

A Waiting Soul and a Gracious Lord

Preached at Providence Chapel, Eden Street, London, on
Lord's Day Evening, July 21, 1850

"Yea, in the way of thy judgments, O Lord, have we waited for thee; the desire of our soul is to thy Name, and to the remembrance of thee." Isaiah 26:8

These words form a part of "the Song" that is "to be sung in the land of Judah." This song is a hymn of praise, a song of deliverance; and in it the church recounts the Lord's dealings with her, with the fruit of those dealings, and blesses him for all his gracious acts towards her.

Time and opportunity will not allow me to enter into the general drift of the Song; I shall, therefore, this evening, chiefly confine myself to the words before us.

We may observe, I think, two leading features in them, corresponding to the two clauses of the text.

I.—*First*, the *past experience* of the church; and

II.—*Secondly*, the *present experience* of the church.

Her *past* experience we find in the words, "Yea in the way of thy judgments, O Lord, *have we waited* for thee."

Her *present* experience is contained in the expression, "The desire of our soul *is* to thy Name, and to the remembrance of thee." In this twofold way then, I shall, with God's blessing, endeavour to take up the subject.

I.—The church speaks here of God's "*judgments*." What are

we to understand by the word? We must not be misled by the sound. The word "judgments" in our language generally signifies the manifestations of God's displeasure. When anything striking befalls an ungodly man, it is spoken of as 'a judgment;' and we are so much in the habit of attaching that meaning to the word, that we can scarcely divorce our minds from that signification. But it has, in the Scriptures of truth, a far wider and more comprehensive meaning. It is true, that the manifestations of God's displeasure are called in Scripture "judgments:" "When thy judgments are in the earth, the inhabitants thereof will learn righteousness." But there are many passages in the word of God, and especially in Psalm 119, in which it would be the greatest absurdity to suppose that by the word "judgments" nothing is signified but the manifestations of God's displeasure. For instance, in the 20th verse of that Psalm, we read, "My soul breaketh for the longing that it hath unto thy judgments at all times." Was David's soul "breaking for the longing" that it had unto the manifestations of God's displeasure? That cannot be. We read in the 39th verse, "Turn away my reproach which I fear; for thy judgments are good." David would not call the manifestations of God's displeasure "good." He says also in another verse, "I have hoped in thy judgments." The manifestations of God's displeasure rather produce fear or despair than hope. "Correct me," says the prophet, "but with judgment; not in thine anger, lest thou bring me to nothing." (Jer. 10:24.) There "judgment" is spoken of in direct contrast with wrath and anger. In fact, the word "judgments," in Scripture, means commonly, *the righteous dealings of God*—the declaration of his righteous character. It is true, that this is often in a way of displeasure; but it is also in a way of mercy. The righteous character of God is displayed not only in wrath, but in "justifying the ungodly," that "He might be just, and yet the justifier of him that believeth in Jesus." Thus, the word "judgments" in our text seems to signify

God's righteous dealings. It is used in a similar sense (Prov. 8:20), "I lead in the way of righteousness, in the midst of the paths of *judgment.*" And again (Psa. 72:1), "Give the King thy *judgments,* O God, and thy righteousness unto the King's Son."

Now, it is in "the way" of these righteous dealings that the church declares she had waited for God.

Apply this to ourselves. Until the Lord is pleased to give us light and life, and work a work upon our souls, we know nothing, believe nothing, and feel nothing of the righteous character of God. We rather view him as unjust; for the carnal mind being enmity against God, the heart being alienated from the life of God, and wrapped up in the clouds of densest ignorance as to the character of God, we know him not, we see him not, we feel him not to be a righteous God. But when the Lord is pleased to quicken the soul into spiritual life, and send that word into the heart of which we read that "its entrance giveth light," *this* conviction flashes into the mind, and *this* truth is ever after sealed upon the soul—that God is a righteous God—that all his acts are acts of righteousness, and all his dealings in strict consistency with his holy and righteous character. We now come to know something of God's "judgments;" that is to say, as the righteous character of God is opened up to the soul, we see and feel that everything that God does must be consistent with that righteous character; that all his dealings are dealings in righteousness, and all his ways are ways of righteousness.

But now comes the opposition; because this righteous character of God is strictly opposed to our unrighteous nature, and these righteous dealings of God are diametrically contrary to the unrighteous thoughts of our heart, the

unrighteous words of our mouth, and the unrighteous actions of our hands.

Yet God means to bring us to submit to his righteous dealings: and therefore he surrounds us with them. The text says, "In *the way of thy judgments*;" as though God's righteous judgments surrounding us on every side, and we walking in the midst of them, as in a cloud, it brought these righteous judgments into direct opposition to the workings of our carnal mind.

