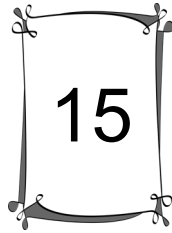


The background of the cover is a photograph of a scenic landscape. A paved road curves through a valley, flanked by trees with autumn foliage in shades of yellow, orange, and green. To the left of the road, a railway track with overhead power lines runs parallel. In the distance, a large, rugged mountain peak rises under a cloudy sky. The entire scene is framed by a green border with decorative, rounded corners.

# Sermons of Robert Murray M'Cheyne

**15. Happy Art Thou,  
O Israel**

**Sermons  
of  
Robert Murray  
M'Cheyne**



**Happy Art Thou,  
O Israel**

***“Happy art thou, O Israel: who is like unto thee, O people saved by the Lord, the shield of thy help, and who is the sword of thy excellency? and thine enemies shall be found liars unto thee; and thou shalt tread upon their high places”***  
**Deuteronomy 33:29.**

These are the last words of Moses, the man of God. He was now an hundred and twenty years old; his eye was not dim, nor his natural force abated. For forty years he had led the people through the wilderness — he had cared for them, and prayed for them, and led them as a shepherd leads his flock; and now, when God had told him that he must part from them, he determined to part from them blessing them. And in this respect, as in many others, did he foreshadow the Saviour, of whom it is written, that “he led his disciples out as far as Bethany, and he lifted up his hands, and blessed them; and it came to pass, while he blessed them, he was parted from them, and carried up into heaven.”

First of all, we may understand these words literally as the blessing of Moses upon the people of Israel. He looked back over the wilderness through which he had led them, and it was all brilliantly studded with the wondrous things which God had wrought for them. He remembered the high hand and outstretched arm with which he had brought them out of Egypt. He remembered how he clave a path for them through the Red Sea, when their enemies sunk like lead in the mighty waters. He remembered how he went before them in a pillar of cloud by day, and a pillar of fire by night. He remembered how he had sweetened the waters of Marah, for they were bitter. He remembered how he had fed them with manna from on high — man did eat angels’ food.

He remembered how he had smitten the rock at Rephidim, and waters gushed forth — how he had held up his hands to the going down of the sun, and Israel prevailed over Amalek. How he had received the law from the very hand of God for them. He remembered how he had again brought water from the flinty rock at Meribah. How he had lifted up the brazen serpent in the wilderness; and, looking back over all this track of forty years’

wonders, during which their garments had not waxed old, neither had the sole of their foot swelled, how could he but put a blessing upon them? He felt as Balaam did: “Blessed is he that blesseth thee, and cursed is he that curseth. thee.” And accordingly, when he had gone over each of the tribes separately, leaving each his prophetic blessing, he sums up the whole in these glorious words: “Who is like unto the God of Jeshurun?”

But, secondly, these words may be understood typically as the blessing of Moses upon God’s people to the end of time. No man can read the Old Testament intelligently without seeing that the people of Israel were a typical people—that the choosing of them out of Egypt — the bringing them through the Red Sea, and through the wilderness and into the land of promise — were all typical of the way in which God brings his chosen ones out of their sins, through this world of sin and misery, into the heavenly Canaan — the rest that remaineth for the people of God. If, then, the bondage, the deliverance, the unbelief, the enemies — the journeying — the guidance, and the rest of the Israelites, were all typical of God’s dealings with his own people to the end of time, we are quite justified in understanding these words as the blessing of Moses, the man of God, upon all the true children of God.

“Happy art thou, O Israel: who is like unto thee, O people saved by the Lord, the shield of thy help, and who is the sword of thy excellency! and thine enemies shall be found liars unto thee; and thou shalt tread upon their high places.” From these words I draw the following

*Doctrine.* — That the people of God are a happy people, because they are saved by the Lord.

### **I. Israel is a happy people, because chosen by the Lord.**

#### *1. This was true of ancient Israel.*

Moses tells them plainly: “The Lord did not set his love upon you, because ye were more in number than any people; for ye were the fewest of all people: but because the Lord loved you, and because he would keep the oath which he had sworn unto your fathers.” (Deut. 7:7). Here is a strange thing which the world cannot understand. He loved them because he loved them — not

because they were better, or greater, or worthier than any other nation, but because he loved them. Strange, sovereign, unaccountable love! He gives no account of his matters; so, then, “it is not of him that willeth, nor of him that runneth, but of God that sheweth mercy.”

*2. This is true of all God’s people to this day.*

David says: “Blessed is the man whom thou choosest, and causest to approach unto thee.” Christ says: “Ye have not chosen me, but I have chosen you.” And Paul says: “Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who hath blessed us with all spiritual blessings in heavenly places in Christ; according as he hath chosen us in him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and without blame before him in love.” Ah! yes, my friends, our God is a sovereign God: “Therefore hath he mercy on whom he will have mercy; and whom he will he hardeneth.”

