

# Being full of the Holy Ghost

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Let us pray.

*Dear heavenly Father, most gracious and holy Lord, we praise thy name, Lord, and we thank thee for thy faithfulness. Lord, how faithful and just and holy thou art. How faithful thou hast been in thy healing across our people. How faithful thou hast been to preserve our freedoms, to preserve us, Lord, in thy grace. Lord, as we have those that are not with us today, I pray that thou would come to them mightily also, that, Lord, you would prepare our hearts now for the receiving of thy Word and that thy Holy Spirit would commune with us and fill us this day, this hour, the hour to come. Oh Lord, I pray as we are much an afflicted people and have many things on the horizons, many things in our sight when seen would trouble us. Lord, we ask today that you would come to our souls, that you would meet us here with thy power, that you would take us away from all that so easily besets us and, Lord, may you empower us to lay it aside. Lord, we ask for thy presence now to anoint this message, that, Lord, thou would bring it forth in thy power, in thy love and for the glory of your name. In Jesus' name I pray. Amen.*

The apostle Paul said in Ephesians five. I don't know if he enjoined the people to be filled with the Holy Spirit. I don't know if it was a command to be filled with the Holy Spirit, but I do know that it is something that the child of God longs for. It is something the child of God knows that it is his closest place to heaven here on earth. It is a place when the Lord takes you away from the afflictions, from the fears, from the torments to see him. We are enjoined in the Word to be filled with the Spirit.

I believe it was more of a blessing Paul spoke about enjoining the people of God to be filled with the Holy Spirit, as I would love to say the same to you today. May all of you be filled with the Holy Spirit, filled in this hour, filled in this minute. As we come to the Word and as we are brought to this place, there is a dire, dire need for our Savior. There is a dire, dire need for our Savior to come to our souls. We have so much going on. We have so much affliction. We have so many things that are near on the horizon for this people. We know that our only comfort is when we are filled with the Holy Ghost, because, see, the Holy Ghost testifies of Christ. He leads us beside still waters. He makes us to rest in the green pastures that Christ has prepared for his people before the foundation of the world. And we also know that in these times we have this old man in us. We have a fallen nature. And that fallen nature is so quick to believe the lies of

Satan, so quick to entertain them, so quick to have thoughts of unbelief of our precious Lord who has been faithful time and time and time again. And over and over in the lives of the people of God he proves his faithfulness.

And I am not saying all of this to put guilt on the people of God. I am saying all this to exalt the faithfulness of our Lord. He is faithful when we are not. And that is a comforting thing.

When we are filled with the Holy Ghost he removes doubt. He removes fear. He removes the uncertainty of this world, the events of this world, the things in our life. And although we may not see the end of whatever it is that we are in, it is the Holy Ghost that leads us to apprehend faith, to apprehend the gift of faith when given from above. It is the Holy Ghost that testifies to us that we are the children of God. It is a blessed thing to be able to judge all things.

Paul said:

“But he that is spiritual judgeth all things, yet he himself is judged of no man.”<sup>1</sup>

That is going to be hard to believe in light of the passage we look at today, in light of the things we see today. I want to take you to the end of Stephen’s life if you will turn with me over to Acts chapter seven and look at verse 55 which will be our focal verse today. We will ask the Lord’s blessing on it. There is a lot of depth in these last moments of his on earth.

“But he...”

That being Stephen.

“being full of the Holy Ghost...”<sup>2</sup>

And I tell you, dear ones, there is no other way. There is no other way for this one who is under the power, under the affliction, under the gnashing of teeth of his enemy.

And we know that this was a physical gnashing. But I put forth to you today there was some spiritual gnashing going on, too, the wickedness in high places. As Satan stirs up the anger of his minions, as the people willfully follow him there is Stephen. Stephen is sitting there and as 54 tells us, after Stephen had preached a message to them, and he began back in Abraham and he went all the way until the incarnation of Christ and he put forth before them what their forefathers did to the prophets and he put forth to them the tyranny, the anger, the bitterness that they have had against the Messiah. And as we come to the end of what he had to say he says in 52:

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<sup>1</sup> 1 Corinthians 2:15.

<sup>2</sup> Acts 7:55.

