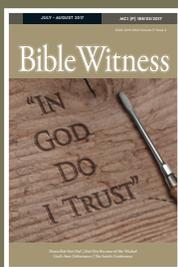


Bible Witness



Down But Not Out! | Fret Not Because of the Wicked
God's Sure Deliverance | The Saint's Confidence



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CONTENTS

"In God Do I Trust"

- 3** Editorial *Prabhudas Koshy*
- 4** Down But Not Out! *Ho Kee How*
- 10** Fret Not Because of the Wicked
Ho Kee How
- 16** God's Sure Deliverance
Ho Kee How
- 24** The Saint's Confidence
Prabhudas Koshy

Children's Page

- 27** Bible Trivia - Exodus 32
Sarah Yong
- 28** Eric Henry Liddell (1902 - 1945)
"From an Olympian to a Missionary"
- Part 2
Jenny Lok

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Editorial

Dear readers,

In this issue of Bible Witness, we publish articles to encourage and embolden Christians who face difficulties and despair to continue to trust in their Lord. These articles are based on passages taken from the book of Psalms. Psalms contain prayers offered by God's servants amidst their troubles. Those prayers not only express their requests, but also their confessions about God and their confidence in Him.

The more deeply we meditate on the psalms, the more often we will find ourselves making them our own prayers. All who have delighted in the study of Psalms have found them to be a boundless source of their spiritual nourishment. They provide comfort, hope and joy to the souls of God's people.

Martin Luther, the great Reformer, was well-known for his reliance on the book of Psalms. In the midst of life's battles, he clung to the mighty promises of the Psalms for comfort and courage. From this ancient hymn book of Israel, he drew strength to fight earnestly and fearlessly the battles of Reformation. He wrote in his Bible the words of Psalm 119:92, "Unless thy law had been my delights, I should then have perished in mine affliction."

We pray that you too will be cheered as you meditate on the Psalms. May the Lord be pleased to use the articles in this magazine, which are based on certain portions of Psalms, to empower you to persevere through your many struggles in life. May these articles spur you on to read Psalms and delight in the wonderful spiritual truths found therein.

Yours in His service
Prabhudas Koshy

DOWN BUT NOT OUT!

Ho Kee How

"I waited patiently for the LORD; and he inclined unto me, and heard my cry. He brought me up also out of an horrible pit, out of the miry clay, and set my feet upon a rock, and established my goings."

Psalm 40:1-2

Whether young or old in age, new or experienced in the faith, the Christian reader will realise that the Christian journey is not an easy road. You will not always feel high and exuberant all the time; there will be times when you feel quite disheartened and downcast. Dear believers, do not despair in such times – you are in good and godly company! For even spiritual “giants” do struggle in life, being in need of great encouragement and having come out of it all stronger in their faith, as attested to by the psalmist in Psalm 40:1-2.

As the title of Psalm 40 tells us, this is a psalm of David. The psalmist David is certainly a spiritual “man after (God’s) own heart” (Acts 13:22b). But that did not exempt him from afflictions and trying circumstances that caused him to be “troubled on every side”, feel “cast down”, and almost be “in despair” (cf. 2 Corinthians 4:8-9)! We see here a desperate individual in need of great encouragement, one who is literally “cast down, but not destroyed” (2 Corinthians 4:9b). May we draw comfort as we consider the psalmist’s deliverance from spiritual dejection unto spiritual rejoicing.

Anticipation of Deliverance

From v. 1, we can tell that the psalmist had been undergoing some sort of serious spiritual dejection when he mentioned that God “heard my cry”.

The Need to Cry Out

Crying is a strong manifestation of pent-up emotion and anguish, indicative of the agony one is going through, especially when one feels weighed down and almost crushed by one’s problems. This writer

is certain that many, if not all, of our Christian readers have gone through rough patches or experienced difficult times which totally overwhelmed and drained you that you just had to cry unto the Lord. Like the experience of another psalmist, “In the day of my trouble I sought the Lord ... I complained, and my spirit was overwhelmed ... I am so troubled that I cannot speak” (Psalm 77:2-4)! Words fail us – pouring out our soul unto the Lord is our only option.

Crying is not a shameful thing, which is what the psalmist testifies here. The problem in our self-assured, affluent society is that we do not cry enough, especially when things are plain-sailing. People who hardly cry out gradually tend to become self-sufficient, self-righteous and arrogant altogether. It is of the Lord’s mercy that He sometimes allows afflictions and trials to come into our lives to bring us to our knees. Afflictions serve a preventive purpose – to jolt us out of our spiritual complacency and prevent us from “getting stuck” in the rut of our spiritual lethargy. But thank God, He will not allow us to suffer beyond what He has enabled us to endure, for “God is faithful, who will not suffer you to be tempted above that ye are able; but will with the temptation also make a way to escape, that ye may be able to bear it” (1 Corinthians 10:13). Just as a good husbandman prunes the branches selectively so that the trees will bear more fruit, God (the Heavenly Husbandman) does not let sufferings go to waste. “When He plows, it is because He purposes a crop” (J. O. Sanders). Through them, He purges and refines rough edges in our lives, and in the process, makes us more fruitful and “more than conquerors” (Romans 8:37)!

The Need to Wait Patiently

Hence the importance of waiting patiently upon the Lord, even amidst tension while enduring our afflictions. The phrase, "waited patiently" (v. 1a), emphasises the idea of "holding one's spirit in check". Christians are not to take matters into their own hands, but are urged to bear up nobly and show great restraint, even in the face of hostility. Remember Jesus' teaching on the Beatitudes in His sermon on the mount – "Blessed are ye, when men shall revile you, and persecute you, and shall say all manner of evil against you falsely, for my sake. Rejoice, and be exceeding glad: for great is your reward in heaven" (Matthew 5:11-12a). Be it insult or injury, there should be no room for retaliation or loss of temper. We are not to avenge ourselves, but let God avenge us in His time – "Vengeance is mine; I will repay, saith the Lord" (Romans 12:19b). We, like the psalmist, are to be patient in waiting for God to act and be prepared to "suffer long".

And in our patient waiting, the psalmist encourages us to purposefully look forward to God's timely deliverance, by giving his own testimony of God's "inclining" unto him (v. 1b). The picture is that of bending down to be close enough to hear clearly (much like a loving parent stooping down to lend an attentive ear to his frightened, disoriented child in a noisy crowd). What a wonderful assurance of the "eyes of the LORD (being) upon the righteous, and his ears ... open unto their cry (for help)" (Psalm 34:15)! Such assurance should settle our hearts to embrace the patience of Job, whereby we "have seen the end of the Lord; that the Lord is very pitiful, and of tender mercy" (James 5:11b). Like Job, we will see the "end" (which can also mean "purpose") of the Lord. Whatever

trial God permits to come into our life is never purposeless; it is not endless either! Take heart, the Lord has a gracious end or purpose in all of our sufferings. Such is the psalmist's confidence in God delivering him out of his troubles in due time. May that be our confidence too.

Realisation of Deliverance

Now, it is instructive to note that the psalmist's troubles are not your simple, run-of-the-mill woes, such as children falling sick or going for an exam, or having to choose a right school or university course for our children, or difficulty in paying for church camp fees, or grappling with some financial problems. And yet we can become so fretful unnecessarily!

Against Overwhelming Odds

Rather, the psalmist vividly portrays how the LORD brought him up "out of an horrible pit, out of the miry clay" (v. 2a). The picture depicted here is that of a dramatic "rescue operation". He was literally lifted up from "a well of roaring waters"! It was not merely an empty pit – it was a deep well, not of still waters, but "roaring waters". This signifies turbulent turmoil and pressure, giving hint of the magnitude and intensity of the psalmist's deep troubles. That was not all. He had gone through "the clay of mire" as well. Mire means mud. Now, when you have mud thrown at you, how would you feel? You feel like you have been stained with something sticky and stinking – very unpleasant indeed! The phrase "miry clay" is a figure of speech referring to men's contempt and smearing disdain. Abuses and false accusations would have been hurled at the psalmist, which stained his good name. He had been called all sorts of names; in place of a machine gun, he

had apparently been “slayed” with words of abuse and misrepresentation!

