

THOSE WHO DESIRE NO. 2714

A SERMON
INTENDED FOR READING ON LORD'S-DAY, FEBRUARY 17, 1901.

**DELIVERED BY C. H. SPURGEON,
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ON LORD'S-DAY EVENING, APRIL 11, 1880.**

***“O Lord, I beseech You, let now Your ear be attentive to the prayer
of Your servant, and to the prayer of Your servants, who
desire to fear Your name.”
Nehemiah 1:11.***

NEHEMIAH was earnest in his prayer for the good of his sorrow-stricken nation, but he did not make the mistake of thinking that he was the only praying man in the world. He said, “Be attentive to the prayer of Your servant, and to the prayer of Your servants, who desire to fear Your name.” In this one respect, I like Nehemiah better than Elijah. They were both noble men and greatly concerned for the highest welfare of their fellow countrymen, but, at one time at least, Elijah did not have a true or a fair estimate of things as they really were. He even presumed to say to God, “I have been very jealous for the Lord God of Hosts: for the children of Israel have forsaken Your covenant, thrown down Your altars, and slain Your Prophets with the sword; and I, even I only, am left; and they seek my life, to take it away.” Nehemiah, however, acted on another and a more hopeful principle. When he had presented his own personal supplication, he felt certain that there were others who were also praying to the Lord, so he said, “Be attentive to the prayer of Your servant, and to the prayer of Your servants, who desire to fear Your name.”

You know, dear Friends, that Elijah was quite wrong in his calculation, for God said to him, “I have left Me seven thousand in Israel, all the knees which have not bowed unto Baal, and every mouth which has not kissed him.” There were, hidden in caves, or in other parts of the country, thousands who feared God and bowed the knee to Him alone. Let not any of us fall into the mistake that Elijah made. Do not you, my Brother, claim to be the solitary Prophet of God, and say, “I only am left; and they seek my life, to take it away.” There are quite as good men as you are elsewhere in the world and there are other people who are as earnest in prayer as you are. If you get to supposing that you are the only man left who holds sound doctrine, you will become a bigot. And if you think that you are the only praying man on the earth, you will most likely prove to be self-righteous! If you fancy you are the only man who has a deep spiritual experience, probably you will be doing a great wrong to others of your Lord's servants and speaking evil of those whom He has accepted. It is better far to believe, with Nehemiah, that your suppliant voice is not a

solitary one—and that there are many who, like yourself, cry day and night unto God.

I think it would be better to go even a little further and to believe that if you are earnest, there are others who are still more earnest, and that if you possess a deep-toned piety, there are some who have even more than you have. So, instead of separating yourself from your Brothers and Sisters in Christ, as though you stood first and foremost—hope and believe that you are only one small star in a great constellation—one tiny speck in the milky way of Divine Light with which God still studs the evening sky of this world's history. Take a hopeful view of things and you will be more likely to be near the mark than if you judge others severely and imagine yourself to be the only faithful servant of the Lord.

It is quite clear that Nehemiah valued the prayers of others, for he pleaded with God, "Be attentive"—not only "to the prayer of Your servant," but also "to the prayer of Your servants, who desire to fear Your name." Beloved Friends, there is a great value in the prayers of God's people, so we ought to set great store by them. If you ever wish to do me a good turn, pray for me! And if you would be the means of blessing your fellow Christians, incessantly pray for them! You may think that your petition is of small account, but it is the many "littles" that make up the great whole. A pinch of incense from each worshipper will fill the House of the Lord with sweet perfume. Small lumps of coal cast into the glowing furnace will still further increase its heat. Do not think that we can afford to lose your prayers, whoever you may be, but cheerfully contribute it to the general treasury of the Church's devotion.

It seems to me that the persons to whom Nehemiah referred may be regarded as rather weak servants of God, for they were those who *desired* to fear His name. Perhaps it could not actually be said that they did fear it, but they desired to do so. Still, Nehemiah felt grateful even for their prayers and we cannot afford to lose the prayer of a single godly child, or of the most feeble Christian among us. Do not ridicule him about his shortcomings and say that his prayer is useless. No, my dear weak Brother, we need your supplication! Even Abraham could not afford to lose the prayer of Lot, for Abraham's prayer, alone, did not save a single city of the plain—but poor miserable Lot was able to bring just the last ounce of intercession that turned the sacred scale—he contributed a very little prayer and thus one city was saved from destruction. Well, then, if Lot's prayer was needed at the back of Abraham's mighty plea in it, perhaps the petition of the very least among us may, in God's judgment, suffice to turn the scale in some other instance! The Lord may say, "The prayers of My people have prevailed now that this last one has added his request." If one of you should stay away from the Prayer Meeting and thus not contribute your share to the supplication of the whole Church because you think you are not a person of much consequence, it may be that yours is the last prayer which is needed to complete the chain so that it would prevail even as Lot's did. We shall certainly not lose any blessing if you add your prayers to ours, but we shall gain by them! We wish, therefore, to offer to God not only the prayers of any servant of His who is strong, as Nehemiah was, but also the prayers of any of His servants who *desire* to fear His name.

I am now going to speak concerning those of whom it is said that they *desire* to fear God's name. I have already described them as being rather feeble folk, yet all who are included in this class are not alike weak. Still, as a rule, it does indicate an early stage of the working of God's Grace when we can only say of them that they desire to fear God's name. The two remarks I shall make upon the text are these. First, that *this description includes all who have any true religion*. And, secondly, that *this description includes many grades of Grace*.

I. First, then, THIS DESCRIPTION INCLUDES ALL WHO HAVE ANY TRUE RELIGION—they desire to fear God's name.

For, first, *true religion is always a matter of desire*. If you do not desire to fear God, you do not fear Him. If you do not feel any desire after that which is right in God's sight, you have not anything at all right in your heart.

Some have a religion that is all a matter of custom. They go to a certain place of worship simply because they were brought up to go there. Their father went before them and their grandfather went before him—so they follow in their steps as a mere matter of form. If we were to say to them, "Now, do whatever you like. Do not take any notice of what anybody else has done, or is doing, but just please yourself"—in all probability they would not go any longer—or if they did, it would be from sheer force of custom. These are the people who say that our Sundays are very dull and that our religious services are—well, I need not repeat what they say of *them*—but they do not enjoy them, for they have in their hearts no desire towards fearing God, or towards His worship in the public assembly. They would be far happier if they could go to some place of worldly amusement, or idly loiter by the seaside, for the worship of God's House is a weariness to them, and they are glad when the Sabbath is past.

If this is true of any of you, dear Friends, do not deceive yourselves about your real condition, for it is clear that you have not any religion at all! If your presence in the sanctuary is not a matter of your own deliberate choice. If you do not desire to fear God's name, there is nothing in it that is acceptable to the Most High, for God abhors the sacrifice where the heart is not found! What blessing can result from your coming into His courts and rendering only hypocritical worship? What are you doing, after all, every Sabbath, but sending into God's House the mere pretense of a man, if your heart is not here! Your coat is here. Your flesh is here. But not your very self and, therefore, the form of worship is a mere mockery!

There are others, whose fear of God arises entirely from dread. They dare not go to bed at night without offering some sort of prayer—not because they have any real desire to pray, or to commune with God, but through fear as to what might happen if they omitted their usual form! They would not allow a Sunday to pass without attending the means of Grace at least once—not because they have any desire to go, or any delight in the services of God's House—but because they are afraid *not* to go. Yet we must always remember that the religion of dread is not the religion of Christ. That which you do because you are afraid to act otherwise is no evidence of a renewed heart—it is, rather, the proof that you are a slave, living in dread of the lash, and that you would act far other-

wise if you dared! But the child of God loves his heavenly Father and delights to worship Him. Oftentimes, when the Sabbath is about to close, he says—

***“My willing soul would stay
In such a frame as this,
And sit and sing herself away
To everlasting bliss!”***

He delights in the worship of God! It is his element, his pleasure, his treasure—and he loves it without measure!

So, dear Friends, by this test shall you judge yourselves, for true religion is always a thing of *desire*. I do verily believe that attendance at public worship in this Tabernacle is a thing of desire to very many. I see people walking to some places of worship in such a sad and solemn way that they look as if they were going to be flogged or burned. But I notice how joyfully most of you trip along when you are coming here. You are glad when the Sabbath arrives and you look forward to it with delight. May it always be so with you, for you may rest assured that there is no worship which is so acceptable to God as that which we, from our heart, desire to render to Him!

And so, dear Friends, I come back to the assertion that all true religion must be a thing of desire. And not only is this generally true, but if you dissect piety and devotion, you will find that *every part of it must be a matter of desire*. Take repentance, for instance, and I am sure I may say that there never was a man who repented who did not desire to repent. The Holy Spirit never makes anyone repent without his desiring to do it—that would be an impossible thing. So is it with faith—no man believes against his will—to the saving of his soul. There must be a desire to trust Christ, or else there cannot be true faith. In like manner, no man ever loves God without a desire to do so. It would be an absurdity even to talk of such a thing! Indeed, there is no Christian Grace which can be exercised without the desire to exercise it. So, there is no act of worship which can be performed aright unless it arises from desire. A man never really praises God until he desires to do so. You cannot sit still and say, “I joined in praising God involuntarily.”

Desire is also the very life-blood of prayer. An unwilling prayer would be a hollow mockery. If I pray that which I am forced to pray, I insult God. So is it with the observance of the ordinances of the Christian religion. The time was, you know—and not very many years ago—when no man could be a member of a corporation, or could be employed in the service of Her Majesty unless he would take what some people still erroneously call, “the sacrament.” Cowper truly said that they made the ordinances of Christ into a picklock of office! But do you suppose that a man who took “the sacrament” in order that he might be made into a mayor, or a sheriff, or a member of Parliament ever had, in that act, any real communion with Christ? It is all but blasphemous to suppose such a thing! The right observance of the ordinance must be a matter of a Christian’s own free will—the Grace of God must make him desire thus to show forth his Lord’s death. Anyone who pretends to observe either of the ordinances of Christ from any motive but holy desire makes a mockery of them and certainly does not use them aright.

Desire must be at the back of every religious act, or else there is nothing at all in it. It is so in the case of almsgiving. Always take heed that you do not give to the poor, or to any charity, or to the funds of the Church simply because you are asked to do so, for, unless you really *desire to give* what you appear to present, you have not, in God's sight, given it at all! If, in your heart of hearts you feel, "I wish I had dodged round the pillar, or gone down the other aisle, and so escaped having to give," you have not truly offered anything to God. The shrewd Scotchman's remark was quite right when a man said to him, "I have given a half-crown to the collection when I only intended to give a penny," and asked if he could have it back. "No," said the Scotchman, "when it is once in, it is in for good." "Well," said the man, "I shall get credit for half-a-crown, at any rate." "Oh, no you won't!" said the canny Scot, "you only intended to give a penny and you will not get credit for any more than that."

There is another thing that is worthy of observation. That is, wherever there is this holy desire, even if there is no power to carry it into action, *the desire is itself so much the very essence of true religion* that God accepts it. Desire is acceptable, for instance, in the matter of almsgiving even where no alms can be given. According to what a man has, and not according to what he has not, is the measure of acceptance for his gift. David, you remember, wished to build the temple, but God would not let him carry out that great work because his hands had been stained with blood. Yet the Lord said to him, "Whereas it was in your heart to build an house unto My name, you did well that it was in your heart. Nevertheless you shall not build the house, but your son that shall come forth out of your loins, he shall build the house unto My name." And God accepted the will for the deed and blessed David accordingly. This principle may afford encouragement to any of you who perhaps feels, "I cannot do much for the Lord's cause, but I am quite willing to do all that I can." Be ready to give or to act whenever you have the power—and God, our gracious Lord—will take the will for the deed whenever your desire cannot be translated into action.

But remember one solemn fact, and that is that *wherever there is a man who has not even the desire to fear God, there is condemnation*. Such a man must indeed be dead in trespasses and sins! If that is your case, my Friend, you have never repented and you say that you do not desire to repent. You have never believed in Christ Jesus and you confess that you have no desire to do so. You have never, in spirit and in truth, worshipped the God who made you and you have no desire to do so. You have never confessed your sin and sought pardon for it, and you say that you have no desire to do so. Well, you scarcely need, I think, that I should pronounce over you the sentence of condemnation which God's Word declares to be yours! Does not your own conscience tell you how far you must be from the right road when you are not honest and you say, "I do not want to be honest"? What a confirmed rogue such an individual must be! If a man says, "I am not chaste in life and I do not want to be chaste," you know how debauched he must be when he not only sins, but finds pleasure in the iniquity, and boasts that he has no wish to be delivered from the evil! God have mercy upon you, my Friend, if

that is your case! But I pray you to stand convicted of your guilt and to cry unto God to change your heart, and renew your will, and make you at least to desire to be right, for where that desire is really cherished, there is something good and hopeful about you. But where there is not even a desire after that which is right and pure, and holy—what can we say but, “Woe be unto you unless you repent”?

II. Now, in the second, place, I want to show you that THE DESCRIPTION GIVEN OUR TEXT—“Your servants, who desire to fear Your name”—INCLUDES MANY GRADES OF GRACE.

It does not, however, include some who would like to be included in it. Here is, for instance, a man who says, “I am not a Christian, but I sometimes desire to be one.” Yes, my Friend, that is on Sunday night when you are in the company of God’s people. But what about Saturday nights? What about Friday night when you received your week’s wages? You did not desire to be a Christian, then, I think—at least when you got home to your wife and family, they could not suppose, from the way you walked, that you had any desire of that sort!

Here is another man who says, “I desire to be a Christian,” yet he is contemplating attendance at some playhouse or other each night in the week, and he is arranging to spend a great part of his time in the company of the ungodly. I say frankly that I do not believe in that man’s desire to be saved. My Friend, your goodness is like the early cloud or the morning dew—we sometimes have a faint hope concerning you, but while your desires come and go as they have done, there is a text of Scripture that just suits you, and we advise you to take it home to yourself—“The soul of the sluggard desires, and has nothing.” You are like a man lying in bed and all the while saying, “I desire to plow my field, but I do not mean to get up at present.” The sun has long risen. Indeed, it is high noon, but he still says, “I desire to plow my fields, but I do not intend to get up just yet.” And so he sleeps on through the whole day. He keeps on saying that he desires to plow his field and to sow it, but the weather is not favorable—it is either too hot or too cold—it is too dry one day, and too wet another, so he goes on desiring and does nothing. The man is a fool, or something worse and, alas, we have many such foolish folk who are always desiring, and desiring, and desiring and yet nothing comes of their desires!

There is a tombstone erected in memory of a prince who died some little while ago—I will not say where he used to live, but his principality was badly managed, I should think, for he never did a good thing in his life except by mistake. No one ever credited him with having done any good. And when he was dead, they put upon his tombstone this inscription, “He was a man of excellent intentions.” Yes, and that is all that will be able to be said of many others when they come to die, “They were men of excellent intentions—sometimes.”

Such people are very different from those to whom Nehemiah referred in his prayer—“O Lord, I beseech You, let now Your ear be attentive to the prayer of Your servant, and to the prayer of *Your servants, who desire to fear Your name.*” Who are those who are included in this description?

