

ISAIAH 33

WIDE RIVERS AND STREAMS

In order to rightly understand this chapter, we must trace out the speakers and the persons spoken to in the different verses. The first verse is addressed to Sennacherib by the prophet: “Woe to thee that spoilest!” Then, in the second verse, there is a cry for help from God’s people – who dread this powerful enemy – to their heavenly Father. In 2 Chronicles 32:20, we are told that King Hezekiah of Judah and the prophet Isaiah prayed and cried to heaven; and no doubt the words of verse 2 formed the theme of their prayers: “O Lord, be gracious unto us; we have waited for thee; be thou our arm every morning, our salvation also in the time of trouble!” In verses 3 and 4, God – through His prophet – again addresses Sennacherib. He tells him that although the people had all scattered and fled for fear of him, yet his spoil would be gathered and taken from him. Then, in verse 5, God’s people (who had uttered the cry of distress in verse 2) burst forth into a song of praise – being encouraged by the Lord’s Word. And in verse 6, they address good King Hezekiah and speak of that which constituted his strength and his treasure – namely, wisdom and knowledge and the fear of the Lord. Verses 7-9 describe the distress and desolation of the country when it was threatened with destruction by Sennacherib, who eventually invaded the land (709 BC; 2 Kings 18:17), despite the humble message and the present which Hezekiah had formerly sent him (713 BC; 2 Kings 18:14-16). The ambassadors of peace who had delivered that message and that gift truly had reason to weep bitterly when they found how fruitless their embassy had proved to be. But in verses 10-13, God Himself speaks and warns Sennacherib of his doom! “Now will I rise, saith the Lord; now will I be exalted; now will I lift up myself. Ye shall conceive chaff, ye shall bring forth stubble: your breath, as fire, shall devour you!”

Let us dwell for a moment upon the prayer in verse 2. It is the utterance of the afflicted soul in every age of the world, who has no earthly resource, but who hangs in simple faith upon an unseen God. David says, “Behold, as the eyes of servants look unto the hand of their masters, and as the eyes of a maiden unto the hand of her mistress; so our eyes wait upon the Lord our God, until that he have mercy upon us” (Ps. 123:2). The promise of God is that those that wait upon Him shall inherit the earth. “Wait on the Lord, and keep his way, and he shall exalt thee to inherit the land” (Ps. 37:9, 34). “Wait on the Lord: be of good courage, and he shall strengthen thine heart: wait, I say, on the Lord” (Ps. 27:14). With such promises, believers are justified in thus pleading with God;

Outline of the chapter:

- ❖ The Lord’s protection of His people, and His judgments against their enemies – verses 1-14
- ❖ The Lord’s people are secure, safe, and happy; while their enemies are consumed and destroyed – verses 15-24

and they may take David's experience for their encouragement, when he said, "I waited patiently for the Lord, and he inclined unto me, and heard my cry" (Ps. 40:1) – as well as Hezekiah's experience, in the very case before us. The Lord was gracious to him, and delivered him from Sennacherib! God has never yet disappointed the expectation of any who have waited for Him! As surely as the morning's dawn comes to those who have waited for it through a long and dreary night, so surely does God's mercy cheer and bless those who wait for Him. When we need any deliverance, or desire any blessing, let us learn this holy art of waiting upon God for it – waiting in all patience, and in all submission; content that the mercy we look for will come in God's time, and not in our time; content that it will come in God's way, and not in our way; but yet waiting in full assurance of hope, and in entire confidence in the Lord's Word.

Verses 15-24 describe the safety of the Lord's people under His protection, and their deliverance from their enemies. In verse 23, Sennacherib's army is compared to a shipwrecked vessel – of which the masts were injured, and the sails could not be spread, so that it must be left to destruction by the fury of the storm. However, it is impossible to read these verses without feeling that they are expressed in such a way as to carry our minds onwards to the blessings which belong to God's people in all ages. See, for instance, what is said in verse 16 of the man who walks righteously: "He shall dwell on high." Paul says, "God hath raised us up together, and made us sit together in heavenly places in Christ Jesus" (Eph. 2:6). United with the risen Savior, the believer's dwelling place is indeed on high! Verse 16 also says, "Bread shall be given him; his waters shall be sure." And our Savior has taught us to "take no thought, saying, What shall we eat? or, What shall we drink? or, Wherewithal shall we be clothed? (for after all these things do the Gentiles seek:) for your heavenly Father knoweth that ye have need of all these things; but seek ye first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things shall be added unto you." Here are the words of verse 17: "Thine eyes shall see the king in his beauty; they shall behold the land that is very far off." By faith, the believer even now beholds the beauty of his King and Savior – seeing "him who is invisible" (Heb. 11:27). But the time is not far off when we shall see Him eye to eye! And last but not least, how beautifully is Jehovah's relationship shown to His people in verse 21: "The glorious Lord will be unto us a place of broad rivers and streams, wherein shall go no galley with oars, neither shall gallant ship pass thereby." No one who has seen a wide river – sweeping along with its deep current, carrying blessing and fruitfulness – will be at a loss to understand this comparison. Nor will they be unable to see the combination of power and mercy which it expresses, and to which the next verse refers: "The Lord is our judge, the Lord is our lawgiver, the Lord is our king; He will save us."

Thank You, Lord, for enabling Your children to dwell in perfect safety from the enemies of their souls! Amen.