Every believer is a witness of this. Is there any believer here? Well, I take you to bear witness. You were once dead and careless about your soul — you could be happy with the world, though unforgiven and un sanctified. How was it that you were brought to flee from the wrath to come? Did you waken yourself out of sleep? Ah! no; you know well that if God had let you lie, you would willingly have slept on. Like the sluggard, you would have said: “A little more sleep, a little more slumber, a little more folding of the hands to sleep;” but he awoke you by his Word — by his ministers, or by his providence; and he would not let you go till you cried: “What must I do to be saved?” Again: you were brought from conviction of sin to conviction of righteousness, from a troubled conscience to a heart at peace in believing. How was this? Did you come yourself to Jesus, or were you drawn of the Father? Ah! you know well you received it not of man, neither by man — that God brought you within sight of Jesus. He that at first brought light out of darkness shined into your hearts, and stirred you up to act faith on Jesus; and thus you were saved; for “no man can come to Jesus except the Father draw him.” From beginning to end, then, the work is God’s. By grace ye are saved;

and blessed, indeed, is “the man whom thou choosest, and causest to approach unto thee.”

*Objection.* But some one may object that this doctrine ministers to pride — that to make a man believe himself the chosen favourite of God puffs up that man with pride. To this I answer, that this is the very truth which cuts up pride by the roots. As it is written: “Who maketh thee to differ from another? and what hast thou that thou didst not receive? Now, if thou didst receive it, why dost thou glory as if thou hadst not received it?” (1 Cor. 4:7).

If there be one believer among you, I bid him look round upon those of his own family still without Christ and without God in the world. Perhaps you are the only one in your house that knows and loves the Saviour. Now, I ask you, Who made you to differ? Are you by nature any better than your kindred, that you are chosen and they left? How, then, can you be proud? Or, look round on your neighbourhood, you will see drunkenness and pollution — you will hear oaths and profaneness. Now, I ask, Who made you to differ? or, what better were you than they? Can you, then, be proud? Or, look round on the Popish and Heathen world sunk in darkest ignorance — without any to tell them the plain way of salvation by Jesus. Look upon nine-tenths of the world that want the pure light of the Gospel, and tell me, Who made you to differ? And how can you be proud? Or, look beyond this world’s horizon — look down to the realms of darkness and of death eternal, and see the angels that fell:

“Far other once beheld in bliss—  
Millions of spirits for *one* fault amerced  
Of heaven, and from eternal splendours flung  
For their revolt!”

Look upon these majestic intelligences, “reserved in everlasting chains, under darkness, unto the judgment of the great day,” and tell me, Who made you to differ? what better are you by nature than devils? Unconverted men are children of the devil. There is no lust in the heart of the devil that is not in every natural heart; and yet God hath passed them by, and come to save you. God

came and wakened you when you were in a natural condition, and no better than devils; yea, he hath passed by the Heathen — he hath left your neighbours in their sins, your own children unawakened; but he hath awakened you.

Oh! most mysterious electing love! Well may you cry out with Paul: “O the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! how unsearchable are his judgments, and his ways past finding out!” And does this make you proud? does it not rather make you bury your head in the dust, and never lift up your eyes any more? And does it not make you happy? “O happy Israel: who is like unto thee, O people saved by the Lord!” Does it give you no joy to feel that God thought upon you in love before the foundation of the world? That when he was alone from all eternity he gave you to the Son to be redeemed? “Before I formed thee in the belly, I knew thee; and before thou camest forth out of the womb, I sanctified thee.” Does it give you no joy to think that the Son of God thought on you with love before the world was: “My delights were with the children of men.” That he came into the world bearing your name upon his heart, that he prayed for you on the night of his agony: “Neither pray I for these alone, but for all those that shall believe on me through their word?” Does it give you no joy that he thought upon you in his bloody sweat, that he thought of you upon the cross, and intended these sufferings to be in your stead? Oh, little children! how it would lift your hearts in holy rapture above the world, above its vexing cares, its petty quarrels, its polluting pleasures, if you would keep this holy joy within, taking up the very word of your Lord: “Father, thou lovedst me before the foundation of the world.”

O unbelieving world! ye know nothing of this joy. It is all frantic presumption in your eyes; and this is just what the Bible says: A stranger intermeddles not with the believer’s joy. This is just what Christ said: “Ye believe not, because ye are not of my sheep.” Carry this one thing away with you: “We were once just what you now are (every believer will tell you) — we were just as senseless and unbelieving as you are. We once despised and

laughed at the very persons with whom we are now one in the Lord; but we were awakened by God, and fled to Christ, and are redeemed and happy” — “knowing our election of God.” Oh! May this be your history, and then you will know the meaning of these words: “O, happy Israel!”