Beginning at the bottom, I should say, first, *the man who has an earnest desire to be right.* I remember once asking a man if he was a Chris-

tian, and he answered, "I am very sorry to say that I am not saved. But, oh, Sir, I do wish that I were!" I looked at him with much yearning in my heart and I saw how earnestly he meant what he had said. And I then went on to enquire why he was not a Christian if he longed to be one, because the great point is to get men to desire to be saved—and when they do desire it, what is there to hinder them from having the blessing? When a boat is guided by a rudder, it only needs that the rudder should be turned in a particular way and the boat will turn at once. And when a man's heart is so turned that he says, "I really desire to be right with God, I long to be a believer in the Lord Jesus Christ"—when that is not merely a passing fancy, but when he can truly say, "I am always desiring this. I earnestly and vehemently desire it"—why, such a man is not far from the Kingdom of God!

There is, however, this remark to be added—*he must not be content with that desire, but must carry it into action*. Suppose that it is time for me to eat my dinner and that I sit down at the table with the meat before me and say, "I desire to eat"—and yet I simply sit looking at the meat? I have my knife and fork ready and I say that I am earnestly desiring to eat—would not anyone who was near me say, "Then, why do you not eat? There is the meat before you. Help yourself!" Ah, dear Friend, that is what I have long tried to induce you to do in the matter of food for your soul. Do you not know that all the provisions of the Gospel are free to all who desire to partake of them? If you have a willing mind, you may come and you will be heartily welcome! There is nothing to hinder you, for all that there is in Christ is free to all who will come to Him. Every soul that really desires to have Christ can have Him!

Perhaps someone asks, "How may I take Him, then?" Why, *simply by trusting Him and entrusting yourself to Him*. You know how I have often put it to you, using that verse in which the Apostle Paul says, "The Word is near you, even in your mouth." Then swallow it if it is in your mouth! Let it go down into your inmost being—that is all you have to do—take it into your very soul. I do not know of a more beautiful emblem of faith, after all, than that idea of swallowing the Truth of God, receiving it, eating and drinking it—taking Christ, who is the Truth, into your inmost self. Only trust Him and you will no longer cry, "I desire to fear the Lord," for it will be true that you do really fear Him.

Now we will go up a stage higher. There are some, included in this number of those who desire to fear God, *who really do fear Him, but are afraid they do not*, so they dare not say that they fear God, but they confess that they *desire to fear Him*. Now this is a kind of holy modesty which, if it is not carried too far, is even commendable. The first thing that certain men in Greece did was to call themselves sophists, or wise men. When they grew wiser, they called themselves philosophers, that is lovers of wisdom and, sometimes, a man who at first calls himself by a very big name, when he gets to be really bigger, is content with a smaller title. I have known some people who have been very sure about their own conversion, but I did not feel anything like so sure about them. And I have known others who were never sure about their own safety, but always felt a sacred anxiety lest they should not be right, yet I felt quite sure about them, for I always saw in them the marks and evidences of

deep sincerity and holy watchfulness. There are many of God's true children who hardly dare call themselves by that privileged name. But there are others who are very sure about their position, to whom we would commend the words of the poet, Cowper—

**“Come, then, a still, small whisper in your ear—
He has no hope who never had a fear;
And he that never doubted of his state,
He may, perhaps—perhaps he may—too late.”**

There is such a thing as never doubting when you ought to doubt. But, on the other hand, I do not want our dear modest friends always to be saying, “I hope and I trust,” yet never to get any further. Why, surely the Word of God is very plain, and the way of salvation is very simple! “He that believes on the Son has everlasting life.” Then, if you believe on Him, you have everlasting life! The man who really trusts Christ loves and fears God—and if you love Him and can say, “Lord, You know all things, You know that I love You,” then you are a God-fearing man. If you are relying for salvation upon Jesus Christ and have no other trust, then you need not say, “I hope I am saved.” You may be sure that you are saved. Still, God forbid that I should ever seem to condemn those whom God accepts, so, if all you dare to say is that you *desire* to fear Him, give me your hand, my Brother! Give me your hand, my Sister—though you are weak and feeble, and your enjoyment of the things of God is but slender, you are in the King's family, one of the redeemed and your prayer is needed to be united with ours, so let us have it and God will accept it!

Let us advance a step further. Those who desire to fear God are found among those who know that they do fear Him and dare to confess it, but who, nevertheless, are afraid that *their imperfections are so abundant that their religion still lies more in the region of desire than of attainment*. I remember being in the company of a person who was talking very much about his own growth in Grace. If I remember rightly, he said something about a higher life that God gives to all His people and he boasted very much about his own attainments. There was another Brother there who said nothing, so the first speaker turned to him, and asked, “Have not you got any religion.” “Yes,” he meekly replied, “but I never had any to boast of.” I would rather join with the second man than the first! The man who does not believe that he might be any better has very little good at present. He who thinks that he has got to the end of perfection is probably at the wrong end of it. No, no, my Brothers and Sisters, those of us who fear God most, also *desire* to fear Him! We have repented, but we want to have a deeper repentance. We do believe in Jesus, but we long to have a stronger faith. We hope to have a brighter, clearer hope than we, at present, possess. We do serve God, but we wish to serve Him ten times as much as we have ever done. Have I any zeal? Oh, that the zeal of His house might eat me up! Am I a saint? Oh, that I might be more fully sanctified and that sin might be more thoroughly overthrown! There is yet very much left to be desired in the best of us—there is great room for further progress and we must keep on pressing forward toward that which is before, and forget that which is behind! In this sense, then, we

are all among those who desire to fear God's name even when we do fear it.

Let us advance another step. There are some who desire to fear God's name in a sense which, no doubt, was intended by Nehemiah. The poor Jews at Jerusalem could not worship God as they wished to do—there was no temple, no altar, no sacrifice. They could not carry out the ceremonials and festivities which God had ordained, *so they desired to show that they feared God's name more publicly and more openly, and to do it more thoroughly and with greater freedom and less hindrance.* I daresay I am speaking to some dear child of God who says, "That is just my case—I desire to fear God's name, but I am hampered in many ways." You have conscientious convictions and you are placed, just now, where you cannot carry them out. You are as yet under age, perhaps, and parental authority is interposed, and you say, "I cannot do what I believe to be right, but I do desire to fear God's name." Hold on to that, dear Brother, dear Sister, and do all that you can do, and God will enlarge the place of your footsteps, by-and-by!

I have known servants who could not get out to the House of God and other persons placed in positions in the family where they could not enjoy the means of Grace, and persons living in villages where they have been obliged, if they went to any place of worship at all, to go where the Gospel was not preached. If that is your case, you may well say that you desire to fear God's name and want more liberty and greater scope. And though you may, at this present moment, be like Naaman the Syrian, and have to bow in the house of Rimmon, I wish you would not do it—I wish you would give up Rimmon and his house! But, still, with all the imperfections with which your circumstances surround you, I know some of you, who are God's true children, are in a dreadful fix and do not know what to do. I want to include you within the lines of those whom God will bless so long as you desire to fear His name.

Cry mightily to God about it and He will yet bring you better days. The Apostle Paul said that if a man who was a slave was converted to God, and he could not lawfully get out of his position, he could glorify God as a slave. And you may do the same wherever your lot may be cast. Make it the subject of prayer that you may be able to serve God whatever happens. Perhaps you dwell in Mesech. When you go home tonight, you cannot gather at the family altar, you cannot mention Christ's name in the house where you live without setting blasphemous tongues going, directly. Let it be your desire that God will place you in other circumstances—and if He does, then carry out what you desire. Do not let the associations in which you are placed cause your piety to degenerate, lest, when God gives you enlargement, you should not have an enlarged heart at the same time and continue to live as you are now when there will be no excuse for your doing so!

To close my discourse, let me say that the very highest form of devotion we can ever reach is included in the description in the text, "Your servants who desire to fear Your name," for I find that some of our translators and expositors read it, "who *delight* to fear Your name." There is not much variation in it, after all, because to *desire* to fear God's name is much the same thing as doing it as a matter of *delight*. Come, Beloved,

God grant that we may all get to be of that number who delight to fear His name! May we be of those to whom it is a pleasure and a joy to be the soldiers of the Cross, the followers of the Lamb—to whom prayer is recreation, to whom praise is Paradise, to whom the service of God is Heaven! We are not now slaves, but happy children who delight in God, and joy in Him! And we can sing with our sacred poet—

***“I need not go abroad for joys,
I have a feast at home!
My sighs are turned into songs,
My heart has ceased to roam.
Down from above the blessed Dove
Is come into my breast,
To witness Your eternal love,
And give my spirit rest.”***

O yes, we delight to fear God! Our misery is that we cannot fear Him as we would. Our sorrow is if we ever fall into sin. A child of God cannot find pleasure there. He may be led into sin, but he will be whipped for it, and he will whip himself for it. He will groan, and cry, and sigh to think how wrong he was to go astray. But his greatest delight is in the Law of the Lord and in His Law does he meditate day and night.

Thus I have shown you that this description comprehends all ranges and grades of Grace. God grant that we may all come in under the description, and may we then take care to present our prayers with those of all who fear God’s name. Be at the Prayer Meetings whenever you can and I beg you to pray at home, and to join the people of God wherever prayer is offered, even though some of you, at present, only desire to fear His name. And may the Lord bless you all, for His dear name’s sake! Amen.

EXPOSITION BY C. H. SPURGEON: NEHEMIAH 1.

Verses 1, 2. *The words of Nehemiah the son of Hachaliah. And it came to pass in the month, Chislev, in the twentieth year, as I was in Shushan, the palace, that Hanani, one of my brethren, came, he and certain men of Judah; and I asked them concerning the Jews that had escaped, which were left of the captivity, and concerning Jerusalem. Nehemiah was in a high office in Shushan, the palace of King Artaxerxes, but his heart was at Jerusalem. He therefore remembered the very date, “in the month Chislev,” when some of his brethren came from Judah to visit him, for he was more interested in their coming than in any transaction of the court in which he was, for a while, employed. Observe the subject of this good man’s conversation—“I asked them concerning the Jews that had escaped, which were left of the captivity, and concerning Jerusalem.” Whenever Christian people meet together, they ought to make the subject of their mutual discourse an enquiry as to the progress of the Kingdom of God in the place where they respectively dwell. If you have come up from the country, we want you to tell us about the work of God in your village, or in the town to which you reside—are there many conversions there? We also will tell you about the work in London. Thus should Christian brethren commune with one another and ask concerning*

Christ's Kingdom among men, and the progress that His Gospel is making.

3. *And they said unto me, The remnant that are left of the captivity there in the province are in great affliction and reproach: the wall of Jerusalem also is broken down, and the gates thereof are burned with fire.* They gave a correct description of the real state of affairs in Jerusalem. They did not color it, but they stated the actual facts. It is well, sometimes, to tell our Christian brethren about the low estate of Zion. Where things are not prospering as they should, it is best to say so, and not to try to smother up the truth and give a false report.

4. *And it came to pass, where I heard these words, that I sat down and wept, and mourned certain days, and fasted, and prayed before the God of Heaven,* This good man was greatly affected by the sad news which he heard. He was not indifferent to the condition of his countrymen. He did not say, "We are getting on very well here. I am a Jew and I am in the palace of Artaxerxes, but I cannot do anything to help my Brothers and Sisters. You, who are away there at Jerusalem, must do the best you can." No. Nehemiah said no such thing! He looked upon himself as being part and parcel of the whole Jewish race, just as every true Believer should regard all Christians as being near akin to himself. We are not 20 churches, Brothers and Sisters, nor two hundred—our Lord Jesus Christ is the Head, and we are members of that one body which is His Church. We ought to sympathize with all who are in Christ and, especially, if the cause of God is not prospering in any place, we should do as Nehemiah did—he wept, and mourned, and fasted, and prayed before the God of Heaven. He tells us what he said in his prayer. These are, as it were, the shorthand notes of his supplication.

5, 6. *And said, I beseech You, O LORD God of Heaven, the great and terrible God that keeps covenant and mercy for them that love Him and observe His commandments: let Your ear now be attentive, and Your eyes open, that You may hear the prayer of Your servant, which I pray before You now, day and night, for the children of Israel Your servants, and confess the sins of the children of Israel, which we have sinned against You: both I and my father's house have sinned.* This is quite a model prayer. How earnest it is and how truthful! Nehemiah recognizes the terrible side of God's Character as well as His mercifulness. He evidently had right views of God. Some people try to explain away all the passages of Scripture which represent God as a terrible God. Whether they know it or not, they will find this course of action to be a great source of weakness to them in dealing with the ungodly. Nehemiah calls Jehovah "the great and terrible God," but he adds, "that keeps covenant and mercy for them that love Him." He tells us that he prayed before the Lord day and night. Of course he had to attend to his daily duties, so that he could not always be upon his knees, but his heart was praying even while he was engaged with other matters. And as often as he could, he retired to his room, so that he might cry out unto God. Please observe that he makes a confession of "the sins of the children of Israel." It is our duty as Christians, as it were, to take the great load of the sins of the nation upon ourselves and to make confession of them before God. If the guilty ones will not repent, we must repent for them. If they will not confess their sins, we

must confess their sins as though we stood in their place. Nehemiah very pathetically says, “and confess the sins of the children of Israel, which we have sinned against You.” And then coming still more closely home, he adds, “both I and my father’s house have sinned.”

7-9. *We have dealt very corruptly against You, and have not kept the commandments, nor the statutes, nor the judgments which You commanded Your servant Moses. Remember, I beseech You, the word that You commanded Your servant Moses, saying, If you transgress, I will scatter you abroad among the nations: but if you turn unto Me, and keep My commandments, and do them; though there were of you cast out unto the uttermost parts of the heavens, yet will I gather them from there, and will bring them unto the place that I have chosen to set My name there.* He quotes the Covenant and he pleads the promise of Jehovah! Now, there is no means of getting a man to do us a favor so powerful as this, to quote his own promise. “You said You would do it.” So, here Nehemiah says, “Remember, I beseech You, the word that You commanded Your servant Moses.”

10-11. *Now these are Your servants and Your people, whom You have redeemed by Your great power, and by Your strong hand. O Lord, I beseech You, let now Your ear be attentive to the prayer of Your servant, and to the prayer of Your servants, who desire to fear Your name. And prosper, I pray You, Your servant this day, and grant him mercy in the sight of this man.* That is, in the sight of King Artaxerxes to whom he was about to speak.

11. *For I was the king’s cupbearer.* He counts this as a high privilege, that he would be able to speak for his people to the great king who would give him the opportunity to go and rebuild the walls of Jerusalem.

HYMNS FROM “OUR OWN HYMN BOOK”—63 (Song 3), 116 (Song 3), 39.

—Adapted from *The C. H. Spurgeon Collection*, Version 1.0, Ages Software, 1.800.297.4307

**PRAY THE HOLY SPIRIT WILL USE THIS SERMON
TO BRING MANY TO A SAVING KNOWLEDGE OF JESUS CHRIST.**

SURVEYING THE FIELD

NO. 3364

A SERMON
PUBLISHED ON THURSDAY, JULY 24, 1913.

DELIVERED BY C. H. SPURGEON,
AT THE METROPOLITAN TABERNACLE, NEWINGTON,
ON THURSDAY EVENING, MARCH 7, 1867.

