

ISRAEL'S SUN AND SHIELD

Preached at Oakham, Rutland, on Lord's Day Morning, July 9th, 1854

"For the Lord God is a sun and shield: the Lord will give grace and glory; no good thing will He withhold from them that walk uprightly. O Lord of hosts, blessed is the man that trusteth in Thee." Psalm 84:11, 12

Judging from internal evidence, there can be but little doubt that David, when he composed this psalm, was deprived of the privilege of worshipping in the courts of the Lord's house. Now, there were only two seasons, as far as we can gather from his history, in which David, for any length of time, was banished from the sanctuary which he loved so well. One was during the period of his persecution by Saul, when he was hunted like a partridge on the mountains; the other, when he fled from Jerusalem, driven thence by the rebellion of his son Absalom. On which of these two occasions, we may ask the question, was this psalm written? According to the date in the margin, it was written during the latter period, namely, when Absalom's unnatural rebellion had made him a wandering fugitive, and, but for the special providence of God, would have stripped him both of crown and life. And to this point of time we seem tied down by the word Zion in the seventh verse: "They go from strength to strength, every one of them in Zion appeareth before God." Zion did not belong to the children of Israel in the days of Saul, but was still possessed by the Jebusites, the ancient inhabitants of the land, from whom it was only conquered by David, who made it his own city, and afterwards brought up into it the ark of the Lord.

Being, then, deprived of the privilege of worshipping in the

courts of the Lord's house, he breathes forth in the psalm before us his desires after it. "How amiable," he cries—that is, how lovely, how desirable—"are Thy tabernacles, O Lord of hosts. My soul longeth," and, as if that expression were not strong enough to convey his feelings, he adds, "yea, even fainteth"—as though his desires after them were so intense that he swooned under the weight of absence from them—"yea, even fainteth for the courts of the Lord; my heart and my flesh crieth out for the living God." His desire was to enjoy the presence of the living God as he had felt it in the tabernacle, and to see His power and glory as he had seen them in the sanctuary, as he speaks in another psalm: "O God, Thou art my God; early will I seek Thee; my soul thirsteth for Thee, my flesh longeth for Thee in a dry and thirsty land, where no water is; to see Thy power and Thy glory, so as I have seen Thee in the sanctuary."

I have thought sometimes, and I believe it is true, that the Lord in those days was wont to manifest Himself in the tabernacle to His believing people in an especial manner—a manner to which we have no full similarity in His earthly courts now; for though it is a blessed privilege to meet in the house of prayer, to worship Him in spirit and in truth, to hear His Word, and sing His praise, yet we have nothing in the assembling of ourselves together exactly parallel to what the worship of the tabernacle was to the believing Israelite. It was there, and there only, that God recorded His name; it was there, and there only, that His presence was specially pledged; there alone were the sacrifices offered; there only the altar of incense sent forth its odoriferous breath; there, and there only, the ark of the covenant, and the mercy-seat sprinkled with the atoning blood, and the Shechinah, or divine cloud, manifesting the presence of God as resting between the cherubim, were seen. As the tabernacle was the place where the Lord especially dwelt, so He appears to have

made Himself especially known in the manifestations of His presence to the believing Israelite when he came to worship in the Lord's house. This made Daniel open his window toward Jerusalem when he knelt and prayed three times a day; this, also, led Jonah, when in the whale's belly, and in his own feelings in the very belly of hell, to say, "Then I said, I am cast out of Thy sight; yet I will look again toward Thy holy temple."

The promise which God specially made to Solomon was, "I have hallowed this house which thou hast built, to put My name there for ever; and Mine eyes and Mine heart shall be there perpetually." This blessedness we cannot be said indeed to have altogether lost, because we possess in substance what they had but in figure—Jesus Christ, the true tabernacle, which God pitched and not man. But we cannot expect to realise in our assemblies that peculiar blessedness which the believing Israelite enjoyed in the earthly sanctuary. Our sanctuary is not on earth, but in heaven; and as every desire of the believing Israelite, in ancient days, went out towards the tabernacle, as the standing type and visible representation of the promised incarnation of the Son of God, so every desire of the believing Christian now goes out after and centres in the Lord Jesus, He being the true antitypical tabernacle in which the fulness of Godhead dwells.