Isn't that how we must have felt sometimes? When people try to discredit us by telling lies about us, we feel like we have been “dragged through the mud”. It is meant to cast aspersions on our character. Please do not think that if you are God-honouring and upright, you will not experience these scandalous insinuations. Scripture records for our learning instances of righteous men who found themselves in “an horrible pit” and “miry clay”. Besides the psalmist David, the patient Job (cf. Job 1-2) and the uncompromising Elijah (cf. 1 Kings 19) are two such biblical examples. Nonetheless, they, being faithful to God, “waited patiently for the LORD” and in due season, experienced God “inclining” unto them and delivering them out of their spiritual dejection.

Spiritual Footing Regained

Oh, what a sense of vindication for the psalmist when deliverance was experienced! The LORD “set” his feet “upon a rock” (v. 2b). The Hebrew word translated as “set” is the “Hiphil” (or causative) form of the root verb (*qum*) meaning “to rise”. Hence, it literally means “to raise”. God has raised the previously downcast psalmist onto a firm footing and caused him to stand atop a “rock” (literally a cliff, which rises high above the raging waves), and thereby a place of security. When God delivers us, we will not be left wobbling on shaky ground. Not only will our footing be regained, our “goings” will also be “established” (v. 2c). In other words, our life's direction and way of life will be rendered sure and prosperous. The whole idea here is one being vindicated and made secure in the way of righteousness.

Truly, the realisation of God's timely deliverance in our lives should remind us of God's gracious dealings with His afflicted choice servant, Joseph, whom He elevated to the prime-ministerial position in Egypt, following his enforced sale into slavery and unjust imprisonment resulting from false accusation. May we be able to say, like Joseph, “(men) thought evil against me; but God meant it unto good” (Genesis 50:20a). It should also reassure us of God's promise to those who, like Joshua, observe to do according to all of God's law, come what may: “for then thou shalt make thy way prosperous, and then thou shalt have good success” (Joshua 1:8b). It certainly corroborates Solomon's heavenly advice for earthly living: “Trust in the LORD with all thine heart; and lean not unto thine own understanding. In all thy ways acknowledge him, and he shall direct [read ‘establish’] thy paths [or ‘goings’]” (Proverbs 3:5-6).

Exultation in Deliverance

With his spiritual footing regained, the psalmist now finds his spirits uplifted and his heart overwhelmed with gratitude and spontaneity of joy. His tongue is now “the pen of a ready writer” (Psalm 45:1b), as it were.

Heart's Rejoicing Resounded

The revitalised psalmist could not contain his joy. He could not help but let out a joyous, triumphal outburst of singing, for God “hath put a new song in my mouth” (v. 3a). This would be no ordinary song, but a divinely-inspired “new” (i.e. fresh) melody and spiritual song, in fitting response to God's mercies and compassions, which are themselves “new (or fresh) every morning” (Lamentations 3:22-23). Just as crying is a strong manifestation of the soul's anguish,

singing unmistakably manifests the heart's elation and joy. Though God uses the mouth as the instrument of praise, it is obvious that what comes out of the mouth proceeds from a rejoicing heart! And this personal rejoicing would in turn spill into public praise and worship. "Enter into his gates with thanksgiving, and into his courts with praise: be thankful unto him, and bless his name" (Psalm 100:4).

God's Faithfulness Testified

The stage is now set for public acknowledgment and affirmation of God's unseen yet unerring Hand of providence and deliverance. Thankfulness for God's dealings in our private lives should lead to thanksgiving in the sanctuary of God. "I will remember the works of the LORD ... I will meditate also of all thy work, and talk of thy doings. Thy way, O God, is in the sanctuary: who is so great a God as our God? Thou art the God that doest wonders: thou hast declared thy strength among the people" (Psalm 77:11-14). All trials are not forever, only for a season. When God has seen us through, may we not forget to testify of His wondrous doings in bringing us out of our "pit". Prayer meetings, watch-night service, Bible camps, etc. are good avenues for "offer(ing) the sacrifice of praise to God continually, that is, the fruit of our lips giving thanks to his name" (Hebrews 13:15).

Coupled with the psalmist's public testimony, the evident favourable change in the psalmist's spiritual prosperity is so irrefutable that "many shall see (i.e. consider and take heed of) it" (v. 3b). Many would be stirred to consider God's faithfulness, as encapsulated in 6 rhetorical questions (all of which can be answered

with an emphatic "No!") posed by the psalmist in Psalm 77:7-9 – "Will the Lord cast off for ever? and will he be favourable no more? Is his mercy clean gone for ever? doth his promise fail for evermore? Hath God forgotten to be gracious? hath he in anger shut up his tender mercies?" Even the detractors who had rubbed salt into his wound by taunting him that God had forsaken him, especially they "which say of my soul, There is no help for him in God" (Psalm 3:2), would take heed that "The LORD hath done great things for (him); whereof (he is) glad" (Psalm 126:3). They would be reduced to "fear" (v. 3c), i.e. be put in reverential awe of the faithful and all-powerful God. Indeed, many others, in seeing that "If God be for us, who can be against us?" (Romans 8:31b), would be emboldened to place their hope and "trust in the LORD" (v. 3d).

Conclusion

Dear believers, are you undergoing some afflictions or troubles now in your life? Perhaps some trial may await you in the near future, or it may be just round the corner. Remember the psalmist's experience recorded for our learning and comfort. God knows how to deliver the righteous from all sorts of situations, including afflictions. "The steps of a good man are ordered by the LORD: and he delighteth in his way. Though he fall, he shall not be utterly cast down: for the LORD upholdeth him with his hand" (Psalm 37:23-24). On our part, let us cry unto the LORD and wait patiently. When deliverance comes, remember to give praise and thanks, that God be glorified and God's people edified and emboldened to trust in the LORD. Amen.

Reformation Lectures 2017

in commemoration of
the 500th Anniversary
of the Reformation

Theme: "Historical Relevance of the Reformation"

1st October – **Pre-Reformation** –
Ecclesiastical Corruption and
Declension
by Pr Andrew Koh

8th October – **Reformation from Within** –
"Morning Stars" and
"Forerunners"
by Pr Dennis Kabingue

15th October – **Reformation Precipitated by the
Times** –
Social Developments and
Intellectual Movements
by Pastor Prabhudas Koshy

22nd October – **Reformation Breakthrough** –
Defining Moments and Key
Figures
by Eld Richard Tiu

Venue: SingPost Centre, Level 5 Auditorium (next to Paya Lebar MRT station)

Time: 1.30pm - 3.30pm

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Welcome
to a time of soul-nourishing
learning of God's Word!

Fret Not
BECAUSE OF THE
WICKED

Ho Kee How



“For I was envious at the foolish, when I saw the prosperity of the wicked ... When I thought to know this, it was too painful for me; Until I went into the sanctuary of God; then understood I their end.”

Psalm 73:3, 16-17

Since time immemorial, history has been replete with instances of godless and wicked men flourishing and prevailing, often in great power, pomp and prosperity, while the righteous had to endure terrible

hardships and great injustices. This is true not only in the larger context of the constant grab for power in the political realm, but also in all walks of personal lives of families and individuals.

We need not look far to notice many of the rich and successful among those in high society living the high life with total disregard for moral fidelity or integrity, and without

any desire to include God in the equation. In their hearts, they hath said, "There is no God" (Psalm 14:1a). A classic case of the wicked flourishing and enjoying life right to the end of a ripe age on earth is the godless rich man in the life of the impoverished but godly Lazarus. The rich man was said to be "clothed in purple and fine linen, and fared sumptuously every day" until "it came to pass, that ... the rich man also died, and was buried" (Luke 16:19, 22); he seemed to have enjoyed life right to the end (cf. Luke 16:25a). Such a godless rich man is not an isolated case in this world. Suffice to say that in the annals of human history, whether in the public sphere or private domain, one indisputable fact stands out – "The wicked walk on every side", and sometimes even "the vilest men are exalted" (Psalm 12:8). "Where is God when the wicked seemingly flourish?" – some troubled soul may fretfully ask.