Now here we see something of the work of grace upon a man's conscience. He is surrounded with the righteous character of Jehovah: the righteous dealings of God enclose him on every side; that righteous character is opposed to his unrighteous character; and every righteous act of the Lord is opposed to the unrighteous actings of his heart; yet he is compelled "in the way of these judgments" to wait upon God.

But let us come a little into particulars. It is in particulars that the life of experience and religion consists. We will not then lose ourselves in the **mist [midst?]** of generalities; we will come down to particular dealings of God upon the soul, and see how we still have to wait upon him "in the way of his judgments."

1. The Lord finds us *sinner*s; he does not find us saints, holy people, prepared for heaven. He finds us sinners, and sinners, too, of the deepest, blackest dye. Sinners in heart, in lip, in life; sinners without, sinners within. For sin is engrained into our very being, in fact, our very selves. Then, if this be the case, these "judgments," or righteous dealings of God, must be altogether opposed to every breath of our carnal mind, every wish of our fallen nature. This we have to learn by the application of God's righteous law, by the

manifestation of his purity and holiness, and by a sentence from his presence coming with a divine power into the conscience, to manifest and to condemn sin. And this brings us to his feet; because in all these things we are obliged to recognize the righteous character of God. If he send us headlong to hell, he is righteous. If he cut us down at a stroke, he is righteous. He cannot err, he cannot act unjustly. If he never hear a cry for mercy, he is still righteous: if he never bestow a look of love, he is still righteous: if he afflict us with every suffering here, and crush us with eternal damnation hereafter, he is still righteous. Now this is painful work; this is being betwixt the upper and nether millstone, ground, as it were, between the righteous character of God and the carnal mind; the soul lying under the righteous character of God, as the wheat under the upper millstone.

2. But again; the righteous dealings of God are *against all our idols*; for we are dreadful idolaters. Idolatry is imbedded in our very nature; a part of our very being; a second self. Idolatry is the worship of anything that the carnal mind intensely loves. Now, the righteous character of God and the righteous dealings of God, must be directly against idols and idolatry. He is a jealous God. And as such, nothing provokes him more than idolatry. How in Old Testament times the displeasure of God was manifested against his people for this! What provoked him to indignation so much as their departing from him to worship idols? We too have our idols. Who is without them? The man who thinks he is without an idol, knows not what an idol is. The man who thinks his heart is free from idolatry, is an idolater, though ignorant of the idols he worships. Wife, property, children, name, respectability, ease, sensual lusts—O, the idols, the forest of idols in a man's carnal mind! But the righteous dealings of God are against them all, and especially against that heart-idolatry whereby these idols are so fondly worshipped.

3. But again. There is in our carnal mind *a determination to have our own way*. We are desperately selfish; we are determinedly obstinate; we do not choose the Lord's way very soon or very easily; we love to have our own will and our own way, and this in a thousand different forms, but all opposed to the righteous dealings of God. Still his righteous character, his righteous dealings must have the preeminence. If our will be unrighteous, and God's will be righteous, which must prevail? which is to stand? which to gain the day? If our will be opposed to God's will, our will must come down. It may be very hard work for our will to come down; but come down it must, come down it shall. The "judgments" of God will bring it down. You will find that the righteous dealings of God will never be brought into conformity with the will and way of your carnal mind. Thus, our will must give way, and our mind be brought down; that God's will and way may stand. This is no pleasant, no very easy, no very comfortable work. It is very trying, wonderfully trying—when I want one thing, and God wants another: when I will this, and God wills that. But God's will must and shall stand. It is very trying for my will to have to give way; yet, give way it must, if I am the Lord's; because he will bring me to that spot where I shall put my mouth in the dust, and say, "Thy will be done!"

4. Our *high looks* is another thing that must be brought down; our proud heart another thing that must be humbled; our *self-righteous nature* another thing that must be crushed; our *worldliness* another thing that must be subdued. Yes, everything in us contrary to God and godliness must be laid low and effectually brought down. And they are all brought down and laid low by God's "judgments," in other words, by God's righteous dealings, and the manifestation of God's righteousness thereby.

Now when we get surrounded by these righteous dealings, then we are "in the way of God's judgments." Have you never found that God's righteous dealings stand in the way of your sins, of your idols, of your worldly-mindedness, of everything that your earthly nature cleaves to? If so, there has been a wonderful struggling in your mind; there has been some painful work in the court of conscience; you have not found religion to be as Dr. Watts speaks—

"Religion never was designed
To make our pleasures less."