Time, however, will not permit of my running, even in a cursory manner, through the whole psalm, though it is full of beauty and blessedness. I pass on, therefore, to the words of our text, merely observing, by way of showing their connection with the general bearing of the psalm, that when David uttered them it was as though he said—"Here I am, a stranger in the wilderness; driven from my throne and home by my ungodly, unnatural son; deprived of the privilege of worshipping in the Lord's courts, and banished from that

sanctuary where I have been so blessed and favoured. But is all lost, because I am deprived of these highly-prized mercies and privileges? Is all my hope for ever gone? Is not God still the same in every place? Is He not still full of mercy and goodness?—my God, my sun, my shield, here as well as in Jerusalem? and though I cannot see Him in His earthly tabernacle, as in days past, days looked at and longed for, yet can I not, and do I not, feel Him here in the wilderness still precious to my soul?" Look now at the words of the text in the light of this short commentary. "For the Lord God is a sun and shield: the Lord will give grace and glory; no good thing will He withhold from them that walk uprightly. O Lord of hosts, blessed is the man that trusteth in Thee."

In opening up these words I shall, with God's blessing, follow the order of the text, taking up the four clauses as they lie before me; but they seem so full of blessed truth, that I feel I shall not do justice to the text, to you, or to myself, if I crowd all my thoughts and feelings upon it into one sermon. I shall not attempt, therefore, to venture beyond the first clause this morning. The Lord give His blessing to what I may speak in His Name.

"The Lord God is a sun and shield."

How simple, beautiful, and expressive are the figures of Scripture! They are so pregnant with divine meaning; there is lodged in them such a fulness of heavenly truth, and at the same time such a suitability to the wants and exercises of the family of God, that they cannot be too closely examined, or too highly prized. Let us then endeavour to gather up the spiritual meaning of these two striking figures, each in its order.

i. "The Lord God is a sun." Bear in mind that whenever the

Scripture speaks of "the Lord God," it usually means Father, Son, and Holy Ghost, three Persons in one glorious Essence. There is no division or discord in the Holy Trinity. All the thoughts and acts of the three divine Persons are one, though their operations differ according to their several undertakings in the covenant of grace. What the Father wills, the Son wills, and what the Son wills, the Holy Ghost wills. When, therefore, the Scripture speaks of the LORD God, it does not speak of the Father to the exclusion of the Son, nor of the Son to the exclusion of the Spirit, for in Deity there is neither division nor disunion—"Hear, O Israel, the LORD our God is one Lord!" but as the Lord Jesus Christ is especially spoken of in the prophet Malachi as "the Sun of Righteousness," we may view that figure as especially applicable to the second Person in the glorious Godhead, Immanuel, God with us.

Now, look at the sun—I mean the natural sun, that blazes in the midday sky; and see what a beautiful representation it is of the Lord Jesus Christ.

1. The sun is the *centre of our system*. It is only by its attraction that the earth is kept in its orbit. Without the sun the earth would not only be a miserable chaos, but could not even exist; nor was there ever a period when there was earth without sun, for "in the beginning," we read, "God created the heavens and the earth." So the Church has no existence separate from Christ. He holds her in her orbit, and draws her to Himself by His attractive influences, as the sun attracts the earth. "Draw me, we will run after Thee." From this primary connection between the sun and the earth come all its subsequent operations and influences.

2. From it, for instance, comes *light*. How darksome is the earth in the absence of the cheering orb of day! What would

the earth be without the light of the sun? A chaos of miserable confusion, without life or inhabitant, a wild, desolate waste, worse than the crater of a volcano. Jesus is to the Church of God that divine light of which the sun to the natural world is but a dim representation. The sun is but a creature—a dead and lifeless creature. He is the Creator. The sun shines only by divine command, and exists only by divine sufferance. Jesus shines in the rays of eternal Deity, and will continue to shine when the light of the natural sun is quenched. But as without the light of the sun the world would fall into desolation, so without the light and sustaining influences of the Son of God the Church would fall into nothingness. As, too, the sun gives light to the whole earth, "his going forth being from the end of the heaven, and his circuit unto the ends of it," so Jesus gives light to all His believing people; for there is not a ray nor a sparkle of divine light in the soul which does not come out of His glorious fulness.

