

The End of the Earth, and the Rock of Ages

Preached at Providence Chapel, Eden Street, London, on
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"From the end of the earth will I cry unto thee, when my heart is overwhelmed: lead me to the rock that is higher than I." Psalm 61:2

Is there such a thing as Christian experience? Every God-taught soul will in a moment answer, 'Yes, there is; and I hope I have felt it.' But is this experience of great importance? 'Yes,' the same heaven-taught soul will reply, 'Of infinite importance; for on the possession or nonpossession of it depends heaven or hell.'

But, if this be the case, whence comes it to pass that some deny, and others ridicule it? It springs chiefly from two causes: *ignorance*, on the one hand; and the *enmity* of the human heart, on the other. Men will naturally deny that of which they know nothing. And the human heart is so full of desperate, implacable enmity against God, that it will always fight against every thing that bears his image. We need not therefore wonder, that experience—the work of God upon the soul—in all its various branches, is denied by some, and ridiculed and despised by others.

But what a mercy it is, not only to feel at times a measure of true Christian experience in our own hearts; but also to find it so clearly and blessedly traced out in the word of God! These are two witnesses: the witness within, and the witness without; the witness in the bosom, and the witness in the word of truth. "In the mouth of two or three witnesses shall every truth be established."

It is then a mercy, an unspeakable mercy to the church of God, that every feeling which is produced by the blessed Spirit in the heart of the living family is to be found in God's book. And it is a mercy in two points of view. It is a mercy, *first*, because we can sometimes, when we are opposed upon these truths, point to the word of God, and say, 'It is *here*—can you deny what God himself has declared?' And it is a mercy, *secondly*, when we are tried and exercised about the reality and genuineness of our own experience to find it tally with the word of God: and thus have an evidence that it is wrought in our heart by the same Spirit of God who has revealed it in the word of truth.

Our text consists of two clauses. With God's blessing, I shall endeavour this morning to take them up in the order they lie before me; and in so doing, I shall purposely lose sight of David's special case (the word of God being "of no private," or individual "interpretation,") and apply it generally to the experience of an exercised child of God.

I.—The *first* clause is somewhat in the language of *complaint*; the *second* breathes the language of *prayer*.

"From the end of the earth, will I cry unto thee, when my heart is overwhelmed." The words breathe the language of *complaint*, combined with a divine resolution in the breast of the Psalmist. Where was he in his feelings when he breathed forth this cry? At "the end of the earth;" for it was thence that he was crying unto God.

i. But what are we to understand in a spiritual and experimental sense by "the end of the earth?" Jerusalem is considered in the word of God as the centre of all divine worship. It was there God was pleased to record his name; it was there he chose to manifest himself as "dwelling between

the cherubim;" it was there he commanded the tribes to come up three times a year to present themselves before the Lord. Jerusalem, therefore, became the centre of divine worship; and being the centre of divine worship, it became considered by the Israelites the centre of the earth. "The end of the earth," therefore, spoken of in our text, signifies, in a spiritual and experimental sense, the farthest, remotest distance of a soul from God. It has nothing to do with natural locality. It does not mean that David was literally and actually in some remote region: it is simply expressive of the feelings of his soul. And thus, when he wished to describe in the most striking way the distance, the felt distance of his soul from God, he uses the expression, "the end of the earth," as though he would significantly point out the remotest spot from happy Zion, where God was known, loved, and worshipped.

But what *brings* a soul there? Man is there, I know, naturally. All men, as fallen creatures, are at a distance from God. But they know it not, they feel it not; there is no language of complaint in their souls because they are there. Here we have the distinction between one dead in sin, and one alive to God. Both, in a certain sense, are there; but the one knows it, the other knows it not; the one feels it, the other feels it not: to the one, it is a source of pain and misery; to the other, no source of grief or misery at all: the one gasps and pants in it as in a foreign element; the other swims joyously in it as the very element of his natural being.