## **II. Israel is a happy people, because they are justified by the Lord:**

“The eternal God is thy refuge.” — Verse 27. “He is the shield of thy help.” — Verse 29.

First of all, this is true because Christ is our refuge and shield, and Christ is God. It is said of him: “In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God” (John 1:1). Again, it is said of him: “Thy throne, O God, is for ever and ever: a sceptre of righteousness is the sceptre of thy kingdom” (Heb. 1:8). Again, it is said of him: “By him were all things created, that are in heaven, and that are in earth, visible and invisible, whether they be thrones, or dominions, or principalities, or powers: all things were created by him, and for him: and he is before all things, and by him all things consist” (Col. 1:16, 17). Again, it is said of him, that “he is over all, God blessed for ever” (Rom. 9:5). Again, Thomas saith unto him: “My Lord, and my God.” And he is called “God manifest in the flesh.” (1 Tim. 3:16). So, then, he is indeed “Immanuel, God with us.” He is the maker of the world — the God of providence — the God of angels. And this is the being who came to be the Saviour of sinners, even the chief!

Now, brethren, I wish you to see the use of the Saviour being God, and how the whole comfort and joy of the believer is founded on it. Everything that God does is infinitely perfect; he never fails in anything he undertakes. Everything, therefore, which the Saviour did was infinitely perfect. He did not, and could not, fail in anything which he undertook.

1. *He undertook to bear the wrath of God in the stead of sinners.*

His heart was set upon it from all eternity; for, before the world



was made, he tells us: "My delights were with the sons of men." For this end he took on him our nature — became a man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief. From his cradle in the manger to the cross, the dark cloud of God's anger was over him; and especially toward the close of his life, the cloud came to be at the darkest — yet he cheerfully suffered all. "How am I straitened till it be accomplished!" The cup of God's anger was given him without mixture; yet he said: "The cup which my Father hath given me, shall I not drink it?" Now, we may be quite sure, that since he was the Son of God, he hath suffered all that sinners should have suffered. If he had been an angel, he might have left some part unfinished; but since he was God, his work must be perfect. He himself said: "It is finished;" and since he was the God that cannot lie, we are quite sure that all suffering is finished — that neither he nor his body can suffer any more to all eternity.

*2. But, again, he undertook to obey the law in the stead of sinners.*

Man had not only broken the law of God, but he had failed to obey it. Now, as the Lord Jesus came to be a complete Saviour, he not only suffered the curse of the broken law, but he obeyed the law in the stead of sinners. Through his whole life, he made it his meat and drink to do the will of God. Now, we may be quite sure, that since he was the Son of God, he hath done all that sinners ought to have done. His righteousness is the righteousness of God; so that we may be quite sure, that every sinner who puts on that righteousness is more righteous than if man had never fallen — more righteous than angels — as righteous as God. "Who shall condemn whom God hath justified?"

O careless sinners! This is the Saviour whom we have always been preaching to you — this is the divine Redeemer whom you have always trodden under foot. You would think it a great thing if the king left his throne, and knocked at your door, and besought you to accept a little gold; but, on! how much greater a thing is here. The King of kings has left his throne, and died the just for the unjust, and now knocks at your door. Careless sinner, can you still resist?

*Awakened, anxious souls!*

This is the Saviour we have always offered you — this is the refuge — the rock which has followed you. You are anxious for your soul; and why, then, will you not hide here? Do you think that you honour Christ by doubting if his blood and righteousness be enough to cover you? Do you think you honour God by making him a liar, and refusing to believe the record which he hath given of his Son? Oh! doubt him no longer. Another day, and it may be too late. Flee like men who have an eternal hell behind them, and an eternal refuge before them. Take heaven by violence. “Strive to enter in at the strait gate; for many, I say unto you, will seek to enter in, and shall not be able.”

*And you who have fled for refuge to the Saviour:*

“O happy Israel: who is like unto thee, O people saved by the Lord!” The eternal God is thy refuge; and of whom can you be afraid? Remember, abide in him. In the dark hours of sin and temptation, Satan always tries to drive you from this refuge. He will try to make you doubt if Christ be God — if his work be a finished work — if sinners may hide in him — if a backslider may hide in him; but cast not away your confidence. Cleave fast to Christ; and then the eternal God is thy refuge. In the hour of death, you may have a dark valley to pass through — you may lose sight of all your evidences — you may feel all your graces departed, and cry: “All these things are against me.” Still, as a helpless sinner, flee to the Saviour God. Throw away the question whether you ever believed or no; and say, I will believe now; and thus at evening time it shall be light, and you will die with the eternal God as your refuge. Your eyes will close on this world only to open on the world where there is no doubt, and no fear, and no death.