“Which of the prophets have not your fathers persecuted? and they have slain them which shewed before of the coming of the Just One; of whom ye have been now the betrayers and murderers.”<sup>3</sup>

And that is the thing. When the gospel comes forth with that kind of power it has two effects. It is a two edged sword. If it cuts to the very sunder of the anger and the bitterness and Satan comes and communes with that individual, we have what it turns out to be here, a reckless abandon of who you are as they turn to wild animals. And they went and they fell upon Stephen and they gnashed him with their teeth.

But it also has another effect to the child of God. It humbles the child of God and the child of God says, “Yes, Lord, it was me. It was I that put you on that cross. It was I that has denied you over and over again. It is my sin that you laid down your life for. It is my denial and I have denied you over and over again.”

As I have told you. He is faithful even when we are not.

Back to 55. It says:

“But he, being full of the Holy Ghost...”<sup>4</sup>

And you have got to understand that, dear ones. This isn't a potential, this isn't a could this happen to the children of God. Stephen is no different here than any one of us in this room that are God's children. This is the way we apprehend and we can steadfastly look into heaven, being full of the Holy Ghost. How else steadfastly means firm and not looking anywhere else, not looking at the trial, not looking at the affliction, not looking at the circumstance, not looking at the situation going on in our country. None of that. Being full of Holy Ghost, this is the gift of the Lord to his people.

I told you. These are the times we long for here on earth, because those times is the only time there is peace. Those times is the only time that we can function in this life.

Later the apostle Paul would say:

“For to be carnally minded is death.”<sup>5</sup>

To be taken up in this world, to live upon this world, to be caught up in the things of this world, there is one end for that. It is death. Oh, it is death. It is a dead feeling. And for the child of God it is deadness in his soul.

“For to be carnally minded is death; but to be spiritually minded is life and peace.”<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> Acts 7:52.

<sup>4</sup> Acts 7:55.

<sup>5</sup> Romans 8:6.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid.

That is Romans 8:6. Life and peace, to be spiritually minded. Being spiritually minded is being full of the Holy Ghost. These are the times we long for down here because we know what it is like to be full of ourselves. We live this life in that kind of struggle every day.

But looking steadfastly into heaven he saw the glory of God. There is no other way to see it. There is no other way to see the glory of God in your trial today, in your affliction today, in the hurting that you have today, in the life.

As hard as this life is, there is no other way to see the glory of God in it until the Holy Spirit comes and says to your soul, "It is good."

It is good because it is from the hand of the one who loves you. It is from the hand of the one who nurtures you. It is from the hand of the one who cares for you.

"But he, being full of the Holy Ghost, looked up stedfastly into heaven, and saw the glory of God, and Jesus standing on the right hand of God."<sup>7</sup>

Standing, not sitting, standing. Standing in power, presiding over the whole situation that Stephen is going through, presiding with his righteous indignation over the ones who are doing it, presiding with his care, his love and his grace for Stephen.

You tell me, dear ones, how someone in the midst of being chewed on like wild animals could have such a peaceful spirit, could have such a... and this is 56.

"And said, Behold, I see the heavens opened."<sup>8</sup>

There is only one way those heavens are opened, being full of the Holy Ghost, being led of the Holy Ghost, being shown the heavens opened by the Holy Ghost. He saw the Son of Man. We are going to talk about that phrase, the Son of Man standing on the right hand of God.

And so we have for us today in those two verses we have what being full of the Holy Ghost is. We have how the Lord in his faithfulness comes to his children in their time of need.

And you say, "Well, you know, Stephen's need was much more dire than mine."

Really? Can you say that? Same soul anguish. All the trials and things that we have that are peculiar to us, they are designed for us. They are designed for every one of us in there. The Lord tells us he won't give us more than we can bear. He will make a way to escape.

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<sup>7</sup> Ibid.

<sup>8</sup> Acts 7:56.

Well, Stephen can't escape. He is going to be stoned. He escaped. His soul escaped. His soul escaped that mighty hour of great torment, because he is full of the Holy Ghost. He is full of God. And this is, dear ones, how we live by that, being full of the Holy Ghost, having the Holy Ghost reside within us.