Undeniable Prosperity of the Wicked

Now, that seems to be the anguished complaint of the psalmist in the first part of Psalm 73. Admittedly, there is nothing more disturbing and detestable to the godly than to see the wicked prospering and living it up in life. "For I was envious ... when I saw the prosperity of the wicked ... When I thought to know this, it was too painful for me" (vv. 3, 16).

No Simplistic Formula in Life

As pointed out in the opening paragraph, the reality of this life is that successful wicked men do abound and godly people do get on the receiving end. The wise Preacher of Israel had somberly observed, "there is a just man that perisheth in his righteousness, and there is a wicked man that longeth his life in his wickedness" (Ecclesiastes 7:15b). Alas, life does not follow a strict pattern or simplistic formula: "an evil man will always be punished and a good man be blessed always."

That was precisely the anguish felt by the psalmist when he lamented that the wicked "are not in trouble as other men; neither are they plagued like other men" (v. 5). They were not plagued by illnesses or afflicted by great trials, like himself (cf. v. 14) or other righteous men he knew. In other words, what he had difficulty grappling with, is this: How can a perfect God be considered "infinite, eternal and unchangeable in His ... justice (and) goodness" (Westminster Shorter Catechism Question 4) – among His other attributes – when the unrighteous did not seem to suffer as much as their righteous counterparts here on earth. Far from suffering, they seemed to be flourishing! "Behold, these are the ungodly, who prosper in the world; they increase in riches" (v.

12). To the conscientious psalmist, it made no judicial sense for the righteous to suffer in spite of their fear of God and departure from evil; neither did it seem to pay to walk in the paths of righteousness, having denied the indulgence of the lusts of the flesh and mind. "Verily I have cleansed my heart in vain, and washed my hands in innocency" (v. 13). This apparent lack of commensurate returns for well and evil doing in life is one sore sticking point that has bugged many believers no end!

A Reality Check

When we think of godly men being on the receiving end, one of the classic examples and most ready characters that spring to mind is that enduring and endearing biblical figure, Job. In refuting his three misguided friends' insinuations of his horrendous afflictions being divine retribution for his living a double life, Job spells out the upsetting reality in Job 21:7-13.

He points to the indisputable fact that wicked men do live to a ripe old age, and having attained good success in life, wield tremendous influence over others (v. 7). They may even enjoy an enriching family life and be surrounded with devoted, successful children (v. 8), thus bringing them delight and honour. Their houses stand safe and secure, not merely as shelters against the elements but also as strongholds which serve as status symbols (v. 9). Moreover, the wicked are also known to possess fruitful livestock which multiply prolifically (v. 10), thereby accumulating exceeding material wealth. Furthermore, mirth and musical instruments seem to be their constant companions (vv. 11-12). To add insult to injury, after living lavishly they die without struggle with prolonged illness or agony from any debilitating

disease, but "in a moment go down to the grave" (v. 13). As is concurred by the psalmist, "there are no bands (i.e. pangs of pain) in their death: but their strength is firm" (Psalm 73:4). Longevity, position of power, great posterity, luxurious residential property, abundant possessions, merry entertainment, good health, quick, painless death without suffering – you name it, the wicked have it all.

We can sense a great irony here. Job, "a perfect and an upright man" by God's standard (cf. Job 1:8; 2:3), on the other hand, had lost all his 10 children [crushed to death in a collapsed house caused by a whirlwind (Job 1:19)]; his abode was next to a heap of ashes outside as he could not stay in the house due to his disease (Job 2:8); all his hundreds and thousands of sheep, camels, oxen and asses had been forcibly stolen by merciless bandits or destroyed by an outbreak of fire (Job 1:14-17). It goes without saying that sadness and grief (not joyful music) accompanied him daily (Job 2:13b). Above all, he was in excruciating pain and agony (Job 2:7-8a), and in the eyes of all and sundry, dying a slow painful death, as it were. The contrasts could not have been more stark!

Clearly, the usual yardsticks and parameters, which the majority of people use to measure happiness or blessedness, cannot be viewed with finality to gauge God's approval of a man. Undeniably, the wicked do have it good; they do live a prosperous and successful life, and may even be widely acclaimed by others.

Unabashed Pompousness of the Wicked

As if that isn't bad enough, "Because sentence against an evil work is not executed speedily, therefore the heart of the

sons of men is fully set in them to do evil" (Ecclesiastes 8:11). Not surprisingly, we read in Psalm 73:6-11 of the prosperous wicked men's prideful conduct and presumptuous disregard for God's judgment.

Pompous Conduct of Personal Life

Having enjoyed the good things and pleasures in life to their hearts' content (v. 7b), the wicked become prideful and violent (v. 6), corrupt and oppressive [literally enriching themselves by extorting from and impoverishing others] (v. 8a), even boastful and blasphemous (v. 8b-9). Furthermore, "Their eyes stand out with fatness" (v. 7a)! This Hebrew expression literally refers to the midriff-fat (which is near the heart) that has the undesirable effect of a dead-weight, making the heart slow to respond to an increased need in blood flow. It is a figure of speech for an unreceptive heart. Figuratively speaking, the wicked, with their "hearts be(ing) overcharged with surfeiting, and drunkenness" (Luke 21:34a), have become desensitised to the needy's plight and unresponsive to others' needs and their own needful duties.

Oh, what tragedy this haughty and over-indulgent self-assertiveness will lead to. Men will be "lovers of their own selves, ... boasters, proud, blasphemers, ... incontinent, fierce, ... high-minded, lovers of pleasures more than lovers of God", which is what the Bible prophesies will be characteristic of the perilous times that shall come in the last days (2 Timothy 3:1-4). Propelled by sheer self-will and unrestrained by the fear of God, the wicked will want to enjoy life at all costs. The imagination of the thoughts of the heart will only be evil continually, eventually leading men to a sensual lifestyle craving

to fulfil the desires of the flesh and mind. Such fleshly nature is painfully manifested in a fast-catching epicurean culture, which is openly and unabashedly advocated in modern society!

Presumptuous Disregard for Accountability to God

In v. 11, we see the wicked ask a derogatory question: "How doth God know? and is there knowledge in the most High?" By asking it in a mocking manner, they seem confident that they can get away with their misdeeds and misdemeanours as they presume that God, if He exists, cannot perceive and thereby judge everything that they do or say or think. How mistaken they are! They fail to realise that "Hell and destruction are before the LORD: how much more then the hearts of the children of men?" (Proverbs 15:11). There is an omniscient God, who "knowest my downsitting and mine uprising, ... understandest my thought afar off ... and art acquainted with all my ways" (Psalm 139:2-3). Besides, "there is not a word in my tongue, but, lo, O LORD, thou knowest it altogether" (Psalm 139:4). The psalmist rightfully cries out, "Such knowledge is too wonderful for me; it is high, I cannot attain unto it" (Psalm 139:6)! In denying the knowledge of God, the wicked merely betray their arrogance and blatant rebellion. God's wisdom and power are clearly manifest in the created world around us through natural revelation (cf. Psalm 19:1-3). Man is without excuse when he refuses to acknowledge "the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God" (Romans 11:33a), all the more so now that God has specially revealed Himself through His Word (cf. Psalm 19:7-9).

There is more to life than this physical world. God has put eternity in our hearts; everyone has an immortal soul which is not only distinguishable from the body but separable (upon death, that is). And this soul is that which yearns after God. Man is distinct from all the animals in that he is made in the image of God. This "image" is spiritual, one of righteousness and holiness. This means that we have morality imprinted in us, which makes us conscience-driven. Only man can discern moral right and wrong; only man can judge and be judged. It is thus too pompous and presumptuous of the wicked to downplay their accountability to their Creator. Contrary to what they have retorted, there is infinite, eternal and unchangeable "knowledge in the most High", before whom we all must stand one day.