**III. Israel is a happy people, because sanctified by the Lord:**

“Underneath are the everlasting arms “ — and, “Who is the sword of thy excellency.”

In the chapter before (Deut.32:11, 12), God compares his carrying of Israel to an eagle and her young: “As an eagle stirreth

up her nest, fluttereth over her young, spreadeth abroad her wings, taketh them, beareth them on her wings: so the Lord alone did lead him, and there was no strange god with him.” Again, in Isaiah 63:9, it is said: “In all their affliction he was afflicted, and the angel of his presence saved them: in his love and in his pity he redeemed them; and he bare them and carried them all the days of old.” Again, in the story of the lost sheep, (Luke 15:3-7) we find that the Saviour not only finds the lost sheep, but “when he hath found it, he lays it upon his shoulders rejoicing.” This is the very same meaning as the text: “Underneath are the everlasting arms;” and again: “He is the sword of thine excellency.”

When a young believer has come to peace in Jesus, he then comes to anxiety about walking holily. No sooner has he found the sweet calm of a forgiven soul, than he begins to know the bitter anxiety of a soul that fears to sin. True, I have come to Christ, and should have peace; but now I begin to fear I shall not be able to confess Christ before men. Now I begin to see that the whole world are against me, that all things are tempting me to sin; and I fear I shall go back to the world. I fear I shall be ensnared again. My companions — how can I resist them? and Satan — how can I fight against him?

This is the time when the young believer begins to make a great many resolutions in his own strength. If he could only keep out of the way of temptation, and separate from the world, he thinks he could keep himself holy; but God soon teaches him the insufficiency of his own strength. His resolutions are all broken through — his habits of walking strictly vanish like smoke before the breath of temptation; and the young child of God sits down to weep over the plague of his own heart, and to cry: “O wretched man who shall deliver me from the body of this death?”

If there be any such hearing me, suffer me, I beseech you, to recommend a new plan — a far more excellent way. Give yourself into the everlasting arms. When sin arises, when the world sets in like a flood, when temptation comes suddenly upon you, lean back upon the almighty Spirit, and you are safe. How

does the little child do that has been set down upon the ground to walk, when it finds that its little limbs bend under it — that the first breath of wind will overthrow it? Does it not yield itself up into the mother’s arms? When it cannot go, it consents to be carried; and so do you, feeble child of God. God hath given you *cleaving faith*, to cleave to Christ alone for righteousness; and that gave you the peace of the justified. Pray now that God would give you resigning faith, that you may trust him alone for strength — that you may yield yourself into the everlasting arms. Go you and learn what this meaneth: Jehovah our Righteousness is the same as Jehovah my Banner. Then, but not till then, will you fully know the meaning of the blessing: “O happy Israel: who is like unto thee, O people saved by the Lord!”

*Objection:* I do not see the Spirit, nor hear the Spirit, nor feel the Spirit; and how can I yield myself into his arms?

*Answer:* This is the very Bible-description of the Spirit’s work: “The wind bloweth where it listeth, and thou hearest the sound thereof, but canst not tell whence it cometh, or whither it goeth; so is every one that is born of the Spirit” (John 3:8). You do not see the wind, nor do you understand the machinery by which it blows, and yet you spread the sail to catch the breeze; and thus the tall vessel is borne over many a rough sea to the haven of rest. Just so lean upon the Spirit, though you understand not his working. Though now you see him not, yet believe in him, and you shall rejoice with joy unspeakable and full of glory, you shall be borne over the rough waves of this world to the haven of rest. Again: you do not know how the well springs up, you do not understand the machinery by which the water springs unfailingly; and yet you carry the pitcher to the well, and never come back with it empty. So depend on the unseen supply of the Spirit — get a daily supply for daily wants — go confidently to the wells of salvation, and ye shall draw water with joy. “If any man thirst, let him come unto me and drink.” “O happy Israel: who is like unto thee!”

Be of good cheer. We are confident that He which hath begun a good work in you will carry it on to the day of Christ Jesus. *But,*

*ah! poor Christless souls*, there is no promise of the Spirit to you. All the promises are yea and amen in Christ. Out of Christ there is no promise—nothing but wrath. You have no everlasting arms underneath you. You are sensual, not having the Spirit. There is no sin into which you may not fall. The sins that make men shudder and turn pale, you may commit. God has nowhere promised to keep you from them. You have not the Spirit — you cannot love God, or do any good work — you can only sin. O poor souls! that are growing still on the stock of old Adam, you cannot but bear evil fruit; and the end will be death. Oh! that you would go away and weep over your miserable estate, and cry to God to bring you among his happy Israel — who are chosen — justified, sanctified — saved by the Lord!

