

REV. DR. TALMAGE.

The Eminent Brooklyn Divine's Sunday Sermon.

Subject: "Selah."

Text: "Selah."—Psalms lxi, 4.

The majority of Bible readers look upon this word of my text as of no importance. They consider it superfluous, a mere filling in, a meaningless interjection, a useless refrain, or a faint echo. "Selah!" But I have to tell you that it is no mere word, but a word of great import. It occurs seventy-four times in the Book of Psalms and three times in the Book of Habakkuk. You must not charge this perfect book with seventy-seven trivialities. Selah! It is an enthroned word. It, according to an old writer, some words are battles, then there is a Marathon, a Thermopyla, a Judas, a Waterloo; some words decisive, sometimes for poetic beauty, sometimes for grandeur, and sometimes for external import. Through it roll the thundering chariots of the omnipotent God.

I take this word for my text because I am often asked what is its meaning, or whether it has any meaning at all. It has an air of mystery from which I shall never dare to strip it. I will speak to you, so far as I have time, of the Selah of poetic significance, the Selah of intermission, the Selah of the emphasis and the Selah of perpetuity.

Are you surprised that I speak of the Selah of poetic significance? Surely the God who supplied the heavens and made the earth and the sun, and the stars, and the oceans hanging to it like drops of morning dew, would not make a Bible without rhyme, without redolence, without blank verse. God knew that eventually the Bible would be read by a great majority of young people, for in this world of malaria and casualty there is more than the average of human life, in Bible to be a success book it must be adapted to them.

Here is the prosofy of the Bible—the drama of Job, the pastoral of Ruth, the epic of Juges, the dithyrambic of Habakkuk, the threnody of Jeremiah, the lyric of Solomon's Song, the oratorio of the Apocalypse, the idyl, the strophe and antistrophe, and the Selah of the Psalms.

Wherever you find this word Selah, it means that you are to rouse up to greater stanzas, that you are to open your soul to great analogies, that you are to spread the wing of your imagination for great flight. "I answered thee in the secret place of thine bower; I spake at the waters of Meribah, Selah." "The earth and all the inhabitants thereof are dissolved; I bear up the King of Glory? The Lord of Hosts. He is the King of Glory, Selah." "Thou shalt comfort me about with songs of deliverance, Selah." "Though the waters thereof roar and be troubled, though the mountains shake with the swelling thereof, Selah." "The Lord of Hosts is with us, the God of Jacob is our refuge, Selah." "Thou hast given a banner to them that fear, That in it may be displayed before the peoples, 'There is hope,' and under the covert of Thy wings, Selah." "Oh, God, when Thou wentest forth before Thy people, when Thou didst march through the wilderness, Selah."

Whoever you find this word it is a signal of warning hung out to tell you to stand off the track while the rushing train goes by with its imperial passengers. Poetic word, charged with sunrise and sunset, and tempest and earthquake, and resurrections and millenniums.

Next I come to speak of the Selah of intermission. Gessner, Tholuck, Hengstenberg and other writers agree in saying that this word Selah means a rest in music; what the Greeks call a diapsis, a pause, a halting.

Every musician knows the importance of it. It is the rest in the music, the pause.

It is the rest in the drama, the pause, the musical leader, stand before five thousand singers and players upon instruments, and with one stroke of his baton smite the multitudinous hallelujah into silence, and then soon after, that, with another stroke of his baton rose up the full orchestra to a great outburst of harmony, then you know the mighty effect of musical pause. It gives more time to what is being done, gives more power to what is to come after.

So God thrusts the Selah into His Bible and into our lives, compelling us to stop and think, stop and consider, stop and admire, stop and pray, stop and repeat, stop and be sick, stop and die. It is not the great number of times that we read the Bible through that makes us intelligent in the Scriptures. We read it over and over again, an hour for one word. What though it take a year for one chapter? We must pause and measure the height, the depth, the length, the breadth, the universe, the eternity of meaning in one verse.