A feeling sense of guilt lying upon the conscience is that, then, which sets a soul at "the end of the earth;" as the Lord speaks, "Behold, the Lord's hand is not shortened, that it cannot save; neither his ear heavy, that it cannot hear: but your iniquities have separated between you and your God, and your sins have hid his face from you, that he will not

hear." (Isa. 60:1, 2.) It is sin that separates from God. Guilt charged home upon the conscience drives the soul sensibly away to the very "end of the earth." And thus, wherever there is a sense of guilt upon the conscience produced by the Holy Ghost charging sin home, there must be, there will be, a feeling sense of a distance from God: for he is every thing that is holy and blessed; every thing that is bright and pure; he dwelleth in the light which no man can approach unto; and with him is no darkness at all. Thus when the blessed Spirit is pleased to open up the depths of the fall, and lay sin as a burden upon our conscience, its effect upon us is to drive us to the "end of the earth," as it raises up a feeling of our infinite distance from God. Guilt, then, *drives* us there; but what *keeps* us there? There are several things that keep us there.

1. *Unbelief* keeps us there. For could we but believe; could we but act faith upon God's promises; could we but see and feel the goodness, mercy, and love of God revealed in the heart, we could, as it were, take one leap from "the end of the earth" into God's bosom. But unbelief, the power of unbelief working in the carnal mind, keeps the soul at "the end of the earth." For a living soul knows well he can only draw near in the actings and exercises of living faith; as the apostle says, "Without faith it is impossible to please him: for he that cometh to God must believe that he is." (Heb. 11:6.) A soul taught of God well knows that there is no approaching unto the living God except in the actings of living faith.

2. *Darkness of mind* is another cause that keeps a poor soul at "the end of the earth." He cannot behold the face of the Lord shining upon him "merciful and gracious;" he cannot see his interest in the love and blood of the Lamb; he cannot trace that the blessed Spirit is working in his soul under the painful feelings wherewith he is exercised; he cannot feel the

love, goodness, and mercy of God in his heart; he, therefore, walks in darkness, and has no light. And, being thus beclouded, and at times almost filled with darkness, he cannot draw near to a living God, all light and love, because he is in his feelings at "the end of the earth,"—at the farthest possible distance from the divine Majesty.

3. *Creature helplessness, thorough inability to raise up one gracious feeling in his soul*, is another cause that keeps him where guilt put him,—at "the end of the earth." Thus he learns creature helplessness, not as a doctrine revealed in God's word, but as a solemn truth revealed in his own soul. And this wretched feeling of creature helplessness keeps him where guilt places him; for without divine drawings he is unable, utterly unable to draw near to a living God with some sense of acceptance in the Son of his love.

4. *The accusations of his own conscience* is another cause that keeps him where guilt put him, at "the end of the earth;" for conscience within bears testimony to the word of God without, so that he feels himself to be what that word declares him to be—a vile, guilty, miserable, and polluted wretch.

5. *The workings of Satan*—confusing the mind, stirring up unbelief, rebellion, infidelity, and hard thoughts against the living God; putting every gracious feeling out of sight, and infusing everything devilish and infernal into the carnal mind, is another cause that keeps a poor soul feelingly at "the end of the earth."

Now all these things working in the heart combine together to keep a poor soul at "the end of the earth" whom God has placed there for good and wise purposes, that he may there effectually and experimentally learn that nothing short of a

manifestation of mercy and love can bring him from the "end of the earth" into the bosom of God, and into the enjoyment of the light and life of his gracious countenance.

ii. But was there nothing else? Yes; he speaks in our text of his heart being overwhelmed. "From the end of the earth will I cry unto thee, *when my heart is overwhelmed.*" And what was his heart overwhelmed by? What is the meaning of the figure? Flooded, buried, drowned. But what was his heart flooded, buried, drowned by? By a variety of painful sensations, all conspiring together to sink his soul in grief and trouble. For instance,

1. He was overwhelmed with *doubts and fears* whether the work of grace was ever begun upon his heart; whether the Lord would ever be gracious to him; whether he would ever smile upon his soul; whether he would ever seal pardon upon his conscience; whether he would ever speak to him with his blessed voice, saying, "Fear not; I have redeemed thee; thou art mine."

2. He was overwhelmed with a *sight and sense of the evils of his heart*; the corruptions, the fearful corruptions of his fallen nature; the boilings up of that great deep within. Thus he was made painfully and experimentally to feel that by these waves and billows of internal corruption he would be, he must be, but by divine interposition, eternally overwhelmed, flooded, drowned, swallowed up, lost.