But was not the sun made to shine? Is not this its appointed office? When the creating voice of God set that glorious orb in the sky, was it not placed there by Omnipotence itself, that it might shine forth in countless rays of blazing splendour? Thus we may say that in shining the sun only fulfils the office which God gave it to perform; and the more brightly and gloriously it shines, the more does it accomplish its appointed work. So we may say of the blessed Jesus. He is the Sun of the church; and when God set Him as the great High Priest over the house of God, at His own right hand, in the heavenly places, He put Him, so to speak, as a Sun in the spiritual firmament; that, as the natural sun gives light to the world, so Jesus might give light to the church. "The sun shall be no more thy light by day; neither for brightness shall the moon give light unto thee: but the Lord shall be unto thee an everlasting light, and thy God thy glory." We read, therefore,

of John the Baptist, "He was not that light, but was sent to bear witness of that light. That was the true light which lighteth every man that cometh into the world" (John 1:8, 9); or, as the words might be rendered, "that was the true light which, coming into the world, lighteth every man;" that is, every believing man, every partaker of grace. Now can the earth produce light of itself? Can she call up from her dark caves and inward abysses any beams for her own illumination? Neither can a child of God produce light in his own heart, or raise up from its dark caverns any cheering rays to gladden and illuminate his own soul. But does the sun wait until he sees some light previously kindled on earth before he begins to shine? He rises at the appointed hour; and when he bursts forth from his chambers in the east, he gives forth his bright beams without waiting for any previous light kindled in his absence, through ignorance or rivalry, to supply his place. Is it not so in grace? You may try to elicit some light from the depths of your own heart; you may search its inward recesses, hoping to find in them some cheering beams of hope, some rays of divine comfort. But what heavenly light can you find in that fallen nature of which the apostle said, "I know that in me, that is in my flesh, dwelleth no good thing?" To look then for light in ourselves, distinct from that which shines into the soul out of the fulness of Christ, is to look into earth's dark caverns for sunshine. Not to speak of its hidden caves, the very face of the earth is dark without the sun. Such is the face of the soul without Christ. But when He, the Sun of righteousness, rises upon the soul with healing in His wings, He brings light with Him; and in this light we not only see Him, but every other object on which He shines. Our evidences, waymarks, and testimonies all shine forth as He shines upon them. We can no more see Jesus by the eye of faith without seeing light in His light, than we can see the natural sun without seeing his light shining all around. But sometimes the natural sun is

obscured. It is so to-day. When I was here last, it was shining brightly into our midst. Now the day is cloudy, and his bright beams are veiled from sight. But have we not light enough to see one another and surrounding objects? By the light of the sun, though himself you saw not, you walked hither, and by the same light you will walk home. On the last Lord's day that I was here, the sun brightly streamed through every window. Now his light is comparatively dull, and his rays are hidden by clouds. Yet is he not the same sun now as then? So it is in grace. We have not always the same bright light shining into the soul, nor do we always feel the Lord's presence gladdening the heart. The Sun of righteousness, according to our feelings, is then beclouded, and His light dim and dull; yet it is the same light that enlightens us when we walk in darkness as when we walk in the light of the living. Nay more, not only may clouds veil his face, but he may for a while set, as he will certainly do this evening; but will he not rise again at the appointed hour, and shine brightly as before? So Jesus, the Sun of the church, seems at times to set—as if He were gone and gone for ever; but He rises again at the appointed season; as He said to the disciples, "I will see you again, and your heart shall rejoice."

3. But whence come all warmth and heat? Is it not out of the sun? He is not only the fountain of all light, but the source of all heat, that is, as regards the face of the earth. So Jesus is the source of all divine warmth in the soul. How cold, how frozen, our hearts often are—the flowings and gushings of love and affection locked up as if in chains of ice. Can you at such wintry seasons raise up one living affection towards the Lord of life and glory? Can you produce one genial glow, one soft, melting sensation, when frost and ice thus congeal your very heart? No; nor can you melt yourself into contrition, brokenness, godly sorrow for sin, weeping and mourning with and over a suffering Man of sorrows, any more than the

earth can thaw itself into softness, or than a brook, when locked up in frozen chains, can of itself flow down into a running stream. The chilled earth and ice-bound brook want the sun to shine upon and into them; and when his beams burst forth in their genial heat, more is done by them in five minutes than without his warmth they could do for themselves in five centuries. So it is in grace. We may try to pray, read, and meditate, and thus seek to warm our cold, icy heart into love, submission, and obedience. Alas! it is but chafing a frozen limb with snow. If a momentary glow be obtained, it soon becomes cold as before. But one ray of love shining out of the fulness of the Lord Jesus Christ is able in a moment to give us that heavenly glow, that divine warmth, that melting of soul, and dissolving of heart which we could not produce by all our own exertions, separate from grace, if we were engaged in them every moment of our lives.

4. And whence come joy and gladness to the earth? Does not the sun gladden the whole face of creation? What a contrast between a day of gloom and of sunshine! How when the sun bursts forth, the very birds hail with gladness his returning beams, and sing to him their grateful songs of joy. How every glowing and beauteous tint is reflected in the clouds above, and lights up mountain and vale beneath. How it even cheers our animal spirits to walk abroad in the early spring with the bright sun shining in full lustre over our heads. How it seems to refresh the wearied body and restring the slackened nerves. Is not this also true of the spiritual Sun? Whence comes every gladdening sensation of the soul; whence all spiritual joy, all real heartfelt happiness? Only, only from the shining in of the beams of the Sun of righteousness. It is only He that puts gladness into the heart more than in the time that the corn and wine of worldly men increase. What joy and gladness His presence creates in the soul of a downcast sinner, when he can say, "Thou hast

turned for me my mourning into dancing: Thou hast put off my sackcloth, and girded me with gladness" (Psa. 30:11).

5. And is not the sun also, in a certain sense, the source of all life? In winter how all creation seems buried in torpor and death. But when, with returning spring, the sun once more climbs his airy height, and darts forth his former beams, how nature at once revives out of its state of wintry death; and what new life is put into all animated creation! Is it not so with the Sun of righteousness? What life is there in the soul except what He is pleased to bestow? What life is there in praying, preaching, hearing, or meditating, except He is pleased to revive His own work in the heart? This made Davidsay, "Wilt Thou not revive us again, that Thy people may rejoice in Thee?"

6. And is not the natural sun the cause of all fruitfulness? Where would the harvest be without the sun? Where bread for man, or food for animals, except as produced by his ripening influences? What fruit, too, could arrive at maturity and flavour were it not for his genial rays? So, where is any Christian fruit except as produced by the Sun of righteousness? How unable is the soul to bring forth any fruit to the honour and praise of God except as that gracious Sun is pleased to make it fruitful in every good word and work! O it is not our own exertion, or any strength of the creature, that can produce in our hearts, lips, and lives any fruit acceptable to God. "From Me is thy fruit found;" "Without Me ye can do nothing," is the testimony of the Scripture, and the express declaration of Jesus. That all Christian fruit is only produced by the beams and rays of this blessed Sun of righteousness is a truth which every child of God will most heartily subscribe to; nor is there one truly taught of God who will not say that as the Lord Jesus is the only source of his light, life, heat, and gladness, so is He the only source of

all his fruitfulness.

If, then, these be the real feelings of your heart, have you not the same experience that David here speaks of? "The Lord God is a sun." This he knew, for he had felt His beams; he knew also what those beams produced; he had seen His light, and felt His life; it had gladdened his eyes, and warmed his heart, dispelled his gloom, and revived his soul.

Thus he knew there was a spiritual Sun by soul experience, as he knew there was a material sun by bodily experience, and he could therefore say, in the language of faith and love, "The Lord God is a sun. Let men say what they will, He has been, and is, even now in this wilderness, a sun to my soul." It will be a blessed thing for us if we can see eye to eye with David in this important matter, and say the same thing from a similar experience.

