

Wilderness Hunger and Heavenly Manna

Preached at Gower Street Chapel, London, on Lord's Day Evening, July 1, 1866

"And thou shalt remember all the way which the Lord thy God led thee these forty years in the wilderness, to humble thee, and to prove thee, to know what was in thine heart, whether thou wouldest keep his commandments, or no. And he humbled thee, and suffered thee to hunger, and fed thee with manna, which thou knewest not, neither did thy fathers know; that he might make thee know that man doth not live by bread only, but by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of the Lord doth man live." Deuteronomy 8:2, 3

The book of Deuteronomy has been sometimes called the "Old Testament Gospel;" and with some reason, for it contains, perhaps, more gospel doctrines, at least more clearly expressed and more fully developed than any other book of the Pentateuch. It is true that in the latter part of the book of Exodus and throughout Leviticus we have, under type and figure, much blessed gospel preached; but the whole is deeply veiled by ceremonial rites, of which the spiritual meaning could not be fully understood till they were fulfilled by the sacrifice and bloodshedding of our gracious Lord. The book of Deuteronomy was, so to speak, the legacy which Moses left to the people of Israel before he resigned his commission and his breath, and in this respect it somewhat resembles the last speeches which our Lord made to his disciples, and of which they themselves bore this testimony: "Lo! now speakest thou plainly, and speakest no proverb." (John 16:29.) It is filled, therefore, with holy instruction; and, whilst it abounds in promises, is replete with most powerful exhortations, mingled and thoroughly seasoned with earnest warnings, expostulations, reproofs,

and directions; the whole forming what I may perhaps call a most blessed spiritual compound, precisely adapted to the state and case of the children of Israel, then upon the edge of the wilderness and upon the eve of entering into the promised land. The warm, tender, affectionate, fatherly, and mellow tone which pervades the whole book carries with it its own evidence that it was the voice of the man of God about to yield up his parting breath; and yet the earnestness, vigour, and power shining through the whole show that "his eye was not dim nor his natural force abated." It is indeed a book which demands and would amply repay our earnest and prayerful study; for it is as full of instruction, encouragement, and warning to us as it was to the children of Israel to whom it was first delivered.

I shall not, however, dilate any further upon the character of the book of Deuteronomy, but come at once to our text, in which Moses seems to sum up the dealings of God with the children of Israel in the wilderness, and the fruits which it was the intention of God that they should reap from them. He calls upon them, therefore, to look back and remember all the way which the Lord their God had led them forty years in the wilderness; nor would this retrospect be unprofitable if they could understand and bear in mind the reasons why God had thus dealt with them for so many years; that he had a certain object to effect thereby, and that this object was to humble them, to prove them, and to know what was in their heart, whether they would keep his commandments or no. He tells them further that God suffered them to hunger and fed them with manna, a food which they knew not nor their fathers before them, and for this express purpose, that they might know that man doth not live by bread only, but by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of the Lord doth man live.

I have thus in a few simple words outlined the subject before us, and now let us see whether, by God's help and blessing, we may be able to gather up something this evening for our personal instruction, edification, and encouragement; something which may communicate that spiritual, solid, and abiding profit without which all preaching falls to the ground like water spilt. I shall, therefore, view the subject as having a particular and personal bearing upon our own Christian experience; and, to facilitate clearness in treating it both for my own sake and yours, shall divide it mainly into two leading branches.

I.—*First*, the *injunction* which our text contains, of remembering all the way which the Lord our God has led us in the wilderness.

II.—*Secondly*, the *benefits* and *blessings* which spring out of the Lord's thus dealing with us, and which it is his revealed will and intention by means of them to communicate to us.

I.—"Better is the end of a thing," says the wise man, "than the beginning thereof." (Eccl. 7:8.) This is often true in natural things, but invariably so in divine. Rarely at first can we foresee what will be the issue of any matter which we take in hand. We may begin it with much hope, and find in the end those hopes sadly disappointed. We may begin it with much fear, and find from the event those fears utterly groundless. Whatever we take in hand it is very rare that our expectations are fully carried out, for we have again and again to learn that "man's heart deviseth his way but the Lord directeth his steps;" and that there are many devices in a man's heart, nevertheless the counsel of the Lord, that and that only, shall stand. But so far as we are amongst the family of God, and as such are under especial guidance and divine teaching and leading, whether our first expectations

are accomplished or not, the end stamps wisdom and goodness upon all the dealings of God with us both in providence and in grace. However chequered his path has been; however, as Job speaks, his purposes have been broken off, even the thoughts of his heart; however when he looked for good, then evil came unto him, and when he waited for light there came darkness; whatever bitter things God seemed to write against him when he made him to possess the sins of his youth, yet sooner or later every child of God will be able to say, "O how great is thy goodness which thou hast laid up for them that fear thee;" and this will embolden him to add, "Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me, as they have already followed me, all the days of my life, and I shall dwell in the house of the Lord for ever." Thus it is good sometimes at the end, it may be, of a long profession; and there are those here who have made a long profession—I myself have professed, and I hope possessed, the fear of God for nearly forty years; it is good, I say, for such sometimes to look back through the long vista of many years, and see how the Lord has dealt with us, both in providence and in grace; yes, it is good to take a solemn review of what marks we can find of his favour, what testimonies of his teaching, what Ebenezers we may set up at various points in this path, as blessed memorials of his gracious and merciful help. We are, therefore, bidden in our text to remember all the way.