Unenviable Plight of the Wicked

Now, apparently the psalmist, in coming to terms with the wicked flourishing, had been disquieted by a no small inner theological turmoil raging in his heart. In trying compulsively to fit life's dilemma and perplexity into his "theological mould", he had become an unwitting victim of his sheer human logic. He was only relieved of his hurt and fretfulness when he "went into the sanctuary of God" (Psalm 73:17a). The Hebrew word for "sanctuary" literally means a sacred or set-apart place. It can refer to God's house or a regular place set apart for personal communion with God. Truly, it is so easy for us to fret "because of him who prospereth in his way, because of the man who bringeth wicked devices to pass" (Psalm 37:7b). The remedy for this is daily communion with God in our quiet closet and constant meditating on His Word (cf. Psalm 1:2; 119:97-101).

Terrifying End of the Wicked

Through God's Word, we are given to understand that if the sovereign God had seemed to allow the wicked to flourish, it is because He "hath made ... even the wicked for the day of evil" (Proverbs 16:4b). If this life is all there is to it, then there is no solution to the unfairness of life. The wicked seem to get away scot-free, having prospered on earth. We might as well eat, drink and be merry, for tomorrow we die. Not so! "And as it is appointed unto men once to die, but after this the judgment" (Hebrews 9:27). No wicked individual can escape, not even the rich man mentioned in Lazarus' life. Scripture records for us that the rich man subsequently ended up "in hell ... being in torments" (Luke 16:23), which is the destiny of all the wicked, however much or long they may have flourished while on earth. Therefore, we do not envy the wicked; we rather pity them once we "understood their end" (Psalm 73:17b).

Now, the "end" refers to a future state which, though not yet seen, is sure to come to pass (as revealed in God's Word). It denotes the ultimate result and eventuality of a course of action. God's longsuffering is not to be equated with helplessness or slackness (cf. 2 Peter 3:9). In fact, His allowing the wicked to flourish is actually preparing them to be "set ... in slippery places", waiting to be cast "down into destruction" and "into desolation", and be "utterly consumed with terrors" (Psalm 73:18-19)! We do well to hear what Job has to say of the "end" of the wicked. When "the candle of the wicked (is) put out", they are "as stubble (remains of wheat) before the wind, and as chaff (husks separated from the grain after threshing) that the storm carrieth away" (Job 21:17-18). These

are effectively worthless (of no value) and lightweight (easily banished by the wind). This conjures a picture of being at the mercy of Someone far greater. We know that judgment begins with God's people; if it begins at us, we shudder to think how terrifying shall the end be of the ungodly (1 Peter 4:17-18)!

Ultimate Judgment Awaits the Wicked

The Bible is unambiguous that the wicked "shall see his destruction, and ... drink of the wrath of the Almighty" (Job 21:20). This surely intimates the second death, namely eternal damnation in the dreadful lake of fire (Revelation 20:14), which is the ultimate and eternal destination and destiny of all the wicked who die in their sins. Note several points concerning this place:

Firstly, it is a place of no return – it lasts for eternity (Revelation 20:10b). Oh, life on earth is "too short" to prolong another day of sinful living and hell is "too long" for the wicked to delay another day of unbelief. Secondly, it is a place where no one needs to go – it is a place designated for the devil and his minions (Revelation 20:10). God's mercy and justice have met at the substitutionary atonement of Christ. God has given His Son, that none should perish if they repent of their sins and believe in Him. Lastly, it is a place where

inequalities are set right – here you can strictly say that an evil man will always be punished and no infringement overlooked (Revelation 20:13-14). Certainly, no wicked will flourish there!

Conclusion

So, back to the question: "Where is God when the wicked seemingly flourish?" In the light of eternity, even if their prosperity extends throughout their entire earthly lives, their triumph is short-lived. The just God is still on the Throne; He "will not at all acquit the wicked" (Nahum 1:3); He has everything (including thought, word and deed) recorded in His books (cf. Revelation 20:12). Finally, realise that God has all eternity in which to punish the wicked, while He has but "a lifetime on earth" to mould and prepare His saints for heaven.

Therefore, there is no need to envy the wicked; rather they are to be pitied. So, judge nothing before the time. The times are in God's hands. We do well to wait patiently and trustingly upon "the Judge of all the earth" (Genesis 18:25b). Meanwhile, while on earth, "Whom have I in heaven but thee? ... it is good for me to draw near to God: I have put my trust in the Lord GOD, that I may declare all thy works" (Psalm 73:25a, 28). Amen.

"Where is God when the wicked seemingly flourish?" In the light of eternity, even if their prosperity extends throughout their entire earthly lives, their triumph is short-lived. The just God is still on the Throne; He "will not at all acquit the wicked" (Nahum 1:3); He has everything (including thought, word and deed) recorded in His books (cf. Revelation 20:12).

God's Sure Deliverance

Ho Kee How

“He that dwelleth in
the secret place of the
most High shall abide
under the shadow of the
Almighty. I will say of
the LORD, He is my
refuge and my fortress:
my God; in him will
I trust.”

Psalm 91:1-2

The Bible reveals to us the mind of the infinite, eternal and unchangeable God, who is an all-knowing and loving Heavenly Father to His redeemed children. Not only does it contain light to direct our way through this sin-darkened world, it also gives comfort to cheer us along life's (very often) dreary journey in this trouble-filled world. No wonder the psalmist cries out, “Open thou mine eyes, that I may behold wondrous things out of thy law” (Psalm 119:18). And from God's law, we are made to realise that God is our “refuge” and “fortress”, in whom we can utterly trust, even in the midst of great troubles and adversity in life. One psalm that comes readily to mind which talks of God's unflinching protection and deliverance is Psalm 91.

Apparently, this psalm was written by one who had gone through great trials and spiritual pressures in his life – someone who had been “troubled on every side, yet not distressed ... (nor) in despair” (2 Corinthians 4:8). He remained steadfast and strong because he had experienced God's sure deliverance time and time again. This we can tell from his unequivocal opening declaration (through the inspiration of the Holy Spirit and also by experience) of the Almighty's absolute reliability for those who seek Him (vv. 1-2). The psalmist is so spiritually strengthened that he is able to “dole out” spiritual exhortations and reassurance to those who are currently undergoing or who will (at some point in time) go through intimidating “storms of life” (vv. 3-13). This psalm ends with God Himself reiterating and affirming the psalmist's bold pronouncement of His sure deliverance and vindication (vv. 14-16).

Affirmative Declaration of God's Sure Deliverance

Now, Psalm 91 opens with a majestic declaration: “He that dwelleth in the secret place of the most High shall abide under the shadow of the Almighty” (v. 1). “He” would refer to the believer, God's saint. The psalmist recognises the special relationship the believer has with his God. Having been redeemed and “called ... out of darkness into his marvellous light” (1 Peter 2:9b), believers are now God's special people. God's wrath has been lifted from us believers; the enmity between God and us has been removed by the atoning blood of Christ on the cross (which the Old Testament saints looked forward to by faith). We now have access to the most High, the Almighty, even the LORD, and can “therefore come boldly unto the throne of grace, that we may obtain

mercy, and find grace to help in time of need" (Hebrews 4:16). But this very blessed spiritual status also automatically makes us sworn-enemies with the world. Straightaway, we become the target of the world's hatred. "Marvel not, my brethren," the Bible tells us, "if the world hate you" (1 John 3:13). In other words, do not be surprised that if the world is provoked by the holy and impeccable demands of God's Word, it will also detest those who advocate and propagate God's Word.

