

## The Soul's Compassion

### Murdoch Campbell

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*"We are journeying into the place of which the Lord said, I will give it you: come thou with us, and we will do thee good: for the Lord hath spoken good concerning Israel."* (Numbers 10:29).

In the lives of most men and women there are moments when they are presented with solemn issues which may profoundly affect their future lives, if not their destiny. This is especially true of those who hear the Gospel. Such solemn issues call for careful and prayerful consideration, and by the grace of God, for a wise decision. A wrong decision, or no decision at all, may involve us in regret, in remorse, and in everlasting sorrow. On the other hand, a right response to the overtures of God in the Gospel shall bring us into the way of peace and eternal happiness.

In this chapter we read of a man who, at the cross-roads of destiny, was asked by Moses to throw in his lot with the people of God. He was also given the promise that if he did so, he would truly share in their blessings and in their inheritance. We have reason to believe that although Hobab at first hesitated in obeying the word which God through His servant addressed to him, he did join himself to the Israel of God and that he became an heir of the righteousness which is of faith. And because, I believe, there are in this congregation some, if not many, to whom this appeal is also addressed by God in His Word I want to give these solemn words a personal application.

Hobab, we believe, is with God in heaven, but you may be here still "halting between two opinions" with eternity very near, and your precious soul unsaved and your time unredeemed. Although you are still in the room of mercy, do remember that you may yet be a stranger to God. Your state, therefore, is truly perilous. Let us offer a few remarks on these words.

Let us consider:

### **I. The Urgent Appeal and The Loving Invitation**

"Come thou with us."

Hobab, we know, was related to Moses by natural bonds; but it was not any mere natural affection which lay behind these words of Moses. True, the Lord's people, like Paul, have a concern for those who are their kinsmen according to the flesh; but their spiritual concern, prayers and affections go beyond their own immediate circles. They would, indeed, have all men come to the knowledge of the Truth and of Christ. In this matter they are also, like Paul, constrained by the love of Christ. Christ Himself has compassion on the ignorant and on those who are out of the way. On earth He wept over those who, in their folly, moved toward eternal destruction, but whom He would have gathered under His wings. If we have a measure of the spirit of Christ our compassion also will go out to the wayward and the lost. Who can remain silent before God as they see the great harvest which might be reaped for Him if true labourers were on the scene! If we were the means of bringing even one soul to seek salvation how great would be our joy in the day of Christ! In the words of Samuel Rutherford, heaven would be heaven twice over if, in the world of glory, we saw one who came to Christ as the result of our prayers or of our witness.

If, like Moses, we belong to Christ, we would have others share our spiritual happiness. Moses, in the midst of all his afflictions, was a happy man. So were God's true Israel whom the Lord had saved, not from mere temporal danger, but from the power and consequence of sin. "Happy art thou, O Israel, O people saved by the Lord." The day he and they came to the knowledge of God, and had tasted that He was merciful and gracious, was the day when they found the key to everlasting blessedness. "O, taste and see that God is good." Only God is good. Only God alone can give us the desire of our heart. "This," said David, in speaking of his hope of enjoying eternal communion with God, "is all my salvation and this is all my desire."

Moses, as we know, was offered the best — or the worst — that this world could give him. He was, perhaps, even offered a throne. He was offered all the pleasures, all the riches and all the honours that this world could confer upon him. Not merely some of these earthly and carnal favours, but all of them. But when he tasted of the heavenly life, and of the deep unspeakable enjoyment of communion with God, he, as an immortal being, knew how empty and vain were all created things. He knew that earthly "things" are ultimately irrelevant to such as are destined to exist for ever. He knew that man can carry nothing with him to eternity but either sin or God. God had forgiven him his sin, and had made him an heir of glory. He knew that to live in sin and to be deprived of God's mercy and love would involve him in misery and despair for ever and ever. O, my dear fellow sinner, we are not trying to deceive you when we say with him, "Come thou with us. and we will do thee good." "How great is thy goodness, which thou hast laid up for them that fear thee: which thou hast wrought for them that trust in thee before the sons of men!" God's people only enjoy an earnest, or a foretaste, here of what is awaiting them in the world to come, but even these drops from heaven are infinitely preferable to all the so-called joys which this unclean and empty world can bestow.