I should like to see some one sail around one little adverb in the Bible, a little adverb of two letters during the lifetime—the word "if" in the New Testament—say, "God so loved the world." Augustine made a long pause after the verse, "Put ye on the Lord Jesus Christ," and it converted him. Matthew Henry made a long pause after the verse, "Open thou my lips, and my mouth shall show forth thy praise," and it converted him. William Cowper made a long pause after the verse, "Being fully justified by His grace," and it converted him. When God tells us seventy-seven times metitatively to pause in reading two books of the Bible, He leaves to our common sense to decide how often we should pause in reading the other sixty-four books of the Bible.

We must pause and ask for more light. We must pause and absorb the strength of one promise. We must pause and consider how about how many times they have read the Bible through, when they seem to know no more about it than a passenger would know about the State of Pennsylvania who should go through it in a St. Louis lightning express train and in a Pullman "sleeper," the two characteristics of the journey, velocity and somnolence. It is not the number of times we go through the Bible, but the number of times the Bible goes through you, Pause, reflect, Selah!

So also on the scroll of your life and mind, we go rushing on in the song of our prosperity from note of joy to note of joy, until it is a long drawn out legato, and we become indifferent and unappreciative when suddenly we come upon a blank in the music. There is a blank in the scroll of your life, a pause. God will fill it in with a soft bell, or a commercial disaster, or a grave. But, thank God, it is not a breaking down. It is only a pause. It helps us to appreciate the blessings that are gone. It gives us higher appreciation of the blessings that are to come.

The Selah of Habakkuk and David is a dividing line between us and God. Dr. Sage begins his book with the words, "Blessed is the man," and after seventy-four Selahs he closes his book with the words, "Praise ye the Lord." So there are mysteries behind us, and there are going to be mysteries before us. It is good for us that God hails us in our fortunes, and hails us with physical distress. More than once you will have been visited by such a Selah. You wrung your hands and said, "I can't see any sense in this Providence; I can't see why God gave me that child, if He is so going to take it away. Oh, my desolate home! Oh, my broken heart!" You could not understand it. But it was not a Selah of overthrow. It gave you greater appreciation of the blessings that are to come, it gave you greater appreciation of the blessings that will come.

When the Huguenots were being very much persecuted in France a father and mother were obliged to fly from their country, leaving their child in the possession of a comparative stranger. They did not know whether they would ever return, or return if they did, and for that time one might as well be dead. The mother was almost frenzied at the thought of leaving the child, and then, even if coming back again, not being able to know her. Before they left the father drew his

sword and he marked the wrist of that child with a deep cut. It must have been a great exigency to make a father do that.

Your absence passed on and after awhile the parents returned, and their first anxiety was to find their lost child. They looked up and down the land, examining the wrists of the young people, when lo! after awhile the father found a maiden with a scar upon her wrist. She knew him not, but he knew her. And oh, the joy of the reunion! So he says, "Whom the Lord loveth He chasteneth." His truth, He marketh and when He comes to claim His own, the Lord will know them that are His; know them by the scar of their trouble, know them by the stroke of their desolation.

Oh, it is good that the Lord sometimes halts us. David says, "It is good that I have been afflicted." Before I was afflicted I went along, and nothing kept Thy word. In deed, we must all soon learn that there is no improved human longevity, but some of them have proposed to make terrene life perpetual. But the Gospel makes death a Selah between two beatitudes—between dying triumph on the one side of the grave and celestial escort on the other side of the grave. Going on this life to the unprepared is an Attention! Behold! Hark! Selah!

Now I speak of the Selah of perpetuity. The Selah of the Believers in Chaldees, renders this word of the text. Many writers agree in believing and stating that one meaning of this word is "forever." In this very verse from which I take my text Selah means not only poetic significance and intermission and emphasis, but it means eternal reverberation—forever! God's government forever, God's goodness forever, the righteousness of God, righteous forever. Of course you and I have a surveyor's chain with enough links to measure that domain of creation.

In this world we must build everything on a small scale. A hundred years are a great while. A tower five hundred feet is a great height.

A journey of four thousand miles is very long. But eternity! If the archangel had not stopped to fly across it, but

there is no need of our trying in the small shallow of human thought to voyage across it.