You have found religion to be a very trying thing, because it has so cut you to the quick and so come into your heart and conscience, as to lay the axe to the root of all your worldly happiness and every desire of your natural heart.

But until we get into something of this path, there is no "waiting for God;" for the church declares that it was "in the way of God's judgments" that she "waited" for him. It was being hedged up, surrounded, and encompassed with these righteous dealings of God that made her wait for him. She could not get out of his hands; she could not escape his strokes; she could not get away from his righteous character; she could not flee from his righteous dealings in her soul. She had therefore no alternative, (and grace made her willing) than to wait upon God, and to wait for him "in the way of his judgments." If she could have found refuge anywhere else, she would have hid her head in a refuge of lies. Could she have got hope from any other quarter, she would have pillowed her head upon a false hope; and could she have obtained help from any other source, she would have rested in a delusion. But the righteous character of God having been revealed in her soul, and the righteous dealings of God surrounding her on every side, she could not get out

of his hand; and therefore, amid all the strugglings of unbelief, infidelity, rebellion, and murmuring, she was bound fast, held down, and she had no alternative, but to wait upon him who could in his own time relieve, deliver, and bless.

But, besides this necessity of compulsion, there was mingled with all a blessed feeling, whereby she waited not merely from necessity, but also because the Lord was pouring out upon her the spirit of grace and of supplications, and enabling her thus to "wait." But what a strange intermixture of exercises and feelings this makes in the soul! Sometimes driven, and sometimes drawn; sometimes compelled, and sometimes, like Japhet, "persuaded;" sometimes from having no other hope, sometimes from wishing to have no other; sometimes from there being no other refuge, and sometimes from not desiring that there should be any other. Sometimes from bitterness, and sometimes from sweetness; sometimes from sorrow, and sometimes from joy; sometimes by threatenings, sometimes by smiles; sometimes by frowns, and sometimes by favours. And yet, all so wonderfully blended, and so strangely intermixed, that without hardly knowing at times whether it be from compulsion or from choice, from being driven or drawn, from the necessity of the case or the sweetness of the mercy, the soul is still brought to this point, "in the way of thy judgments have we waited for thee, O Lord."

But what is it to "*wait?*" Chiefly, by prayer and supplication and begging of God to appear. To cry, sigh, beg, supplicate, implore, long, and breathe out the soul's desire; to take no denial, the case being so necessitous; heaven or hell being at stake; the soul's interest lying so close to the heart—this is to "wait" upon God, and to "wait" upon him "in the way of his judgments," surrounded and encompassed with his righteous character and dealings.

It is a great thing to see God's righteous character, and to believe that his dealings are dealings in righteousness. It requires faith to believe it; because to our sense and reason, to our unbelieving minds and infidel hearts, these dealings of God often seem directly the contrary. This indeed is the trial—to *believe* that they are righteous dealings, and yet not to be able to see that they are such; not to dare to murmur, and yet have every disposition to fret; to be kept from open rebellion, and yet feel its miserable workings; to believe that God cannot act unjustly, and yet to be sadly tempted to believe he is not acting justly. And yet to be so overpowered by the righteous character of God as to be compelled to lie at his feet, and wait "in the way of his judgments" till he clear up the mystery, till he appear for the soul's good, till he remove the cloud, and shine forth in beams of mercy and love.

II.—But we pass on to consider, *secondly*, what the church speaks of as her *present experience*. I do not mean to say, that there was not much in her present experience mingled with the past; and much in her past experience mingled with the present. But as there is a distinction of tenses in our text, we will adhere to it.

"The desire of our soul is to thy Name, and to the remembrance of thee." God's righteous dealings had broken her down at his feet; they had taken away her idols, and brought her into submission to his righteous will; and with it all there was some manifestation of the Name of God. By the "Name of God," we are chiefly to understand the Lord Jesus Christ; for when God sent him as his angel before the children of Israel, he said, "My Name is in him." By the "Name of God," then, we understand him by whom God is made known—in whom the love and mercy of God are

revealed—who has in himself all the perfections of Godhead—
"In whom, dwelleth all the fulness of the Godhead bodily"—in
a word, the glorious "Immanuel, God with us."

Now after the Lord has been pleased to exercise the soul with
these righteous dealings, and made it submit; when he has
given it to feel that he would be just if he sent it headlong to
hell, he generally reveals something of the Son of his love,
something of that great and glorious Name which he
manifested to Moses when he put him in the cleft of the rock,
and his glory passed by before him, and he declared that he
was a God "forgiving iniquity, transgression, and sin," in the
Person, work, and blood of Immanuel. The Lord usually,
then, after he has exercised our souls with his justice,
manifests somewhat of his mercy; when he has taught us out
of his law, he goes on to teach us out of his gospel; when he
has shewn us something of his righteousness in himself, he
shews us something of his righteousness in the face of Jesus
Christ. And these manifestations of the Lord Jesus Christ to
the soul, this bringing of the gospel into the heart, raise up a
desire unto, and a love towards his Name. Thus, the church
says, "The desire of our soul is to thy Name."