Our "Hiding Place"

This spiritual reality is alluded to by the psalmist when he uses the expression "secret place". The Hebrew word translated as "secret" means "cover" or "hiding" – hence it denotes a hiding place, i.e. a place of protection. The psalmist is fully aware – and so must we who are discerning – that upon being born-again, we are entered into a formidable arena of spiritual conflict. There is an invisible warfare going on! Notwithstanding Christians' role as "peacemakers" (cf. Matthew 5:9), Jesus has warned his disciples that "In the world ye shall have tribulation: but be of good cheer; I have overcome the world" (John 16:33b). The Greek word for "tribulation" denotes being squeezed, pressured, compressed. This implies that Christians will have to endure troubles from "outside agents". The apostle Peter also attests to this fact: "Beloved, think it not strange concerning the fiery trial which is to try you, as though some strange thing happened unto you" (1 Peter 4:12). If anything, all these intimate an intensive, unrelenting spiritual conflict – which can be so intense that we will need to "dwell in" (i.e. resort continually to) a hiding place, which is readily available "in the secret place of the most High".

This thought is corroborated by the word "shadow", which literally means "shade" from the elements. So, figuratively speaking, the Almighty is our "shade" or defence from the hostile elements of our world around us. Incidentally, "the most High" is God's title referring to His supremacy while "the Almighty" draws attention to His power. Thus, He is the most Supreme in position, in power and in every degree. Indeed, He "is high above all nations, and his glory above the heavens. Who is like unto the LORD our God, who dwelleth on high, Who humbleth himself to behold the things that are in heaven, and in the earth!" (Psalm 113:4-6). To be able to find shelter in Him is to find safety at the highest level.

Object of Our Confidence

Oh, what great comfort! No wonder the psalmist can "say of the LORD, He is my refuge and my fortress" (v. 2a). He expresses his utmost confidence in God, whom he likens to a "fortress" – a stronghold that cannot be breached by any enemy. "If God be for us, who can be against us?" (Romans 8:31b). Besides, his invoking of the name of "the LORD" is also very telling. He invoked the sacred name of the covenantal God of Israel – "Yahweh" – which refers to the pre-existent, eternal God who can see the end from the beginning. While we cannot see beyond our present pressures and trials, the LORD knows the end of our paths. We can trust in Him whose counsel shall prevail over the "many devices in a man's heart" (Proverbs 19:21), thereby ruling and overruling the affairs of men (cf. Proverbs 16:9). Hence, "my God; in him will I trust" (v. 2b).

A note of reflection is in order here. While we sojourn here on earth as strangers

and pilgrims, we will face external pressures due to unexpected events, where we cannot see exactly what lies “around the corner”. All these can intimidate us, and press us into taking some hasty step or making some regrettable decision. In such times, we do well (like the psalmist) to put our confidence in the LORD God. May we not place our confidence in a world-class education system, an efficient government, influential and well-connected men of renown, material wealth, or even our own intellectual powers and shrewd abilities. It is no exaggeration to say that we Christians living in advanced and affluent societies (like Singapore and many first-world cities) can become easily captivated by all these. May our conviction be thus: “Some trust in chariots, and some in horses (which is a vain thing for safety): but we will remember the name of the LORD our God” (Psalm 20:7; cf. 33:17a).

Metaphorical Depictions of God’s Sure Deliverance

To drive home his utmost confidence in God’s sure deliverance, the psalmist employs the use of 4 metaphorical depictions.

Rescue of a Vulnerable Bird from Hunter (vv. 3-4)

The first picture depicted is one of a decisive rescue scene. An unwary bird was delivered “from the snare of the fowler” (v. 3a). The Hebrew word (*natsal*) for “deliver” here indicates that it was snatched away in the nick of time by its rescuer. This tells us that unbeknown to us, there are formidable, treacherous, malicious enemies who would want to harm us and even entrap us. They would secretly and subtly scheme against us who follow the truth. Well, the psalmist has this reassurance for us: God

shall “snatch us away” from the trap laid down by the workers of iniquity and those with hidden agenda. If we walk in God’s truth, not only will “The righteousness of the upright ... deliver them: but (also) transgressors shall be taken in their own naughtiness” (Proverbs 11:6). In other words, “Whoso diggeth a pit shall fall therein: and he that rolleth a stone, it will return upon him” (Proverbs 26:27)!

In fact, v. 4a renders a very graphic depiction of God’s deliverance of us – “He shall cover thee with his feathers, and under his wings shalt thou trust”. This figuratively refers to us being screened by gigantic wings surrounding us, as in a giant bird huddling and protecting small chicks under her enormous wings, keeping predators out so that they won’t become easy prey. We will be so sheltered that no wicked schemer can come near to harm us. Their schemes and devices can never penetrate God’s protective “wings” over us. The psalmist displays a little sense of mocking humour here. These crafty “fowlers” may be able to catch all sorts of vulnerable “birds” unawares, but their most sophisticated of “bird-traps” are no match when confronted by God’s powerful “wings” – they become a case of “predators-turned-prey” instead! Note that it is “his truth” (as revealed in God’s Word) that shall protect us (v. 4b). “He that walketh uprightly (i.e. according to God’s truth) walketh surely” (Proverbs 10:9a), for the LORD “shall keep thy foot from being taken” (Proverbs 3:26b). God’s deliverance is decisive indeed!

Preservation of a Soldier in Battle (vv. 5-7)

In vv. 5-7, grim terms are mentioned – “terror” (sudden alarm and dread), “arrow

that flieth" (a weapon of war), "pestilence" (deadly, infectious disease apparently due to piles of dead, rotting bodies left lying in the open at the end of a day's fighting, which pose great health hazard), "wasteth" (having a devastating effect), "thousand ... fall at thy side". All these are descriptions befitting a war-scene. The psalmist is here portraying a fierce, heated battleground with heavy casualties, where many soldiers are being wounded, cut down and killed. We are not saying that Christians are belligerent, aggressive people looking for a fight. But in our spiritual battle, we are at times confronted head-on by our enemies who are out to do us hurt. We are put on the defence. Notwithstanding, the LORD of hosts is able to preserve us in the heat of the battle, so much so that though "A thousand shall fall at thy side, and ten thousand at thy right hand; but it shall not come nigh thee" (v. 7).

We see an allusion to God's army in Old Testament times – in Joshua's time (cf. Joshua 10:7-11), in Gideon's time (cf. Judges 8:10-12), in David's time (cf. 2 Samuel 10:17-18), etc. Interestingly, we read little of casualties on the Israelites' side, except when there was sin in the camp (as in the case of Achan in the battle of Ai) [Joshua 7:1-5]. This was "because the LORD God of Israel fought for Israel" (Joshua 10:42b). Remember Gideon's army of 300 men (Judges 7:7a) against "the Midianites and the Amalekites and all the children of the east (that) lay along in the valley like grasshoppers for multitude" (Judges 12a)? While we read of no casualties among Gideon's 300 men, Scripture tells us that "there fell an hundred and twenty thousand men (of all the hosts of the children of the east) that drew sword" (Judges 8:10b). Literally, "a thousand" and "ten thousand", as it were, "shall fall at thy

side"! This is a powerful imagery of God's sure protection even in the heat of spiritual battle. The Lord knoweth them that are His. Truly, God's deliverance is unerring!

Security of the Habitation of the Just (vv. 9-10)

In the third metaphorical depiction of God's sure deliverance, the psalmist engages in a play of words. Because you make the LORD your "habitation" (v. 9b), i.e. you spend much time retreating in communion with God, He will make your "dwelling" (v. 10b) safe and "quiet from fear of evil" (Proverbs 1:33b). Of course, we do not put our confidence in the brick

"He (God) will
comprehensively deliver
upon (Him)"

and mortar of our house, but rather on the LORD who watches over our safe dwelling, though other dwellings may crumble or be "plagued". The Hebrew word for "plague" (v. 10) comes from the root verb (*naga*) which means "to strike". It hints at "something that happens suddenly and forcefully" and can refer to catastrophic strokes of nature, like natural disasters. After all, we know that earthquakes, tornadoes, hailstorms, floods, etc. are all manifestations of God's wrath and judgment on this sinful world. Yet God is certainly able to protect any house, according to His sovereign will, and withhold His Hand of judgment.