1. Now if this be so, the first point to fix our eyes upon is the *beginning* of the way—the starting point. I have long contended for a good beginning; for I know well that where there is a good beginning there will be a good ending; and there will often be a satisfactory middle. But what do I mean by "a good beginning?" I mean for God to begin with us, and not for us to begin with God. By a good beginning, then, I mean a marked epoch in our life—what I have called in one

of my early sermons "a beginning felt"—looking back upon which we can more or less distinctly trace the hand of God to have been made manifest in a communication of grace to our souls. We may be—I have myself been often—tried as to the reality of the work; and I am sometimes tried to this day whether I have a single grain of grace in my heart. But I have never doubted the time when, nor the circumstances under which it began, nor what my feelings were under the first teachings of the blessed Spirit in my heart; and I have come to this decision in my own mind, if that be wrong then all is wrong; if that be right then all is right. If I began with God then God may leave me to end with myself; but if God began with me independent of any will, inclination, power, or action of my own, in a sovereign way of grace, by the implantation of his fear in my heart and the communication of divine life to my soul—if God himself thus began a good work in me, I have his certain promise that he will perform and complete it until the day of Jesus Christ. (Phil. 1:6.) Upon this we sometimes hang amidst doubt, fear, and perplexity; we hang, I say, upon God's work upon our heart as begun by himself. We have then to remember this, and this is not very difficult, for the first work upon our conscience is sometimes as fresh in our minds as if it occurred yesterday. People tell me sometimes that I have a strong memory, but whether our memory be strong or weak, it is astonishing what an impression divine realities make upon our mind in their first communication. Often, too, God's dealings with us in providence were as marked as his dealings with us in grace. Do you think that Paul ever forgot his journey to Damascus, Matthew his sitting at the receipt of custom, Nathanael his kneeling under the fig tree, Zacchaeus his climbing up into a sycamore tree, or Peter and Andrew casting their net into the sea? Similarly with us. The providential circumstances under which the work of grace was commenced; the leadings of God to place us in a certain

position, bring us into a certain state, and open up a certain path in which he fixed our feet, that he might prepare us for the communication of his grace, are usually so marked that they are fixed indelibly in our mind and memory. And besides such general leadings, I have often observed—it was my own case, and I have seen it in others—some very marked intervention of God in providence, such as a change of abode, a bringing a peculiar affliction on body or mind, an opening up of some unexpected circumstance, which, if not grace, prepared for grace; and though had it been nothing but temporal and natural would have died in the very birth, yet it so worked in the providence of God with his grace that, like links in a chain, the two were bound together. Thus the first link was a link in providence, say, for instance, some very deep and painful trial which seemed to cut the very heart-strings of life. Many perhaps have had deeper trials than we; but they only had with it the sorrow of the world which worketh death; but we had, we hope, with it the grace of life working with the trial, over-ruling it, and turning it into a gracious channel. Grace softened the heart; and though this very softening made the trial more deeply felt, yet it humbled and meekened the soul under it. As then we lay hold of this first link we find it knitted on to a second. Call the first link, if you like, a link of iron, but call the next a link of gold, for if the first were providence, the second was grace. Then as we lay hold of the golden link its thrilling touch, as with an electric power, makes us remember how eternal realities first fell upon our mind, how the conviction of sin first entered our conscience, the guilt of sin, the burden of it, and the exercises connected with it; how the Spirit of grace and of supplications was communicated; the cries, sighs, tears, groans, wrestlings, in which we sought mercy at the Lord's hands; the separation from friends and associates which it entailed; the breaking off of sin and all connections contrary to God's mind and will, with the coming out of the

world and everything worldly and the giving up of ourselves freely unto God, to be his in life, death, time, and eternity. However the Lord may have wrought with different degrees of power in our hearts, yet we may lay it down as a clear and positive truth that the effect of his dealings with our consciences was to separate us from the world and bring us unto himself. Is not this God's testimony concerning his people Israel? "Ye have seen what I did unto the Egyptians, and how I bare you on eagles' wings, and brought you unto myself." (Exod. 19:4.)