Now we are going to look at this in fullness. As we look back at 54 again, we said we talked in the beginning about Stephen. He delivered this sermon. He told them from the beginning and he told them what they did and he told them how they betrayed Christ and how they were murderers and he ended in 53 by saying:

“Who have received the law by the disposition of angels, and have not kept it”<sup>9</sup>

See, you are going to see that strand going through here, too, the law mongers. That was the cutting thing. Are you accusing these people that they cannot keep the law? Their whole life is built on keeping the law. Their whole life is built on what they do for God. Their whole life is built on what they do, what they have done and what they will do to earn the merit of Christ, well, of God.

“When they heard these things, they were cut to the heart.”<sup>10</sup>

And cut to the heart, the Holy Ghost would tell us, that it cut them deeply not in a physical way, but they were cut so deep that their madness, the madness and the hatred and the anger for Christ and his anointed was unbridled in them. It cut them so deep and it went to deep to them that they could be accused of these things, that they could be lumped in together as a murderer or a betrayer, because, remember, they rejected Christ. So this was all a lie to them and they had this one standing in front of them blaspheming over and over saying the things that they knew they hadn't done. This is the effect of the gospel on those who are hardened. There is no effect, no saving effect. And their conscience is seared with a hot iron.

And I want you to understand, because experientially, the experience we have in life when we come to a passage like this, I want you to understand that as sober as I can put this, in their minds they did what they did for God. Understand that. All that Saul will do, he does for God, he believes he is. This is the zeal, the heinousness, this is the wickedness in high places. This is the deception that Satan does in this world that people do these things for religion. They hate Christ's name for religion's sake. But they believe in their God that they worship, but they are blinded. They are blinded and it pleased the Lord to do so.

When they were cut to the heart they gnashed on him with their teeth. And then we have our focus here.

“But he, being full of the Holy Ghost.”<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> Acts 7:53.

<sup>10</sup> Acts 7:54.

<sup>11</sup> Acts 7:55.

This is what I mean. Do you see the direness of this situation?

Now, you know, we are designed to really think about the things that the Lord brings into our own life. We are thinking people. The Lord has designed us that way. He has told us many times to remember things. But, you know, when things happen to us in God's providence as we heard last week, it comes into our lives and it permeates our lives. Everything that the Lord brings into our lives is by his god and purpose of his will and it is perfect.

Sometimes we don't agree with those things and those cross providences, as we would call them, we seem to introvert and look and say, "Woe is me." Or we say, "Lord, I don't know if this is right for my life."

Stephen is in one of those situations. But, see, the Lord didn't leave Stephen and that is what I want you to understand today. This isn't potentially, this isn't will the Lord leave me? But the Lord doesn't leave his children in their time of need.

As all of us have things on the horizon, as we are going through them right now, it is a gospel truth throughout all of the Word, that the Lord is an ever present help to his people. We doubt that help and we keep doubting whether it is going to come or maybe this time it will run out. Maybe this time I have sinned it away, as we put ourselves back under the law. Maybe this time I have done something so heinous and so ... that the Lord won't come because I did this. And we put ourselves right back under the same law that these guys are going to persecute Stephen.

"But he, being full of the Holy Ghost, looked up stedfastly into heaven."<sup>12</sup>

And how could you do that, Stephen? Because Christ is the author and the finisher of our faith. And the Holy Ghost had revealed to him Christ. How could he see Christ but by Christ? How could he see Christ standing on the right hand of God but through the eyes of faith? How can we see the glory of God but through the eyes of faith?

See, now there is always a prerequisite to us trying to figure it out on our own and it always comes back to this, doesn't it? It doesn't matter how many messages the Lord lays upon my heart to preach up here, it all comes back to the same thing. We are in dependency upon our Lord. We live in dire need of him every minute, every hour of the day and it is designed that way. The Lord has designed it that way for his glory. And he won't be robbed of that glory and he will continue to show the child of God and humble him over and over to show them his dependency upon his Lord.

Sometimes we think we have learned something because we have been brought through something and we say, "You know? The Lord taught me that." And lo and behold he brings it again and tries us again and all of the sudden we have forgotten how faithful the Lord has been over and over again, how faithful he has been, what he has done in every

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<sup>12</sup> Ibid.

day. He is in every day for the child of God. And he is there giving more grace and he is there healing and he is there as an ever present help.

