

## The Prayer of Moses

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Lord's Day Evening, July 4, 1847

"Make us glad according to the days wherein thou hast afflicted us, and the years wherein we have seen evil. Let thy work appear unto thy servants, and thy glory unto their children. And let the beauty of the Lord our God be upon us: and establish thou the work of our hands upon us; yea, the work of our hands establish thou it." Psalm 90:15-17

The title of the Psalm is, "The Prayer of Moses, the man of God." The Holy Ghost, therefore, used the pen of Moses to give this inspired production for the benefit of the church of God. But, bear in mind who Moses was. He is called emphatically here "the man of God;" being the man whom God raised up in an especial manner to do his work. He is also called God's "servant," and declared to be "faithful in all his house." (Heb. 3:5.) The Lord especially favoured him, too, by taking him up into the mount, and there communing with him for the space of forty days; so that when he came down from the mount his face shone with such resplendent glory that the children of Israel could not bear to look upon it. But did the work which the Lord gave Moses to do, or did the glorious manifestation of the Lord's presence and power set Moses upon some lofty pinnacle, far out of sight, and far out of the reach of God's family? It did not. He was a man of like infirmities and failings with ourselves. And I say it with all reverence, had Moses by the favour of God manifested to him been set upon some lofty pinnacle, out of reach of the infirmities, sins, and exercises that God's people are tried with, the productions of Moses' pen would have been of little service to them. But we have him here, though so highly favoured, and so blessedly enriched with the lovingkindness

and mercy of the Lord, in the same exercised spot that the Lord's family are ever to be found in. "We are consumed by thine anger, and by thy wrath are we troubled. Thou hast set our iniquities before thee, our secret sins in the light of thy countenance." And thus, though he had been so highly favoured, he had not got beyond the reach of God's anger made manifest in his conscience when he sinned, nor beyond the reach of his secret sins being set in the light of Jehovah's countenance. Nor again, had he got beyond a cry after God's manifested mercy. "O satisfy us," he cries from the bottom of his heart (for nothing else can satisfy us), "O satisfy us early with thy mercy; that we may rejoice and be glad all our days." And then follow the words of our text. "Make us glad according to the days wherein thou hast afflicted us, and the years wherein we have seen evil. Let thy work appear unto thy servants, and thy glory unto their children. And let the beauty of the Lord our God be upon us; and establish thou the work of our hands upon us; yea, the work of our hands establish thou it."

There are four petitions in the words before us. God grant us to consider them in the light of the Spirit; and the Lord enable me to speak out of the fulness of a feeling, believing heart, what I see and feel in them!

I. The first petition runs thus: *"Make us glad according to the days wherein thou hast afflicted us, and the years wherein we have seen evil."*

What is the Lord's testimony concerning his family? Is it not this? "I will also leave in the midst of thee an afflicted and poor people, and they shall trust in the name of the Lord." (Zeph. 3:12.) Is it not the Lord's own solemn declaration, that "In the world ye shall have tribulation?" (John 16:33.) Did not the Apostle Paul confirm the souls of the disciples by

exhorting them "to continue in the faith, and that we must through much tribulation enter into the kingdom of God?" (Acts 14:22.) Do we not read also, 2 Timothy 2:12, "If we suffer with Christ, we shall also reign with him?" And when John, the beloved disciple, saw a glorious company before the throne, and enquiry was made who they were, was not this the reply, "These are they which came out of great tribulation, and have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb?" (Rev. 7:14.) If this be the case, then, to be out of the way of tribulation is to be out of the way altogether. And not to know anything of "the sufferings of Christ" is not to be with him hereafter, and see and partake of his eternal glory. Thus afflictions, tribulations, exercises, trials, and temptations, lie in the path of every child of God. If, then, we have them not, it is a mark against us; but if we have, it is so far a token in our favour.

