

"Oh that I had wings like a dove! for then
would I fly away, and be at rest."

- Psalm lv,6

Isaiah lx,8-end

Matthew v,33-end

Psalm 84

New Book of Worship, Psalm 84, p.65

The Psalm from which this text is taken is a prayer of David for deliverance from his enemies. He is weary from the struggle and longs for a relief, which to him seems like wishing for the impossible. But looking a little deeper, the import of the Psalm is that a relief is possible.

Our natural bodies, heavy and inert, tie us to natural place and conditions. We are often compelled to remain amid surroundings which are uncongenial, and to see and hear things that are unpleasant. And in our occupations we are often limited to a narrow, monotonous round which we see day after day with little variation.

But it is only the natural body that is tied. The soul is not fettered by time and space. It rises on the wings of thought and flies where it pleases. The walls and pavements of the city may limit the natural sight, but the soul is free and in thought revisits the places it loves best - the shaded woods where the air is clear and pure and the paths through which we love to walk. The soul rises without fatigue to the tops of mountains and looks out upon the forests spread out beneath, the checkered farms, the villages and lakes in the distance. The flight of thought carries the soul across the sea without effort or delay, revisiting places and scenes of interest in other countries.

This freedom of the soul from the limitations of time and space, this power to come and go at will is imaged in the flight of birds. So in the Scriptures we read that angels were seen flying.

When we are away from home as to the body, the soul returns to the familiar scenes. The Scriptures recognize the flight of the birds as representing the quick presence ~~presence~~ of the soul on the wings of thought. When the Jews were captive in Babylon, their thoughts flew back with longing to their temple in Jerusalem, and they sang: "Yea, the sparrow hath found an house, and the swallow a nest for herself... even thine altars, O Lord of hosts, my King, and my God."

The wings of the soul are wings of thought which free it from the limitations of material surroundings and carry it where its affections lead. Considering merely the most natural exercise of this gift, it is a means of bringing refreshment to us - we fly away and are at rest.

But the power of these wings of thought is not limited to this natural world and to material scenes. They can rise to the world of ideals and picture to the

spirit scenes of orderly and beautiful life such as are not realized among men. The soul can read the laws of order in the Lord's own perfect works, and still more plainly in His inspired Word, and it is borne aloft on wings which leave earthly scenes below and spread before the mind the scenes of heaven.

A world is thus presented to our view which is of greater beauty and more living than this earth, homes that are more perfect, and people who are the embodiment of all that we can conceive of nobility, grace, and loveliness. And all this is not superficial beauty, but the expression of the life of these people. It is their kind affection and pure thought made visible and perceptible to every sense. Our wings of thought have brought us to a land where everyone's work is his delight and there is no weariness or drudgery in it. There is no friction between neighbors, no unkind acts are done, no unkind words are spoken. There are no misunderstandings, there is no constraint, but all intercourse is the expression of abundant love, the love for the Lord within pressing for expression in love to one another.

The Lord is preparing for us a home in heaven - such a home as is exactly suited to our genius. In it everything, to our eyes, is more lovely than anywhere else in heaven. The scene is such as we love best. Those who are to be near us are in part already there. They have a likeness to ourselves. They have had faults similar to ours but they have overcome them. There is a place for us among them, and there is expectation of our coming and preparation to receive us.

Our thoughts can carry us beyond the limits of the natural earth and universe to our heavenly homes. It is this turning heavenward which is especially referred to in the Psalm: "My soul longeth, yea, even fainteth for the courts of the Lord... Yea, the sparrow hath found an house, and the swallow a nest for herself."

And is there not in this ability to rise above what is hard and wearying to the highest ideals a rest for the soul? If life here seems hard, monotonous, and circumscribed, if our way is made hard by misunderstandings and by much that is uncongenial, is there not rest in rising above these things on the wings of thought to our home in heaven where all is congenial and all is at peace without and within?

But some will say immediately, "All this is mere wishful thinking, an invention of the mind that wishes to escape from reality." It is not an invention of the human mind. It is a revelation given by the Lord to mankind in every age from the very beginning. Reality is of the soul, not of the body. There is indeed a danger in our power of mental flight. Like all good gifts, it can be abused. We may indulge in thoughts about what we should like and even about heaven until we become careless and indifferent to our everyday surroundings, inadequate to

our tasks, and unaware of our opportunities of service to others. But this abuse of our "wings" is not necessary. Even when we are intent on our natural work, when we are busy with our everyday responsibilities, our inner thoughts are free. They can constantly turn toward heaven, keeping the influence of heaven with us in our work, and this opens our natural eyes to see what is good and lovely everywhere. It enables us to see good in other people. It enables us to see something of the Lord's kind providence in the events of life as they come to us, transforms many hardships into blessings, and shows us cause always to be content with our lot. So the wings of thought give us rest not only when we cease from natural labor, but while we labor and are occupied with natural cares. They keep us at the same time in heaven. They protect us from what is unheavenly in the world about us, and open our eyes to what is lovely and good.

It is otherwise if the thoughts of our hearts are turned to evil. For then when attention to our duties of the moment is relaxed, our thoughts carry us to unlovely scenes, and cause us to see everywhere only what is in agreement with the evil. So it is important what our inner thought is. The Psalmist prays for the wings of a dove. This is a prayer that our inner thoughts may tend to what is pure and good, for this is what the dove represents, that when we withdraw our attention from natural things, it may turn to things of heaven as its home, and that while we are engaged in natural work and pleasures, there may be the spirit of heaven in them and the power to see what is lovely and good everywhere. The wings of evil thought give us no rest; they cause unrest and discontent. But thoughts that are good and pure are the wings of the dove, which give us rest.

It is not so much the natural things of life that we need to escape from, nor its cares and labor, nor its uncongenial surroundings, as the evil, discontented, poisoned spirit which distorts everything. If we can but flee from this, we shall find rest even though the natural circumstances of life are unchanged.

And if we realize the importance of this ability of lifting up our thoughts, we ought constantly to be in the effort to strengthen the wings. We ought to learn more and more about heavenly and Divine things, for we cannot think about things of which we have no knowledge. We must also give our wings practice until they grow strong. We must rebuke our thoughts when they turn downward, and cause them to look up. Then when our natural strength is cut off and we fly away, we shall surely and quickly turn to our heavenly homes as doves fly to their windows.

Amen