“And I arose in the night, I, and some few men with me: neither told I any man what God had put into my heart to do at Jerusalem: neither was there any beast with me, save the beast that I rode upon.”
Nehemiah 2:12.

NEHEMIAH, it seems, prepared himself for action by taking a survey of the necessities of the case. Although he lived before our Savior's day, he certainly acted upon one of our Savior's maxims about counting the cost, lest, after having begun to build, we should not be able to finish. I like to picture to myself that man of God going by moonlight round all the waste places of the city, compelled here and there to dismount by reason of rubbish, clambering over the fallen stones, leaping, sometimes, with agility from crag to crag of the city's walls—getting in his mind a clear idea of all the city's desolation—and feeling in his heart the pressing, heavy weight and burden of the responsibility which God had thrust upon him. If he had begun his work carelessly and thoughtlessly, he might have failed in it, but having begun months before with prayer, having been guided by Providence so far, yet even now the very first step he must take is a personal survey of the work and a thorough personal acquaintance with the necessities of the case.

Now, I know that there are here, on the weeknight at the service, many who love the Master and are anxious to do something in His cause. And I thought I might very profitably commend to them the example of Nehemiah in this respect. We shall consider Nehemiah, then, first as a *fine example to those who would seek the good of the Church at large*. Secondly, a *pattern to any of us laboring in any one distinct sphere*. And thirdly, I think I may apply the same principle in reference to *the personal work which is being done in our own hearts*. And before we conclude our meditation, I may ask you to take a quiet ride around the desolations of your own spirit and so get a clear view of what must be done before you shall become a city inhabited by God to His praise and Glory! First, then, dear Friends, I suppose I have here, as Nehemiah had, a few men and women earnest, resolved—disinterested men and women who are willing—

I. TO SEEK THE GOOD OF THE CHURCH, OF THE CHURCH AT LARGE.

Such men will allow the word of exhortation when I say to them, first, you and I are in the service of the great Church of God and we must, like

Nehemiah, *firmly resolve that we will do it*. Our heart must be set upon this thing. It must not be with us a mere fancy which we have taken up as we might have taken up any other. It must not even be of a spasmodic kind, but our heart must be set towards the Church of God because it is the home of our love, the place of our birth, the bride of Christ, the hope of the world, the pillar and ground of the Truth of God! If we have not such a view of the work to be done and a resolve that it shall be done—we certainly shall not succeed in it.

And, my Brothers and Sisters, we must, like Nehemiah, *be quite clear that we have no sinister motives*, no selfish ends to be answered! Nehemiah was in a high and good position as chamberlain or cup-bearer to the king, but he gave up that and left Shushan to the desolations of Jerusalem—a long and toilsome journey. Even when the city was built, though the place was the beloved of his heart, yet he does not seem to have had any prospect of remaining in it, for the king had set him a time for his return. And though he did stay there 12 years, yet it must have been by successive furloughs that he obtained this absence from the palace, so that he had no selfish objective whatever. If the city were built, he would not dwell in it. And if the Temple-glories were restored once more, he would but once look upon them and then return again to the city of his employment and to the palace of the alien king at Shushan.

God will not bless us to the Christian Church if we want to make a party to ourselves, or to take to ourselves the leadership. He will not acknowledge us in the work if we are merely seeking our own esteem, good name and fame under cover of a zeal for righteousness and for the Glory of God. No! There must be a resolution, but the resolution must be based on something better than the objectives of personal aggrandizement. There must be a devotion to God and a complete and perfect dedication and consecration of our souls to the good of the Church and our Lord Jesus Christ.

Supposing that we have already, by Divine Grace, been called into such a condition? Then, further, we must learn, like Nehemiah, *the art of waiting*. He first prayed about Jerusalem, but he did not cease to hope. And when he came to the holy, though wasted city, he did not rush to the work at once, as our hot blood too often suggests to us to do. He knew that “raw haste” was “half-sister to delay.” He was there three whole days in which nothing was attempted. He did not seize a trowel in his hand and hasten at once to work, letting other people come and join him if they pleased, but he rode alone all round the walls to inspect the damage and to estimate the cost in sacrifice and toil to repair it. We must be eager to labor, but we must also learn to wait. God’s servants will find that their Master does not always give them instant and immediate success, but that He is often pleased to glorify Himself by testing their faith. If you are a soldier, you must not expect to be always in the fight, but must sometimes lie, perhaps for tedious days and even weary months, in the trenches, just as our army had to lie before Sebastopol—worn out with waiting, anxiously wishing for the order to charge. So our heavenly

Lord, our great Captain, sometimes teaches us patience, making us wait until the time shall come to do and dare. Fellow Christian, young man or aged Believer, I am persuaded you will need to have in the midst of your toil for Jesus, to hear the word, "You must wait. Trust in the Lord and wait patiently for Him."

But after he had waited, Nehemiah set a further example to us. *He felt that he could act alone.* Throughout the whole Book of Nehemiah you are struck with the singleness of the man and the potency of his individuality. He is quite prepared, if no one else will rise up to serve God, to serve Him by himself! And yet at the same time *he never refuses the help of others.* "And I arose in the night, I and some few men with me; neither told I any man what God had put in my heart to do at Jerusalem." He who would serve God to any purpose must be willing to serve Him all alone. If you cannot stand the brunt of being forsaken, you will scarcely do to be a soldier of the Cross. Those whom Christ will greatly use must learn to be misunderstood, to be misrepresented by their Brothers and Sisters and in their more daring projects to be looked upon as being perfectly beside themselves. Yet they must count this among the cost and to be still prepared to stand to their work. Paul says, "At my first answer, no man stood with me, but"—sweet and mighty encouragement to your faith if you are alone!—"nevertheless, the Lord stood with me." Now, I think we shall find that it is not easy to couple the independence of a noble mind with the willingness to accept help from the few and the feeble, who at the very first are willing to gather around you. A man is apt to say, "No! I can act alone. These will but hamper me." And yet let us always remember that, though God has usually worked by one man, and though almost all the great wonders of the olden times were accomplished by personal courage and were feats of personal faith, yet at the same time He has frequently been pleased to ally to the one man a company of others, without whom the one man would have been feeble, indeed! Take the case of Gideon. We are told of "the sword of the Lord and of Gideon," and, of course, Gideon leads the van, but what would Gideon have done without the men that lapped? Those few and feeble folk with their pitchers and their torches must go with Gideon—and God will bless Gideon through them—and the world through the man and those who follow him! We must be willing, therefore, to take any help God may offer to us, and not be very particular about what that help is, so long as we are assured that God has sent it to us. We must be willing to lay aside our individual and sole reliance to come down from the high place of personal independence and work side by side with others, if it is the Lord's will.

Then, further, my Brothers and Sisters, if you and I should now have in our minds some great work for God, *we must be quite sure that we do not indulge in any boasting.* Oh, great things are going to be done! Oh, the wonderful prospectuses that some people have brought out of wondrous things that were going to regenerate the world—and the only

purpose they have served up to now has been to increase the work in some printing office! Nothing else has come from many of them. And you know there are people who really, by their own talk, should have turned the world upside down by now, but they have not done anything of the sort as yet. Perhaps the time may not yet have come, but with them it seems as if it never will come or could come! Nehemiah says, “*Neither* told I any man what my God had put into my heart to do at Jerusalem.” You will often find it best not to commit your plans to others. If you want to serve God, go and do it and *then* let other people find it out afterwards. You have no need to tell what you are going to do and, I may add, there is no need for your telling what you have done, for very, very frequently God withdraws Himself when we boast of what is being done. One of the greatest injuries to the revival in the North of Ireland a few years ago was that it was made to be a kind of show thing and people said, “Come, see my zeal for the Lord of Hosts,” and after awhile the Glory departed—not because the workers on the spot, themselves, desired any such vain-glorying, but because some who were not of a like spirit gave occasion to the flesh in this respect. We must mind and take care that when we work for God, we keep always before us that we are not working as unto men and do not need men’s praise, but unto the Lord is the offering presented and the Lord alone shall have it!

I have not yet come to this midnight ride of Nehemiah’s, but I think it important to mention that he is again a pattern to us in our work for the Church of God in that he was *absolutely sure that what he was doing was right*. He speaks of the thoughts and longings that he had as something which God had put into his heart to do. Get quite clear and assured of that, my Brothers and Sisters, or else go home. If you are not certain that the work you are about was given to you of God, and as positively and distinctly given to you as the work was given to Isaiah when the seraph touched his lips with the live coal from off the altar, you have no business to enter upon the work at all, for your whole strength will lie in a full conviction that your Master has sent you.

And now having brought the man before you, let me exhort you, dear Brothers and Sisters, if you long for the good of the Church of God, to quietly take a walk round about her. Count her towers. Mark her palaces and her bulwarks. Do not go out and take notes and jottings as to what the world says Christ’s Church is, or ought to be! Do not go with the view of seeing faults where there are none and railing at Christianity generally. That is a very heathenish practice, into which some persons constantly fall. But go with this solemn intent as before God, “Now, if I am to be serviceable to the Church in any large measure, I must know what her present condition is.” My own solemn conviction is that a painstaking, judicious investigation into the present state of the Christian Church will have the result of perfectly appalling you! It has been said, and there are abundant facts to prove it, that probably during the last 200 years, instead of Protestantism, taking it in the large sense of the word, making any increase in the world, it has rather been diminishing and that Popery

has increased! It is also, I believe, very certain to any of you that like to read the reports of many missionary societies, that the number of conversions worked under the missionaries abroad is so insignificant that it scarcely keeps up to the number of converts in years past! We have heard of a missionary returning after 12 years of labor and, on being asked if he knew of one heathen being converted under him, said he did not know of one! We feel that the whole field of missionary work everywhere—with but the exception, perhaps, just now of Southern Africa and of the labors of some in China—is just simply working without results. Not but what we ought to work all the same if we have no results, for even then we must not fall back.

And the Church of God in England is just the same. There is no increase. We know it is a matter of statistical fact that our own denomination, with the exception of London and one Welsh county, has made no progress whatever during the last 12 months. Statistics prove it to be in the same position now as then. The whole mass of Methodism, which was once so potent for good, has, I think, only received 100 increase on the year before—and it is questionable whether they have increased at all. So it is everywhere. New Churches are built, but what is the information we get? Why, in several built in the poorer districts, the whole congregation might go into the vestry, and so the buildings are now practically useless, seats without occupiers because some of the preachers are men that cannot be understood by the common people. If they preach the Gospel—and often they do not—they preach it after such a dull and lifeless fashion that it is not worthwhile going to listen to it! Now, if this is so, we must get the fact, saddening as it is, well worked into our hearts. The errors of some Churches, the division of others, and the general coldness and deadness—oh, if we did but keenly realize these, I am persuaded that many of us would cry day and night unto God that He would make bare His arm in the midst of His own Church! We should not go in and out of our pews feeling happy and comfortable because our own Church may be prospering and because in our sanctuary souls are being saved—but there should be great searching of heart for the state of Zion! There should go up a weeping and a wailing unto God, until the set time to favor her. Even the set time should come because her children take pleasure in her stones, and favor the dust thereof! I would encourage you to get a clear view of the Church at large and then, in God's strength, go forward to any work which God has given you for her good.

We shall not need much time, in the second place, to indicate that this is also—

II. THE RIGHT METHOD OF PROCEEDING WITH REGARD TO ANY SERVICE WHICH, IN OUR SPHERE, WE ARE RENDERING TO CHRIST.

Brothers and Sisters, I hope you are all working for Christ. If Christ has saved you, can you do otherwise than live to your Savior? If, indeed, your sins are all put away by His precious blood. If you are wrapped in His spotless righteousness and accepted in the Beloved, I do trust that

the love of Christ compels you to tell others of the way of salvation, and to seek to bring in the wandering sheep of the house of Israel! Now, if I am right in my belief that you are engaged in some departments of Christian service, I am sure I shall be judicious in saying to you—*take a thorough investigation of the work in which you are engaged*. If it is to teach a class of children, lay those children on your heart! Think a great deal about them. Think about them by night, as Nehemiah thought of Jerusalem, and remember that they have souls, that those souls are under condemnation—that nothing but the precious blood can deliver them—that if they are not so delivered, sooner or later those boys and girls of yours will perish! Yet said our Lord, “It is not your Father’s will that one of these little ones should perish.” Get that solemn fact thoroughly worked into you. Mothers, fathers, you have children committed to your care. You are longing for the conversion of these little ones. Now I want you to get a full estimate of the character of each child! You have peculiar opportunities of riding around, as it were, your little city. Mark the different constitutions, the special weaknesses and defects of that boy and the blemishes and sins of that girl—and always keep this before your minds—that your children, like the children of others, need the regenerating of the Holy Spirit and the saving Grace of the Lord Jesus Christ! Do not take a light view of sin in your children any more than sin in others’ children. The hate of God against sin is as real and intense in their case as in others until they are born-again! When you sit down to breakfast with them, think, “Ah, my dear child, I shall not meet you in eternity unless you are brought to the Cross !” Look the girl in the face, as you see her growing up to womanhood, and say to yourself, “Ah, my Lord! In mercy bring her to sit at Your feet as Mary did, and learn of You, or else she shall be no joy to me, for I must be parted from her in the world to come.”

Take, I say, a full survey of each child’s condition and of its future ruin—and you will be most likely to be a blessing to the child if with your whole heart you are thus earnest and careful.

Now, my dear Hearers, most of you are working with me in this place. Let us now go around the walls of this Tabernacle and find you out, as it were. Well, here are a great number of Church members—between three and four thousand—all professors of religion! But are all saved? Ah, *there is an inquiry! We know they are not!* We have used our best judgment in this question. We have urged upon them continually to make no profession unless they are sincere, but alas, the sad faces of some and their ultimate departure from the Truth of God prove that they went out from us because they were not of us! I know this is one of the worst parts of the wall with me. There is no grief that stings our heart like this, when Demas forsakes Christ, having loved this present evil world, or when some—overtaken by the lusts of the flesh, or the pride of life—crucify the Son of God afresh and put Him to an open shame! It is a mercy when such hypocrites are found out and put away, but oh, it is a grievous injury to the Church which they have disgraced!

Then, next, let us think of this. There are a number of people who always occupy these seats. They belong to them—they are *their* seats and they have been sitting in them, some of them, ever since the house was built! And some of them were in the former house and have been under our ministry now for these 13 years. And yet some of them are not saved! A gentleman told me the other day he was surprised to hear that the Church was half as large as the congregation—or more, and he said, “That is a very great thing!” “No,” I said, “*that is a very little thing*, for when we were at Park Street the Church was larger than the congregation.” That is to say, there were more saved souls among us than there were seats for hearers, so that the members of the Church could not all come at any one time. And my soul will not be satisfied until this Tabernacle becomes much too small to hold the Church if they were all to come together at one time. I shall be very glad, indeed, if they swarm off and go elsewhere, and form other churches. I shall be most happy if they do that! But still, I shall always be looking forward to seeing all those saved who have sittings here. You know that at Park Street it came to this—on one occasion when a man wanted to take a seat, he came to me and said—I remember him well—“Sir, I understand that if I take a sitting here, I should be expected to be converted, but I cannot count upon that.” “No, my good Friend,” I said, “I know not, but still, if you take a seat, let us hope you will be.” “Oh,” said the man, “is that what was meant? I heard somebody say that when persons took seats, you expected them to be saved.” Well, some do, and why should we not? Ought we not to expect that if they hear the Gospel preached, God will bless it to them?