3. He was overwhelmed also with *the fears of death*. Not having a clear manifestation of the love of God to his soul, death was to him a frightful enemy. Not knowing, not being persuaded, fully persuaded, that the last enemy was destroyed; and being in his feelings at "the end of the earth," at this distance from God, death appeared to him as a King

of Terrors; and he was overwhelmed when he felt how soon he might be called away from this earthly scene without those sweet manifestations of the love of God in his soul for which his heart was so ardently panting.

iii. But how did he lie there? As a log of wood—unfeelingly, insensibly, prayerless, worldly-minded, buried in sin, drowned in carnality? No. Now we come to a mark of divine life in his soul. There are many who are at "the end of the earth:" yes; all men by nature are at "the end of the earth." There are many, too, who are "overwhelmed" with natural trouble arising out of the various things that come upon them in the providential dispensations of God. None but the Lord's people, however, are at "the end of the earth" *spiritually* in their feelings; none but the Lord's people are overwhelmed in their souls with spiritual exercises. But, above all (for *this* is the thing that I wish to lay my hand upon—here let me touch the secret spring of divine life in the soul)—none but God's people know what it is to *cry* unto him under these exercises, "From the end of the earth will I—do I—*cry* unto thee." O what a blessed mark have we here, in this one short word, of the life of God in the soul!

But are there not times and seasons with you when you are feelingly at "the end of the earth," but there is no cry in your soul? And are there not also times when you are well-nigh overwhelmed with exercises, perplexities, temptations, or accusations of conscience; and yet no cry in your soul? But again. Are there not times when in your feelings you are not only at "the end of the earth," and "overwhelmed" with many painful exercises; but through mercy—I must call it a mercy—there is a cry in your soul towards the God of your salvation? If so—and I am sure if there be the life of God in your soul it is so—*here* is your experience; here it is traced out by the finger of God. Men may cast their slurs and

contempt upon it. They may say, 'There is no such thing as a believer being at "the end of the earth;"' or 'Away with being overwhelmed with *this, that, and the other.*' But *here* it stands. Have they yet succeeded in tearing the Psalms out of God's book? Have they yet succeeded in blotting this verse out of the 61st Psalm? No; here it stands, and ever will stand till the world is destroyed. Here it stands, and ever will stand, for the encouragement of God's poor, tried, tempted family, though all the towering professors in the world pour out their contempt upon it: "From the end of the earth will I cry unto thee, when my heart is overwhelmed." And O, what a mercy it is to have a God to cry to! And O, what a mercy to have a heart to cry to him! It is the Lord, however, and the Lord alone, who can raise up a cry to him from the very depths of our heart. And be assured, wherever the Lord has raised up, and is raising up that cry in the soul, he has an ear to hear, a hand to deliver, and a compassionate heart to relieve. And God give us grace, when we are, as we often are, if one may speak for another, at "the end of the earth," and "overwhelmed"—God give us grace to cry again and again to him.

But what is meant by the expression "*cry?*" Is there not something expressive, deeply expressive in it? A "cry" denotes pain, anguish, with a desire to be delivered from that under which we are suffering. It is something more intense, more significant, more earnest than mere prayer. Prayer is good, a sigh is good, groans are good; they are all the work of the blessed Spirit, and therefore must be good. Yet a "cry"—O it seems as though this touched Jehovah's heart most. Their "cries," we read, "entered into the ears of the Lord of Sabaoth." (James 5:4.) But, it is, for the most part, only through real trials and perplexing circumstances that the "cry" is pressed out of your bosom. There is earnestness, urgency, fervour, and importunity in *that*. It is

as though we must be heard; we can take, we will take, no denial.

But what raises up this "cry?" The Spirit of God, doubtless, immediately. But through what medium? Why, by sending us to "the end of the earth;" by causing those various trials which I have been describing to come upon and overwhelm us. Thus, when he has put us there by his own hand, and caused these overwhelming sensations to come over the soul, he kindles, creates, and raises up this "cry" in the heart towards the Lord God of our salvation; for we are brought to this point—none but God can save our souls—none but God can deliver and bless us—none but God can do *for* us and *in* us that which our souls desire to have done. For observe, the "cry" implies not merely a sense of pain and grief—I might say, at times of anguish—but it also implies an earnest desire to be brought near. Is not this a mark of life? What says the carnal mind to God, 'Depart from me; I desire not the knowledge of thee!' How acted the carnal mind in Cain? He "went out from the presence of the Lord." There was no desire to be brought nigh; no desire after reconciliation, no desire after pardon and peace, no desire to come to God, and be blessed by the smiles, lovingkindness, and mercy of the Almighty. But where there is a "cry" raised up in the soul by the Holy Ghost, it implies not merely the anguish of separation, and the fears of the dismayed heart under the guilt of sin charged home upon the troubled conscience, but the panting and longing of the soul to be brought near to God, and to enjoy a sense of his fatherly favour and most merciful and blessed smile.