But, you know, through our blindness, through our hardness of heart, we don't see it. That is why we are dependent upon him so that we can look steadfastly into the heavens, so that we can see the glory of God, so that we can see him standing on the right hand of God ruling all things under his feet, all things for the good of his people. That is what he is standing and in power, such great power over all of the things that beset us this morning. And he said in his testimony:

“Behold, I see the heavens opened, and the Son of man.”<sup>13</sup>

Now don't make any mistake why he said that. That was words they could identify with. They understood the Son of man was something that David had mentioned, Daniel had mentioned years before. They had understood that terminology that the Son of man meant the Messiah. But, see, they rejected the Messiah. Stephen, as he is being gnashed on with his teeth, he looks up into heaven and his testimony is Christ. His testimony is, “I see the Messiah. I see him. I see the Lord reigning. I see Jesus, this one that you have rejected, the one that you killed.”

Now, understand the anger going on in this, because right now all they hear from Stephen is utter blasphemy. Everything out of Stephen's mouth is blasphemy to them. This isn't the Messiah. We told you it wasn't Messiah. And now you say you see him in heaven?

“Behold, I see the heavens opened, and the Son of man standing on the right hand of God.”<sup>14</sup>

And what effect did that have on them? Well, certainly Stephen, if you see the Son of God then everybody there will see the Son of God, because can't we live by the faith of others? Can't we see the same things that others see? No, we can't. Because, see, it is a personal thing. The Lord comes unto his own. He comes to them. He meets them where they are. He takes them. He puts them on his beast. He takes them back to Jerusalem. He takes them back and he nourishes their wounds. He nourishes, but it is individual. The Church has many that make it up. But every one of those in that church, in that spiritual body will have a relationship with the Lord. He must meet them where they are and he does and he seeks them out.

Then they cried, this is verse 57.

“Then they cried out with a loud voice, and stopped their ears.”<sup>15</sup>

See, the Jewish... in the Jewish law and in one of their customs they were taught in the Talmud, they were taught in the synagogues that if you heard something that was bad, if

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<sup>13</sup> Acts 7:56.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid.

<sup>15</sup> Acts 7:57.

you heard something that was bad, you were supposed to stick your fingers in your ears and pull the flap of our ear down with your thumb. That was so you couldn't hear it, because, remember, the Jews were all about outward, nothing about the inward. Not all the Jews, I should say, the Pharisees, the Sadducees.

“Then they cried out with a loud voice, and stopped their ears.”<sup>16</sup>

Because they couldn't hear this blasphemy that was coming from Stephen's mouth as Stephen exalted his Lord. And, you know, there are many in our life that don't like to hear that either. You want to see somebody squirm? Exalt Christ's name. You want to... as people tell you, oh, you did this good or, boy, you have got a beautiful family and you tell them it is all of him. You tell him the gifts you have are from the Lord and they are his. You want to see some looks? You want to see some people who put their nose up and go off?

“Then they cried out with a loud voice, and stopped their ears, and ran upon him with one accord.”<sup>17</sup>

Well, what are you going to do? What are you going to do with this one who had to have the heavens opened? Well, we are going to go back to the law again. What does the law say to do?

“And cast him out of the city.”<sup>18</sup>

Because the Levitical law and the law that was given in Deuteronomy said that anybody who blasphemes the name of God had to be thrown out of the city. And they had to be taken away from where everyone was and then they were stoned.

“And cast him out of the city, and stoned him: and the witnesses laid down their clothes at a young man's feet, whose name was Saul.”<sup>19</sup>

So they really got into how angry they were. And keep in mind they are doing this for God. They are doing this out of God's law. They are doing this out of what they believed was right in religion. And they took Stephen out and they took off their upper garment, because they wanted to be able throw that stone a little bit harder. And they took off those upper garments and they gave them to a young man that is called Saul here even though he was probably 30 years old. And his name was Saul and they asked him to hold the garments. And Saul did.

And as he held them, verse 59 says:

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<sup>16</sup> Ibid.

<sup>17</sup> Ibid.

<sup>18</sup> Acts 7:58.

<sup>19</sup> Ibid.



“And they stoned Stephen, calling upon God, and saying, Lord Jesus, receive my spirit.”<sup>20</sup>

Do you know what that one is, dear ones? Do you know what that is? That is assurance. That is assurance that his Lord is in heaven ruling all things for his good. Do you know what that is? That is him at rest.