Even in the midst of judgments, He is selective over which houses to destroy or to plague, like He did in the land of Egypt while the children of Israel were being enslaved there. When the LORD "rained hail upon the land of Egypt ... the hail smote throughout all the land of Egypt all that was in the field, both man and beast; and the hail smote every herb of the field, and brake every tree of the field. Only in the land of Goshen, where the children of Israel were, was there no hail" (Exodus 9:23, 25-26). Furthermore, when the LORD plagued the Egyptians with "a thick darkness in all the land of Egypt three days: they saw not one another, neither rose any from his place for three

children, that no evil (whether natural or man-made) may encroach upon them outside of His jurisdiction. In short, "God is on the throne, and He is in control", whatever happens. A case in point was the gripping well-documented incident concerning Kokura, the Japanese city which was spared the second atomic bomb at the close of World War II. Hiroshima had been bombed; next on the list was supposedly Kokura. Somehow, due to a mysterious cloud obscuring the pilots' view, Nagasaki was targeted instead. Only a week later did news filter through that large groups of American prisoners-of-war (some of whom would have been believers or children of Christian parents)

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 over His afflicted child who "hath set his love
 upon him" and who "shall call upon (Him)."

days: but all the children of Israel had light in their dwellings" (Exodus 10:22-23). Truly, "The curse of the LORD is in the house of the wicked: but he blesseth the habitation of the just" (Proverbs 3:33).

The LORD is not a "hands-off" God who is so unconcerned about the affairs of the world that He just let nature take its course. Nor is He a God with limited power who could only watch helplessly when evil things happen. All things are planned and allowed by God. He can use events, circumstances, people; He can also intervene directly. In fact, He exerts himself in eagerly watching over His

children, that no evil (whether natural or man-made) may encroach upon them outside of His jurisdiction. In short, "God is on the throne, and He is in control", whatever happens. A case in point was the gripping well-documented incident concerning Kokura, the Japanese city which was spared the second atomic bomb at the close of World War II. Hiroshima had been bombed; next on the list was supposedly Kokura. Somehow, due to a mysterious cloud obscuring the pilots' view, Nagasaki was targeted instead. Only a week later did news filter through that large groups of American prisoners-of-war (some of whom would have been believers or children of Christian parents)

had earlier been moved by their Japanese captors to a concentration camp in Kokura! Coincidence? Nay, we are persuaded that it was due to God's special providence at work, which manifests God's deliverance as selective!

Safe-Keeping of a Traveller from Harm
(vv. 11-13)

In v. 11, we note that God shall "charge" (or give command to) his angels to "keep" (or guard) us in all our ways. This metaphorical portrayal of a traveller brings to mind the promise of God in preserving our "going out" and our "coming in"

(cf. Psalm 121:8). God's commitment to preserve His children's safe passage can even go to the extent of ensuring that they would not get hurt physically, if He so wills. Not one hair of our head shall perish without the Father's knowledge and permission (Luke 21:18; cf. Matthew 10:29-31). Hence, His angels "shall bear thee up in their hands, lest thou dash thy foot against a stone" (v. 12). However, this does not give us licence to expose ourselves to unwarranted and needless risks or dangers. Remember Jesus' firm rebuke of Satan's misuse of this promise? "Thou shalt not tempt the Lord thy God" (Matthew 4:6-7)! Nonetheless, in our service or work or needful travellings for the Lord's sake, if we encounter dangers to life and limb, it is God's prerogative to protect us from all harm and danger, if He so wills.

With that understanding, we should have no difficulty accepting the truth of v. 13: "Thou shalt tread upon (i.e. 'triumph over') the lion and adder: the young lion and the dragon shalt thou trample under feet (i.e. 'put under subjection')." Again, it must be reiterated that we don't go looking for trouble, that is, until trouble befalls us. No one should look for a lion or viper to tread upon. But if you are thrown into the lion's den, like Daniel when he was "entrapped" by the jealous officials in his righteous obedience to God's law, God can shut the lion's mouth on your behalf and subdue it (cf. Daniel 6:16-23). Or if you are shipwrecked and escaped to an island for shelter, like Paul in his last missionary journey when a venomous viper fastened on his hand without warning, God can see to it that no harm comes to you (cf. Acts 28:1-6). Or if in guarding a flock of sheep, like as in young David's case when a young lion snatched a lamb out of the flock, God

can grant you strength and wits to smite and slay it, literally "trampling it under feet" (cf. 1 Samuel 17:34-35). Admittedly, the creature "dragon" may pose a little bit of a problem to Bible-readers in general. Now, the word "dragon" can refer to dinosaur, representing the largest and most ferocious of land animals. Notwithstanding, the Almighty God would have no problem subduing that powerful creature (which He has created in the first place) as well in His commitment to safe-keep His child so that he can do His bidding. This metaphorical representation of a traveller's safe-keeping highlights God's deliverance as comprehensive!

Divine Reaffirmation of God's Sure Deliverance

Interestingly, an abrupt change in speaker is detected in vv. 14-16. It is no longer the psalmist speaking, but Someone who is the object of worship (v. 14a) and prayer (v. 15a), and who has the power to deliver (v. 15b) and grant salvation (v. 16b). Clearly, it is none other than the LORD God! Do realise that Psalms constitute poetry, and the grammatical rules governing poetry are more flexible than for prose. The grammatical rules of poetry allow for frequent switching of addresser and addressee, through the interchangeable use of respective pronouns (the context being key to understanding respective sections of a piece of poetry) – quite unlike a narrative account, where there are strict rules governing structure and usage.

Divine Interest in Believers' Deliverance

Apparently, God is here reaffirming and putting His seal upon all that the psalmist has boldly declared earlier. He not only reiterates His commitment to

deliver, but also emphasises the conditions precipitating His sure deliverance. He will decisively, unerringly, selectively and comprehensively deliver His afflicted child who "hath set his love upon (Him)" (v. 14a) and who "shall call upon (Him)" (v. 15a). The conditions required of such who will be delivered are that he delights in communing with God and meditating on His law day and night, and that he cries out to God "in every thing by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving" (Philippians 4:6). God in turn reassures such a one of His favourable response.

It is instructive to note that God uses intensive verbs in describing His actions. Now, in Hebrew language usage, besides the plain form of a verb, there is also an intensive form of the same root verb. For example, the intensive form of "kill" is "slaughter", and the intensive form of "eat" is "consume". Four times in this last section of Psalm 91, God's actions are captured in intensive verbs ["deliver", "set on high" (v. 14), "deliver", "honour" (v. 15)], which have the effect of reiterating and reaffirming His sure deliverance.

Divine Undertaking of Believers'

Deliverance

Of note is that in this psalm alone, three different Hebrew words are used for "deliver". The first (*natsal*) has been mentioned in v. 3. The second Hebrew word (*palat*) for "deliver" (in v. 14a) means "cause to escape". That is to say, God will provide a way out for us. When the chip is down, He "will with the temptation also make a way to escape, that ye may be able to bear it" (1 Corinthians 10:13b). The third Hebrew word (*chalats*) translated as "deliver" (v. 15b) has the idea of "equipping

to strengthen", thereby indicating that God can so strengthen us in our trials as to make us prevail over woes and foes. This triple use of the word "deliver" not only signals to us the various means God has at His disposal to deliver us, but also reaffirms God's commitment to see to our sure deliverance.

This brings us to our last verse: "With long life (literally 'length of days') will I satisfy him (i.e. 'cause him to have enough'), and shew him (i.e. 'cause him to see') my salvation" (v. 16). Well, not all godly saints get to live to a ripe old age, for sure. But God will grant to us sufficient length of days in our limited lifespan to fulfil all of His wondrous will for our lives. And in the process, He will cause us to personally experience His "salvation" – not so much as in the salvific sense of the word (since we have already experienced God's saving grace upon believing), but rather as in the sense of victory and deliverance!