Now, what is that which I may call the substratum, the foundation of this prayer of Moses? It is, that the Lord would "make them glad according to the days wherein he had afflicted them, and the years wherein they had seen evil." He could ask to be gladdened in no other way. It was only in proportion to "their days of affliction, and their years of evil," he could ask the Lord to gladden their hearts. He could not come to the throne of mercy to ask the Lord to gladden them, except as being partakers of affliction, and being tried with evil. And thus we cannot with any consistency come to a throne of mercy, and ask the Lord to gladden, comfort, cheer, and bless our souls, except we are walking in a similar path. Affliction, then, in its varied shapes and forms, is the very basis upon which all consolation must stand; and an acquaintance with the evil of our hearts by daily exercise, must be the foundation upon which we come, to beg of the Lord that he would speak peace and comfort to our souls. If, then, we come in any other way, surely we cannot come in

simplicity and godly sincerity.

There are, then, *days* wherein God sees fit to *afflict* his children; and there are *years* wherein he is pleased to show them *evil*. The Lord enable us to look at some of the afflictions wherewith he chastens his Zion.

1. *Affliction* is the lot of all the children of men; for "Man is born to trouble, as the sparks fly upward." (Job. 5:7.) But more especially is affliction the lot of God's people. How few of the living family are exempt from *providential* and *temporal* troubles! How many of the Lord's family are afflicted, deeply afflicted, *in body*! How many carry about with them a tottering tabernacle, a poor diseased frame, from which pain and suffering seem scarcely a day absent! And this they know by painful experience to be a severe trial, a painful, providential affliction. How many of the Lord's people are deeply tried *in circumstances*! God hath chosen the poor of this world to be "rich in faith;" and he hath seen fit, in his infinite wisdom, that by far the greater proportion of his redeemed family should have to wade through many troubles arising from natural poverty and scanty circumstances. How many of the Lord's family are pained and grieved with *domestic trials*! The very natural sources of affection become sources of grief and sorrow. The partner of their bosom, the children upon whom they have fixed their affections, often prove sources of trial to God's family.

But though these are trials (and ever must be trials as God makes them so), yet how little are they in real magnitude compared with *spiritual* sufferings, with those afflictions *in grace* that the Lord sees fit to exercise his people with. For instance,

2. *A sense of guilt*, from sin being laid as a heavy burden

upon the conscience—is not this one of the afflictions which the Lord's people are from time to time deeply tried with? What cuts so deeply as guilt? What penetrates and pierces like God's anger felt in the conscience? What burden is more hard to be borne than a sense of God's wrath against transgression, when that wrath is let down into the soul? Is not this one of the afflictions spoken of in the verse preceding our text? "We are consumed by thine anger, and by thy wrath are we troubled. Thou hast set our iniquities before thee, our secret sins in the light of thy countenance." Whenever God sets our iniquities before himself, and our secret sins in the light of his countenance, it must be a day of affliction to the soul thus deeply exercised.

3. *The hidings and withdrawals of God's gracious countenance*; the soul hanging in doubt and fear; despondency working in the heart; inability to get near the throne of mercy; accusations of conscience; the fiery darts of Satan hurled into the carnal mind—are not all these afflictions which fall to the lot of Zion?

Nothing can cut so deep as *spiritual* affliction. Let us have *temporal* afflictions in all their magnitude; if the Lord is pleased to be with us and manifest his love, supporting us by his presence, and speaking peace to our souls, we can bear them contentedly, if not cheerfully. But when, added to these temporal trials and providential afflictions, there is guilt upon the soul, hidings of God's face, darkness of mind, accusations of conscience, suggestions of Satan, and a thousand desponding feelings passing through the mind—how close it cuts, how it penetrates into the very depths of the heart!

But, besides these "days of affliction," there are "years of evil." "Make us glad according to the days wherein thou hast afflicted us, and the years wherein we have seen evil."

Affliction comes by days; evil comes by years. Affliction comes time after time, as God sends it; but there are many of the Lord's people who have had years of profession (and of a gracious profession too), yet who in all these years have seen little else but evil—the evils of their heart brought to light; the workings of their corrupt nature; the pride, presumption, self-righteousness, sensuality, worldly mindedness, and desperate wickedness of their carnal mind made manifest, held up before their eyes, and laid with weight and power upon their consciences.

