him for our supreme good and portion? Or do we still remain miserably encumbered with the lumber of earthly objects,—wretchedly ignorant of the Source of our being, —encompassed with darkness which has known no morning,—wickedly and fatally straying from the only source of happiness,—vagrants in the region of confusion, night, and misery? Ah wretched souls, whither do ye wander? Why prefer the night of chaos to the glories of the uncreated sun? Why flee from the fountain of happiness and love in pursuit of wretchedness and eternal war? Where can such bliss be found as you have left behind? Wherefore do you speed your course from the Author of your being as though all misery lived with him? Whither would you hurry in the wildness of your distraction? O return, return. Seek no longer for happiness in shunning its only source. O return, return. Let planets break loose from the attractions of the sun, and wander wildly and without order into the regions of night; but let not immortal souls break away from the attractions of the eternal Sun, to wander in wild and dark vagaries, in wretched confusion and ruinous disorder to all eternity. O return, while return is possible, to the substance and fountain of light and blessedness. Let the attractions of divine love draw you nearer and nearer, until you shall fall into the glorious Sun, and lose yourselves to all eternity in this beatific union. Renounce your alliance with worms and dust, sustain a glorious resurrection from the dead, and learn to say, “Whom have I in heaven but thee? and there is none upon earth that I desire besides thee.”

The subject will apply itself to backsliding Christians. Ah why should they who have seen his glory and known his love, and seen the world eclipsed by his

charms, so often forsake the fountain of living waters for broken cisterns? Why should that which they have known to be the supreme good, be left for things which they know cannot profit? In better hours you have avouched the Lord Jehovah to be your God and portion: you have vowed eternal fealty and subjection to him. Your oath is recorded in the rolls of heaven. Why then violate your promises thus attested, and forsake the source of happiness for comfort which you know is no where else to be found? Awake from these enchanted slumbers. Pursue no longer the unnatural course which carries you from your life and from the centre of yourselves. And what can you find abroad to allure you from home? Precisely what the dove found on leaving the ark,—no place on which to rest the sole of her foot. May you, like her, soon grow weary of the damp and cheerless regions with out, and return on lagging pinions, and with mourning notes plead for an extended arm to take you in. Consider also from what mercies you have fled, and through what obligations you have broken away: and then, with the melting griefs of the Psalmist, give it in charge to yourselves, “Return unto thy rest, O my soul, for the Lord hath dealt bountifully with thee.”

In the last place, the subject addresses itself to those who have deliberately and heartily made choice of the supreme good, and who have never, by the mists of earth or hell, lost sight of the good they have chosen. Hail, happy souls! All hail, ye unrivaled few! From my heart I give you joy. Ye have found the pearl of great price. Ye have found that treasure which worlds might be sold in vain to purchase. Accept our congratulations.— Accept the congratulations of angels. Let your souls arise and shout for joy; for all the treasures of the universe are yours. The infinite God, with all that he possesses, is made over to you by a covenant well “ordered in all things and sure.” Let your pious hearts be comforted under the loss of all terrestrial vanities. Let them shout for joy under all trials and crosses. For under the loss of all things, you possess all things still. The immortal God is yours; and in him you have all and need no more. Be not disheartened at the trials and conflicts in which you may be involved. Soon will you emerge from them all, and like the sun breaking from a cloud, forever shine forth in the kingdom of your Father. It is in our heart to bid you God speed, and encourage you to go on and renew your wise and virtuous choice of the God of all benignity and blessedness. Be emboldened to take a larger and still larger portion of the supreme good. God has said “Open thy mouth wide and I will fill it.” Be satisfied with this portion, and murmur not though sinners take the rest. Never indulge vain regrets for the objects you have left behind. “Delight” yourselves more and more “in the Lord,” and “He will (more and more) give you the desires of your heart.” And whatever allurements try to draw you away, whatever terrors arise in your course, whatever crosses you may have to encounter, never suffer yourselves to be unsettled from

the habit of hourly saying, “Whom have I in heaven but thee? and there is none upon earth that I desire besides thee.” Amen.

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