Let me say something else; Paul, you will remember, speaks of the "terror of the Lord". And knowing what that meant he sought to persuade men to "flee from the wrath to

come". Moses also knew what these words meant. He extended his earnest invitation to Hobab because he knew that the alternative to God's goodness and obedience to His will would be His eternal displeasure. He had seen with his own eyes the dire consequences of disobeying God's voice and of living a shelterless life without the safety which Christ's death and blood provide. He saw the land of Egypt come under God's anger and become a veritable city of destruction. The deluge of wrath which descended on Egypt and of which he was a witness was, however, limited and momentary. But "the wrath to come" is unmixed with mercy and is eternal. And since it is the will of God that none should perish but that all should return to Him and live, this precious invitation is not merely from man's heart or lips but from the heart of God Himself. We are but Christ's ambassadors who plead with men to be reconciled to God.

The blessed implication of these words, you will notice, is that the free offer of salvation and the invitations of the Gospel have the sanction of God's Word. We find them in every part of Scripture. Our Lord addressed men in these words: "Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest." Since all men enter the world under a burden of guilt and sin these words are, therefore, addressed to "all". None is excluded. One of the last words in the Bible is "Come". The Spirit and the bride say "Come". The Church unites in uttering the same word as Christ and the Spirit. So do all who hear and obey God's voice.

To say that this appeal to men implies that they have some measure of ability to save themselves is not true. In the matter of salvation man, of himself, can do nothing. He is utterly helpless. But there are, on the other hand, three solemn facts which confront us in relation to the offer and invitations of the Gospel. The first is that man is accountable to God. Why shall the ungodly be excluded on the last day from the presence of God? Is it because they had lost all ability to come to Christ? No. "I was a stranger and you took me not in." He knocked at their door, but they kept it closed. How often, and in how many ways, has He knocked at your own?

Another truth is that there is something we can do. This is not a contradiction of what we have just said. We can pray. We can cry for mercy. "I waited patiently for the Lord, and He included unto me and heard my cry." It is truly God's power and hand that rescues us from the pit of sin; but, as in the case of the Psalmist, He does this in answer to prayer. Prayer is always the expression of our inability to save ourselves. You stay as you are and you will remain where you are. Keep silent and God may keep silent also. The cry of a drowning man cannot save him, but it may bring someone to his side who can rescue him. Let me ask the Lord's people here this question. Was it not in answer to prayer, and with your eye upon Christ crucified, that the Lord saved you? I can almost hear the still small voice of a universal "yea" within the souls of all to whom the question comes.

There is another and a more important truth which we should mention. When Moses said to Hobab, "Come thou with us", the Holy Spirit accompanied that word to his heart and made him willing in a day of His power. The Holy Spirit, who is present in His own infallible Word, is He who quickens us and who draws the soul to Christ. Here, then, is a

mystery of God's sovereignty which is beyond our comprehension. "The wind," said Christ, "bloweth where it listeth, and thou hearest the sound thereof but canst not tell whence it cometh, and whither it goeth: so is every one that is born of the Spirit." May that blessed wind, from the very portals of heaven, waft into your soul and bear you away to the very place whence it has its rise. When, therefore, we say, "Come thou with us", we do so in the hope that the blessed Spirit who also says "Come" may, through our words, work effectively in your heart.

Sometimes when we speak to men and women about their need of salvation, and of their duty to come to Christ, they reply that they are, as yet, "not good enough". But, as one put it, Christ did not come to save little sinners or good sinners, but great sinners and bad sinners. Christ saved the poor publican who cried for mercy while He left the proud and "good" Pharisee severely alone. How unspeakably solemn and terrible is the divine contempt in relation to such men who put their own righteousness before Christ's. We are all in the same category. Our best, before God, is often our worst; for we substitute our own imperfect and soiled righteousness for the spotless righteousness of Christ. My dear fellow sinner, be not deceived. He wants you as you are. There is no sin in your heart or in your life but His blood can wash away. Our God is a forgiving God. "Who is a God like unto Thee that pardoneth iniquity and passeth by the transgression of the remnant of his heritage? He retaineth not his anger for ever, because he delighteth in mercy." Let me say, like many another who obtained mercy, that there was a dark distressing season in my own life when a deep fear lurked in my heart that I had a sin, in the shape of evil thoughts, which God would not and could not forgive. But when He passed by me in mercy, and spoke to my soul in love I saw the wonder of His forgiveness, and the depth of pity which is in His Being toward the lost. "Come thou with us", and you will discover this for yourself.

Look again at:

## **II. The Sure Hope and The Great Promise:**

Moses assured Hobab that they were "journeying to the place of which the Lord said, I will give it you", and that He had "spoken good concerning Israel". God had, indeed, promised His people that He would bring them into a land flowing with milk and honey. We know also that because of their unbelief and disobedience many in that camp never saw that good land. Moses himself was denied that favour. He saw the good land from the top of Pisgah, but, literally speaking, he did not inhabit it. He was already in Heaven when he appeared on another mount — the Mount of Transfiguration — talking to the Lord.

It is good to know that Canaan was but a type of that other land "which is fairer than day" — the heavenly country. The natural Canaan was but a pale imperfect shadow of Heaven. While Moses, therefore, might have included the lower Canaan in his words to Hobab, we know that his eyes and heart were fixed on "Him Who is invisible" and on the place where He dwells. This was how he endured amid all the tribulations of his life. In

the Epistle to the Hebrews Moses, and all the heirs of God's promises, are spoken of as spiritual men who desired and sought that country wherein dwelleth righteousness. They saw spiritual and eternal realities by faith. God and Heaven were more real to them than this sinful world which is, after all, but a passing shadow. As spiritual men they had put this world for ever behind their back. They had become pilgrims and strangers on the earth. This then is what Moses truly meant when he said, "We are journeying to the place of which the Lord said, "I will give it you". They were journeying to the new Jerusalem which is from above.

And those who are going to Heaven are in the way to Heaven. How will you reach your own home after this service? Only by taking the right way to your own door. And unless you are in the way to Heaven how can you reach it?

For Moses and his people this journey began with the slaying of the paschal lamb and "the blood of sprinkling". "When I see the blood I will pass over you". This transaction was typical of the great atonement which Christ made for the redemption of His people. He is the way to Heaven. "I am the way and the truth and the life". it is through His merits and death that we have access to God, and are provided with a way of escape out of our bondage. It is through His death that God's saving power operates for our salvation. It was through the blood of sprinkling that God's arm was outstretched to make a pathway for His people through the deep.

Another evidence that they were in God's way was that God provided for their daily needs. Hobab might have wondered how the great host who were journeying through the wilderness could survive the journey. But he came to know that this favoured people had a daily supply of manna from Heaven, and that a stream from the rock followed them to the end. Dear friend, who may be still ignorant of the blessings which God's people enjoy, little do you know of their enjoyments. They feed on Christ, the "bread of life". They drink daily from the river of life which flows from the smitten "Rock of Ages". Goodness and mercy shall follow them all the days of their life here. Their bread shall be given them, and their water shall be sure. But till you come with us, you shall know nothing of the spiritual fare which nourishes the souls of His people. He has prepared this table for them in the wilderness. "They go from strength to strength, every one of them in Zion appeareth before God." "Eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither have entered in the heart of man the things which God has prepared for them that love Him: but God hath revealed them unto us by His Spirit."

To enjoy the rest and the happiness which remain for the people of God, Hobab must also share in their afflictions. Israel was surrounded by enemies. Their souls were often discouraged because of the way. But afflictions are not hostile to our true happiness or to our holiness. Very often our greatest blessings come through our greatest trials. Besides, the true believer has more joy in his afflictions, both actually and prospectively, than graceless men have in all their choice pleasures. Their sighs and tears are preferable to the smiles and frivolities of the ungodly. The greatest honour and privilege that can be conferred on us here is that we should be partakers of Christ's sufferings. If we are in the way of Heaven we shall reach the desired haven through many storms.

Moses did not conceal or exclude this fact when he spoke to Hobab. Do we participate in the trials of His people? Are we in the footsteps of His flock? If so, we are journeying to the place where sorrow is unknown.

The greatest happiness that Moses knew on earth was the enjoyment of God's presence. This was not personal or exclusive to Himself. The Lord was also in the midst of His people. He dwelt between the cherubims in the most holy place. The pillar of cloud by day and of fire by night was over the camp always. It was not only the symbol of His gracious presence, but also of His nearness and protecting power. What solemnity, sweetness and comfort did this lend to the hearts of His people! "Lo, I am with you always." "My presence shall go with you and I will give you rest." You, who have enjoyed moments, hours or days of God's presence in your own soul, know that this verily is Heaven in the foretaste. Short of this, we have nothing. Without this we shall have nothing but utter desolation for ever. To know God in His love and gracious Presence reduces all other favours to mere nothingness. My dear fellow sinner, when we say to you, "Come thou with us and we will do you good", it is not something of our own that we want to impart to you, but to know Christ "whom to know is life eternal". This is the great goodness to which you also are invited.

By the words, "We will do thee good", was Moses not also emphasising how wonderful is the communion of the saints on earth, and that we are safer and happier in the company of God's people than in the company of those who know not God? The Lord warns us in His Word that the companions of fools shall be destroyed. Ruth, by choosing the people of God as her companions, is now in Heaven. So is David who said, "I am a companion of all those who fear thee." Dear Christless friend, we are not perfect. Far from it. God's people have their own infirmities and failings. They are still in the flesh. If you go about with your magnifying glass you will find spots and flaws in their life. Like Paul, they all acknowledge themselves to be the chief of sinners. But those who belong to God have something which you will never find elsewhere. You have even now a place in their affections, in their prayers, and in their desire for your salvation. O, how happy would the Lord's people here tonight be if you also would say with Ruth: "Entreat me not to leave thee, or to return from following after thee; for whither thou goest I will go, and where thou lodgest I will lodge; thy people shall be my people and thy God my God."

In conclusion, let me say a word on:

### **III. His Hesitation and Decision**

As we have remarked, Hobab's immediate reaction to Moses' appeal was unfavourable. As he viewed the present state of Israel, and compared it to his own temporal comforts, he was inclined to reject his offer. Israel was a people apparently homeless. They were moving within the heart of a barren and dreary land. Their past afflictions were many. Their future trials might be even greater. He had an earthly home of his own. He lived among a people who cared for his temporal welfare. He lacked nothing in God's

providence. But something happened. Yes, something happened. Moses' second appeal moved his heart to go with him. Perhaps, at that moment, he also had a glimpse and a foretaste of the things which are unseen and eternal. The Holy Spirit unveiled his inner eyes and enabled him to taste and see something of the great goodness laid up in heaven for all who fear God and follow Him. In Joshua, Chapter Four, we have Hobab's name and some of his descendants mentioned as being members of God's Israel. Hobab therefore did "come". O! that this would happen to you.

The Lord's people should persevere in prayer and persuasion where precious souls are concerned. We must never conceal from them the worth of our inheritance, and the certainty of its possession. Our prayers, our words and invitations God may bless in their salvation. Even a casual word of welcome and exhortation to Christless souls may be the means of arresting them in their sinful ways. All Christians have a lovely story to tell and a lovely Saviour to commend. They are on the way to a lovely place which is their eternal Home. The gates into this blessed Home are open night and day to all who would enter in.

Notice also how Moses detected in this man latent gifts and talents which the Lord might, by His grace, use for the good of His cause in this world. How unspeakably sad it is to see men of gifts and parts serving the world and the enemy of their souls! Only a few days ago have I listened to two young men preaching the good tidings of salvation. Like Hobab they once hesitated, but now they know the joy of the Lord and they display the banner of Truth and fight His battles. Are you here, either misusing or burying your talents? Great, dear friend, will be your sorrow and remorse in eternity if you do not give your Creator His own back with its interest. Remember, the night is coming when no man shall be able to work. Your opportunity and your day of grace are passing away. "Jesus of Nazareth passeth by." Moses was moving on when he met Hobab. And your present privilege may never be repeated. We, also, say to you from the depths of our heart: "Come thou with us and we will do thee good." Will you, like Mary, make choice of Christ, the Good Part? Will you, like this man of old, be one of His in the day when He shall make up His Jewels? Will you, whether old or young, be among those who shall praise Him in His Zion? "Acquaint now thyself with Him and be at peace: thereby good shall come unto thee."

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