Conclusion

Dear saints of God, the LORD, who is "the most High" and "the Almighty", is also our heavenly Father who "as a father pitieth his children, so the LORD pitieth them that fear him" (Psalm 103:13). He "knoweth our frame" (Psalm 103:14a), and in His deliverance of His afflicted children, He not only undertakes to secure them (cf. "set on high"), but He will also show up the weight of truth to be on their side (cf. "honour"), thereby vindicating their trust in Him. Truly, safe is the saint who dwells continually in the secret place of the most High, He being "a very present help in trouble". And wise is the Christian who makes communion with God an abiding daily affair in his life. Amen.

The Saint's Confidence

Prabhudas Koshy

“God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble” (Psalm 46:1).

Psalm 46 has been known as “Luther’s Psalm”. It was Martin Luther’s habit to dwell upon the Psalms when troubles engulfed him. In 1527, Martin Luther faced some of the greatest difficulties of his life. During this period, much of the European continent was affected by the Black Plague. Germany was also not spared from that epidemic. Luther’s son fell ill and was on the brink of death. Soon, Luther himself fell sick. In the midst of these personal conflicts and the great

battle of Reformation, Luther would call unto his co-labourers, “Come, let us sing the 46th Psalm.” He loved contemplating the promises of Psalm 46.

Luther’s heart was instructed by the words of Psalm 46 to put his confidence in God when dangers and disasters befell him. Like the psalmist, Luther too wanted his disheartened friends of the Reformation not to be weary and not to give up their fight of faith. He wanted his fellow men to find their confidence in God. So, he wrote his famous hymn, “A mighty fortress”, based on Psalm 46.

Psalm 46:1 serves as an instruction on how God's people ought to possess an indefatigable faith in God, even when they are encircled by terrors and troubles. The psalmist is not only an example of unfaltering faith, but also an encourager who exhorts fellow believers to put their confidence in God. The psalmist's confession of God's goodness towards His people is remarkably invigorating. He teaches us to embolden ourselves in times of our trials by making three assertions about God.

God is Our Refuge

The first truth that we should affirm in the midst of our troubles is that "God is our refuge". Some have built for themselves what appear to be well-fortified castles with tall, strong walls and thick iron gates, guarded by hosts of strong men with powerful weapons. Yet time and time again, such man-made refuge had been breached by enemies and are subjected to all kinds of perils. A far superior shelter is the LORD God for all who trust in Him. He is their impregnable refuge. Taking shelter in God is far better than running into man-made shelters. God is our safe shelter!

God alone is His saints' unfailing shelter. Only in God can we find true security. He is our retreat beyond the reach of our adversaries. He is our hiding place. So, let us quickly run into Him. In prayer let us wait on Him. "The eternal God is thy refuge, and underneath are the everlasting arms" (Deuteronomy 33:27).

God is Our Strength

The second truth that God's people must affirm always is that God is their "strength". When they feel weak and defenceless, God is the source of their strength. They can come to Him, and

renew their strength. God's omnipotence provides His people with assurance and motivation to endure their troubles and accomplish all that God has called them to do. Let His people believe that God's strength is their strength. Let them arise in confidence to fulfil all His good purposes, even when troubles assail them. God is our unfailing strength!

All who trust in the Lord's strength can surely say, "Therefore I take pleasure in infirmities, in reproaches, in necessities, in persecutions, in distresses for Christ's sake: for when I am weak, then am I strong" (2 Corinthians 12:10). His saints may be troubled on every side, but they have no need to despair. The Lord's word to us all is: "My grace is sufficient for thee: for my strength is made perfect in weakness." So let us joyfully say, "Most gladly therefore will I rather glory in my infirmities, that the power of Christ may rest upon me" (2 Corinthians 12:9).

God is Our Help

The third solemn truth that God's people must affirm constantly is that God is "a very present help in trouble." When trouble is near His people, God is nearer to them than the trouble. He never withdraws Himself from His troubled people. He draws near to His children in their trouble. God is closer to His people than their nearest and dearest family member or friend. He will be with them as their Help. His presence will be nearer than the trouble. He will never be absent from His people. Troubles confronting God's people are not a sign of God's abandonment of His people. Rather, they are an opportunity bestowed by God for them to experience the grandeur of His presence. Come, let us sing the forty-sixth Psalm!



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Bible Trivia - Exodus 32

Sarah Yong

Read this passage from the Bible, and then rearrange the following statements in the correct order by writing the numbers 2 to 9 in the blanks provided. (The first statement has been numbered for you.)

- ___ When Moses, together with Joshua his minister, descended from the mount carrying the tables of the testimony, they heard the noise of singing from the camp.
- ___ The LORD, being omniscient, saw the corruption of the people and was so angered that He wanted to consume the people.
- ___ He called for those who were on the LORD's side to come forth, and he sent them throughout the camp to slay the wicked, and 3,000 men fell by the sword.
- 1. While Moses was in the mount communing with the LORD forty days and nights, the people grew impatient and they asked Aaron to make them gods.
- ___ But Moses pleaded with God to turn from His wrath and to remember the covenant He had made with Abraham, Isaac and Israel.
- ___ The LORD instructed him to continue to lead the people forward to the Promised Land and gave assurance that His presence would go before him.
- ___ Instead of rebuking them for violating God's commandments, Aaron gathered their golden earrings, fashioned a golden calf and built an altar to worship it.
- ___ At the sight of the graven image and the sin of the people, Moses became very angry and threw the tables of stone to the ground, and then he went to destroy the golden calf.
- ___ Moses returned to the LORD and offered to bear the punishment of the people, but the LORD reminded him that every man would be judged according to his own sins.

In Exodus 20, the LORD had spoken to the people and given them the Ten Commandments. Which two commandments had they broken by worshipping the golden calf? Write them in the boxes below.

ANSWERS TO BIBLE TRIVIA - EXODUS 31 (VOLUME 17, ISSUE 3, P. 27)

- | | | | |
|------------|--------------|------------|-----------------|
| 1. Judah | 2. knowledge | 3. brass | 4. wood |
| 5. Aholiab | 6. priests | 7. Sabbath | 8. cut off from |
| 9. six | 10. six | 11. stone | 12. Sinai |

ERIC HENRY LIDDELL

FROM AN OLYMPIAN TO A MISSIONARY (1902 – 1945) - PART II

(Retold from “Living 4 God” by Kath Dredge, published by Day One Publications;
“For the Glory: Eric Liddell’s Journey from Olympic Champion to Modern Martyr”
by Duncan Hamilton, published by Penguin Press)

Retold by Jenny Lok Illustrated by Andronicus Koshy

In July 1925, a tearful crowd at Edinburgh bade a fond farewell to Eric Liddell who was leaving Scotland for China. After a fortnight’s travelling, he was reunited with his family in the French part of the city of Tientsin. By then, there was great political instability in the land; much of China was taken over by Japanese and European people. As a result, the Chinese hated the foreigners.

Undeterred, Eric set about the task of teaching science and training the students in sports. Some of these college students went on to break records at athletic meets. Occasionally, Eric would participate in some athletic events because he still loved to run. On one occasion, he took part in an athletic race in the port city of Darien, where he was to run in the 400-metre race at 2.40pm and then had to catch a boat back to Manchuria at 3.10pm. Immediately after the race, a taxi would be waiting to take him to the port in about 20 minutes. However, due to some delay, when he arrived at the wharf, the boat was leaving. How disappointed he was! Just at that moment, the wind pushed the boat slightly towards him. Without hesitation, Eric threw his bag onto the wooden deck before taking an “enormous leap” into the boat. For this feat, he was nicknamed: “The Flying Scotsman”.



In his work among the Chinese people, Eric did not forget that it was important to speak their language well so that he could minister to them more

effectively. So twice weekly, he and another staff were tutored in the Chinese language. To familiarise himself with its Chinese characters, he studied the Bible and the mission hymn book in Chinese. Eric was enthusiastic in his teaching and in fulfilling all his assigned responsibilities. Once in a while, his entire family had the pleasure of spending time together in Peitaiho, a beachside bungalow that belonged to the London Missionary Society (LMS), where they enjoyed swimming, hunting and picnics. Though Eric enjoyed such sweet and memorable times with his family, he did not forget the fact that, in some corner of Tientsin, there were the poor who lived in shacks and earned their living as “coolies, carpet weavers, or manual labourers on the roads”. His heart yearned to reach out to them with the Gospel.

Throughout his mission work in Tientsin, Eric had always looked up to his father as an example of the model missionary. James Liddell's favourite Bible passage, based on the Sermon on the Mount (Matthew 5-7) influenced him a great deal. Matthew 5:48 – “Be ye therefore perfect, even as your Father which is in heaven is perfect” – summed up Eric's aim in life, which he knew would be impossible to achieve without God's help. He truly determined to follow Christ. Naturally, James Liddell was happy that his son could serve alongside him. However, he and his wife Mary had to return to Scotland due to his poor health. Though Eric missed his parents very much, he continued to serve in Tientsin with great diligence and dedication. He was kind to everyone and had a good sense of humour. Many knew him or had heard about him. However, Eric had a secret prayer in his heart – he needed a wife to serve together with him, someone who would be his “soul mate, best friend, confidant, and unconditional supporter”, the way his mother had been to his father. God's provision came sooner than expected. Eric met Florence Jean Mackenzie (also known as Flo), whose parents were missionaries from Canada. Shortly after their engagement, Flo returned to Canada to be trained as a nurse.

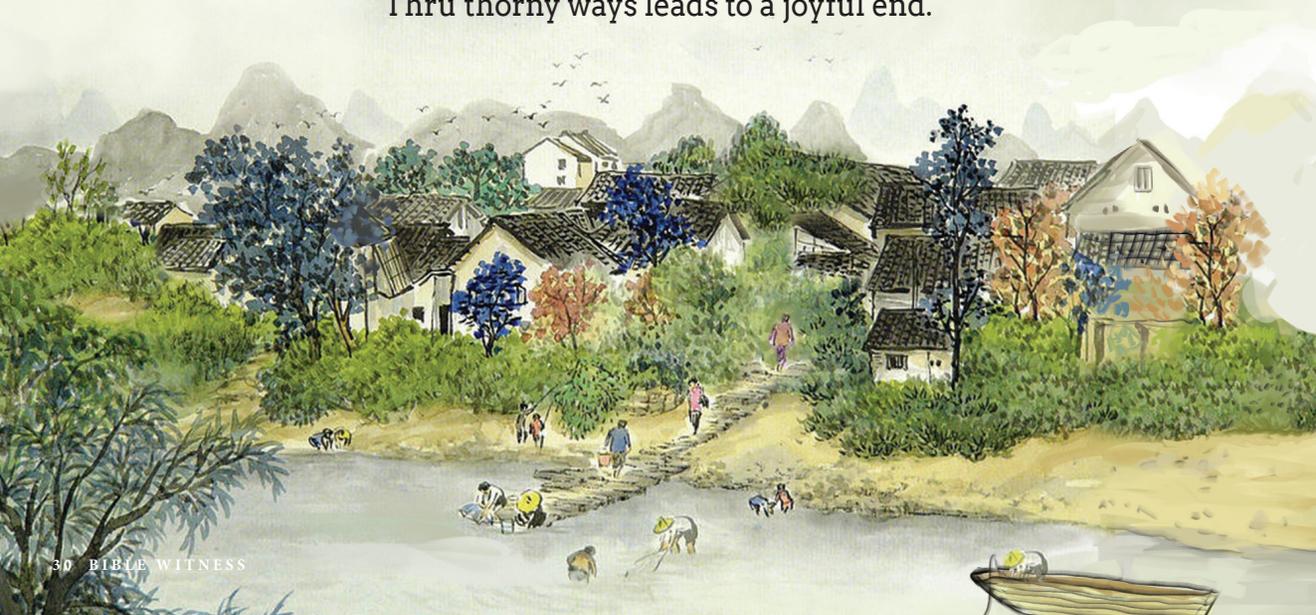
Four years later in March 1934, Eric and Florence were married in Tientsin's Union Church, where they had first met. To Florence, Eric was a man who was “so understanding of other people. He always seemed to be able to put himself in the shoes of somebody else”. Above all, he never failed to spend the early hours of the morning in quiet private study of the Bible. Less than 2 years after their marriage, Eric and Florence had their first child, a daughter whom they christened Patricia. This was followed by another girl, named Heather, in 1937. Prior to Heather's birth, the LMS

had wanted Eric to go to Siaochang (which was his childhood home and his father's previous missionary station) to do evangelistic work in its rural areas. Eric was not ready to go as he felt the Anglo-Chinese College in Tientsin needed him more. Yet after "much prayerful consideration", he left for Siaochang (after 12 years in Tientsin) when he realised it was God's will for him. Living for God was far more important than living for himself. However, Florence and their 2 young daughters had to stay behind in Tientsin, because of much unrest and violence in Siaochang due to the Japanese invasion.

Life in Siaochang was tough, with food shortage and overcrowded hospitals. Not discouraged at all, Eric set about to work among the Chinese in the countryside, carrying in his rucksack the Bible, a prayer book and a compass. His desire was to spread God's Word and at the same time, try to understand the sorrows, heartaches and needs of the people. To Eric, it was "wonderful to feel one with the people". As for the Siaochang folks, Eric was seen as a trusted friend, a good comforter in times of grief, a problem-solver, etc. He was no stranger to them because his father was much loved and respected there. Like his father, Eric was very thorough and creative in his work. He would draw maps of places he needed to visit, even noting the shortcuts, which later helped him to escape from the Japanese patrols! He also came up with charts and schedules to facilitate his visits to all the churches to minister God's Word to them.

Eric also loved to teach the Chinese people hymns which speak of God's comfort. His favourite was "Be Still, My Soul", written in 1752 by the German Katharina von Schlegel, a Lutheran. He would constantly encourage them with the last line of the first stanza, which goes like this:

Be still, my soul – thy best, thy heavenly Friend
Thru thorny ways leads to a joyful end.



He did this because much of the people's life was filled with poverty, starvation, violence and intense sufferings due to war. Despite the inconvenience and difficulty of travelling to meet his congregation (because the Japanese soldiers often conducted spot checks), Eric never behaved rudely or showed hatred towards the soldiers. Instead, he was tactful, warm and cheerful, which helped to avoid any ugly scenes between him and the soldiers. Sometimes, he would even show photographs of his family (which he always kept in his wallet), as a way to get the less aggressive Japanese soldiers to talk to him about their common love and longing for home. A few of them became friendly towards him after that! Eric truly lived out Matthew 5:44 in his life – "But I say unto you, Love your enemies, bless them that curse you, do good to them that hate you, and pray for them which despitefully use you, and persecute you". To Eric, the Japanese were like "lost sheep" who needed Christ to save them. Eventually, Eric was accepted as a minister who "tramped and cycled the Siaochang roads endlessly, never missing a church service".

Subsequently, he was also appointed as acting superintendent of the hospital. This turned out to be a blessing as Eric could then make short trips to Tientsin to collect medical supplies and Chinese currency, and at the same time visit Florence and their 2 young daughters. However, in early 1939, he had a frightful encounter while on his return trip from Tientsin to Siaochang. He learnt that a man, slashed on the face by a Japanese officer, was left to die in a shack. When Eric was brought to the badly wounded man, he saw that his face was wrapped up in dirty rags. He brought the man in a cart through a very long and dangerous journey to the mission hospital in Siaochang. The man survived the ordeal but his face was permanently scarred. Nevertheless, he was very touched by Eric's compassion and willingness to risk his own life to save him. As a result, he became a Christian. It turned out that he was an artist and later, he painted pictures to express his thankfulness to God, his Heavenly Father. Eric rejoiced in the blessing of winning a soul for Christ ...



SCENES FROM 5TH MISSIONARY CONFERENCE (KUCHING, SARAWAK, 5 - 9 JUNE 2017)



THAT THE TRUTH OF THE GOSPEL MIGHT CONTINUE WITH US

GALATIANS 2:5