Thus, when they look back, perhaps through years of evil, how few, how rare, how scantily dispersed are the marks and testimonies of God's love and favour to their souls! But O, how thick, how numerous, yea, how innumerable are the evils, the horrid evils, that are spread through that long course of years! Not perhaps absolute falls; but O, the backslidings of heart, the internal adulteries, idolatries, and departures from the living God! O, the carnality, sensuality, filth, guilt, and pollution of our fallen nature! O, the evils of every shape and name that all come trooping to view when God sets our iniquities before him, and our secret sins in the light of his countenance!

But who would think that these things were *needful* to be experienced; that "years of evil" were absolutely necessary to bring down the heart with labour, and to crush us into that spot where mercy and love are to be manifested? Yet it is the way, let men fight against it as long as they may; it is the way; and thus only so far as we are brought into this spot by "days of affliction, and years wherein we have seen evil"—perhaps little else but evil—can we cry from the bottom of our hearts with simplicity and godly sincerity, "Make us glad according to the days wherein thou hast afflicted us, and the years wherein we have seen evil."

Observe the word "*according*." It is the key-stone of the text; it is the pivot upon which the petition turns: "Make us glad *according* to the days wherein thou hast afflicted us, and the years wherein we have seen evil." Have our afflictions been great? Have the years of evil been long? Make us glad in due proportion to the "days of affliction, and to the years of evil!" Days of long, deep, heavy affliction, need gladness in due proportion; and years of evil, deep evil, dreadful evil, mourned over evil, abhorred evil, instrumentally qualify the soul to be made glad in due and equal proportion.

Are you one who knows nothing of inward grief and affliction? Are you one whose years have never been years of evil? The prayer is not for *you*; the petition does not suit your heart, though it may come from your lips. It was not written for *you*. When Moses under divine inspiration took the pen in hand, and traced out in living characters the feelings of his soul, he wrote not this for you. But, on the other hand, if you are one of the Lord's tried, tempted family, who know, painfully know, daily know evil, temporal and spiritual (it is not strictly defined which), yea, long and many "years of evil," it is for *you* that this petition was written.

Does not the prayer fit into the very feelings of your heart? Is it not the very desire that seems most suitable to the exercises of your soul? "*Make us glad*." How is God to make us glad? What read we in the preceding verse? "O satisfy us early with thy mercy, that we may rejoice and be glad all our days." It is mercy, then, felt in the soul; mercy revealed to the heart and sealed with divine testimony upon the conscience, that can alone make us glad. Thus we see how spiritual afflictions that cut deep into the heart, and an experience of years of evil, fit and prepare the soul for being gladdened with mercy. Is not mercy for criminals? For none else. Is not mercy for guilty wretches? None else. Is not

mercy for those who without mercy must perish under God's manifested wrath? For none others. And none else can be gladdened by mercy, except those who know the weight of spiritual affliction, and have been exercised, deeply exercised, with years of felt evil. Others may be gladdened by the opinions of men; by their wine, corn, and oil being increased; by such toys and baubles as poor, perishing worms delight in. But the tried, exercised family of God, who know what "days of affliction, and years of evil" are, cannot be gladdened except by the manifestations of God's mercy and love to their souls.

The pardoning mercy of God made manifest to them, and his eternal love shed abroad in their heart; the application of some precious promise to their fainting spirit; whispers from God's own mouth; smiles from the Lord's own countenance; teachings and testimonies from the blessed Spirit in the court of conscience; the "fear nots" that the Lord himself alone can speak to the soul; the being embraced in the arms of Jesus, and being satisfied, like Naphtali, with the favour of the Lord—*these* are the things that alone can make a child of God glad. But do see how necessary, how indispensably necessary, "the days of affliction, and years of evil" are to prepare their hearts! Mercy, pardon, love, blood, salvation, eternal favour—what are all these to a man who knows nothing of the evils of his heart, and never moaned beneath the corruptions of his fallen nature? He may use the words, he may bandy them backwards and forwards, he may see them revealed in God's book; but a vital, internal, and experimental knowledge of them—can he have them? can he desire to have them? He cannot, except in exact proportion to his experience of the "days of affliction, and years of evil."

II.—"*Let thy work appear unto thy servants, and thy glory unto their children.*" Creature works we here read nothing of.



They had been long ago cut to the very ground. And what had been their death-blow? What had driven the dagger into their very heart? "Days of affliction, and years of evil." These had been their destruction; creature righteousness they had stabbed to the very heart, and let out the life-blood of human merit. There is no petition, then, 'Let *our* works appear!' No. These were buried in the grave of corruption; these were swallowed up and lost in "days of affliction and years of evil." But "Let *thy* work," the finished work of the Son of God; the obedience of Jesus to the law; the atoning blood which he shed upon Calvary's tree; the work which he undertook, went through, and completed—'O,' breathes forth the man of God in earnest cry, (and our hearts if they have been taught by the same Spirit, will unite in the same strain), "Let *thy* work appear unto thy servants." What! can we not see that work in the word of God?—is not *that* sufficient? Can we not hear that work set forth by good men?—is not *that* sufficient? Can we not read it as opened up by the pen of ready writers?—is not *that* sufficient? Yes; for those who have never seen "days of affliction, and years of evil"—amply sufficient: but not for God's exercised children; they have other thoughts and other feelings upon these matters. *They* know what darkness of mind is, the power of unbelief, and creature helplessness; and they know that nothing short of the light of God's countenance, the manifestation of God mercy, and the teaching and witness of God the Spirit, can make the work of Jesus appear in all its beauty, suitability, and glory; and therefore, they can say, "Let *thy* work appear unto thy servants." 'Give me, Lord, a sight by living faith of the atonement of Jesus. "Show me," (the soul would cry, in the language of Moses,) "Show me thy glory;" reveal in my heart the finished work of Jesus; sprinkle my conscience with his atoning blood; discover him to me, and thus give me a sweet manifestation of his Person, love, blood, and complete salvation. Let it, Lord, appear before mine eyes, and in my

heart, and seal it with divine power upon my conscience.'

But we may perhaps give another turn to the words. There is not only the work of the Son of God upon the cross, which we cannot see except in the light of God's countenance, except in the manifestation of the Spirit to our soul; but there is the work also of the Holy Ghost upon the conscience; and that work, though it is an inward work, we can no more see, except as the Lord shows it unto us, than we can see the work of Christ upon the cross. O, the darkness, the thick darkness that often envelopes our mind, when we cannot read one mark of God's dealings upon our soul; as the church complained of old, "We see not our signs." (Ps. 74:9.) Can there be faith? we ask, where we feel perhaps little else but unbelief? Can there be life? when there is such deadness, coldness, and carnality? Can there be hope? when doubts and fears seem to take such strong possession? Can there be the work of God? when there is so much evil, horrid evil, painfully, daily felt? We need, therefore, that God should shine upon his own inward work; for then, and then only, can we see it.

"Let thy work appear unto thy servants." 'Lord,' the soul cries, 'make it plain that there is a work going on within: that my soul is taught of thee; that I am a partaker of thy grace; that the blessed Spirit is dealing with my conscience.' Surely we may, without pressing our text too hard, give this turn to it.

"Let thy work appear unto thy servants, and *thy glory unto their children.*" Children were especially included in the old covenant. We have no such special promise in the new; and therefore giving a New Testament turn to these words, we may speak of ourselves rather than of our children: 'Let thy glory appear before our eyes and in our hearts.' And is not

this what at times we are earnestly longing to behold? What did the Lord Jesus Christ pray for his disciples? Was it not, that they might behold his glory, and see him as he is? as he says, "Father, I will that they also whom thou hast given me, be with me where I am, that they may behold my glory, which thou hast given me; for thou lovedst me before the foundation of the world." (John 17:24.) And what was it, when he was tabernacling upon the earth, that caught the eyes, and ravished the affections of his beloved disciples? "We behold his glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth." (John 1:14.) And have not our eyes sometimes seen this glory—the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ? The glory of his Person; the glory of his love! that glory which delights the eyes, and touches the affections of the soul! But often we cannot see it; it is hidden from our eyes. We often walk in darkness. "We grope for the wall like the blind, and we grope as if we had no eyes; we stumble at noon-day as in the night; we are in desolate places as dead men." (Isa. 59:10.) Yet we want to see the glory, and to say with David, "O God, thou art my God; early will I seek thee: my soul thirsteth for thee, my flesh longeth for thee in a dry and thirsty land where no water is; to see thy power and thy glory, so as I have seen them in the sanctuary." (Ps. 63:1, 2.)