A skeptic, desiring to show his contempt for the passing years and to show that he could build enduringly, had his own sepulcher made of the finest and the hardest wood, and then sank it down into the jargon of death. But the Gospel makes the death of the Christian a joyful resurrection and entombment. "Almost won," said dying Richard Baxter, "almost won." "Play those notes over again—those notes which have been so great a delight an solace to me," said the dying Christian Mozart. "None but Christ, none but Christ," exclaimed dying Lambert.

Ralph Emerson, the Scotch connoisseur, went into the battle the other day praying: "Lord, spare the green and keep the red." This is the day I have longed for. This is the day I shall get my crown. Come, let us fight it to the last! Forward! So you see there is only a short pause, a Selah of intermission, between dying consolations on the one side and overpowering raptures on the other.

My flesh shall slumber in the ground till the last trumpet's joyful sound;

Then burst the chains with sweet surprise,

And in my Saviour's image rise.

I next speak of the Selah of emphasis. Ewald, the German orientalist and theologian, says that this word means to ascend; and wherever you find it, he says, you must look for the ascension of the voice and you must put more force into your intonation. It is a Selah of emphasis. Ah! my friends, you and I need to correct our emphasis. We put too much emphasis on the world and not enough on God and the next world. People think these things around us are so important, the things of the next are not worthy of our consideration.

We have the Selah of the first step that we find in the marble slab of the tomb; only a milestone, marking the first mile, and that the greatest journey is begun.

We have only time enough in this world to put on our sandals and to clasp our girdle and to put on our shoes. The first step from cradle to grave, and then we open the door and start—great God, whether?

The clock strikes the passing away of time, but not the passing away of eternity. Measurable, measurable! This Selah of perpetuity makes earthly inequalities so insignificant, differences between septon and septon, between dying consolations on the one side and overpowering raptures on the other.

This Selah of perpetuity makes our getting ready so important. For such prolongation of travel what outfit of guidebooks, of porters and of escort? Are we putting out on a road, smooth swept and ghost haunted, or into regions of goblins, devils and spray gardens? Will it be a smooth road to Gehenna? Once started in that world, we cannot stop. The current is so swift that once in no car can resist it, no helm can steer out of it, no herculean or titanic arm can baffle it. Hark to the long resounding "Hoorsa!" Oh, wake up to the interests of your deathless spirit. Strike out for heaven. Rouse ye, men and women for whom Jesus died. Selah! Selah! Forever!

On the other hand, look at Satisfaction amid the worst earthly disadvantage. I never saw until I was blind," said a Christian man. "I never knew what contentment was while I had my eyesight as I know what contentment now. I have lost my sight. I affirm though few would credit me, that I would not exchange my present position and circumstances for my circumstances before I lost my eyesight." That man put the emphasis in the right place. We want to put less stress upon this world and more stress upon our God, as our everlasting portion.

David found out the nothingness of the world and the insignificance of God. Notice how he interjects the Selahs. "Trust in the Lord at all times; ye people, pour out your heart before Him. God is a refuge for us. Selah." "Blessed be the Lord who daily leads us with benefits, even the God of our salvation. Selah." "The Lord shall count, when He writeth up the people, that this man was born there. Selah." Let us rejoice in His honors, and its riches, and its pomp. Let me have the Lord for my light, my peace, my fortress, my paragon, my hope, my heaven.

What sinners value I resign;

Lord! 'tis enough that You art mine.

I shall ne'er be like Thy blissful race,

And stand complete in righteousnes;

This world is all an empty show,

But the bright world to which I go

Hath joys substantial and sincere;

When shall I wake and find me there?

O glorious hour! O blest abode!

I shall be near and like my God,

And stand and see no more care;

The endless pleasures of my soul.

But when I speak of the Selah of emphasis I mean a little drama of the world and the insignificance of God. Notice how he interjects the Selahs. "Trust in the Lord at all times; ye people, pour out your heart before Him. God is a refuge for us. Selah." "Blessed be the Lord who daily leads us with benefits, even the God of our salvation. Selah." "The Lord shall count, when He writeth up the people, that this man was born there. Selah." Let us rejoice in His honors, and its riches, and its pomp. Let me have the Lord for my light, my peace, my fortress, my paragon, my hope, my heaven.

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