But is not the sun sometimes eclipsed? Do not clouds and darkness often veil his face? And does not the soul in a similar manner often go, as one speaks of old, "mourning without the sun?" It does. But is the sun then utterly extinct? Do the clouds that hide his face sweep him from the sky? Is there no sun because we cannot see him? "No," you say, "the sun is still there, even though he be eclipsed, and he still shines behind the clouds, though I cannot see him on account of them." But you will see the sun by-and-by shining the more brightly for his temporary absence. After the cloudiest morn is there not often a bright afternoon; and even if the whole day has been one of clouds, does not the sun sometimes go down without a single wreath to intercept his beams? So in grace. How many of God's dear children have walked in darkness the greater part of their days, and yet have made a good end! The rays of the Sun of righteousness have gilded their dying pillow, and gladdened their hearts, before they shut their eyes on earth to open

them for ever in heaven.

ii. But He is also a shield. "The Lord God is a sun and shield." How diversified are the figures of Scripture! First the Lord is spoken of as "a sun" to shine, and then as "a shield" to protect. David, we may observe, does not say, "The Lord is like a sun," but he says, "He is a sun." And so he does not say, "He is like a shield," but, "He is a shield." How is the Lord a shield? What is a shield? It was a warlike implement used in ancient times to protect the person of the warrior, but now discarded as useless, through the improvement, if I may use such an expression, of the arts of warfare. When men fought with spears and arrows, then the shield was a very useful weapon of defence, it being made of light yet tough materials, such as hard leather or steel, so as to receive and ward off the thrusts of the enemy. The leading idea, then, couched under the figure of a shield, is a weapon of defence.

Now, look at this idea in connection with the Lord Jesus. A shield implies that we are exposed to the spears, arrows, and other deadly weapons wielded by numerous, yea, innumerable enemies; and that the Lord Himself is our only protection from them.

1. Look, for instance, at the law. O, what a curse belongs to it! How fearful is the language which it breathes! "Cursed is every one that continueth not in all things which are written in the book of the law to do them." Have you ever felt what it is to be cursed of God in your getting up and in your lying down, in your coming in and in your going out? O to be cursed of God! No language can describe the horror of a man's soul who feels or fears he is under His curse. We need not wonder that a man should be tempted to commit suicide if he feel the curse of God in his soul. It seems as if he could not do anything less, were he not prevented by the special

providence and sovereign grace of God. But O! how the Lord Jesus Christ, the Son of God, interposed as a shield between the curse of God's righteous law and the souls and bodies of His people. The shield receives into its bosom the thrusts of the sword and spear and points of the deadly arrow, and thus preserves the warrior unharmed. How this thought seems to bring before our mind's eye the sufferings and sorrows of the Lord Jesus Christ. As the shield of the warrior is pierced with the arrows and spears of the enemy, so the curses of God's righteous law pierced the holy soul and body of Jesus. "Thine arrows," He says, "stick fast in Me." Those curses which would else, through all eternity, have lighted upon the Church, all fell upon the Church's Head; and thus by piercing the incarnate Son of God, they could not reach her; for she stood as if behind the shield which He interposed between the Law and her, when He presented His sacred body and soul to drink up all the bitter wrath of God. O what a glorious and blessed truth, that all the penal wrath of God due to the Church fell upon Him, and by falling on Him was intercepted, so that not a single arrow or dart can ever take effect upon the bride and spouse of the Lamb, her covenant Head and Husband having bled and died for her.