We do trust that day will soon come, but meanwhile we may go around this place and say that a great many who have seats here are unblest, unsaved, have no desires after Christ, but are dead while they live!

Well, then, you are painfully struck, in the next place, with the *many casual hearers who come here and are not saved*. It was once well said by someone, that if sinners were scarcer than they are, we would think a great deal more of them! If there were only one unsaved soul now remaining in London, why, the whole Church would be awake and in earnest to pray for that one soul! But when I say to you that, Sabbath after Sabbath, these aisles are thronged, and these pews, too, and that yet a very large proportion of the congregation remain unconverted—why, you hear it and you say, “Well, it is a very sad fact”—but it does not impress your hearts! We do not get the same impression of human ruin that Nehemiah got as he rode round Jerusalem. I wish we could. I wish we could think it over, resolve it in our minds and resolve it yet again until it came to be painful to us to think that so many human beings to whom the Gospel is preached should remain callous to its influence! And so many to whom Christ, Himself, shall become a savor of death unto death, and not of life unto life!

Thus would I urge each Brother and Sister here, who is working for Christ, to get a clear view of the needs of the case.

And now, lastly, I shall be happy if I shall be successful in this last point. It will be well for us, individually, to—

III. TAKE A LITTLE JOURNEY AROUND THE CITY OF MANSOUL WITHIN.

Let me speak to every professor here. You say, “I am a Believer in Jesus.” Well, Brother, Sister, then you can have no objection to look within, to search your heart! Ride around your soul. How about the tower of prayer? Is that well kept? Are you much with God in secret? And how about the castle of communion? Do you maintain fellowship with the Father and with His Son, Jesus Christ? How about the gate of humiliation? Do you bow before the Lord, humbly acknowledging what you owe to Him, or has pride been pulling down the cornerstone thereof? How about the gate of holy zeal? Is that wide and in good care, or has it been burned with fire and taken away? And what about the wall of your love? Does that stand erect as it used to do? Have you not heard of one of old of whom it was said, “Gray hairs are here and there upon him, and he knows it not”? May not that be your case? If you will spend an hour or two tonight when all are asleep. If you should lie awake and commune with your own heart upon your bed, it might be a wondrous blessing to you! If you shall honestly look at yourself, not flatteringly. If you shall determine to know, as God shall teach you, the worst of your case. If you should desire to see which Grace is fainting, which holy passion expiring, which sacred feeling ready to die—oh, it shall be well with you! Examine yourself, whether you are a Christian! This is a duty which cannot too often be performed. Ask the Lord to examine you. Say to Him, “Try my reins and my heart: search my inward soul: see if there is any wicked way in me: and lead me in the way everlasting.”

Oh, that some men would be more careful about the garden of their souls! But they let the weeds grow and they see them not! Like the sluggard, they do not want to see what will involve so much toil, but tossing upon the bed of presumption, from side to side, they dream of comforts and consider themselves to be safe, while all the while presumption is stealing away from them all their goods and making their garden to be a wilderness! Come, you slumberer, up! God help you up! Mistake no longer presumption for assurance! Recollect that assurance will stand the fullest examination, but if you dare not examine yourself, depend upon it—you are a presumptuous soul! I suggest this to the professor.

And now I want to suggest the same thing to *some of you who are unconverted*. Some of you, perhaps, who have come in here tonight do not often listen to the Gospel and you wonder what I am doing, talking about riding around a city. Well, I want you to *ride around yourselves*, as it were, to take stock of your heart—to make calculations about your present state. Now, I will venture to say that some of you are not happy. You know you are not. You do not seem as if you had anything to live for, but to work hard at the shop, or to go to business. If you make money, it

does not satisfy you. Time was when if you went to the theater, you spent a very glorious night, but now if you go there—well, it seems a very dreary sort of stuff to you—and the enjoyments you once got on with so well are very empty things to you now. I am glad to hear it! I am glad to hear it! I should like you to keep on thinking about this, and you would soon find that, in addition to the world's not satisfying you, you need a great deal more to content you than this world can ever give you! I wish, dear Friends, you would think of yourselves, for when we get men to think, the battle is half won! Thoughtless persons are on the outskirts of Hell, but thoughtful persons God blesses! Heedless and Too Bold went on and fell over the precipice and were dashed to pieces, but he who, being checked, waked and said, "Where am I? I do not know," and began to look about him, found himself just on the brink of ruin. But he had just time enough to start back and so was saved.

My dear Friend, if you are not a converted person, do you not know that all your past life has been a waste? God made you, but you have never served Him! Why, if you make a tool, you expect it to be of use to you. God made you, but you never serve Him. If you keep a dog or a cat, you expect to have some pleasure from the creature. God has been keeping you all these years and what have you ever done for Him? If a man keeps a horse, it does him service, and when God makes a man, it is but reasonable that the man should do Him some service—and yet you have not. So your life has been a dead waste as to its noblest ends. And as for the present—why, that is no better! You are not living as you wish to live, and as *for the future*—no, no, no—do not say, "I won't think about that." Be a wise man and *do* think of it! You cannot escape the future any more than I can. You and I must die—and after death the Judgment follows—and an appearance before God. Now, my dear Hearer, be bold enough to look ahead. Oh, but you do not like the prospect! Well, but nevertheless gaze upon it, for it will be for your soul's good to know what it is to die without Christ and to rise again without Christ! And when you have got an estimate of that, it may be you will say, "No, I cannot endure this! Jesus, I throw myself into Your arms. Save me, and I shall be saved!" Oh, that men would but take stock of their souls and it would do them good. What a routing-out there is of corners! What long, long hours of extra toil at our great shops to take stock. Nobody thinks of going on in business without taking stock every now and then, or if he did, he would soon find himself in the Bankruptcy Court. Every good trader knows there must be a stock-taking. Why should not men take stock of their souls? How is it that here they say, "Oh, let well enough alone! I daresay it is all right," and so at last wake up and find themselves eternal bankrupts with nothing wherewith to pay, shut up in the prison out of which they can never escape?

May God the Holy Spirit press home these words so feebly spoken. And if any sinner here shall be led by the sight of himself to tremble before God, let him remember and rejoice that there is life for a look at the

Crucified One! Whoever trusts in Christ is saved! Rest wholly in Him. Cast yourself upon Him. As the swimmer gives himself up to the water, that it may support him, so do you, and thus shall the Grace of God that brings salvation appear unto you!

**EXPOSITION BY C. H. SPURGEON:
NEHEMIAH 1; 2:1-8.**

Verses 1, 2. *The words of Nehemiah the son of Hachaliah. And it came to pass in the month Chisleu, in the twentieth year, as I was in Shushan the palace, that Hanani, one of my brethren came, he and certain men of Judah; and I asked them concerning the Jews that had escaped, which were left in captivity, and concerning Jerusalem.* This good man was, of course, one of the banished Jews, but he had greatly prospered. He had risen in the empire of Ahasuerus until he had come to be great—even to be one of the chamberlains of the empire. But his heart was towards his poor people—his fellow Jews that were in poverty. Now, whenever God exalts a Christian in a temporal position, he ought not to disown his poor brethren, but his heart should go out towards them to see what he can do for them. It is a shame for any man to forget his country. Does not the Pole still say, “No, Poland, you shall never perish”? And we admire such patriotism. And the same feeling should be in every Christian breast. We should love the Church of God even as Nehemiah loved the chosen race from which he had sprung. So when he met with Hanani, the conversation was all about the poor brethren that remained at Jerusalem.

3. *And they said unto me, the remnant that are left of the captivity there in the province are in great affliction and reproach: the wall of Jerusalem also is broken down, and the gates thereof are burned with fire.* A sad story they had to tell! Ezra had assisted in somewhat rebuilding the Temple, but little had been done for the private dwellings and for the walls and public buildings of the city. It was in a sad and wretched state—and the Jews were despised and reproached. Nehemiah was a great man, but he was sorry to hear this. He felt as if he was a fellow sufferer with his poor brethren.

4. *And it came to pass, when I heard these words, that I sat down and wept, and mourned certain days, and fasted, and prayed before the God of Heaven.* Was it his concern? Was it any more his concern than that of other men? Yes, he felt it to be his—and the tender heart which he had towards the people of God made him feel it to be peculiarly his. If nobody else did anything, he must! And, oh, dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ, whenever you see the cause of God in a sad estate, lay it to heart—weep, lament and pray—feel that you have an interest in it! Christ is your Savior. Of the Church you are a part. These blessed interests of Sovereign Mercy belong to you. Take them to yourself and say, By God’s help, I will lay myself out for the progress of His cause. “I sat down and wept, and mourned certain days, and fasted and prayed before the God of Heaven.”

5, 6. *And said, I beseech You, O LORD God of Heaven, the great and terrible God, that keeps Covenant and mercy for them that love Him and observe His commandments—Let Your ear now be attentive, and Your eyes open, that You may hear the prayer of Your servant, which I pray before You now, day and night, for the children of Israel, Your servants and confess the sins of the children of Israel, which we have sinned against You: both I and my father’s house have sinned.* He seems to act like a priest for God, taking the sin of the people upon himself and confessing it. If they were hardhearted, and would not confess, he would, and pour out his complaint before God!

7-10. *We have dealt very corruptly against You, and have not kept Your commandments, nor the statutes, nor the judgments which You commanded your servant Moses. Remember, I beseech You, the word that You commanded Your servant Moses, saying, If you transgress, I will scatter you abroad among the nations. But if you turn unto Me and keep My commandments and do them: though there were of you cast out unto the uttermost part of the Heavens, yet will I gather them from there and will bring them unto the place that I have chosen to set My name there. Now these are Your servants and Your people, whom You have redeemed by Your great power, and by Your strong hand.* You see what an admirable prayer this is. There is a full confession of sin—an acknowledgment of the Justice of God in having punished His people. But then there is a quoting of the Divine Word—a putting of the Lord in remembrance that He had made such-and-such a promise! That is the very backbone of prayer! If you go to the bank, the main part of the transaction is to put the check—the note of hand—upon the counter. You get no money otherwise! So when you go in prayer, the main part of prayer must lie in pleading the promise, “You have said it. You have said it.” Hold God to His word with a sacred daring of faith. “You have promised. You have declared. Now be as good as Your word.” Then notice another plea he has. He says he is pleading for God’s servants—His redeemed—redeemed by great power! Oh, it should always make us feel strong in prayer when we recollect that God’s people are very dear to Him and He has done great things for them—therefore He loves them and for those whom He loves, surely He will work great deliverances! These are arguments. There ought to be great argument in prayer if we hope to prevail.

11. *O Lord, I beseech You, let now Your ear be attentive to the prayer of Your servant, and to the prayer of Your servants who desire to fear Your name, and prosper, I pray You, Your servant this day, and grant him mercy in the sight of this man.* That was king Artaxerxes, whom he rightly viewed as a man, for, great as he was—all-potent king of Persia—yet still but a man! Nehemiah consoles himself in the prospect of having to go in before him to ask favor at his hands.

11. *For I was the king’s cupbearer.*

Nehemiah 2:1. *And it came to pass in the month Nisan. Three or four months after he began to pray.*

1. *In the twentieth year of Artaxerxes the king, that wine was before him: and I took up the wine, and gave it unto the king.* We have in some of the old slabs and carvings some singular pictures of the dainty way in which the kings of Persia and Media were served by their cupbearers. They always spilled a little wine upon their left hand and drank first, for fear the king should be poisoned. So the greatest men of the different provinces of the empire were called by turns to act this part before the king. It was a piece of State ceremony.

1. *Now I had not been beforetime sad in his presence.* And there was a law—one of those stupid Median laws—that no man was to come before the king with a sad countenance. It was supposed that the king must be so serenely happy, himself, that none might come there unless they were happy, too. Nehemiah had been able to obey this rule, but on this occasion he did not because he could not.

2-6. *Therefore the king said unto me, Why is your countenance sad, seeing you are not sick? This is nothing else but sorrow of heart. Then I was very sore afraid, and said unto the king, Let the king live forever: why should not my countenance be sad, when the city, the place of my father's sepulchers, lies in waste, and the gates thereof are consumed with fire? Then the king said unto me, For what do you make request? So I prayed to the God of Heaven. And I said unto the king, If it pleases the king, and if your servant has found favor in your sight, that you would send me unto Judah, unto the city of my father's sepulchers, that I may build it. And the king said unto me, (the queen also sitting by him). Who was probably, Queen Esther and, therefore, abundantly agreeable that such a work should be done for her own nation. "The king said unto me."*

6. *For how long shall your journey be? And when will you return? So it pleased the king to send me: and I set him a time.* He was a valued servant. They did not wish to part with him. And if he would go for a time to do this business, yet they took steps to assure he would return. There are some servants that I know of, who, if they were to go away, their masters would not be particularly anxious that they should come back again! It is well when a man is so in favor with God that his piety acts upon his ordinary life and he becomes in favor with men, also. That is a poor, miserable religion that does not make its possessor a good servant. Yes, in whatever station of life we may be placed, we ought to be far more valuable to those round about us on account of our fearing God! May we always be of such a character that if we were gone, we should be missed. "I set him a time."

—Adapted from *The C. H. Spurgeon Collection*, Ages Software, 1.800.297.4307

**PRAY THE HOLY SPIRIT WILL USE THIS SERMON
TO BRING MANY TO A SAVING KNOWLEDGE OF JESUS CHRIST.**

BRIEF, SILENT PRAYER

NO. 1390

**DELIVERED ON LORD'S-DAY EVENING, SEPTEMBER 9, 1877,
BY C. H. SPURGEON,
AT THE METROPOLITAN TABERNACLE, NEWINGTON.**

***“So I prayed to the God of Heaven.”
Nehemiah 2:4.***

Nehemiah had made inquiry as to the state of the city of Jerusalem and the tidings he heard caused him bitter grief. “Why should not my countenance be sad,” he said, “when the city, the place of my fathers’ sepulchers, lies waste and the gates thereof are consumed with fire?” He could not endure that it should be a mere ruinous heap—that city which was once beautiful and the joy of the whole earth! Laying the matter to heart, he did not begin to speak to other people about what they would do, nor did he draw up a wonderful scheme about what might be done if so many thousand people joined in the enterprise.

No, it occurred to him that he should do something himself. This is just the way that practical men start a matter. The unpractical will plan, arrange and speculate about what may be done, but the genuine, thorough-going lover of Zion puts this question to himself—“What can *you* do? Nehemiah, what can you, yourself, do? Come, it has to be done, and you are the man that is to do it—at least, to do your share. What can you do?” Coming so far, he resolved to set apart a time for prayer. It never left his thoughts for nearly four months! Day and night Jerusalem seemed written on his heart, as if the name was painted on his eyeballs. He could only see Jerusalem. When he slept he dreamed about Jerusalem. When he woke, the first thought was, “Poor Jerusalem!” and before he fell asleep again his evening prayer was for the ruined walls of Jerusalem.

The man of one thing, you know, is a terrible man—and when one single passion has absorbed the whole of his manhood, something will be sure to come of it. Depend upon that. The desire of his heart will develop into some open demonstration, especially if he talks the matter over with God in prayer. Something did come of this. Before long Nehemiah had an opportunity. Men of God, if you want to serve God and cannot find the propitious occasion, wait awhile in prayer and your opportunity will break on your path like a sunbeam! There was never a true and valiant heart that failed to find a fitting sphere somewhere or other in God’s service. Every diligent laborer is needed in some part of His vineyard. You may have to linger. You may seem as if you stood in the market idle because

your Master would not engage you, but wait there in prayer—and with your heart boiling over with a warm purpose—your chance will come.

The hour will need its man and if you are ready, you, as a man, shall not be without your hour. God sent Nehemiah an opportunity. That opportunity came, 'tis true, in a way which he could not have expected. It came through his own sadness of heart. This matter preyed upon his mind till he began to look exceedingly unhappy. I cannot tell whether others noticed it, but the king whom he served, when he went into court with the royal goblet, noticed the distress on the cupbearer's countenance and said to him, "Why is your countenance sad, seeing you are not sick? This is nothing else but sorrow of heart."

Nehemiah little knew that his prayer was making the occasion for him. The prayer was registering itself upon his face. His fasting was making its marks upon his visage and, though he did not know it, he was, in that way, preparing the opportunity for himself when he went in before the king. But you see, when the opportunity did come, there was trouble with it, for he says, "I was very sore afraid." You want to serve God, young man. You want to be at work. Perhaps you do not know what that work involves. It is not all pleasure. You are longing for the battle, young soldier—you have not smelled powder, yet, and when you have been in a battle and have had a few cuts, or a bullet or two have pierced you—you may not feel quite so eager for the fray!

Yet the courageous man sets those things aside and is ready to serve his country or his sovereign. And so the courageous Christian puts all difficulty aside and he is ready to serve his comrades and his God, cost what it may! What if I should be sore afraid? Yet so let it be, my God, if thus there shall be an opportunity to seek and to secure the welfare of Jerusalem for Your servant who longs to promote it with all his heart. Thus have we traced Nehemiah up to the particular point where our text concerns him. The king, Artaxerxes, having asked him why he was sad, he had an opportunity of telling him that the city of his fathers was a ruin. Thereupon the king asks him what he really wishes. By the manner of the question he would seem to imply an assurance that he means to help Nehemiah.

And here we are somewhat surprised to find that instead of promptly answering the king—the answer is not given immediately—an incident occurs, a fact is related. Though he was a man who had lately given himself up to prayer and fasting, this little parenthesis occurs—"So I prayed to the God of Heaven." My preamble leads up to this parenthesis. Upon this prayer I propose to preach. The fact that Nehemiah prayed challenges attention! He had been asked a question by his sovereign. The proper thing, you would suppose, was to answer it. Not so. Before he answered, he

prayed to the God of Heaven. I do not suppose the king noticed the pause. Probably the interval was not long enough to be noticed, but it was long enough for God to notice it—long enough for Nehemiah to have sought and have obtained guidance from God as to how to frame his answer to the king.

Are you not surprised to find a man of God having time to pray to God between a question and an answer? Yet Nehemiah found that time. We are the more astonished at his praying because he was so evidently perturbed in mind, for, according to the second verse, he was very afraid. When you are fluttered and put out, you may forget to pray. Do you not, some of you, account it a valid excuse for omitting your ordinary devotion? At least, if anyone had said to you, “You did not pray when you were about that business,” you would have replied, “How could I? There was a question that I was obliged to answer. I dared not hesitate. It was a *king* that asked it. I was in a state of confusion. I really was so distressed and terrified that I was not master of my own emotions. I hardly knew what I did. If I did not pray, surely the omission may be overlooked. I was in a state of wild alarm.”

Nehemiah, however, felt that if he was alarmed, it was a reason for praying, not for forgetting to pray! So habitually was he in communion with God, that as soon as he found himself in a dilemma, he flew away to God, just as the dove would fly to hide herself in the clefts of the rock. His prayer was the more remarkable on this occasion because he must have felt very eager about his objective. The king asks him what it is he needs and his whole heart is set upon building up Jerusalem. Are you not surprised that he did not at once say, “O king, live forever! I long to build up Jerusalem’s walls. Give me all the help you can”? But no, eager as he was to pounce upon the desired objective, he withdraws his hand until it is said, “So I prayed to the God of Heaven.”

I confess I admire him! I desire, also, to *imitate* him. I would that every Christian’s heart might have just that holy caution that did not permit him to make such haste as to find ill-speed. “Prayer and provender hinder no man’s journey.” Certainly, when the desire of our heart is close before us, we are anxious to seize it. But we shall be all the surer of getting the bird we spy in the bush to be a bird we grasp in the hand if we quietly pause, lift up our heart and pray the God of Heaven! It is all the more surprising that he should have deliberately prayed just then because he had been already praying for the past three or four months concerning the same matter. Some of us would have said, “That is the thing I have been praying for—now all I have to do is to take it and use it! Why pray any more? After all, my midnight tears and daily cries, and setting myself apart by fasting to cry unto the God of Heaven—after such an anxious

conference, surely, at last, the answer has come! What is to be done but to take the good that God provides me and rejoice in it?"

But no, you will always find that the man who has prayed much is the man who prays more. "For unto everyone that has, shall be given, and he shall have abundance." If you do but know the sweet art of prayer, you are the man that will be often engaged in it. If you are familiar with the Mercy Seat, you will constantly visit it—

***"For who that knows the power of prayer
But wishes to be often there?"***

Although Nehemiah had been praying all this while, he nevertheless must offer another petition. "So I prayed to the God of Heaven." One thing more is worth remembering, namely that he was in a king's palace and in the palace of a heathen king, too—and he was in the very act of handing up to the king a goblet of wine. He was fulfilling his part in the state festival, I doubt not, among the glare of lamps and the glitter of gold and silver. He was in the midst of princes and peers of the realm. Or even if it were a private festival with the king and queen only, yet still men generally feel so impressed on such occasions with the responsibility of their high position that they are apt to forget prayer.

But this devout Israelite, at such a time and in such a place, when he stands at the king's foot to hold up to him the golden goblet, refrains from answering the king's question until first he has prayed to the God of Heaven! There are the facts and I think that seems to prompt further inquiry. So we pass on to observe the manner of this prayer. Well, very briefly, it was what we call a brief prayer—prayer which, as it were, hurls a dart and then it is done. It was not the prayer which stands knocking at Mercy's door—knock, knock, knock—but it was the concentration of many knocks into one. It was begun and completed, as it were, with one stroke! This brief prayer I desire to commend to you as among the very best forms of prayer.

Notice how very short it must have been. It was introduced—slipped in—sandwiched in between the king's question and Nehemiah's answer. And, as I have already said, I do not suppose it took up any time at all that was appreciable—scarcely a second. Most likely the king never observed any kind of pause or hesitation, for Nehemiah was in such a state of alarm at the question that I am persuaded he did not allow any demur or vacillation to appear. The prayer must have been offered like an electric flash, very rapidly, indeed! In certain states of strong excitement it is wonderful how much the mind gets through in a short time. You may, perhaps, have dreamed and your dream occupied, to your idea, an hour or two at the very least. Yet it is probably—no, I think *certain*—that all dreaming is done at the moment you awake. You never dreamed at all

when you were asleep—it was just in that instant when you awoke that the whole of it went through your mind.

As drowning men, when rescued and recovered, have been heard to say that while they were sinking they say the whole panorama of their lives pass before them in a few seconds, so the mind must be capable of accomplishing much in a brief space of time. Thus the prayer was presented like the blinking of an eye—it was done intuitively, yet it was done—and it proved to be a prayer that prevailed with God. We know, also, that it must have been a silent prayer and not merely silent as to sounds but silent as to any outward signs—perfectly secret. Artaxerxes never knew that Nehemiah prayed, though he stood, probably, within a yard of him. He did not even move his lips as Hannah did, nor did he deem it right, even, to close his eyes. The prayer was strictly within himself offered to God.

As in the innermost shrine of the Temple—in the Holy of Holies of his own secret soul—there did he pray. Short and silent was the prayer. It was a prayer on the spot. He did not go to his chamber, as Daniel did, and open the window. Daniel was right, but this was a different occasion. Nehemiah could not have been permitted to retire from the palace just then. He did not even turn his face to the wall or seek a corner of the apartment. No, but then and there, with the cup in his hand, he prayed unto the God of Heaven—and then answered the question of the king. I have no doubt from the very wording of the text that it was a very intense and direct prayer. He says, “So I prayed to the God of Heaven.” That was Nehemiah’s favorite name of God—the God of Heaven.

He knew to whom he was praying. He did not draw a bow at a venture and shoot his prayers anyway, but he prayed to the God of Heaven—a right straight prayer to God for the thing he needed—and his prayer sped, though it occupied less, perhaps, than a second of time. It was a prayer of a remarkable kind. I know it was so, because Nehemiah never forgot that he prayed it. I have prayed hundreds of times—thousands of times—and not remembered any particulars, afterwards, either as to the occasion that prompted or the emotions that excited me. But there are one or two prayers in my life that I can never forget. I have not jotted them down in a diary, but I remember when I prayed, because the time was so special and the prayer was so intense—and the answer to it was so remarkable!

Now, Nehemiah’s prayer was never, never erased from his memory. And when these words of history were written down he wrote that down. “So I prayed to the God of Heaven”—a little bit of a prayer pushed in edgeways between a question and an answer—a mere fragment of devotion, as it seemed, and yet so important that it is put down in a historical document as a part of the history of the restitution and rebuilding of the city of Jerusalem! And it was a link in the circumstances which led up to that

event of the most important character. Nehemiah felt it to be so and, therefore, he notes the record—"So I prayed to the God of Heaven."

Now, Beloved Friends, I come, in the third place, to recommend to you this excellent style of praying. I shall speak mainly to the children of God—to you that have faith in God. I beg you often, no, I would ask you *always* to use this method of brief, silent prayer. And I would to God, also, that some here who have never prayed before would offer a brief, silent prayer to the God of Heaven before they leave this house—that a short but fervent petition, something like that of the publican in the temple, might go up from you—"God be merciful to me, a sinner."

To deal with this matter practically, then, it is the duty and privilege of every Christian to have set times of prayer. I cannot understand a man's keeping up the vitality of godliness unless he regularly retires for prayer, morning and evening at the very least. Daniel prayed three times a day and David says, "Seven times a day will I praise You." It is good for your hearts, good for your memory, good for your moral consistency that you should hedge about certain portions of time and say, "These belong to God. I shall do business with God at such-and-such a time and try to be as punctual to my hours with Him as I should be if I made an engagement to meet a friend."

When Sir Thomas Abney was Lord Mayor of London, the banquet somewhat troubled him, for Sir Thomas always had prayer with his family at a certain time. The difficulty was how to leave the banquet to keep up family devotion. But so important did he consider it that he vacated his chair, saying to a person near that he had a special engagement with a dear Friend which he must keep. And he did keep it and returned, again, to his place, none of the company being the wiser, but he himself being all the better for observing his habit of worship!

But now, having urged the importance of such habitual piety, I want to impress on you the value of another sort of prayer—namely, the short, brief, quick, frequent prayers of which Nehemiah gives us a specimen. And I recommend this because it hinders no engagement and occupies no time. You may be measuring off your calicoes, or weighing your groceries, or you may be casting up an account and between the items you may say, "Lord, help me." You may breathe a prayer to Heaven and say, "Lord, keep me." It will take no time. It is one great advantage to persons who are hard pressed in business that such prayers as these will not, in the slightest degree, incapacitate them from attending to the business they may have in hand!

It requires you to go to no particular place. You can stand where you are, ride in a cab, walk along the streets, be the bottom sawyer in a saw pit, or the top one and yet pray just as well such prayers as these. No al-

tar, no Church, no so-called sacred place is needed! Wherever you are, just a little prayer as that will reach the ear of God and win a blessing. Such a prayer as that can be offered anywhere, under any circumstances. I do not know in what condition a man could be in which he might not offer some such prayer as that. On the land, or on the sea, in sickness or in health, amidst losses or gains, great reverses or good returns, still might he breathe his soul in short, quick sentences to God! The advantage of such a way of praying is that you can pray often and pray always. If you must prolong your prayer for a quarter of an hour you might possibly be unable to spare the time, but if it only needs a quarter of a minute, why, then, it may come again and again and again and again—a hundred times a day!

The habit of prayer is blessed, but the *spirit* of prayer is better. And the spirit of prayer it is which is the mother of these brief, silent prayers and, therefore, do I like them because she is a plentiful mother. Many times in a day may we speak with the Lord our God. Such prayer may be suggested by all sorts of surroundings. I remember a poor man once paying me a compliment which I highly valued at the time. He was lying in a hospital and when I called to see him he said, "I heard you for some years, and now whatever I look at seems to remind me of something or other that you said, and it comes back to me as fresh as when I first heard it." Well, now, he that knows how to pray brief prayers will find everything about him helping him to the sacred habit! Is it a beautiful landscape? Say, "Blessed be God who has strewn these treasures of form and color through the world, to cheer the sight and gladden the heart."

Are you in doleful darkness and is it a foggy day? Say, "Lighten my darkness, O Lord." Are you in the midst of company? You will be reminded to pray, "Lord, keep the door of my lips." Are you quite alone? Then you can say, "Let me not be alone, but be You with me, Father." The putting on of your clothes, the sitting at the breakfast table, the getting into the conveyance, the walking the streets, the opening of your ledger, the putting up of your shutters—everything may suggest such prayer as that which I am trying to describe if you are but in the right frame of mind for offering it.

These prayers are commendable because they are truly spiritual. Wordy prayers may, also, be windy prayers! There is much of praying by book that has nothing whatever to recommend it. Pray with your heart, not with your hands. Or, if you would lift hands in prayer, let them be your own hands, not another man's. The prayers that come leaping out of the soul—the gust of strong emotion, fervent desire, lively faith—these are the truly spiritual prayers and no prayers but spiritual prayers will God accept. This kind of prayer is free from any suspicion that it is prompted by

the corrupt motive of being offered to please men. They cannot say that the secret prayers of our soul are presented with any view to our own praise, for no man knows that we are praying at all! Therefore do I commend such prayers to you and hope that you may abound in them.

There have been hypocrites that have prayed by the hour. I doubt not there are hypocrites as regular at their devotions as the angels are before the Throne of God—and yet there is no life, no spirit, no acceptance in their pretentious homage! But he that prays brief prayers—whose heart talks with God—he is no hypocrite! There is a reality, force and life about his prayers. Brief, silent prayers are of great use to us. Oftentimes they check us. Bad-tempered people, if you were always to pray just a little before you let angry expressions fly from your lips, why many times you would not say those naughty words at all! They advised a good woman to take a glass of water and hold some of it in her mouth five minutes before she scolded her husband. I dare say it was not a bad recipe, but if, instead of practicing that little eccentricity, she would just breathe a short prayer to God it would certainly be more effectual and far more Scriptural.

I can recommend it as a valuable prescription for the hasty and the peevish—for all who are quick to take offense and slow to forgive insult or injury. When in business you are about to close in with an offer about the propriety of which you have a little doubt, or a positive scruple, such a prayer as, “Guide me, good Lord” would often keep you back from doing what you will afterwards regret. The habit of offering these brief prayers would, also, check your confidence in yourself. It would show your dependence upon God. It would keep you from getting worldly. It would be like sweet perfume burnt in the chamber of your soul to keep away the fever of the world from your heart.

Besides, this type of prayers actually bring us blessings from Heaven. Brief prayers, as in the case of Eliezer, the servant of Abraham. As in the case of Jacob when he said, even in dying, “I have waited for Your salvation, O God”—prayers such as Moses offered when we do not read that he prayed at all and yet God said to him, “Why cry you unto Me?” And brief prayers such as David frequently presented—these were all successful with the Most High. Therefore abound in them, for God loves to encourage and to answer them! I might thus keep on recommending brief prayer, but I will say only one more thing in its favor.

I believe it is very suitable to some persons of a peculiar temperament who could not pray for a long time to save their lives. Their minds are rapid and quick. Well, time is not an element in the business—God does not hear us because of the length of our prayer—but because of the sincerity of it. Prayer is not to be measured by the yard, nor weighed by the pound. It is the might and force of it—the truth and reality of it—the en-

ergy and the intensity of it. You that are either of so little a mind or of so quick a mind that you cannot use many words or continue long to think of one thing, it should be to your comfort that brief prayers are acceptable.

And it may be, dear Friend, that you are in a condition of body in which you cannot pray any other way. A headache such as some people are frequently affected with the major part of their lives—a state of body which only the physician can explain to you—might prevent the mind from concentrating itself long upon one subject. Then it is refreshing to be able again and again and again—50 or a hundred times a day—to address one's self to God in short, quick sentences, the soul being all on fire. This is a blessed style of praying!

Now, I conclude by mentioning a few of the times when I think we ought to resort to this practice of brief prayer. Mr. Rowland Hill was a remarkable man for the depth of his piety, but when I asked at Wotton-under-Edge for his study, though I rather pressed the question, I did not obtain a satisfactory reply. At length the good minister said, "The fact is, we never found any. Mr. Hill used to study in the garden, in the parlor, in the bedroom, in the streets, in the woods, anywhere." "But where did he retire for prayer?" They said they supposed it was in his chamber, but that he was always praying—that it did not matter where he was, the good old man was always praying! It seemed as if his whole life, though he spent it in the midst of his fellow men doing good, was passed in perpetual prayer!

You know the story of his being in Walworth, at Mr. George Clayton's chapel, and of his being seen in the aisles after everybody was gone, while he was waiting for his coachman. There was the old man toddling up and down the aisles, and as someone listened, he heard him singing to himself—

***"And when I shall die, receive me I'll cry,
For Jesus has loved me, I cannot tell why.
But this thing I find, we two are so joined,
He won't be in Heaven and leave me behind."***

And with such rhymes and ditties, and choice words, he would occupy every moment of his life! He has been known to stand in the Blackfriars' road with his hands under his coat tails, looking in a shop window, and if you listened you might soon perceive that he was breathing out his soul before God! He had got into a constant state of prayer! I believe it is the best condition in which a man can be—praying always, praying without ceasing, always drawing near to God with these brief prayers.

But if I must give you a selection of suitable times I should mention such as these. Whenever you have a great joy, cry, "Lord, make this a real

blessing to me.” Do not exclaim with others, “Am I not a lucky fellow?” but say, “Lord, give me more Grace and more gratitude, now that You do multiply Your favors.” When you have got any arduous undertaking on hand or a heavy piece of business, do not touch it till you have breathed your soul out in a short prayer. When you have a difficulty before you and you are seriously perplexed. When business has got into a tangle or a confession which you cannot unravel or arrange, breathe a prayer! It need not occupy a *minute*, but it is wonderful how many snarls come loose after just a word of prayer.

Are the children particularly troublesome to you, good woman? Do you seem as if your patience was almost worn out with the worry and harassment? Now for a brief prayer! You will manage them all the better and you will bear with their naughty tempers all the more quietly. At any rate your own mind will be the less ruffled. Do you think that there is a temptation before you? Do you begin to suspect that somebody is plotting against you? Now for a prayer. “Lead me in a plain path because of my enemies.” Are you at work at the bench, or in a shop, or a warehouse where lewd conversation and shameful blasphemies assail your ears? Now for a short prayer! Have you noticed some sin that grieves you? Let it move you to prayer! These things ought to remind you to pray.

I believe the devil would not let people swear so much if Christian people always prayed every time they heard an oath. He would then see it did not pay. Their blasphemies might somewhat be hushed if they provoked us to supplication! Do you feel your own heart going off the lines? Does sin begin to fascinate you? Now for a prayer—a warm, earnest, passionate cry, “Lord, hold me up!” Did you see something with your eyes and did that infect your heart? Do you feel as if “your feet were almost gone and your steps had well near slipped?” Now for a prayer—“Hold me, Lord, by my right hand.” Has something quite unlooked-for happened? Has a friend treated you badly? Then, like David, say, “Lord, put to nothing the counsel of Ahithophel.”

Breathe a prayer now! Are you anxious to do some good? Be sure to have prayer over it. Do you mean to speak to that young man about his soul? Pray first, Brothers and Sisters. Do you mean to address yourself to the members of your class and write them a letter this week about their spiritual welfare? Pray over every line, Brothers and Sisters. It is always good to have praying going on while you are talking about Christ! I always find I can preach better if I can pray while I am preaching. And the mind is very remarkable in its activities. It can be praying while it is studying—it can be looking up to God while it is talking to man! And there can be one hand held up to receive supplies from God while the other hand is dealing out the same supplies which He is pleased to give!

Pray as long as you live! Pray when you are in great pain—the sharper the pang—the more urgent and importunate should your cry to God be. And when the shadow of death gathers round you and strange feelings flush or chill you, and plainly tell that you near the journey's end, then pray! Oh *that* is a time for brief prayer! Short and pithy prayers like this—“Hide not Your face from me, O Lord.” Or this, “Be not far from me, O God” will doubtless suit you. “Lord Jesus, receive my spirit,” were the thrilling words of Stephen in his extremity! And “Father, into Your hands I commend My spirit,” were the words that your Master, Himself, uttered just before He bowed His head and gave up the ghost. You may well take up the same strain and imitate Him.

These thoughts and counsels are so exclusively addressed to the saints and faithful Brothers and Sisters in Christ that you will be prone to ask. “Is not there anything to be said to the unconverted?” Well, whatever has been spoken in their hearing may be used by them for their own benefit. Now let me address myself to you as pointedly as I can. Though you are not saved, yet you must not say, “I cannot pray.” Why, if prayer is so simple, what excuse can you have for neglecting it? It needs no measurable space of time. Such prayers as these, God will hear, and you have, all of you, the ability and opportunity to think and to express them if you have only that elementary faith in God which believes “that He is, and that He is a rewarder of them that diligently seek Him.”

Cornelius had, I suppose, got about as far as this when he was admonished by the angel to send for Peter, who preached to him peace by Jesus Christ to the conversion of his soul! Is there such a strange being in the Tabernacle as a man or woman that never prays? How shall I expostulate with you? May I steal a passage from a living poet who, though he has contributed nothing to our hymn books, hums a note so suited to my purpose and so pleasant to my ear that I like to quote it—

***“More things are worked by prayer
Than this world dreams of.
Therefore let your voice
Rise like a fountain, flowing night and day!
For what are men better than sheep or goats,
That nourish a blind life within the brain,
If, knowing God, they lift not hands of prayer,
Both for themselves and those who call them friend?
For so the whole round world is every way
Bound by gold chains about the feet of God.”***

I do not suspect there is a creature here who never prays because people generally pray to somebody or other. The man that never prays to God such prayers as he ought, prays to God such prayers as he ought not! It is an awful thing when a man asks God to damn him—and yet there are

persons that do that! Suppose He were to hear you? He is a prayer-hearing God!

If I address one profane swearer here I would like to put this matter clearly to him. Were the Almighty to hear you—if your eyes were blinded and your tongue were struck dumb while you were uttering a wild imprecation—how would you bear the sudden judgment on your impious speech? If some of those prayers of yours were answered for yourself—and if some that you have offered in your passion for your wife and for your child were fulfilled to their hurt and your distraction—what an awful thing it would be!

Well, God does answer prayer, and one of these days He may answer your prayers to your shame and everlasting confusion. Would not it be well now, before you leave your seat, to pray, “Lord, have mercy upon me. Lord, save me. Lord, change my heart. Lord, give me to believe in Christ. Lord, give me now an interest in the precious blood of Jesus. Lord, save me now”? Will not each one of you breathe such a prayer as that? May the Holy Spirit lead you to do so! And if you once begin to pray aright I am not afraid that you will never leave off, for there is a something that holds the soul fast in real prayer.

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END OF VOLUME 23

KING'S GARDENS

NO. 790

**DELIVERED ON LORD'S-DAY EVENING, DECEMBER 29 , 1867,
BY C. H. SPURGEON,
AT THE METROPOLITAN TABERNACLE, NEWINGTON.**

***"The king's garden."
Nehemiah 3:15.***

THERE have been many very famous king's gardens, such as those "hanging gardens" in Nineveh, in which Sardanapalus delighted himself, and that remarkable garden of Cyrus in which he took such great interest, because, as he said, every tree and every plant in it had been both planted and tended by his own royal hand. Imagination might bid you wander among the beauties of the celebrated villas and gardens of the Roman emperors, or make you linger amid the roses and lilies of the voluptuous gardens of the Persian caliphs but we have nobler work in hand.

I call you to come with me to orchards of pomegranates, to beds of spices, camphor with spikenard, calamus and cinnamon, myrrh and aloes, and trees of frankincense. I am not about to speak of the gardens of any *earthly* monarch, for we can find far fairer flowers and rarer fruits in the gardens of the King of kings, the resorts of His Son, the Prince Immanuel. There are six of these "king's gardens" to which I shall conduct you, but we shall not have time to tarry in more than one of them.

I. The first of these king's gardens was THE GARDEN OF PARADISE, which was situated in the midst of Eden. You will read of it in the book of Genesis. It was doubtless a fairer place than we have ever seen and much more marvelous for beauty than we can imagine. It was full of all manner of delights—a fruitful spot in which the man who was set to keep it would have no need to toil, but would find it a happy and refreshing exercise to train the luxurious plants. No sweat was ever seen upon his happy brow, for he cultivated a virgin soil. Abundance of luscious fruits ministered to his necessities. He could stretch himself upon soft couches of moss and no inclement weather disturbed his repose.

No winter's wind scattered the leaves of Eden! No summer's heat burned up its flowers! There were sweet alternations of day and night, but the day brought no sorrow and the night no danger. The beasts were there, yet not as beasts of prey, but as the obedient servants of that happy man whom God had made to have dominion over all the works of His hands. In the midst of the garden grew that mysterious Tree of Life, of which we know so little, literally, but of which, I trust, we know much in its *spiritual* meaning, for we have fed upon its fruits and have been healed by its leaves.

Hard by it stood the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil, placed there as the test of obedience. Adam's mind was equally balanced—it had no bias to evil—and God left him to the freedom of his will, giving this as the test of his loyalty, that, if obedient, he would never touch the fruit of that *one* tree. Why need he? There were tens of thousands of trees, all of which

bowed down their branches with abundant fruit for his hunger or his luxury. Why need he desire that solitary tree which God had fenced and hedged about?

But, in an evil hour, at the serpent's base suggestion—we know not how soon after his creation—he put forth his hand and plucked from the forbidden tree! The mere plucking of the fruit seems little to the thoughtless, but the breaking of the Maker's Law was a great offense to Heaven, for it was man's throwing down the glove of battle against his Creator, and breaking his allegiance to his Lord and Master. This was great, great in itself and in its mischievous effects, for Adam fell that day, and he was driven out of Eden to till the thankless, thorn-bearing soil. And you and I fell in him and were banished with him. We were in his loins. He was "the father of us all," and *on* us he has brought the curse of toil, and *in* us all he has sown the seeds of iniquity!

Let it never be forgotten that in connection with the garden of Eden we are not now a pure and sinless race, and *cannot* be by nature, however civilized we may become. Men are born no longer with balanced minds, but a heavy weight of original sin in the scale. We are averse to that which is good. The bias of the mind of man, when he is born into the world, is towards that which is evil and we as naturally go astray as the serpent naturally learns to hiss, or the wolf to tear and to devour. Ah, Brothers and Sisters, beware of thinking too little of the Fall. Slight thoughts upon the Fall are at the root of false theologies. The mischief that has been worked in us is not a trifling matter, but a thing to be trembled at.

Only the Divine hand can reclaim us. The house of manhood has been shaken to its foundations—each timber is decayed—leprosy is in the tottering wall. Man must be made new by the same creating hand that first made him, or he never can be a dwelling place fit for God. Let those who boast of their natural goodness look to the garden of Eden and be ashamed of their pride—and then examine their own actions by the glass of God's most holy Law—and be confounded that they should dream of purity! How can he be pure that is born of woman? "Who can bring a clean thing out of an unclean thing? Not one."

As our mothers were sinful, such are we and such will our children be. As long as men are brought into the world by natural generation we shall be "born in sin and shaped in iniquity." And if we are to be accepted by God we must be born again and made new creatures in Christ Jesus. Alas, then, alas, for that first king's garden! The flowers are gone and the birds have ceased to sing! The winter's winds howl through it and the summer's sun scorches it! The beasts of prey are there. Perhaps the very site of it, which is now unknown, may be a den of dragons, an habitation for the pelican of the wilderness and the bittern of desolation! Fit image, if it is so, of our natural estate, for we were altogether given up to desolation and destruction unless One mighty to save has espoused our cause and undertaken our redemption.

II. The second king's garden to which I will introduce you is very different from the first, but it yields more fragrant spices and healthier herbs by far. It is THE GARDEN OF GETHSEMANE—the garden of the olive press, in which the Lord Jesus Christ was the olive, and God's anger

against sin was the press. Take off your shoes, for the place where you stand is holy ground! 'Tis night. Yonder are 12 men walking and talking sweetly as they walk. Observe One, a mysterious, majestic Person, who is evidently superior to the rest. It is the Son of Man.

Hush! It is the Son of *God*, and as He talks you can hear words like these, "I am the Vine, you are the branches. Abide in Me and I in you." We will conceal ourselves behind that group of olive trees and will see what is to happen here. This is the place where that mysterious Son of God was often to be found with His disciples. Just as God walked in the first garden in Eden, so the Son of God walked in the second garden. And as God in the first garden communed with man, so of the second garden it is written Jesus oftentimes resorted there with His disciples. Look, He has dismissed eight of them. He has told them to wait yonder and on He goes with only three—Peter, and James, and John—the chosen out of the 11—and speaking to them, and bidding them watch, He leaves them, and is all alone.

Let us draw as near as we may. We see the Son of God in prayer, and as He prays His earnestness gathers strength. He is striving with an unseen enemy—struggling like a man who would overcome an adversary, wrestling so vigorously that He sweats—but it is a strange sweat! "His sweat was, as it were, great drops of blood falling to the ground." He is beginning to drink the cup of Jehovah's wrath which was due to *our* sins—a cup which we could not have emptied even through eternity, though every drop of it had been a Hell.

Christ is downing the wrath-cup, and as He trembles under the fiery influence of the draught of worse than wormwood and gall, He cries, "If it is possible, let this cup pass from Me." But He recovers Himself and His prayer is, "Nevertheless, not as I will, but as You will." Backwards and forwards you see Him go like a man distracted. Three times He looks to the disciples for comfort, but they are slumbering. And then again He returns to His God and casts Himself upon His face, with strong crying and tears, pouring out His soul in blood before high Heaven—such is the anguish of His tortured heart!

Behold here the beginning of our *redemption*. Jesus then began to suffer in our place, atoning for our iniquity. The mischief of Eden fell upon Gethsemane. The mist of sin rose up in the garden of Paradise, and as it rose it gathered and collected into a black tremendous storm cloud, and then it burst, with flashes of lightning and with claps of thunder, upon the great Shepherd of the sheep, that we, who deserved to be overwhelmed by the tempest, might find fair weather in the rest which remains for the people of God. Perhaps no sight that was ever beheld of men or angels, except the Crucifixion, was more tremendous than the agony of Gethsemane!

It must have been a terrible spectacle to have seen martyrs in the fire, or men and women devoured by lions and bears in the Roman amphitheatre, but then to the Christian's eyes there was a pleasure mingled with these ghastly sights, for God sustained His faithful ones. They clapped their hands amidst the fire! They sang when the wild beasts were leaping upon them! Such holy joy beamed from their countenances that their

Brethren were *comforted* rather than distressed, and saints wished to be there with them that they might die as they died and win the martyr's crown!

But, when you look at Christ in the garden, you miss the help which the martyrs had. *God* forsakes Him! He must tread the winepress alone, and of the people there must be none with Him. Yes, and yet, dark as that night was—the darkest night that ever fell upon this world—it was the mother of that Gospel *light* of finished redemption which now enlightens the Gentiles and brings glory unto Israel!

Let us leave the King's garden, then, with feelings of deep repentance that we should have made Jesus suffer so, and yet with holy gladness to think that thus has He redeemed us from the ruins of the Fall.

III. I claim a moment's thought for the GARDEN OF THE BURIAL AND THE RESURRECTION. In Joseph's garden, in the new tomb, the Beloved of our souls slept for awhile and then arose to His Glory-life. Detained of death He could not be, for He was no longer a lawful Captive. He had finished His work and earned His reward, and therefore the imprisoning stone was rolled away. He is not here, for He is risen! The seal is broken, the watchmen are dispersed, the stone is removed, the Captive is free!

What comfort is here, for, as Jesus rose, so all His slumbering saints shall likewise leave the tomb. His Resurrection is the resurrection of all the saints. Wait but awhile and the tomb shall be no longer the treasury of death. So surely as the Lord came forth from the sepulcher to glory and immortality, all His saints are justified and clean. None can accuse us now that the Lord has risen, indeed, no more to die. His one offering has perfected forever all the chosen ones and His glorious uprising is the guarantee of their acceptance. Faith delights in the garden where Magdalene found her unknown, yet well-known, Lord, and where angels kept watch and ward over the couch, which the immortal Sufferer had relinquished. Henceforth it is to us a King's garden, abounding with pleasant fruits and fragrant flowers.

IV. And now I desire to take you to a fourth king's garden. You will not have far to go. Put your hand on your bosom and your finger will be on the latch of its door. It is THE GARDEN OF THE HUMAN HEART. The heart is a little garden—little, apparently, but yet so extensive that it is all but infinite—for who can tell the limit of the heart of man? How far-darting the imaginations and the affections of the soul of man may be? Now, this little-great thing, the human heart, is meant to be a garden for God.

Did I say it was a garden? It *should* be so, but alas, by nature it scarcely deserves the name, for I perceive it to be all overgrown with weeds—thistle and briar, deadly nightshade, and nettles, and I know not what besides—spring up everywhere. I see trees, but they drop with poison, like the deadly upas, whose drip is death. There are no luscious fruits, but instead the grapes of Gomorrah and apples of Sodom. This loathsome den of festering evils is what should have been God's garden, but it is a tangled wilderness of all manner of noxious things! Thorns, also, and thistles does it bring forth.

What must be done to this neglected garden? What heavenly horticulture can be used upon it to reclaim it from its desert state? God, the great Farmer, must come and turn it over after His own fashion. The rough plow of conviction must be dragged through it. The spade of trouble must break up the surface and smash to pieces the clods, and kill the weeds. And fire must burn up the rubbish. Has that ever been done in the garden of your heart, dear Hearer? Have you ever had your soul plowed and cross-plowed and harrowed with sorrow till you were driven well-near to despair? Have you seen your sweet sins killed so that you could not take pleasure in them any longer, but desired to be clean rid of them? That must be done if the garden is to be reclaimed and made worthy of the Divine Owner.

Then when the soil is broken up and the clods are turned there must be seed sown, and the planting of slips from the Tree of Life and seeds from the nurseries of Heaven—seeds that shall turn to flowers which shall be full of sweet perfume, acceptable to Christ. The seeds of faith, love, hope, patience, perseverance, and zeal must be carefully cast into prepared soil by the Holy Spirit's hand, and fostered by the same kindly care. Before the heart can be called a garden fit for the King of kings, these must bud, and blossom, and yield their fruits.

When I regard attentively that garden which was so lately covered over with weeds, but which is now sown and planted, I perceive that the plants grow not well unless the soil is drained. There must be always drained out of us much superfluity of naughtiness and excess of carnal confidence or our heart will be a cold swamp—a worthless plant-killing bog. Affliction drains us. We do not like to have our money or our friends taken from us, and yet the love of these might ruin us for all fruit-bearing if God did not remove them. Besides the draining, there must also be constant hoeing, and raking and digging.

After a garden is made, the beds are never left long alone. The gardener must have his eye upon them or they run to riot. If they were left to themselves, they would soon breed weeds again and return to the old confusion—so the hoe must be constantly kept going if the garden is to be clean. So with the garden of the heart—cleansing and pruning must be done every day and God must do it through ourselves, and we must do it by constant self-examination and repentance, striving in the power of the Holy Spirit to keep ourselves free from the sins which do so easily beset us. I find that the weeds grow fast enough in my soul, and keep me in full employment to check their growth.

Cowper talks about—

***“The dear hour which brought me to Your foot,
And cut up all my follies by the root.”***

Surely, good Cowper must have made a mistake! I know mine were never cut up by the roots. When they have been cut down, the root soon sprouts again! They will be cut up by the root one day, as I believe and hope, but till then I must be incessantly watchful. The roots are still there. Alas, alas, that it should be so! O Lord Jesus, help us, or we shall be overgrown with our besetting sins. Corruption still remains even in the heart of the regenerate, and the garden of the King of kings is often overgrown

with weeds. But for God it is still a garden—a garden for Jesus to walk in, and there are happy times when He deigns to sit down in the arbor of our souls!

What a royal garden our poor heart then becomes! It may be the body is covered with poor garments. It may be our whole outward man is very sick and faint, but still our manhood is a King's garden when Christ is within and we are kings and priests unto our God as Jesus holds fellowship with us! The angels come into that garden, too, and when the air is still and the noise of outside cares is hushed, we have often enjoyed a little Heaven within our heart, the beginning of the Heaven to which we hope soon to go!

Dear Hearer, do you know what we mean by paradise within, glory beaming in the heart, Heaven in the soul? Jesus can teach you this. The heart is a King's garden, Beloved. Jesus bought it with His precious blood, and He has now, by His Grace, come into it and claimed it to be His own. My Friend, if He has not come to you yet, I hope He will. If you have not given your heart to Him, I hope you may be led to do so by His gracious Spirit. But, if your heart is His, oh, keep it for your Beloved! Do not give the keys to anyone else! The love of husband, wife and child—each of these is to have its proper place—but the heart's core is the *King's garden*.

Mark you, it is not the husband's garden, nor the wife's garden, nor the child's garden—the dearest idols we have known must not be set up there—it is the King's garden! I hope you will say tonight, before you go to rest, "O king, come into my garden, and eat my pleasant fruit! Awake, O heavenly wind, and blow upon the garden of my soul, and let all the plants of my new nature give forth their sweetness that my Beloved may be charmed with my company, and that I may be filled with His sweet love."

V. However, I want you to spend most of your time in a *fifth* garden, and that is THE GARDEN OF THE CHRISTIAN CHURCH—our garden, and yet the King's garden—planted and flourishing in this place. Follow me in each word of the text. What is it? A garden. The Church of God is a garden. Many thoughts are gathered in that one metaphor like bees in a hive. It is called a garden in the book of Solomon's Song, so I know that we are not wrong in using the illustration.

But what does a garden mean? In the first place it implies *separation*. A garden is not the open waste, the shrubs, or the common. It is not a wilderness. It is walled around—it is hedged in. Ah, Christian, when you join the Church, remember you, too, become by profession hedged in for King Jesus! I earnestly desire to see the wall of separation between the Church and the world made broader and stronger. Believe me, nothing gives me more sorrow than when I hear of Church members saying, "Well, there is no harm in this. There is no harm in that," and getting as near to the *world* as possible. It does not matter what you may think of it, but I am certain that Divine Grace is at low ebb in your soul when you even raise the question of how far you may go in worldly conformity.

We are to avoid the very *appearance* of evil, and especially just at this festive season of the year, this Christmas, when so many of you are having your parties, your children's sports, and all that kind of thing. I would

have you doubly jealous, do remember, Church members, that you are to be Christians *always*, if Christians at all. We do not grant dispensations to sin, as the Roman Catholics did in Luther's day. You are always to wear your uniforms as Christian soldiers and never, at *any* time, say, "Well, I shall do this just now—it is only once a year. I shall do as the world does—I cannot be out of fashion." You must be either out of the fashion, or out of the true Church—remember that, because the place for Christ's Church *is* altogether out of fashion.

You are called to go forth outside the camp, bearing His reproach. If you want to be *in* the camp, you cannot be Christ's disciple, for the love of the world is enmity to Christ. You must be a separated one or be lost. If you want to be the common, you cannot be the garden! And if you are willing and anxious to be the garden, why, then, do not attempt to be the common. Keep the hedges up. Keep the gates well bolted—king's gardens must not be left open to thieves and robbers. Be not conformed to the world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. The King's garden is a separated place—keep it so.

The King's garden is a place of order. You do not, when you go into your garden, find the flowers all put in any which way—the wise gardener arranges them according to their tints and hues so that in the midst of summer the garden shall look like a rainbow that has been broken to pieces and let down upon the earth—delightful to gaze upon. All the walks are even, the beds are in proportion, and the plants well arranged, just as they should be. Such should the Christian Church be—pastor, deacons, elders, members—all in their proper places. We are not a load of bricks, but a *house*.

The Church is not a mere heap, but it is to be a palace built for God, a temple in which He manifests Himself. Let us all try to maintain order in the household of Christ, and above all things hate discord and confusion. Let us be men who know how to keep rank, maintaining a decent order and regularity in all things. We seek not the order which consists in all sleeping in their places, like corpses in the catacombs, but we desire the order which finds all *working* in their places for the common cause of the Lord Jesus. May we never become a disorderly, disunited, irregular Church. May there be order in the garden preserved by the power of love and Divine Grace.

A garden is a place of beauty. Such should the Christian Church be. You gather together the fairest flowers from all lands and put them in your garden. And if you see no beauties in the streets, you expect to see them in the florist's beds. So, if there is no holiness, no love, no zeal, no prayerfulness outside in the world, yet we should see these things in the Church! We are not to take the world to be our guide, but we are to excel it. We must do more than others. The Lord Jesus Christ told His disciples that their righteousness must exceed that of even the Scribes and Pharisees or they could not enter the kingdom. And the genuine Christian must seek to be more excellent in his life than the best moralist because Christ's garden ought to have the best flowers in all the world! Even the best is poor compared with what Christ's deserves—let us not put Him off

with withered and dying plants. The rarest, richest, choicest lilies and roses ought to bloom in the place which Jesus calls His own.

The king's garden is a place of growth, too. I do not suppose the florist would think that soil fit to be a garden in which his plants would not grow. It would be a dead loss to him if the slips remained slips and if the buds never turned to flowers. So in the Church of God. We are not introduced into fellowship to be always the same, always little children and babes in Grace. We should grow in Grace and in the knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. The Prayer Meeting should be a school of practical education for our Beloved young members, a place for the young nestlings to try their callous wings. When they try to pray, at first they may almost break down, perhaps, but if they will not give way to a foolish timidity, they will soon get over it and find themselves useful—not merely in public prayer, but in a thousand works of usefulness besides. Growth should be rapid where Jesus is the Gardener and the Holy Spirit the dew from above.

Again, a garden is a place of retirement. When a man is in his garden he does not expect to see all his customers walking down between the beds to do business with him. "No," he says, "I am walking in my garden, and I expect to be alone." So the Lord Jesus Christ would have us reserve the Church to be a place in which He can manifest Himself to us as He does not unto the world. Oh I wish that Christians were more retired, that they kept their hearts more shut up for Christ! I am afraid we often worry and trouble ourselves, like Martha, with much serving so that we have not the room for Christ that Mary had, and do not sit at His feet as we ought to do. The Lord grant us Grace to keep our hearts as closed gardens for Christ to walk in.

This, then, is a poor description of what the Church is. And now, very briefly, whose is it? The Church is a garden, but it is the King's garden. The Church is not mine, nor yours, but the King's. It is the King's garden because He chose it for Himself—

***"We are a garden walled around,
Chosen, and made peculiar ground.
A little spot enclosed by Grace
Out of the world's wide wilderness."***

We are the King's because He bought us—Naboth said he would not give up his vineyard because he inherited it. So does Christ inherit us by an indefeasible title. We are His heritage and He has so dearly bought us with His own blood that He will never give us up, blessed be His name!

We are His because He has conquered us. He won us in fair fight and now we acknowledge the validity of His title-deeds, and confess, every one of us, as the members of His church, that we are His, and that He is ours. What a nobility this gives to Christ's Church! I have sometimes heard people talk disparagingly of Church meetings—there may be but few persons present—some of those may be young members and some may be very old. Yet I have been much grieved when I have heard people despise such a Church meeting for Christ would not despise it! Let such beware. Whenever the Church meets, either as a whole or representatively, there is a solemn dignity cast about that assembly which is not to be found in a parliament of kings and princes.

Yes, I will say it—if Louis Napoleon could call a senate of all the potentates in this world in Paris and hold a congress there—the whole of them put together would not be worth the snap of a finger compared with half-a-dozen godly old women who meet together in the name of Christ as a Church, in obedience to the Lord's command! God would not be there with the potentates—what cares He for them? But He would be with the most poor and despised of His people who meet together as a Church in Jesus Christ's name. "Lo, I am with you always, even unto the end of the world," is more glorious than ermine, or purple, or crown! Constitute a Church in the name of Christ and meet together as such, and there is no assembly upon the face of the earth that can be compared with it! Even the assembly of the first-born in Heaven is but a branch of the grand whole of which the assemblies of the Church on earth make up an essential part. The Church is the King's garden.

I am going to ask, now, if the Church is a garden, what does it need? One thing it certainly requires is *labor*. You cannot keep a garden in proper order without work. We want more laborers in this Church, especially of one sort. We want some who will be *planters*. I had a letter last week from a young woman. I do not know who she is. I do not know where she sits. It may be in the top gallery, it is quite as likely to be in the second—perhaps more likely—and in the arena quite as likely again. She says that she has been here for two years and that she has been very anxious about her soul, and she has often wished that somebody would speak to her but nobody has done so.