III.—"*Let the beauty of the Lord our God be upon us.*" What is this beauty? "The beauty of the Lord our God." It is, therefore, the beauty of the God-Man; the comeliness, the holiness, the perfection, and glory that ever dwell in the Son of God. Now, "days of affliction, and years of evil" have marred all creature comeliness. There was a time, perhaps, when we could take some pleasure and delight in what we were, or what we vainly fancied we should be. Our own righteousness had a beauty and comeliness to us; and our religion was amiable and pleasing in our own sight. But what

has become of it? Marred, marred; effectually marred. By what? "Days of affliction, and years of evil." These have effectually ruined, defaced, and polluted all creature comeliness. In a word, we were once deeply in love with self; but self has been shown to us such a hideous monster, in so vile and despicable a light, that we have fallen out of love with him altogether; and we have seen, at times, such beauty, glory, loveliness, and suitability in the Son of God—that as we have fallen out of love with self, we have fallen in love with him. Thus as all our own beauty and our own comeliness have been marred and defaced, the beauty and comeliness of the Lord have risen in due proportion. So that this has become the desire of our soul, "Let the beauty of the Lord our God be upon us." 'Let us stand accepted in it; let it be put upon us by the imputation of God himself; let us be clothed with it manifestly before the eyes of a heart-searching Jehovah. Let the beauty of Jesus' atoning blood, the beauty of his perfect righteousness, the beauty of his dying love, the beauty and holiness of his glorious Person be upon us, covering all our filth, guilt, and shame—spreading itself over all our nakedness, sin, and pollution—that when God looks upon us, he may not see us as we are, marred, defaced, and full of wounds and bruises and putrefying sores; but may see us standing accepted in the Beloved, with "the beauty of the Lord our God" upon us.' Is there not something very sweet, very expressive, and very suitable in this petition? But what makes it so? I must still come to my old spot, "Days of affliction, and years of evil." These have marred creature comeliness; these have spoiled creature beauty.

Now, feeling your guilt, filth, and shame, nothing can satisfy your longing soul but "the beauty of the Lord our God" being upon and imputed to you; so that he who searcheth Jerusalem as with candles, and whose eyes are as a flame of

fire, may not see you standing in filthy, guilty, and polluted self; but may see the beauty of Jesus spread over you; and thus behold you holy in his holiness, beautiful in his beauty, and comely in his comeliness; "accepted in the Beloved." O what a matchless robe is this! It outshines angels': for it is the righteousness of God's only begotten Son! And if we stand with "the beauty of the Lord our God" upon us, we can bid defiance to all law-charges, to all the accusations of a guilty conscience, and to all the darts from hell.

IV.—"*And establish thou the work of our hands upon us; yea, the work of our hands establish thou it.*" The work of our hands—that is, what we do in God's name and for God's glory. Not the work of our hands in nature; but the work of our hands in grace. Does not *this* want establishing? See how he doubles the petition, "Establish thou the work of our hands upon us; yea, the work of our hands establish thou it." Are we not sometimes tried and exercised about the work of our hands?—what we have done, or tried to do for God's glory and his great name. How marred it is! Can we preach without sin? Can we hear without sin? Can we pray without sin? Can we meet together without sin? Can we sit down at the table of the Lord without sin? Is not sin deeply engrained in our very constitution? Is not the warp and weft of sin so a part of the web of our fallen nature that we sin with every breath that we draw? And does not this mar the work of our hands? Does not this at times fill us with anxious questionings whether we have ever done a single thing to the glory of God? Self is so mingled with all we do, that it may well raise up the anxious enquiry whether we have ever done anything really right at all?