You know, I have read this passage I don't know how many times. I remember as a young man thinking to myself: How can he be this calm when he has got rocks going in the side of his head? How can you sit there and be beaten with rocks as they are pelting your head and be of so much grace? Because I didn't understand the Lord's rest then I didn't understand the power of the Holy Ghost. I am starting to understand it now.

It is an amazing thing. It is an amazing thing when the Lord comes in his power. It is just ... it is a peace which passes all understanding, because we don't understand how it came so quickly and came so powerfully. And this is the first one of the three things Stephen does that is identical to what Christ did on the cross.

As he yelled and cried out to the Father to receive his spirit, Stephen looks up and sees the Lord Jesus reigning over the situation, coming with power to his soul. And he called upon him and he said, “Receive my spirit.”

We have a lot of fears about death. We have a lot of worries about what our final moments will be on this earth. You know, I keep looking in this Word and I keep trying to find those that passed from their last moments here on earth that had great trepidation in their soul. I haven't been able to find any like that. The Lord meets his people. The Lord has provided for his own here and he has provided peace.

“Stephen, calling upon God, and saying, Lord Jesus, receive my spirit. And he kneeled down, and cried with a loud voice.”<sup>21</sup>

There is the second way that takes us back to the cross as Christ exclaimed with a loud voice. And then Stephen said something remarkable. He says:

“Lord, lay not this sin to their charge.”<sup>22</sup>

And, you know, the Lord prayed something like that from the cross. He said:

“Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do.”<sup>23</sup>

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<sup>20</sup> Acts 7:59.

<sup>21</sup> Acts 7:59-60.

<sup>22</sup> Acts 7:60.

<sup>23</sup> Luke 23:34.

And I have always maintained, I have always believed that Jesus said those things with his own in mind, because he had just said he does not pray for the world. I don't believe he did. I believe Stephen is in the same boat here when he said:

“Lord, lay not this sin to their charge.”<sup>24</sup>

But let's entertain the thought that maybe he was. Maybe he was praying for everyone there. You know, there is a little passage there that the Lord tells us to love our enemies and I tell you. It is impossible. It is truly impossible. It is impossible on this earth to love the enemies of Christ and to love our own enemies. Once again, we are dependent. We are dependent upon being full of the Holy Ghost for those times, as we are in all of life. But as Stephen said:

“Lord, lay not this sin to their charge.”<sup>25</sup>

It was a great act of love, but it wasn't his love. It wasn't Stephen's love. It was the love of Christ for another one of his children that were there. And this is the one that gets me, because I see how he took care of Stephen. I see how he nurtured Stephen in his last hours. I see how he poured his love upon Stephen and even how the sin.

“And when he had said this, he fell asleep.”<sup>26</sup>

And such peaceful words for the child of God to know that falling asleep means when he wakes up, he wakes up into Christ. He wakes up and he is known of the Father and he knows and now his soul is where the Lord is. And what a peaceful time that is.

“And when he had said this, he fell asleep.”<sup>27</sup>

And all throughout this passage it is not hard to see the Lord's love for him. But it is hard to understand that there was another one there, because, see, the next chapter starts out:

“And Saul was consenting unto his death.”<sup>28</sup>

See, Saul was a child of God, too. And Saul was there at that moment and Saul held the raiment as they killed the martyr. In fact, later he said in Acts 22:20 he said:

“And when the blood of thy martyr Stephen was shed, I also was standing by, and consenting unto his death, and kept the raiment of them that slew him.”<sup>29</sup>

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<sup>24</sup> Acts 7:60.

<sup>25</sup> Ibid.

<sup>26</sup> ibid.

<sup>27</sup> ibid.

<sup>28</sup> Acts 8:1.

<sup>29</sup> Acts 22:20.

I have thought about, you know, I have got things in my life that is hard to live with, things that I have done, sins that I have committed. I think about that in light of Paul's, Saul's, Paul's situation here. This had to be a terrible, terrible wait as he sat there and he watched this one die for preaching the gospel and he saw later, Saul would be stoned, Paul would be. Paul will enter and have shipwreck and Paul will be beaten many times. And we know that Paul carried that thorn in the flesh many times his whole life.