2. But we have to remember as another bright waymark and blessed Ebenezer on the road by which we have come, how the Lord was pleased to *manifest a sense of his mercy*, of his goodness, and of his salvation to our heart. There are two points which it is very desirable, if not absolutely needful, for a child of God to be very clear in: One, is the beginning of the work of God upon his soul—to make clear work there; and the second is, to be able to trace out any application of the blood of Christ to his conscience, any manifestation of mercy to his soul, any revelation of the Son of God to his heart, any knowledge of salvation by the remission of sins. Now, though there may be in many cases doubts, fears, and questionings as to the reality of both these points, and especially the beginning of the work, yet I do believe wherever the Lord has begun a gracious work, there will be times and seasons when a sacred light will shine upon that beginning to make it plain and clear; and similarly, if the Lord the Spirit has ever revealed Christ to our soul, and made him precious to our affections, a blessed light will at times shine upon that also, to make that plain and clear: for "in God's light we see light;" and we thus get a testimony in a good conscience, that we have been made partakers of eternal life by a spiritual, experimental knowledge of the only true God and of Jesus Christ whom he hath sent. There are

times indeed when we can believe nothing, and there are times when, so to speak, we can believe everything. There are times when we have to say, "We see not our signs;" and there are times when we can see every waymark and every Ebenezer. But our feelings do not alter facts; and as seeing our signs does not make them, so our not seeing them does not unmake them.

3. But we have to remember *all* the way which he has led us in the wilderness. It is not only then the bright spots which we have to call to mind: there are the *dark* spots also on which we have to look and remember. The children of Israel were bidden to remember "all the way," and therefore all the temptations of the way, trials of the way, sufferings of the way, and I may add, all their own base, rebellious conduct in the way. If, then, in looking back to the way we see here and there an Ebenezer, a token for good, a bright spot, we see spots here and there on which darkness seems to rest, and from which we would fain turn our eyes. Now this darkness may arise from two causes: 1, first, want of clear light; and, 2, secondly, a painful recollection of our own sinfulness. Thus, as sometimes in nature there is a mixture of light and darkness, producing a dim and hazy twilight, and thus obscuring spots which might be otherwise bright, so it is in grace. Let me explain my meaning a little more clearly. Upon some points of our experience we cannot be altogether clear, and for this reason, there was so much of sin and self mixed with them. Thus we can look back on various spots and places when certain sacrifices were to be made, certain things to be given up which we held very close, and to part with which seemed to cut very deeply into our flesh. It might have been an attachment, or a situation, or a prospect of getting on in life. We could not therefore through the weakness of the flesh make the sacrifice. Now this clinging to sin and self has thrown a degree of darkness upon those

spots. And yet all is not dark; for a second look would enable us to view other spots and places where the Lord gave faith to make the sacrifice, come out of the world, give up everything that nature loved and cleaved to, and cast one's lot amongst the family of God. These would be spots in one's experience which one could look back upon with some degree of satisfaction as the Lord's work. Yet in all our movements there is so much sin, so much of the flesh, and so much of self mixed up, that though what we did was performed under a divine power and contrary to the flesh, yet in looking back upon it we cannot call it to mind with perfect satisfaction. Thus it is partly light and partly dark. But even where this is not the case, unbelief, infidelity, carnal fear, and a spirit of bondage will often so work together that the whole may first and last seem buried in confusion. I cannot myself understand those people who are always ready to talk about their experience at any hour and at every hour of the day; so that if you were to wake them up at twelve o'clock at night, they would only have just to rub their eyes and they could tell you all their experience from first to last, between asleep and awake. I know myself that sometimes I have not a word to say about myself or my experience—good or bad—and am silent before God and man; but these men seem to have it all at their fingers' ends, and can wind it off from them as easily a skein of cotton, and pretty much as harsh and dry. It is, I believe, by ourselves in silence, for the most part, that we can best look back upon all the way by which God has led us in the wilderness; and if he do not shine upon the way and bring it to remembrance, "we wait for light, but behold obscurity; for brightness, but we walk in darkness." And yet when the Lord is pleased to shine, how good it is to look back upon all the way.

4. Sometimes, for instance, we see what a God he has been to us in *providence*. We trace his outstretched hand again

and again, with more or less clearness and distinctness, and as our faith sees this hand, we bless and praise his holy name for having led us so conspicuously by it. I have seen much of it myself, perhaps, as much as most men, and especially during these two last years of my life, and I desire to bless God for it; yet at times it is very hard to trace the hand of God distinctly, for as he works by instruments, we sometimes fix our eyes upon the instrument and not upon the hand which holds it; which is the sin condemned by the prophet, "as if the axe should boast itself against him that heweth therewith, or the saw magnify itself against him that shaketh it." But another thing which confuses us is what I may call the zigzag of God's providence. But was not this the case also with the children of Israel? When the pillar of the cloud moved, they moved; by night or by day the camp moved, according to the movement of the cloud, as we read, "And so it was, when the cloud abode from even unto morning, and that the cloud was taken up in the morning, then they journeyed: whether it was by day or by night that the cloud was taken up, they journeyed." (Num. 9:21.) But in thus following the cloud, what a zigzag, in and out, backward and forward path they trod. If you were to see it traced out on a map you would wonder at the intricacy of the path and how they were directed from this station to that in a way which they could not comprehend, yet every step arranged by infinite wisdom. Thus we are to remember all the way whereby God hath led us these many years in the wilderness by his wise and unerring providence.