How sweet and expressive is the phrase, "*The desire of our
soul!*" How it seems to carry our feelings with it! How it
seems to describe the longings and utterings of a soul into
which God has breathed the spirit of grace and mercy! "The
desire of our soul,"—the breathing of our heart, the longing
of our inmost being; the cry, the sigh, the panting of our new
nature; the heavings, gaspings, lookings, longings, pantings,
hungerings, thirstings, and ventings forth of the new man of
grace—*all* are expressed in those sweet and blessed words,
"The desire of our soul!" And what a mercy it is, that there
should ever be in us "the desire" of a living soul; that though
the righteous dealings of God are painful and severe, running

contrary to everything nature loves; yet that with all these, there should be dropped into the heart that mercy, love, and grace, which draw forth the desire of the soul toward the Name of God. This is expressed in the words that follow, "With my soul have I desired thee in the night!" If you can say no more about the work of grace upon your heart than *that*—can you really use these words as descriptive of feelings experienced within, "With my soul have I desired thee in the night?" Is your soul longing after the Lord Jesus Christ? Is it ever in the night season panting after the manifestation of his presence? hungering and thirsting after the dropping-in of some word from his lips, some sweet whisper of his love to your soul? These are marks of grace. The carnal, the unregenerate, the ungodly, have no such desires as these; there is nothing in their heart corresponding with "the desire of the soul" unto the Name of God. But it is the case with all the righteous, for "the desire of the righteous shall be satisfied."

And what do you desire, when you can say, "the desire of my soul is to thy Name?" Is it not, that he will manifest himself to your soul with some sweetness and blessedness; and thus give you power to lay hold of him and bring him into your heart that you may clasp him in the arms of faith and affection, be enabled to breathe forth the language of your bosom into his ear, and say, "My Lord and my God?"—'Thou art mine, and I am thine, and shall be thine when time shall be no more.'

Now this is having the desire of your soul to the Name of God—a longing after the Lord Jesus Christ in the manifestations of his Person, blood, work, and love. I never can believe there is such a desire in the heart of a hypocrite. There may be, and is perhaps, in him a desire to escape "the wrath to come;" but a single, simple, secret, fervent, heart-

felt, panting desire—when no eye sees, no ear hears but the eye and ear of Jehovah—I cannot think that such a simple, sincere, filial, breathing is to be found in any but a regenerate heart. At any rate, it is set forth in the word of God as the experience of the church, "The desire of our soul is to thy Name!" 'Lord, we want *thee*; none but thee; nothing short of thee; thyself, in thy beauty, in thy loveliness, in thy preciousness; for nothing short of thee can make the soul happy or holy. Without thy presence, there is no solid peace; without thy smiles, there is no real happiness; without thy favour, all is darkness and death; and therefore, "the desire of our soul is to thy Name;" for, in having thee, we have everything that can satisfy, bless, comfort, and save.'

"And to the remembrance of thee." By these words we may understand, either to *remember the Lord*; that is, to have his Name, blood, grace, and love deeply engraved upon our heart—and all to have an abiding place in the chamber of our memory; or else to have a sweet *recollection* of what the Lord has been to us in times past. The words may comprehend both of these significations. We will look at them separately.

1. *"To the remembrance of thee."* O, what short memories we have as to the precious things of God! How feeble, how transient, for the most part, are our impressions of heavenly realities! We can remember childish follies years ago, and sins, which we can only think of, or should only think of with shame and confusion of face. There is no difficulty as to having these things in remembrance. But the Person of the Lord Jesus Christ; his sufferings in the garden of Gethsemane, and upon the cross; his dying love, his bleeding sorrows, and what he is to the church of God—O, how hard, O, how impossible to keep these things in firm remembrance! Who is there that goes through the day carrying about in his