I don't want to focus today on Paul or on Stephen. I want to talk about the love of Christ, how he provided even for Saul, one who hadn't been converted, one still dead in sins and trespasses, one not quickened, one sitting there still in his blood, one who has no inkling of who Jesus Christ is. But did that separate him from the love of Christ? No. Did his hardness, did his zeal to sin separate him from the love of Christ? No.

We have before us in this passage, we have the child of God's life. We have the new man and how the Lord comes to our soul and he nourishes our soul and how he is there for us. Yeah, we have got the old man. And we have got that old fallen nature that doesn't see anything good in Christ, that doesn't see his faithfulness, that doesn't see the times over and over again that Christ has brought us through things, that questions the very providence that he brings into our lives, that is caught up in zeal for the things of this world. But yet it didn't change the Lord's love. And as is one was consenting unto his death, the Lord provided something that day. He provided:

“Lord, lay not this sin to their charge.”<sup>30</sup>

And that was a day that would mean a lot more to Paul later as he was revealed Christ. He would be something that he would look at as a great mercy of the Lord, that he would provide for him in that way even while he was persecuting the Church.

As I said, we all have these sins. We all have these highness things. We look back in our life and we say, “I don't know how he forgave that.” And even now we still have those things, because as the Lord does bring us through the trial and as the Lord does bring us through the affliction and the Lord provides his peace and he provides his love and he provides his answer, we then have that moment of sorrow when the Holy Ghost reveals that sin in us that we didn't believe, that we didn't trust him, that we didn't stay upon him.

And, you know, you can go and you can say, “You know, next time I am going to do that. And next time I am going to trust him because this time I didn't and the Lord showed me he is faithful and next time I am going to trust him.”

I used to live that way. Do you know how many next times there were?

We are kept by the power of God. We are preserved by the grace of God. And this isn't a potential preserving. And this isn't a potential power. It is what he does in the lives of the children of God.

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<sup>30</sup> Acts 7:60.

And You say, “Oh, I long to be filled with the Holy Ghost like he was, to see him standing on the right hand of God, to see him and the glory of God in what I am going through and not myself.”

And do you know what? He is faithful. And he will show you that. Just as sure as his Word is sure. I believe it is. I know you do, too. And just as sure as he is my surety.

The Lord is so good.

You know, there is a lot in that little saying, just to say that, to be brought to that place that the Lord is good.

You know, I want to leave you, if any of you read Philpot’s devotion this morning. It came from these two verses. It was absolutely beautiful, Psalm 119 verse 41 and 42.

Let thy mercies come also unto me, O LORD, even thy salvation,  
according to thy word. So shall I have wherewith to answer him that  
reproacheth me: for I trust in thy word.<sup>31</sup>

Lord, I have no answer of the tormenter. I have no answer for the deceiver. I have no answer. And we don’t. He stands there day and night just as he did Joshua in Zechariah. He said there day and night accusing and accusing and accusing and deceiving and deceiving and deceiving.

“So shall I have wherewith to answer him that reproacheth me.”<sup>32</sup>

We have an answer as the Lord’s mercy rains down upon us, as the Lord opens our heart to receive him, to see him fighting for us, to see what he has done, to see that it is finished on the cross. And everything for our salvation was finished there and that he nurtures us every day. He gives us more grace and he gives us everything we need in that time of need.

That is how, Lord, I will have an answer. That is how I will have an answer for him that reproacheth me, for I trust in thy Word.

David had to be brought to trust in his Word. And David had to be brought under the mercy of God to see that without his mercies he can’t even see the salvation. Isn’t that true? Don’t you attest to that? Don’t you say, “Yes, I know exactly what you are saying. I have lived that, sometimes daily. I just can’t see the salvation of the Lord until he is merciful enough to reveal it”? But he does, because he is faithful. He can swear by no other, because he is the mighty God.

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<sup>31</sup> Psalm 119:41-42.

<sup>32</sup> Psalm 119:42.

May the Lord be pleased to comfort his people this morning with the Word and may he lead you by filling you full of the Holy Ghost to look steadfastly into heaven and see the glory of God and see Jesus Christ standing on the right hand of God.

*Dear heavenly Father, most gracious and holy Lord, we ask thy blessing upon the Word this morning, that thou would come with thy power and thy mercy to reveal thyself. In Jesus' name I pray. Amen.*