Now, if your soul has ever been favoured with a taste of mercy, with a sip of the brook by the way; if ever your conscience has felt the application of atoning blood, or the love of God has ever been shed abroad in your heart by the Holy Ghost, when the law comes to curse you, endeavour always to bear in mind that the Lord Jesus Christ stands as the shield between you and its curse. The law has therefore nothing to do with you that believe; it has cursed Jesus Christ for you; as the apostle declares, "He was made a curse for us;" and again, "Who His own self bare our sins in His own body on the tree," &c. Therefore the law has nothing to do with you who believe in Christ Jesus. He has

intercepted the curse for you, and, by receiving it into His own body and soul, bore it harmless away from you. It is a blessed act of faith when you can thus take Christ in your arms and hold Him up as a shield between the law and your conscience. And this the apostle seems to hint at in a measure when he says, "Above all, taking the shield of faith, wherewith ye shall be able to quench all the fiery darts of the wicked;" for many of these fiery darts are taken from the law. It is indeed a great and especial act of faith thus to take Jesus Christ in the arms, and, holding Him up in the face of the law, to be able to say, "Law, thou hast nothing to do with me; Jesus has fulfilled all thy righteous demands, and endured all thy tremendous curses. He is my shield, to protect me from thy condemning sentence; and all thy curses are harmless; they all fall short of me, because they all fell wholly upon Him." I say this is a special act of faith, because we cannot do it except as divinely enabled. Otherwise, it would be but an act of presumption. I may add, also, that it is a very rare thing to be enabled so to take Christ and hold Him up as a shield against the curses of the law; but when done under the influences and operations of the blessed Spirit, it is an act of faith which God approves of and honours. Nor is there any other shield to intercept its tremendous curse.

2. But what accusations there are also from a guilty conscience! What inward condemnation on account of the slips, backslidings, and inconsistencies that we are continually guilty of; and what self-reproach and self-aborrence there is or should be for all these things! How are we to get relief from these stings of internal guilt and self-reproach? By the same all-gracious and all-glorious shield; by interposing the Lord Jesus between the conscience and the accusations of guilt that alarm and terrify it. When we can see the Lord Jesus dying to redeem us from all our sins,

and washing us from them in His own most precious blood, then and only then do we get any true or spiritual relief from the accusations of our own condemning conscience. A guilty conscience is a very trying thing. It brings great darkness into the mind; stops the mouth of prayer; beclouds all evidences; seems at times almost to drown faith, bedim hope, and damp the flame of love, until it is relieved by the application of atoning blood, pardoning grace, and manifested mercy. Till then, we have no sweet liberty of access to God, nor is there any real peace and joy in believing.

3. But there are also the fiery darts of Satan. The great object of Satan is, first, to tempt a child of God to sin, and when he has entangled his feet in his net, then to turn accuser, and tell him he has now sinned beyond all reach of mercy. These accusations are some of his "fiery darts." We must not think that Satan's fiery darts are only blasphemous suggestions. He can and does make great use of our own guilty conscience, as well as of the law, and often forges his arrows, as well as sharpens and tips them, in the inward furnace of our own creating. This, indeed, is the sharpest arrow in his quiver; for there is none that sinks so deep, or makes such galling wounds, as that barbed shaft which is first dipped into the fire of a guilty conscience. Nor can it ever be fully or rightly extracted until we see it lodged in the heart of Jesus, and can believe that He bore these and all our other aggravated sins and backslidings. Here it is chiefly that we see what "a shield" He is against the fiery darts of the enemy.

4. But, in addition to these inward darts, we have also outward reproaches to meet with, if we walk consistently with our Christian profession. These taunts and reproaches are very cutting and lacerating to our feelings, especially if

they come from those who are near and dear to us in the flesh. But how are these best met? Here we shall have occasion to use the same shield. When we can see how the Lord Jesus was reproached, slandered, wrongfully accused, and despised when here below in this ungodly world, this is interposing Him as a shield between us and all our reproaches for His name's sake.

"If on my face for Thy dear name,
Shame and reproach there be,
All hail reproach, and welcome shame!
If thou remember me."

