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Open to me the gates of righteousness: I will go through them, and I will praise the Lord. This is the gate of the Lord, through which the righteous shall enter” (Psalm 118:19-20).

Out of deep distress, the Psalmist has called upon the Lord, and has been brought out of the restricting confines of his soul into a broad place of liberty, victory and joy (vs. 5). This marvelous triumph has provoked a flood of praise and thanksgiving to God. The terrible distress is then further described as a battle in verses 10-13. Alien armies, thick as swarms of bees, against which it is impossible to defend himself, have besieged the suppliant. But “*in the name of the Lord*” they were suddenly “*quenched like a fire of thorns*”. In one moment a raging inferno, the next, a cool calm.

This scenario presents something of a puzzle. It resembles nothing in the military life of David. Nor is it the sort of thing that a Christian believer is likely to experience. We are not in a battle against armies of men, and if we were, we would not be found “destroying them in the name of the Lord” and crowing about it.

A key to the spiritual nature of this battle and its victory is found in the introduction of the word “righteousness” in verse 15 and “righteousness” in verses 19 and 20. The battle has not been with flesh and blood but that antithesis of righteousness, sin! It is sin that brought the curse and cursedness into the world. By sin, death, and all sorrow, grief, suffering and misery entered into the creation. As sin is the fount of all mourning, so righteousness is the spring of all rejoicing. Therefore it can be truly said, “*The voice of rejoicing and salvation is in the tents of the righteous*”. Surely it can be found no where else, for where there is no salvation from sin there can only be the hollow cackling of fools. That is the sound that is heard intermingled with cursing, railing, wailing and weeping from one end of this sin-cursed world to the other.

And what a battle it is with sin! It is one that man can in no wise win. Like swarms of bees it assails us in a thousand points at once. While we are swatting one, we are being relentlessly stung, poisoned, infested elsewhere. Nor can man help us.

Miserable counselors they are, even though they be among the “princes”, those barren religionists setting themselves up as the brokers of salvation, whom can offer no more than worthless platitudes, empty forms and ceremonies. They are no better than society’s modern cult of witch doctors in the garb of psychology, psychiatry and social engineers. The arm of flesh will always fall far short.

It is only the “*right hand of the Lord*” Jesus Christ our Savior Who is able to do valiantly and deliver. It is He alone Who can open the gates of righteousness so that we may enter in, and give us the voice of rejoicing and salvation. _ C. M.