But we have also to remember all his *gracious dealings* with us as contrasted with our own perverseness, rebelliousness, unbelief, and base requitals of all his goodness and mercy. And thus all our trials, afflictions, sufferings, exercises, snares, temptations, wanderings, backslidings, slips, and falls—we have to remember them all, think upon them,

ponder over them, examine them, lament, bewail, and confess our sinfulness in them on our part; and we have to remember also all the patience, forbearance, long-suffering, tender mercy, and rich, superabounding grace on the part of God. We have to look at these things till they enter deeply into our heart, and sink and penetrate into our inmost conscience, that our soul may be like a newly ploughed field, open to sun and rain, and broken down into mellowness and tilth, that we may indeed be "God's husbandry," and that the word of eternal life may be in our heart as the good seed which springs up and grows and brings forth fruit to his praise.

II.—But I will now pass on to consider the *benefits and blessings* which sprang out of their wandering in the wilderness, and which they were to remember as much as the wanderings themselves.

Though their wandering so many years in the wilderness was a punishment for their sins, and especially for that sin of unbelief and rebellion which they manifested on the return of the spies, when they murmured against Moses and Aaron, crying out, "Would God that we had died in the land of Egypt," and actually proposed to make a captain and return, yet God took advantage, so to speak, of their sins and their rebellion to bring about the purposes of his own good pleasure. He did not create their sins; he was not the author of their rebellion; he did not foster their unbelief, for God cannot be the author of sin; and yet he could take occasion by their very sin to work out his own purposes. We cannot have a more striking instance of this than the crucifixion of our dear Redeemer, in which God worked out his purposes by the hands of ungodly men. How plain is Peter's testimony: "Him, being delivered by the determinate counsel and foreknowledge of God, ye have taken, and by wicked hands

have crucified and slain." (Acts 2:23.) It was by "the determinate counsel and foreknowledge of God that Jesus was delivered," or as the word means, "given up" out of the hands of God into theirs; but it was wicked hands which took him, crucified, and slew him. God's determinate counsel and foreknowledge did not make their hands wicked; and yet their wicked hands brought about his holy purposes. So it was with the children of Israel. It was their wickedness which was the cause of their long wanderings; and yet these very wanderings carried out God's purposes, and what is more, were overruled for their good. So it is with us in this wilderness world, of which that "great and terrible wilderness" was a representation. God had a purpose in permitting us to be what we are, to have been what we have been, and to have done what we have done. And what that purpose was is beautifully and blessedly opened in our text. Let us see if we can trace out some of these designs of God, as laid open in the words before us; and let us bear in mind that they are as applicable to us now as they were to the children of Israel: for "whatsoever things were written aforetime were written for our learning, that we through patience and comfort of the Scriptures might have hope."

1. The first purpose is to *humble us*. Our heart, at least mine, is desperately proud; and if there be a sin which God hates more than another, and more sets himself against, it is the sin of pride. Though some men are more tempted, perhaps, to that sin than others, and, like a weed upon a dunghill, it may grow ranker in some soils, especially when well manured by rank and riches, praise and flattery, our own ignorance, and the ignorance of others, yet all inherit it alike from their fallen ancestor, who got it from Satan, that "king over all the children of pride." Those, perhaps, who think they possess the least, and view themselves with wonderful self-complacency amongst the humblest of mortals, may

have as much or more than those who feel and confess it, only rather more deeply hid and buried more out of sight in the dark recesses of their carnal mind. As God then sees all hearts, and knows every movement of pride, whether we see it or not, his purpose is to humble us. And if we take a review of all his dealings with us, we shall see that this is the end which he has ever had in view; for until that is done we may well say that nothing is done.

But how did God humble the children of Israel? By placing them in circumstances which manifested their real character. God, as I said before, does not put his hand to wickedness: God forbid! God does not stir up by his Spirit evil in a man's heart; but he finds it there. If a wasp sting you, if a dog bite you, if you tread upon a serpent, and he turn round and fasten his poison fangs into your ankle, was it any act of yours which put venom into the wasp, sharp teeth into the dog, or poison into the snake? Was it not all there before? It was drawn forth, but there it was; and the occasion only drew it out. So if there be in the heart of man pride, as there is, and circumstances occur to draw it out; or if there be in men's hearts rebellion, and circumstances draw forth that rebellion; or if there be in man's heart unbelief and infidelity, and occasions arise to draw them forth, and those occasions occur in the providence of God, God does not create that pride, that rebellion, that unbelief, that infidelity, nor does he stir it up instrumentally; but he suffers it to manifest itself for this special purpose, to humble the individual in whom the sin thus appears. Mark my words: I am not justifying any kind of sin in thought, word, or deed. Sin, in my eyes, is exceedingly sinful. I would desire never to sin again. I would, if I could, live perfectly holy. I would not have a sinful thought, I would not speak a sinful word, and still less would I commit any sinful action. And yet I find sin working in my mind sometimes all day long. Now what do I learn by this?