But let us seek to bring the points we have been considering this morning more to a head. O what a mercy for the Church of Christ that the God and Father of the Lord Jesus has not left her, as He might justly have left her, to perish in her sins, but has provided for her a Saviour, and a great one, and does from time to time encourage every poor, self-condemned sinner to hope in His mercy! The very things, poor exercised soul, that most try your mind are the very things that make such a Saviour suitable to you. You are dark; this makes the Sun of righteousness exactly suitable to enlighten you. You are cold; this makes you want the Sun to warm you. You are cheerless and cast down; this makes you want the Sun to gladden you. You are barren and unfruitful, and lament that you cannot bring forth fruit to God's glory; you want the Sun to fertilise you. You are, at times, very dead in your feelings, and can scarcely find any inclination to pray, meditate, or read the Scriptures; you want the Sun to enliven and revive you. Are not, then, these very trials and temptations necessary to make you feel that the Lord Jesus is the Sun, the very Sun that David felt Him to be? What value do those put upon the Lord Jesus who make a fire for themselves, and walk in the sparks of their own kindling?

What is Jesus to those who know no trouble of soul? What real and earnest prayer or fervent desire have they after Him? what ardent longing for His appearing? what breathings to see and feel His blood and righteousness? O! it is sharp exercises, manifold trials, and powerful temptations that make the soul really value the Lord Jesus.

Now, is not the sun made to shine? It is his office to do so. So it is with the Sun of righteousness; He is made to shine. And does the natural sun lose any of his light by shining? Why, the more he shines, the more light he seems to have. For ages he has shone as brightly as now. His beams were as glorious before we had birth or being, and will be as glorious when the eyes which now see him are mouldering in the dust. Thousands of harvests has he ripened, millions and thousands of millions has he fed; but he shows no sign of exhaustion or decay. And does Jesus lose anything by communicating His light, life, love, and grace? He is all the more glorified thereby; and the more you look to Him as the Sun, that as such He might shine into and upon your soul, the more you glorify Him as the Sun of righteousness. When in the morning we throw the shutters back, or draw up the blinds, it is to receive the sun into the dark room. So the more we are enabled by divine grace to throw back the shutters of doubt and fear, and draw up the blinds of unbelief which hang down over the mind, the more we glorify the Lord Jesus by receiving out of His fulness, and grace for grace. O! it is good to be sometimes enabled to look beyond and above doubts, fears, misgivings, and the many things that try the mind. You may pore over your sins and miseries till you fall well nigh into despair; you may look back upon your wanderings, inconsistencies, and want of fruitfulness, till you are almost ready to sink down without hope and die. To do this is to resemble a person wandering in a dark room, tumbling over the furniture, and at last sitting down and

saying, "There is no light." If he can but throw back the shutters, the sun will shine into the room. So we sometimes may sit pondering over our many inconsistencies till we say, "There is no light in my soul; there never was, and there never will be." O to be enabled (when I speak thus, I know well, from soul experience, that it is only God who can do it in us and for us) to throw back the shutters, and look away from those things that so weigh down the mind! Look up, O sinking soul, and see the blessed Sun still shining in the firmament of heaven. Why, the very power to do this, the very act of doing so, brings with it a felt blessedness.

How good, also, to be enabled to make use of Christ as a shield! O how often we go to battle without this shield upon our arm! But depend upon it, the Lord would not have provided such a shield for you unless He knew that your enemies were too many for you. Doubt, fear, darkness, despair, the law, the accusations of a guilty conscience, the fiery darts of the devil—how can you fight against these enemies without a shield? Why, you would be like a soldier going out against the Russians without either sword or musket, and laying his bosom bare to all their weapons, without Minie or bayonet in his hand to defend himself. So, to go into combat against the law, the accusations of a guilty conscience, and a desponding heart, and have no blessed Jesus to hold up as a shield against these deadly foes, would be enough to sink a man into despair. But if he be enabled to make use of the shield that God has provided, and to hold Christ up against a condemning law, a guilty conscience, an accusing devil, and a desponding mind, and say to them all, "Christ hath died, and died for me," then he receives into the shield those darts which would otherwise sink into his soul, and then they all fall harmless, because they all fell on the Lord Jesus.

Now, whether you can see it or not, feel it or not, believe it or not, it is still the same grand truth in God's holy Word. You may lack the comfort of it, but there it is; and if God be pleased to seal it on your heart with a divine sweetness and power, you will say, "Blessed be God that there is a spiritual Sun to warm my soul, and gladden my heart; and blessed be His holy name, there is a shield, for without that my soul would sink into interminable despair."