II.—This leads me to the *second* clause, which is closely connected with the *first*: "*Lead me to the rock that is higher than I.*" There is something in this expression, which, to my mind, seems to throw a sweet light upon the figure. What is

"the rock?" Need we ask? Will not every gracious soul in a moment reply, 'Jesus?' Yes; and in so replying you have the word of God with you. "That Rock was Christ." (1 Cor.10:4.) "On this Rock," he says, "I will build my church; and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it." (Matt. 16:18.) He is therefore called in the margin of Isaiah 26:4, "the Rock of Ages."

But why should the expression "*rock*" be selected here? I think, without straining the expression, we may consider that this is the figure employed—a shipwrecked, drowning sailor, buffeted by the waves of the sea, and well-nigh overwhelmed in the billows. What does he see as he is ready to sink in the deep waters? A rock jutting out of the mighty billows which are about to engulf him. At once he feels if he can obtain a firm standing upon that rock, he shall be saved from the billows of the drowning ocean; but being unable to reach it by his own efforts, he cries out, "Lead me to the rock that is higher than I."

Let us apply this figure. Are not the children of God often in a similar condition to this poor shipwrecked sailor? "All thy billows and thy waves passed over me," says the prophet Jonah. (2:2.) Many have to buffet in the deep waters against a thousand waves, every one of which seems sufficient to drown them alive. "My heart," David cries in the text, "is overwhelmed;" as if he were pointing to the waves and billows of temptation, guilt, and shame, that seemed as though they would swallow him utterly up. But he sees "a rock." Is not this true spiritually? There is some discovery made to our soul of Jesus; and seeing who he is in the light of God's word, and in the light of the Spirit's teaching, he becomes to us an object of our heart's most earnest and ardent desire.

But there is something in this expression in our text, "*rock*," which seems, to my mind, to throw a sweet and blessed light upon what Jesus is to the poor and needy. The rock must go down to the bottom of the deep waters, as well as rise out of them, to be a sufficient place of refuge for the shipwrecked mariner. If the rock do not go to the bottom of the deep, it would not be firm; it would be but a quicksand. Is not this agreeable to the Spirit's testimony concerning the humanity of Christ? How deep that went into all our sorrows, into all our sufferings, into all our sins, into all our shame! However deep the waters may be, the rock is deeper than all, however deep the sufferings, sins, and sorrows of the church may be, the sufferings and sorrows of "Immanuel, God with us," were infinitely deeper. But the waves and billows beat in vain against the rock; they cannot move it from its place. So it is with the rock Jesus. All the sins, temptations, sufferings, and sorrows of the elect, with the wrath of God, and the fury of hell, beat against that rock, but they never moved it from its place.

But this rock is spoken of in our text as "*higher than I*." *There* we have the Godhead. For if Jesus were not God as well as man, the God-Man, what support could he be to the sinking soul? what efficacy could there be in his atoning blood? what power and glory in his justifying righteousness? what suitability in him as a Saviour to the utterly lost? But, being God as well as man, yea, the God-Man, the great and glorious Immanuel, he could descend in his human nature into the very depths of the fall, and rise up in his divine nature to the throne of the Most High; and thus, like Jacob's ladder, the bottom of it was upon the earth, but the top exalted to the clouds.

Now this makes the rock so suitable to the poor, troubled, exercised, well-nigh overwhelmed wretch. It is higher than

he; higher than all his sins which seem at times as though they would swallow him up; higher than all his temptations, opening their mouths to drown him; higher than the sea of guilt ready to engulf him; higher than all the accusations of conscience, the assaults of Satan, the exercises of his mind; higher than all without and within which would conspire to cast him utterly away.

Thus, when he gets a view by living faith of the rock Christ higher than he, then longing, panting desires, then earnest cries go out of his breast, "Lead me to the rock that is higher than I." 'I cannot get there by my own efforts; I cannot swim there through the waves; I need the blessed Spirit to take, and by his own divine hand to plant my feet firmly and fixedly upon that Rock of Ages.'