If these be our anxious thoughts, we shall want God to "establish the work of our hands upon us," and thus make it plain and clear in our conscience, that what we do we do to

his glory. God forbid, we should have any other motive. If we give of our substance what the Lord may enable, may it be for his glory. If we take any movement in divine things, may it be to his glory. If we speak, may it be to his glory. Now when we find sin and self so mingled with all we think, and say, and do, we want, "the work of our hands" established, that the Lord may make it plain and clear in our conscience that our hearts the right before him, and our eye is single to his glory; that what we do for the honour of his name is accepted in his sight.

And is not this connected, too, with the grand basis which I endeavoured in God's strength to lay as the foundation of all these petitions?—"Days of affliction, and years of evil." It is the "days of affliction, and the years of evil," that make us see the imperfections and deficiencies of everything done in the Lord's name so that we want God himself "to establish the work of our hands upon us."

Bear with me for a few moments while we rapidly run through the thread of our text. God in mercy leave some impression of its truth upon our conscience! Look first, then, at the grand foundation of all. See if you are right there. Do not leap over the threshold. See whether this corner-stone be laid in your heart. Have you,—have I, let me ask my soul solemnly—seen "Days of affliction, and years of evil?" And if so, what have been their fruit and effect? We may have seen both, passed through both, and yet have derived no profit from either. It is not the seed committed to the ground that gladdens the heart of the agriculturist; it is the crop which the seed bears; so it is with respect to affliction; for "Light is sown for the righteous, and gladness for the upright in heart." (Ps. 97:11.) It is not affliction as it is in itself; it is the fruit of the affliction. It is not having seen evil, but it is the effect produced thereby that we have chiefly to look at.

Now, have these "Days of affliction, and years of evil" brought you down, humbled your pride, laid you in the dust, worked in your soul humility, simplicity, and godly sincerity, given you a sight and sense of your real state and condition before God? If they have, well and good; it is your mercy if such have been their result. God keep you and me from being deceived in this matter.

But we will pass on to ask, whether we can say from a feeling heart what God taught Moses here to write, "Make us glad." Does your heart long to be made glad? Then there must be some kind of sorrow; for to give gladness to a heart that is not sorrowful, is a contradiction in terms. Do we want then to be made glad? What can gladden us? Ask your conscience what can gladden it. Money, health, strength, and worldly happiness, gratified prospects, or flourishing children? Can they? can they? Fatal mark; fatal mark, if they can. But are the longings of your anxious bosom, the pantings of your groaning heart after the manifestations of God's mercy and love? And are there times, in the dead seasons of the night, when your soul pants after God, "as the hart panteth after the water-brooks?" If so, nothing can satisfy, nothing can gladden you, but the mercy and love of God shed abroad in your heart by the Holy Ghost. I should write myself dead in sin, had I not such feelings as these.

And do you long for the work of Jesus to appear, and his glory to be felt and seen in your heart? Are you fairly out of conceit with self, but see such beauty and preciousness in the Lord Jesus, that you long to have his beauty spread upon you, that you may shine in his beauty, and not in your own? And are you sometimes exercised as to the work of your hands, feeling yourself to be such a poor, guilty, filthy wretch, that you cannot see one good thought in your heart, nor one good action performed by you? You, then, want the

Lord to establish it firmly in your conscience, that there is a work going on there, which was begun and is being carried on by his own powerful hand.

Have I, then, faintly and feebly traced out some of the workings and experience of your soul? Are they, or are they not, in accordance with God's inspired word? I believe they are. Do you believe so? Upon what does our belief rest? On the inspired word of God. That is true; for "let God be true, and every man a liar." And if, with all simplicity and godly sincerity, as I hope this evening, I have endeavoured to open up the mind and meaning of God the Spirit in the words before us, all the men in the world united together can never overthrow God's truth; that will stand when the world is in a blaze. If the Lord has raised up these things in your heart, let men say what they will; let Satan harass as he may; or your heart at times suggest what it can; the truth of God stands unaltered; and by that truth we stand, or by that truth we fall.