Humility. But if truly humbled I cannot raise my hand against God; I cannot lift up a rebellious tongue against him and say, "Why hast thou made me thus?" for were I to do so I should have against me the verdict of my own conscience. I must fall down, then, humbly and meekly before him; I must put my mouth in the dust; I must acknowledge I am vile, because I see his greatness, majesty, holiness, purity, and perfections, and see and feel, as contrasted with them, my own exceeding sinfulness before him. This, therefore, teaches me humility; at least if I don't get humility in this way, I don't know how it is to be got. Now when I look back upon a long life of profession, how many things do I see—though with all my sins and follies, slips and falls, I hope the Lord has kept me from bringing any open reproach upon his name and cause, and God keep me to the end, for it would be a dreadful thing for me after my long and well-known profession to bring disgrace upon the truth in my last days, yet my conscience testifies of many things I have thought, said, and done, which grieve my soul almost every day in the recollection of them, and make me hang my head before God, put my mouth in the dust, and confess my sins unto him. Nor do I believe that I am singular in this feeling, for I am well persuaded that there is not a single person in this congregation who possesses the fear of God in a tender conscience who can look back through a life, and especially a long life of profession, without many cutting reflections, many painful reminiscences, and many distressing recollections that humble him in the very dust before God. At least I have no communion, and wish to have none, with any but those whom God humbles. Men of broken hearts, contrite spirits, and tender consciences I would desire to have for my companions, if I have any.

2. But God had other purposes and other ends to accomplish besides humbling. He had "to *prove them*, to know what was

in their heart, whether they would keep his commandments or no."

Every man has to be proved, and every man's religion has to be proved; for every man's work is to be tried with fire; and though the trial may be delayed—though the proof may not yet seem going on, yet if you make a profession of religion, sooner or later the trial will come, and it will be made manifest in the fire of trial and temptation of what sort your religion is. Now the wilderness was meant to prove the children of Israel. They made great boasting at Mount Sinai. All that God bade them observe to do, they said that they would observe and do; and yet, when Moses tarried in the mount a little beyond their expectation, they made a golden calf. So much for the spirit of free will; so much for the resolve of the creature to keep God's commands. Now God is determined to prove what is in a man's heart, and whether he will keep his commandments or no. It is not for the purpose of proving it to himself, for he knoweth all things, but of proving it to us. Where, for instance, he plants his fear, he will prove that fear. Circumstances will arise, various things will occur in business, in the family, in a man's situation, public or private, whereby it will be ascertained whether he is possessed of the fear of God or not. He may for a time carry on his crafty practices; he may wear a mask and may deceive himself and deceive others; but sooner or later, if the fear of God be not in his soul, if he be not a possessor of heavenly grace and God has not wrought anything in his heart by his own divine power and influence, he will prove reprobate silver; he will not stand the test; his religion will be burnt up in the flame, and he himself be cast out as worthless dross. He may go on for many years, and yet the end will prove sooner or later what the man is, and what his profession is worth. But the same fiery trial will also prove what a man has of the life of God in his soul. For

though, through the power of temptation, he may often reel and stagger to and fro, and be at his wits' end, yet God will deliver him out of all his temptations, and manifest in him the power of his grace. It is a day of great profession, splendid pretensions, loud talking, presumptuous boasting, and, as men think, strong faith. I do not think so myself, but just the contrary, for it seems to me to be a day of small things with the very best, and a day of no things at all with the most. But God best knows what the day really is. He sees all hearts, searches all reins. Nothing that we are or have is hidden before the eyes of him with whom we have to do; and it is to be greatly feared that much of this strong faith will be proved to be presumption, many of these boasting claims to be downright arrogance, and much of this loud talk to be that of "the prating fool," against whom, twice in one chapter, God has recorded this awful sentence, "that he shall fall." One grain of godly fear, one sigh and cry of a broken heart, one longing look of living faith, one tender feeling of love to the Lord from a glimpse of his beauty and blessedness, are worth all this loud talk of which the wise man truly says, it "tendeth only to penury."