Now, if the soul in its feelings never was at "the end of the earth," never was overwhelmed with doubts and fears, many sharp temptations and cutting trials, and never from knowing these exercises, cried unto the living God from the very bottom of a troubled heart, there would be no suitability nor glory nor preciousness ever seen in the dear Lamb of God. But just in proportion as we are made to feel the depths of the fall, are at "the end of the earth," overwhelmed with many painful exercises, and cry unto the Lord from the bottom of a troubled heart, do we (as the Lord is pleased to bring it before our eyes, and shed abroad a sweet savour of it in our souls), see something of the suitability, blessedness, preciousness, glory, love, blood, and righteousness of the Lamb. And seeing in him such ample supplies for every want; seeing him to be "of God made unto us, wisdom, righteousness, sanctification, and redemption," the great High Priest over the house of God, "able to save unto the uttermost all that come unto God by him," there is raised up from time to time by the blessed Spirit in the soul, those

earnest breathings, divine longings, and ardent pantings after that sweet enjoyment of Christ in the soul which alone can bring us near to God.

All this, and much more than this is contained in the words before us, "Lead me to the rock that is higher than I." 'Give my poor soul a firm and blessed standing upon this Rock of Ages; sprinkle my conscience with his precious, precious blood; shed abroad his dying love in my soul; reveal and make him very near and very dear to my heart; and bless me with an enjoyment of his mercy, goodness, and favour.'

But when the Lord is pleased to hear these cries, and lead the soul to the rock that is higher than we, then he plants the feet firmly upon it; and when the feet are planted upon that rock, the waves and billows may beat, but they beat in vain. They cannot wash away the rock; therefore they cannot wash away him that stands upon the rock. And as sure as that rock stands (and it will stand to all eternity), nothing can really harm those who through grace are blessed with a standing upon that Rock of Ages. But how often, O how often in our feelings, whatever blessed and glorious discoveries we may have had in times past, are we at "the end of the earth!" Guilt of soul, darkness of mind, hardness of heart, the accusations of conscience, the temptations of Satan, how often do these things drive us to "the end of the earth;" so that we cannot get near to God, cannot find his gracious presence in our souls, cannot bask in the smiles of his loving face, cannot feel that loving favour which makes crooked things straight and rough places plain, drives away every mist and fog, and blesses the soul with joy unspeakable and full of glory.

And O, how often is the heart "overwhelmed;" so many painful things in providence, and so many painful things in

grace; so many trials, so many temptations; so many things without, so many things within, all conspiring together to overwhelm and sink the soul!

And yet is it not a mercy to have a "cry?" Not to be wholly insensible; not to be altogether given up to hardness, carelessness, and carnality; but to feel the breathings of a heart made tender in God's fear, the goings out of a broken spirit, and the cries of a soul that really needs an answer, that keeps on crying till the Lord appear, and gives him no rest until he come down in the sweet manifestations of his mercy and love.

And shall we not, as long as the Lord shall spare us in this vale of tears, have reason, more or less, daily to cry, "Lead me to the rock that is higher than I?" What a mercy, what an unspeakable mercy, then, that there is a rock higher than we, rising above all our doubts and fears, above all our guilt and shame, above all our corruptions and sins, above all our idolatries and backslidings, above all our accusations of conscience, above all the charges of Satan—a rock higher than all: not as we are, confused, sometimes buried, swallowed up, and covered over with the waves and surges of worldly and spiritual anxiety; but a rock that stands up out of these deep waters, and on which the face of God ever shines;—a Rock of Ages. And will not, must not, this be ever, as the Lord is pleased to raise it up, the cry of our soul, "Lead me to the rock that is higher than I?" No salvation anywhere else; no peace anywhere else; no consolation anywhere else. Buffeted by the waves, and well-nigh drowned by the billows, away from that rock; but if led there, brought there, kept there by the blessed Spirit, finding it a safe and sure standing for eternity. And what else but such a rock can save our souls, or what else but such a Saviour and such a salvation, without money and without price, can suit

such ruined wretches?

O what reason has the church of God to bless the God of all grace for having provided such a rock as Christ Jesus, and for raising up in the heart from time to time earnest breathings and longings after this rock; and, above all, now and then to favour the soul with the assurance that his feet are fixed upon this Rock of Ages, and that nothing can separate from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus!