

A Lord's Day Snippet!

Biblical And Southern Studies

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499

1 Guide me, O my great Jehovah,
Pilgrim through this barren land;
I am weak, but Thou are mighty;
Hold me with Thy powerful hand.
Bread of heaven, Bread of heaven,
 Feed me till I want no more,
 Feed me till I want no more.

2 Open now the crystal fountain,
Where the healing stream doth flow.
 Let the fire and cloudy pillar
 Lead me all my journey through.
Strong Deliverer, strong Deliverer,
Be Thou still my strength and shield,
Be Thou still my strength and shield.

3 When I tread the verge of Jordan,
 Bid my anxious fears subside.
Death of death, and hell's Destruction,
 Land me safe on Canaan's side.
Songs of praises, songs of praises
 I will ever give to Thee,
 I will ever give to Thee.

William Williams (1717-1791)

A Prayer for the New Year

"O LORD, I know that the way of man is not in himself: it is not in a man that walketh to direct his steps."

Jeremiah 10:23

Jeremiah uttered a prayer that respects the LORD, recognizes the state of fallen man, and reaches out for help to the right person. The context of this prayer may be seen in Jeremiah's proclamation of the exile of the Lord's people (vv. 17-22). And realizing his own inability to turn the Lord's people back to Him, and he concludes with his prayer (vv. 23-25). The prayer implores the only person who could help—"O LORD;" there is a personal acknowledgment in the prayer—"I know;" and there is a proclamation of a

problem in the prayer—“that the way of man is not in himself: it is not in man that walketh to direct his steps.”

The prayer implores the only person who could help or answer—“O LORD.” He addresses the personal name for the true God—Jehovah. He had defined his God previously, “But the LORD is the true God, he is the living God, and an everlasting King: at his wrath the earth shall tremble, and the nations shall not be able to abide his indignation” (v. 10).

The prayer contains his personal acknowledgment—“I know.” So, the prophet Jeremiah prays with certainty to his sovereign Ruler the Almighty God who is the only way. This remark of the prophet shows that he understands the rudimentary things pertaining to his God. The word “know” has the sense of spiritual perception of one enlightened by the Spirit of God. This word was a part of Job’s testimony, “For I know that my redeemer liveth, and that he shall stand at the latter day upon the earth” (Job 19:25). We know that in time man proposes but God disposes. God controls the ways even of the heathen potentates. Take Cyrus for example—“Thus saith the LORD to his anointed, to Cyrus, whose right hand I have holden, to subdue nations before him; and I will loose the loins of kings, to open before him the two leaved gates; and the gates shall not be shut; I will go before ... I will break ... I will give ... that thou mayest know that I, the LORD, which call thee by thy name, am the God of Israel” (Isa. 45:1-3). Cyrus was God’s anointed whose hand He held guiding him to conquer. Providence is divinely controlled for the ultimate purpose of letting men know He is God. Even the suffering and death of the Son of God was by the determinate counsel and foreknowledge of God (Acts 2:23-24).

Yes, even our lives are under the providence of God so we should be of good courage (Ps. 27:10-14). Jeremiah warned against glorying in wisdom, might, or riches, but pointed out that glorying should be in understanding and knowing the LORD (9:23-24). T. S. Eliot wrote, “All our knowledge brings us nearer to our ignorance, All our ignorance brings us nearer to death, But nearness to death no nearer to GOD.” Then he asked, “Where is the Life we have lost in living?” Jeremiah warned, “The way of man is not in himself....”

The prayer acknowledges a problem to the LORD—“that the way of man is not in himself: it is not in man that walketh to direct his steps.” Fallen men do not have a flawless spiritual GPS for man goes astray from the womb. Man does not know the way! No “the way of man is not in himself” for he is a frail being, Hebrew “*adam*.” “Man’s goings are of the LORD: how can a man then understand his own way [he cannot]” (Prov. 20:24). The problem with fallen man is his presumption, “Go to now, ye that say, To day or to morrow we will go into such a city, and continue there a year, and buy and sell, and get gain: Whereas ye know not what shall be on the morrow. For what is your life? It is even a vapour, that appeareth for a little time, and then vanisheth away” (James 4:13-14).

Man does not have it in him to know the way, “not in man.” Peter said that man had “forsaken the right way, and are gone astray,” then Peter used a startling contrast, “But it is happened unto them according to the true proverb, The dog is turned to his own vomit again; and the sow that was washed to her wallowing in the mire” (2 Pet. 2:15, 22). Behavior always matches nature and man has a fallen nature and has forsaken the right way.

Our text says, “it is not in man that walketh to direct his steps.” The word for “man” here is the word for male (*ish*) the one responsible for the fall. The spiritually dead do not have spiritual direction. Isaiah said men were like sheep gone astray. Paul said they were blind, deaf, dead (Eph. 2:1 ff.). Jesus said men love the dark because their deeds are evil. Who has all this fall impacted? “They are all gone out of the way, they are together become unprofitable; there is none that doeth good, no, not one.... the way of peace have they not known” (Rom. 3:12,17). Only the saving grace of God through Christ can put fallen man back on the right way. Christ is the new and living way (Heb. 10:20). Paul the preacher would “shew ... you a more excellent way” (1 Cor. 12:31). Christ said, “I am the way.” Who will direct our steps in the New Year? Jeremiah in this prayer puts us face to face with the LORD who alone can direct our way, and He can do it flawlessly.

Walking in the way of God’s providence is not always easy: A lady in one day, during her husband’s absence from home, lost both her children by cholera. With a mother’s anguish of heart, she covered a sheet over them, and awaited her husband’s return. “A Person lent me some jewels,” she said when she met him, “and now he wishes them returned? What shall I do?”—“Return them, by all means,” said her husband. Then she led the way, and silently uncovered to him the forms of his dear children.