3. But God has to prove by the wilderness, not only the truth and reality of his work upon the heart, but whether *we will keep his commandments or no*. It is not what we talk that God looks to, but what we do. "The tongue," says James, "is a little member, and boasteth great things." To talk is easy enough, but to do is another matter. Talking brings with it no sacrifices, no self-denial, no crucifixion of the flesh, no mortification of the whole body of sin, no putting off of the old man, no putting on of the new. A man may talk and drink, talk and cheat, talk and lie, talk and live in all manner of ungodliness. But it is walking not talking, praying not prating, doing not daring, obeying not saying, which manifest whose we are and whom we serve. But what are we to

understand by keeping God's commandments? It does not mean, I believe, as interpreted by the rule and spirit of the gospel, keeping the moral law, that is, the law of Moses in the ten commandments, but the preceptive part of God's word, as revealed and laid down in the New Testament, where everything that God would have us to do, and everything that God would have us not to do, are written as with a ray of divine light. It embraces, therefore, every gospel precept, every New Testament command and direction, in a word, everything which proceeds from the mouth of God as given by him in the last revelation of his own mind and will, as the guiding rule of our Christian obedience. For you will observe that this is the test laid down in our text, "whether we will keep God's commandments or no." And where are those commandments laid down in all their clearness and plenitude but in the New Testament. Is he not our Master, whom we serve in godly fear and love, whose approbation we desire to win, whose favour we count better than life, and in the enjoyment of whose love we wish to live and die? Now with all the perplexity, doubt, or fear which may encompass your mind, through the worrying, distracting power and influence of sin, Satan, and self, if you possess the fear of God, there will be that honesty, integrity, uprightness, and sincerity wrought in your soul by a divine power, whereby you can say before God, "Lord, I desire to know thy will and do it. However I come short, however I fail or fall, my desire is to be found walking in thy ways and doing those things which are pleasing in thy sight."

But how does the wilderness prove how far we are willing to do the things which are pleasing in God's sight, and how far we are willing to keep his commandments or no? Thus. Its trials and temptations, its sorrows and afflictions, its perplexities and the exercises which spring from them, lay bare the real state of our hearts, and as they discover to us

the weakness and wickedness of the flesh, so they also bring to light any good thing which God by his grace may have wrought in our soul. When we are in a smooth and easy path, flesh and spirit are alike hidden from view. Like the sea in a calm, the flesh is smoothed into smiles, and what it can be in a storm is hidden in the still yet deep water. Thus we know not what the flesh really is until worked up into a storm by the winds of temptation. Then its waves roll and it casts up mire and dirt; and then we also know the mighty voice which can say to these winds and waves, "Peace, be still." It is thus that the strength of sin and the strength of grace are brought out, and we learn which is stronger, grace or sin, the power of the flesh or the power of the Spirit, the battlings of self or the victories of Christ.

4. But to pass on. The Holy Ghost by the mouth of Moses goes on to unfold other reasons of these wilderness dealings, setting before us both sides of the question, that we may well ponder the path of our feet. The next point then which we have to consider is God's "*suffering us to hunger.*" This, we know, was highly characteristic of the wilderness. No food naturally grew there. All the food supplied during those forty years was food from heaven miraculously supplied. But before that miraculous supply came, they were sharply hunger-bitten. Scarcely had they got into the wilderness before hunger pangs fell upon them, and they cried out, "Would to God we had died by the hand of the Lord in the land of Egypt, when we sat by the flesh pots, and when we did eat bread to the full; for ye have brought us forth into this wilderness, to kill this whole assembly with hunger." (Exodus 16:3.) They were therefore suffered to hunger that they might have a sharp though not long taste of one of the severest of bodily pangs and human sufferings.

But this was typically instructive, and throws a broad light

upon the teachings and dealings of God with the souls of his people in the wilderness now. He suffers us to hunger. We cannot feed upon husks. Worldly things cannot satisfy the immortal desires of a newborn soul. We must have divine food; we must have heavenly realities. Whatever I am, whatever men may think I am, I feel this one thing, that I must have heavenly realities. I cannot do with shadowy appearances, with make-believes and make-do's in religion. I may have but little, but let that little be real, for all else is a mockery and a delusion. Let it be the pure work of God upon my soul; let it be the breathings of his Spirit into my heart; let it be the communication of his life and the visitations of his favour to preserve my spirit. I don't want much; I don't seek great things; but I seek real things. I want a religion to live and die by; I want something to save and sanctify, bless and comfort my soul for time and eternity. I have to die; I have to face eternity. My conscience registers many sins committed against a holy God. I cannot stand before him under the weight of these sins as thus manifested to my conscience. How, then, under the weight of all my sins, known and unknown, seen and unseen? Nothing, therefore, but the manifested mercy, goodness, and love of God can speak any real comfort to my soul, can bear me up under any trial, support me under any affliction, comfort my heart when cast down, and speak a peace to my inward spirit which the world cannot give nor take away. Therefore I want realities. And this makes me preach them to you, and insist upon them both earnestly and continually. And I believe I have a witness in your consciences who fear God that I am right in so doing, for God teaches all his people, be they strong and well established in the faith or weak and feeble, the same lesson: he makes them all alike want realities. And the way which he teaches them to want realities is by suffering them to hunger. Is not hunger a real thing? You who can always find plenty of food in the cupboard and