bosom the Lord Jesus Christ; treasuring up in his memory the words of the Lamb; and sweetly meditating upon his work and sufferings? You can embrace a thousand vanities and follies. Self you can always carry in mind, with its sensual, idle wants; but the dear Son of God, the precious Lamb; the Lord of heaven and earth, the dying, risen Jesus—who is there that carries him enshrined in the tablets of his memory, is refreshing his soul from hour to hour by looking at, thinking upon, and living out of the fulness of the Lord Jesus Christ? And yet, we would hope, "the desire of our soul" is to these things. We have not much grace unless it be so. It is true, we cannot carry about in us the dying of the Lord Jesus Christ, as the Apostle speaks of himself; but we would fain hope we can say, that "the desire of our soul is to the remembrance" of him. We do not, we would not, forget him willingly. It is true, that the world comes with its huge sponge, and too often effaces his name and memory, and our carnal heart is, as it were, continually defiling the characters drawn upon it by the finger of the Spirit: and yet one would fain hope that there is a "desire" in the soul toward the remembrance of him, so that we cannot be happy without him. We are not satisfied with being worldly and carnal; but would fain have now and then a little setting apart of communion with him, a looking unto and breathing after him. We would hope that there are gracious intervals, solemn moments, awakened feelings; living, breathing, earnest cries and desires, by night and by day, after the Lord Jesus Christ, in the sweet visits of his love. If we have this—this is not unlike "the desire of our soul is to thy Name, and to the remembrance of thee."

I would hope that your religion is not like your Sunday coat, put on on a Sunday morning, and laid aside on the Sunday evening, but never worn through the week. That is a poor religion; that is not the religion of the Holy Ghost; that is not

"putting on the Lord Jesus Christ" as your daily raiment. Whatever we are, we cannot call ourselves very thriving, very healthy, or very lively Christians, if we can do without the Lord Jesus Christ for whole days together. It does not seem very much like the experience of the church, "the desire of our soul is to thy Name, and to the remembrance of thee."

2. But the words may also signify a *remembrance of the past*. We get into strange places. Carnality and death seem fearfully to prevail; and yet, we would not, we would fain hope, utterly forget the past;—the day of espousals; the seasons of love; the times wherein the Lord was gracious, when there was some sweet communion with him, and enjoyment of his grace and presence. Have we no Ebenezers—no times to which we can look back, when the candle of the Lord shined upon our head, and by his light we walked through darkness, when we could say, 'Jesus is precious?' Now if our soul has had any of these seasons, there will be "a desire to the *remembrance* of thee." We shall want a revival of the remembrance; a bringing back of sweet recollections and of heavenly feelings that flow out of these reminiscences, when the blessed Spirit leads us back to the days that are past, and drops anew some drops of the mercy and favour of God into the soul. If we can but find something of this in our hearts, it seems to correspond with the language of the church, "the desire of our soul is to thy Name, and to the remembrance of thee."

But observe the connection. How the *past* and the *present* are linked together! "In the way of thy judgments, O Lord, have we waited for thee; the desire of our soul is to thy Name, and to the remembrance of thee." It is "in the way of the Lord's judgments" that we have to wait for him; but when in his righteous dealings, we have to wait, without

seeing the issue; to beg, without receiving an answer; to wrestle, without getting the victory; and yet have to "wait," plead, and beg; then, ever and anon, rising up as it were out of the ruins of self, through some discovery of his grace and mercy, springs up, "the desire of our soul is to thy Name, and to the remembrance of thee." What a strange intermixture there thus is in the soul really and rightly taught of God! fearing his judgments, hoping in his mercy, trembling at his wrath, desiring his favour, crouching beneath his frown, drawn up by his smile, yet still waiting in the way of his judgments, the desire of the soul being towards his Name, and to the remembrance of himself!

Do you find this strange intermixture? "Judgment and mercy" was David's song. "I will sing," he says, "of mercy and judgment." And the church, in ancient days, speaks of waiting upon God in the way of his judgments; and yet "the desire of her soul was towards his Name, and to the remembrance of him." We cannot always put these two things together, and yet God has put them together. How there can be a waiting upon God "in the way of his judgments," and yet a desire towards his Name; how these two things can be consistent (and consistent they are); how these things can dwell in the same heart (and yet in the same heart they dwell)—how to reconcile these paradoxes, and put together these seeming contradictions, we sometimes know not. And yet, if there be, as there appears to be, this jarring work in our soul, it is harmonized sweetly in the word of God and the work of the Spirit on the heart. For we need both. We need the righteous dealings of God to lay low, and we need the merciful dealings of God to raise up; we need the righteous dealings of God to keep from presumption, and we need the merciful dealings of God to preserve from despair; we need the one to afflict, and the other to comfort; we need the one to awe, and the other to

blest. And thus, by this strange intermixture the soul is made right, and kept right; made tender, and kept tender; made humble, and kept humble; made to wait at the Lord's feet, and yet to look unto him with a desire towards his Name, and to the remembrance of his mercy, love, and truth, as felt, enjoyed, and experimentally realized.