

PROVERBS 14

THE PLACE OF REFUGE

The place of refuge (verse 26)

“In the fear of the Lord is strong confidence; and his children shall have a place of refuge.”

Fear is confidence? Really? Those two words sound strange together! They are like that blessed paradox of Paul: “When I am weak, then am I strong.” They are strange indeed, but they are still true! The fear of the Lord will deliver us from all other fear. His salvation is near to those who fear Him. The fear which brings a sinner, submissively and trustingly, to the sacrifice and righteousness of the Substitute – that fear itself is a confidence. The great and terrible God then becomes the dwelling-place of the fugitive. There are different kinds of fear. There is a fear that “hath torment,” but perfect love casts out that kind of fear (1 John 4:18). Like fire and water, these two cannot agree. But the loving fear of dear children is made known by the fact that this kind of fear lives together in unity with great joy!

The wise man declares that the Lord’s children shall have a place of refuge. God is their refuge and strength; they will not need to fear, even though the earth itself may be rooted out of its place. They “are kept by the power of God through faith unto salvation” (1 Pet. 1:5). There are two “keepings” that are very different from each other, and yet they are alike in the fact that both employ strong walls and barred gates. In the one case, the walls and gates form a prison; and in the other, a fortress. In both cases, the walls are high and the gates are strong. But here they differ: the prison is constructed with the purpose of *preventing escape from the inside*, while the fortress is built to *defy attack from the outside*. The one ensures the bondage of its inmates, but the other guarantees their liberty. The one is strong to keep the prisoner *in*, and the other is strong to keep the enemy *out*.

The fear of the Lord – to those who are inside the “walls and gates,” and who have tasted of His grace – is the strong confidence of a fortress, which will defend them from every foe. But to the unbeliever who looks at the stronghold from the outside, it often appears to be a frowning prison that will close out the sunlight from all who enter its moldy dungeons. Alas! To make a mistake on this point is disastrous for the soul.

Life to the Christian is a warfare – all the way. He is safe, but his safety is not the peace of his home. It is the protection of a strong tower, in the presence of enemies. The children of God are safe – not because no one seeks their hurt; but because greater is He Who is for them, than all those who are against them. During their passage through the wilderness of this world, the Lord’s children need “a place of refuge.” Danger surrounds them, but safety is provided for them in Jesus! He is the strong tower into which the righteous run. But alas! Many trembling fugitives mistake the fortress for a prison, and refuse to go in. A soli-



tary soldier in an enemy's country is crossing the plain in haste, and running for his life toward the protection of a strong castle in the distance. A man who appears to be a local native joins him from a bypath; and with apparent kindness, he asks where the soldier is going. "To yonder fortress," says he, "where my king's army is safe and secure." The other man, under a pretense of friendship, endeavors to persuade the soldier that the castle is actually a prison. He is an emissary of the enemy, who has been sent to detain the soldier until it is too late for him to reach the safety of the fortress. In this same way, many souls are turned back from the place of refuge, after they have seemed to be running toward it. Agents of the enemy, under various disguises, attach themselves especially to the young; and they insinuate that to be seriously religious is to throw their liberty away. Multitudes of souls are thus cheated and lost. Safety lies in drawing near to the Savior, and the distinguishing mark of an unbelieving heart is that it departs from Him. If the fortress were some pile of self-righteousness, or even a huge heap of penances and fastings, many people would then be content to take shelter there. But since the offered resting-place is under the eye and even in the heart of the Holiest, they will not and cannot go in, unless the Holy Spirit makes them willing to put off the old nature and leave it behind. Although the Refuge is provided, and the gate is standing open, and the invitation is free; yet poor wanderers still stand shivering outside, because their guilty consciences suspect that the "strong tower" will turn out to be a place of confinement from genial society and human joys. Let us take up Philip's simple prayer, "Lord, show us the Father" – for if the prodigal child would only recognize the Father's love, he would arise and go to Him!

The exaltation of a nation (verse 34)

"Righteousness exalteth a nation: but sin is a reproach to any people."

If it is not beneath statesmen to take lessons from the Bible, let this sound political maxim – the rule of God's national dealings – be deeply pondered. It is righteousness – not the wisdom of politics, nor extent of empire, nor splendid conquests, nor flourishing trade, nor abundant resources – that exalts a nation! Greece in her proud science, and Rome in the zenith of her glory, were both sunken in the lowest depths of moral degradation. Contrast the influence of righteousness; for out of the most debased barbarism, it brings a community that is impregnated with all the high principles that form a nation's well-being. Sin is a reproach to any people; therefore, let us pray for the light of the Gospel to penetrate and transform our communities and our country, for that is the only way to make our nation great again!

Lord, help us to be a faithful remnant in our country, adding to its righteousness, so that we may enjoy true prosperity which follows humiliation and faith. Amen.