plenty of money in the purse to go to market with, or who from various causes have but a weak and feeble appetite, perhaps scarcely for a day in your life know what real hunger is. But hunger is a reality, and you might be in circumstances to find it so. Say, for instance, you were on board a ship when provisions ran short, or on a long journey when food could not be readily obtained, or were so reduced in circumstances that you had no money to buy it, you would find hunger a reality. So it is in spiritual matters. Hunger is a reality. And have you not sometime found it to be a reality? "As the hart panteth after the water brooks, so panteth my soul after thee, O God." No reality in that panting? We read of the wanderers in the wilderness: "Hungry and thirsty, their soul fainted in them." (Psalm 107:5.) No reality in that hunger and thirst, or the fainting of their soul in the very pangs of famine? "My soul thirsteth after God, after the living God." No reality in that? If you say "No" it is to deny at one and the same moment and in one and the same breath that hunger is a real feeling. Sometimes you can hardly get beyond the sigh, the cry, the longing desire, the hungering and thirsting after righteousness; but it is a reality, and a divine reality too, for it is not nature but grace which produces it. And God suffers you to hunger that you may know hunger to be a reality. If you could feed upon husks, why need you hunger? If you could, as men often bid you, take God at his word, believe the promises, rest upon the doctrines, claim God to be your Father, and walk in all the arrogance of the children of pride why need you hunger? Not you. What do these men know about hunger or thirst either? What do they know of David's feelings or David's cry? "Mine eyes fail for thy word, saying, When wilt thou comfort me?" Why need their eyes fail or their soul faint for God's salvation when they have it all locked up in the cupboard? Locked up, do I say? No; for their cupboard has neither lock nor key, but is open all the day long to all comers. But it is because you

cannot take blessings and favours God does not give; it is because your heart cries out, as Berridge says, for heavenly food; it is because you know there is a reality in the things of God, and that if God withhold them you cannot get them, that you cannot do their biddings and steal their stealings. Yes, it is your hunger which teaches you what real food is. Perhaps you have come here this evening hungering. As you walked along there might have been raised up a secret cry in your soul, "Lord, give me something this evening. I want a word. It is a long time since thou wert pleased to speak to my soul. I am in trouble. My soul is deeply tried. I want something from thyself." Here is the hunger of which I am speaking and on which I am insisting. Now God teaches you by the wilderness to feel this hunger: it is his work. The emptying us of self is his; the sifting of our souls in the sieve is his; the bringing down of our proud heart is his; the wounding of our consciences is his; the stripping of all our own goodness, wisdom, strength, and righteousness is his; the feeling of hunger then which springs from these dealings of God with our hearts is his. We know that, alike in nature and grace, hunger is not food, but it is next door to it. We know that a sharp appetite is not good meat or a loaf of bread; but what is good meat or the best of bread if there is no appetite for it? It is a blessed preparation for a feast, if it is not the feast itself. For what is a feast to a man who has no appetite for it? What the smell of roast beef is to a sickly invalid—a subject of loathing not of longing, quenching the appetite rather than sharpening it.

5. But what other dealings of God with them in the wilderness does Moses bid them remember? The *food* with which he supplied their hunger: "*He fed them with manna, which they knew not, neither did their fathers know.*" Here was a provision. What a miracle, and what an undeniable miracle. How stupid, to say the least, must infidelity be to

deny a miracle which was witnessed every day by a million of people. Could you deceive a million of people for forty years? Could manna fall every day except the Sabbath for forty years and feed a people amounting to more than a million, and all those people be deceived in their eyes, in their hands, and in their taste? Why, the very little children would rise up and testify when they saw their mothers bring home the manna which they gathered every morning, that it had fallen during the night from heaven. But as a standing and permanent evidence of the reality of the manna, was not a pot of it laid up before the Lord by the side of the ark to be kept for all generations, not only to bear witness to the miracle but to show what the manna was in itself as a visible substance? I know that there are great difficulties in belief, but I am sure that there are greater difficulties in unbelief. If to believe God's word is a difficulty, and to give full credence to the miracle of the manna seems at times to try our faith, what a much greater difficulty there is in disbelieving a circumstance which was evidenced by such undoubted proofs. If it had fallen once or twice, or in a very small quantity, there might have been more room for question; but to fall every day for forty years together and in such a quantity as to feed more than a million of people—this seems to afford a whole army of proof against infidelity and all its host. Besides which, if once we admit a forty years' wandering in the wilderness, how could that vast multitude have been sustained in it except by a miraculous supply of food from heaven, for earth could not supply it in a waste, howling wilderness? The unbelieving Jews in our Lord's time believed what our modern infidels dispute and deny: "Our fathers did eat manna in the desert; as it is written, He gave them bread from heaven to eat." (John 6:31.)

It was then food not known by any till God sent it. The fathers of those who daily ate it did not know it; but for their

descendants God wrought a special miracle, and gave them bread from heaven—typical, as you know, of the true bread which God gives to his family, the flesh of his dear Son, as our Lord opened up the subject in those remarkable words: "Then Jesus said unto them, Verily, verily, I say unto you, Moses gave you not that bread from heaven; but my Father giveth you the true bread from heaven. For the bread of God is he which cometh down from heaven, and giveth life unto the world." (John 6:32, 33.)

6. Now what was God's object in thus sending them manna from heaven? He could if he had pleased have sent them quails every morning; or created bread, as our Lord created it when he fed the seven thousand. He might have sent them flocks and herds innumerable. But such was not his will. He was determined to feed them by sending them a daily portion of manna from the skies, that they might learn this lesson, that "*man doth not live by bread only, but by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of the Lord doth man live.*"

This, then, is the grand lesson, dear friends, which you and I have to learn in our wilderness journey—that man doth not live by bread only, that is, by those providential supplies which relieve our natural wants. Thanks be to God for any bread that he gives us in his kind and bountiful providence. An honest living is a great mercy. To be enabled by the labour of our hands or by the labour of our brain to maintain our families and bring them up in a degree of comfort, if not abundance, is a great blessing. But God has determined that his people shall not live by bread only. They shall be separated from the mass of men who live in this carnal way only; who have no care beyond earthly possessions, and the sum of whose thoughts and desires is, what they shall eat, and what they shall drink, and wherewithal they shall be clothed; who never look beyond the purse, the business, the

daily occupation, the safe return, the profitable investment, and how to provide for themselves and their families. God has planted in the breast of his people a higher life, a nobler principle, a more blessed appetite than to live upon bread only. We bless him for his providence, but we love him for his grace. We thank him for daily food and raiment, but these mercies are but for time, perishing in their very use, and he has provided us with that which is for eternity. What then does he mean the soul to live upon? "Upon every word that proceedeth out of his mouth." But where do we find these words that proceed out of the mouth of God? In the Scriptures, which is the food of the Church, and especially in Scripture as applied to the heart, in the words that God is pleased to drop into the soul by a divine power, which we receive from his gracious mouth, and lay hold of with a believing hand. That is the food and nutriment of our soul: the truth of God applied to our heart and made life and spirit to our souls by his own teaching and testimony. And see how large and ample the supply is. Look through the whole compass of God's revealed word, and see in it what a store there is of provision laid up for the church of God. How this should both stimulate and encourage us to search the Scriptures as for hid treasure, to read them constantly, to meditate upon them, to seek to enter into the mind of God as revealed in them, and thus to find them to be the food of our soul. If we were fully persuaded that every word of the Scripture came out of God's mouth, and was meant to feed our soul, how much more we should prize it, read, and study it.

But how does the wilderness teach God's people this lesson? Do not trials and temptations make God's word exceedingly precious? Luther used to say, that he did not know the meaning of the word of God before he was afflicted. God's book is written for God's people; and they are "an afflicted

and poor people." When we are at ease, there is nothing in the word of God for us except indeed it be sharp rebukes and cutting reproofs. But directly we get into trial and affliction, there is something in the word of God at once sweet and savoury, suitable and encouraging.

Thanks then be to God if we know anything of living upon God's word. How the prophet knew this: "Thy words were found and I did eat them; and thy word was unto me the joy and rejoicing of mine heart." But through what scenes of temptation and sorrow did he pass to find the word of God to be the joy of his heart. "Why," he cried, "is my pain perpetual and my wound incurable, which refuseth to be healed?" and this almost in the same breath with eating the word. (Jer. 15:16-18.)

By "the word," we may understand also his Person, his work, his blood, his righteousness, his dying love, his sweet promises, his holy precepts, his kind invitations, and what he is as the Christ of God. What food there is in all this to the soul. Paul could say, "The life which I now live in the flesh I live by the faith of the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me." (Gal. 2:20.) And how blessedly did the Lord open up the whole mystery of the manna in the wilderness in those striking words: "As the living Father hath sent me, and I live by the Father: so he that eateth me, even he shall live by me. This is that bread which came down from heaven: not as your fathers did eat manna, and are dead: he that eateth of this bread shall live for ever." (John 6:57, 58.)

This then is the effect, and these are some of the benefits and blessing of a wilderness pilgrimage. We learn it in the lessons which I have endeavoured to unfold. Can you say, looking up to God with a honest heart, that you have learnt any of these lessons in the days of your pilgrimage?—learnt

humility, learnt the trial of faith, learnt the reality of a
hungering spirit, and learnt the blessedness of living by every
word that proceedeth out of the mouth of the Lord? Now if
you can look back through a pilgrimage, be it long or short,
and say, "Ah, if I have learnt but little, I have learnt that
which has humbled me before God; if I have learnt but little,
I have had my faith tried to the quick; if I have learnt but
little, I have learnt to hunger and thirst after a precious
Christ; if I have learnt but little, I have now and then tasted
the sweetness of heavenly food; and if I do know but little, I
still feel that my life hangs upon every word that proceedeth
out of the mouth of the Lord." Then you can look back and
remember all the way that God has led you these years, be
they many or few, in the wilderness; and now that you come
to look back upon it, you can see that goodness and mercy
have hitherto followed you. Why then should you doubt that
you shall dwell in the house of God for ever?