Now, if I knew where she sat, I should say to the friends who sit there that I am ashamed of them! As I do not know where she sits, will those of you who love Christ, but who have not been in the habit of looking after others, be so kind as to be ashamed of yourselves, because there is somebody or other to be blamed in this business! If you love Jesus at all, I cannot understand how you can let a person come to this Tabernacle for two years and not speak to them! Somebody has been negligent, very negligent! Whoever it may be, let him see to it! I do not say you can speak upon the best things the first time you see them, though you might try to do that at any rate—but how can you have been silent for *two years*?

How can this be? You have been here twice every Sunday and that young woman has been here twice. Well, there are 200 times—200 opportunities that you have lost! Two hundred times that you have let that poor soul go away burdened without speaking to her! I need laborers very badly, real hard-working soul-winners! I need planters who can get the young slips and put them where they will grow! I need helpers who will gather up the young lambs, just as they are born, and carry them in their bosom a little while. We need spiritual nurses who will give comfort to the broken-hearted and pour in the oil of consolation into the wounds of poor trembling sinners!

In every Church there ought to be some to watch over those who are planted. When we receive members we ought to look after them! And as one person cannot do it thoroughly—as even the elders and deacons are hardly numerous enough for so great a work—it should be the aim and duty of all the experienced Christians in the Church to fondly tend the

younger ones. I believe that many of you do this, and I am very thankful to zealous friends who are not in office in the Church who do a great deal in visiting the sick and watching over the younger members. Only I want *all* of you to do it! Oh, if everybody were duly anxious about keeping this garden in order, how beautifully trimmed all the borders would be and how few weeds should we find springing up in the beds!

May I ask you, members of the Church, are you doing your duty by the King's garden? You are yourselves His own chosen ones, and He has worked for you so that you have no need to work to save yourselves. But still, you must not be idle, for your Lord has said to you, "Go, work today in My vineyard." Are you doing it? I thank you if you are. If you are not, blame yourselves. There should be a little band in every Church to collect the stragglers. Our vines will grow out of order if they can, but we must deal wisely with them and fasten them up in their places. We must be on the alert when we see backsliding begin. How much can be done by old Christians in trying to stop backsliding among the young! I believe that half the cases that have gone badly might have been stopped by a little judicious forethought.

I say again, what can we, who are the officers of this Church, do with so many? Why, we number more than 3,500 in Church fellowship. But if you will look after each other, and seek wherever you see a little decline or a little coldness, to bring the Brother back, the King's garden will be well cared for. The King's garden needs laborers—may you all labor, and its needs in this respect will be met. Sometimes we need, Brothers and Sisters, to burn up the rubbish and sweep up the leaves. In the best Church there will always be some falling leaves. Somebody gets out at the elbow with another Brother. We are not *any* of us perfect, even though we get on far more than reasonably well with one another as a Church. I never saw any Church that was really so well knit together in Christian love as we are—but there are always a few leaves about, and not a little dust to be put in the corner and burned.

May I ask a Brother, whenever he sees any mischief, to sweep it up and say nothing about it? Whenever you find that such-and-such a Brother is going a little amiss, talk to him about it quietly. Do not spread it all over the Church and cause jealousies and suspicions. Pick up the leaf and destroy it. When a Brother member has offended you so that you feel vexed, forgive him, for I dare say *you* will need forgiveness before many days are over. We have none of us, perhaps, the sweetest of tempers, but if we do have the sweetest, the way to prove it is by forgiving those who have not. If every one would seek to make peace there never could be any great accumulation of discord in the King's garden to annoy Him. And when He came walking in He would find it all beautiful and in good order, and all the flowers blooming delightfully—and He would find His delights with the sons of men.

Now, I have said that the Church needs laborers, but, dear Friends, it needs something else! It needs new plants. I wish I might find some tonight. Our King finds plants for His garden outside the wall. He takes the wild olive branches and grafts them into the good olive, and then the sap changes the nature. A new thing, that! It is not thus in our gardens at

home, but wonders are worked in the garden of the King! He transplants weeds from the dunghill and makes them to grow as lilies in the midst of his fair garden. Will you be such a plant? May the Master's love constrain you to desire to be such a one, and, if you desire it, you shall have it! Trust in the Lord Jesus Christ and you are His! Rest alone upon Him and you are a plant of His right-hand planting, and shall never be rooted up. God grant that you may blossom to the skies.

But, dear Friends, all the laborers and all the new plants would not be what the Church requires if she had not something else—for every garden needs *rain*, and every garden needs *sunshine*. This Church, if it had ever so many laborers, could never prosper without the dew of the Holy Spirit and the sunshine of the Divine favor. We have had these blessings to a very great extent. We must pray that we may have more. I should like to know of some of you how long it is since you have been to a Prayer Meeting. Shall I stop and let you count? Well, you have not been just lately because it is Christmas time. Very well, I did not expect to see you. And if I had expected, I should have been disappointed.

But it was not Christmas time last *October*, and yet you were not here then! Some of you very seldom come at all. If you are lawfully detained at home, I would never ask you to come, or upbraid you for minding your home duties. You have no right to leave legitimate business that ought to be done to come here. But I am certain that some of you are idle and might come if you liked. I pray the Lord to send you a horsewhip in the shape of trouble in your conscience till you do come, for it very much weakens us all in our prayers when our numbers decline!

And whenever people come to despise weeknight services—be sure of it—farewell to the vital power of godliness, for weeknight services are very, very much the stamp of the man. Any hypocrite will come on a Sunday, but a man does need to take some interest in religious services to be found mingling with the people of God in prayer. Am I to believe that some of you do not care whether souls are saved or not? Am I to believe that some of you, our Church members, have no care whether our ministry is blessed or not? Am I to believe that you continue members of a Church in which you take no interest? Am I to believe that it is nothing to you whether Christ is crowned or despised? I will not believe it!

And yet your absence from the meetings for prayer tends to make me fear that it must be so. I beg you correct yourselves in this matter, and as the King's garden needs rain and sunshine and we cannot expect to have it without prayer, let us not forget the assembling of ourselves together as the manner of some is. Oh, for more prayer! More to pray! And for those who do pray, to pray with more fervor and more constancy in supplication! One favor I would ask. If you cannot come to the Prayer Meetings—and many of you, I know, cannot, and I do not speak to you blaming you—but do pray in the family, do pray in the closet for us. Do not let us become poor in prayer. It is a bad thing to become poor in money because we need it for a thousand causes, and cannot get on without it. But we can do without money better than we can do without prayer! We must have your prayers. I had almost said, if you do not give us your daily prayers give up your membership, for it is no good to yourselves and can-

not be of any use to us. The very least thing that a Church member can do is to plead with God that the blessing may descend. It is the King's garden, and will you not pray for it? It is the King's own garden in which He loves to walk and which He has purchased with His blood—shall not your prayers go up that His Church may flourish, and that His kingdom may come?

And now, lastly, on this point. This King's garden, what does it *produce*? If there had been time, I meant to have waited while you answered the question as to how much *you* produced. Sometimes in our garden we have a tree which is so loaded with fruit that we have to put props under it to keep the branches from trembling. There are one or two in this Church of that sort, who bear much fruit for God, and are so weak in body that their very fruitfulness of zeal and earnestness seems as though it would break them. I pray God that with His gracious promise He may prop them up. I am afraid that this is not the picture of most of us. You say to the gardener sometimes, "Will there be any fruit on that tree this season? It is time that it should show." He looks, and looks, and looks again, and at last the good man says, "I think I can see one little one up at time top, Sir, but I do not know whether it will come to much."

That, I am afraid, is the photograph of many professors. There is fruit, or else they would not be saved ones, but it is "a little one." "Herein is my Father glorified, that you bear much fruit; so shall you be My disciples." May your prayer be not for fruit only, but for *much* fruit, and may God send it! Remember, if there is any fruit at all, it all belongs to the King. If a soul is saved, He shall have the glory of it. If there is any advance made in the great cause of Truth and righteousness, the crown shall be put upon *His* head. The keepers of the vineyard shall have their hundreds, but the King Himself shall have His 10,000s time 10,000s, for He deserves it all.

VI. And now, dear Friends, before I send you away, there is one more garden I must mention, but the time is so far past that I shall not keep you to say much about it. It is the GARDEN OF THE PARADISE ABOVE. I shall let God's Word speak to you about that garden, and then have done. "And he showed in a pure river of water of life, clear as crystal, proceeding out of the throne of God and of the Lamb. In the midst of the street of it, and on either side of the river, was there the Tree of Life, which bore 12 manner of fruits, and yielded her fruit every month and the leaves of the tree were for the healing of the nations. And there shall be no more curse but the throne of God and of the Lamb shall be in it; and His servants shall serve Him: and they shall see His face; and His name shall be on their foreheads. And there shall be no night there; and they need no candle, neither light of the sun; for the Lord God gives them light: and they shall reign forever and ever."

In that garden of the Paradise above may we all be found at the last. Amen.

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THE BROAD WALL

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“The broad wall.”
Nehemiah 3:8.

IT seems that around Jerusalem of old, in the time of her splendor, there was a broad wall which was her defense and her glory. Jerusalem is a type of the Church of God. It is always well when we can see clearly, distinctly and plainly that around the Church to which we belong there runs a broad wall.

This idea of a broad wall around the Church suggests three things, *separation, security and enjoyment*. Let us examine each of these in its turn.

I. First, the SEPARATION of the people of God from the world is like that broad wall surrounding the holy city of Jerusalem.

When a man becomes a Christian, he is still in the world, but he is no longer to be of it. He was an heir of wrath, but he has now become a child of Grace. Being of a distinct nature, he is required to separate himself from the rest of mankind, as the Lord Jesus Christ did, who was “holy, harmless, undefiled, and separate from sinners.” The Lord’s Church was separated in His eternal purpose. It was separated in His Covenant and decree. It was separated in the Atonement, for even there we find that our Lord is called “the Savior of all men, specially of those that believe.” An actual separation is made by Divine Grace, is carried on in the work of sanctification and will be completed in that day when the heavens shall be on fire and the saints shall be caught up together with the Lord in the air—and in that last tremendous day He shall divide the nations as a shepherd divides the sheep from the goats! And then there shall be a great gulf fixed, across which the ungodly cannot go to the righteous, neither shall the righteous approach the wicked.

Practically, my business is to say to those of you who profess to be the Lord’s people, *take care that you maintain a broad wall of separation between yourselves and the world*. I do not say that you are to adopt any peculiarity of dress, or to take up some singular style of speech. Such affectation genders, sooner or later, hypocrisy. A man may be as thoroughly worldly in one coat as in another—he may be quite as vain and conceited with one style of speech as with another. No, he may be even more of the world when he pretends to be separate than if he had left the pretense of separation alone. The separation which we plead for is moral

and spiritual. Its foundation is laid deep in the heart and its substantial reality is very palpable in the life.

Every Christian, it seems to me, should be more scrupulous than other men *in his dealings*. He must never swerve from the path of integrity. He should never say, "It is the custom—it is perfectly understood in the trade." Let the Christian remember that custom cannot sanction wrong and that its being "understood" is no apology for misrepresentation! A lie "understood" is not, therefore, true. While the Golden Rule is more admired than practiced by ordinary men, the Christian should always do unto others as he would that they should do unto him. He should be one whose word is his bond and who, having once pledged his word, swears to his own hurt, but changes not. There ought to be an essential difference between the Christian and the best moralist, by reason of the higher standard which the Gospel inculcates and the Savior has exemplified. Certainly the highest point to which the best unconverted man can go might well be looked upon as a level below which the converted man will never venture to descend!

Moreover, the Christian should especially be distinguished *by his pleasures*, for it is here, usually, that the man comes out in his true colors. We are not quite ourselves, perhaps, in our daily toil, where our pursuits are rather dictated by necessity than by choice. We are not alone—the society we are thrown into imposes restraints upon us. We have to put the bit and the bridle upon ourselves. The true man does not then show himself—but when the day's work is done, then the "birds of a feather flock together." It is with the multitude of traders and commercial men as it was with those saints of old, of whom, when they were liberated from prison, it was said, "Being let go, they went unto their own company." So will your pleasures and pastimes give evidence of *what* your heart is and *where* it is. If you can find pleasure in sin, then in sin you choose to live and, unless Grace prevents, in sin you will not fail to perish! But if your pleasures are of a nobler kind and your companions of a more devout character. If you seek spiritual enjoyments. If you find your happiest moments in worship, in communion, in silent prayer, or in the public assembling of yourselves with the people of God, then your higher instincts become proof of your purer character and you will be distinguished in your pleasures by a broad wall which effectually separates you from the world!

Such separation should be carried, I think, *into everything which affects the Christian*. "What have they seen in your house?" was the question Isaiah asked of Hezekiah. When a stranger comes into our house, it should be so ordered that he can clearly perceive that the Lord is there! A man ought scarcely to tarry a night beneath our roof without gathering that we have a respect unto Him who is invisible and that we desire to live and move in the light of God's Countenance. I have already said that I would not have you cultivate singularities for singularity's sake, yet as the most of men are satisfied if they do as other people do, you must

never be satisfied until you do more and better than other people, having found out a mode and course of life as far transcending the ordinary worldling's life as the path of the eagle in the air is above that of the mole which burrows under the soil!

This broad wall between the godly and the ungodly *should be most conspicuous in the spirit of our mind*. The ungodly man has only this world to live for—do not wonder if he lives very earnestly for it. He has no other treasure—why should he not get as much as he can of this? But you, Christian, profess to have immortal life, therefore your treasure is not to be amassed in this brief span of existence. Your treasure is laid up in Heaven and available for eternity. Your best hopes overleap the narrow bounds of time and fly beyond the grave—your spirit must not, therefore, be earthbound and groveling, but soaring and heavenly! There should always be about you the air of one who has his shoes on his feet, his loins girded and his staff in his hand—the air of a pilgrim ready to be off and away to a better land! You are not to live here as if this were your home. You are not to talk of this world as though it were to last forever. You are not to hoard it and treasure it up as though you had set your heart upon it—but you are to be on the wing as though you had not a nest here and never could have—but expected to find your resting place among the cedars of God, in the hilltops of Glory!

Depend upon it, the more unworldly a Christian is, the better it is for him. I think I could mention several reasons why this wall should be very broad. *If you are sincere in your profession, there is a very broad distinction between you and unconverted people*. Nobody can tell how far life is removed from death. Can you measure the difference? They are as opposite as the poles. Now, according to your profession, you are a living child of God, you have received a new life, whereas the children of this world are dead in trespasses and sins. How palpable the difference between light and darkness! Yet you profess to have been “sometimes darkness,” but now you are made “light in the Lord.” There is, therefore, a great distinction between you and the world if you are what you profess to be! You say, when you put on the name of Christ, that you are going to the Celestial City, to the New Jerusalem—but the world turns its back upon the heavenly country and goes downward to that other city of which you know that destruction is its doom—your path is different from theirs. If you are what you say you are, the road you take must be diametrically opposite to that of the ungodly man. You know the difference between their ends. The end of the righteous shall be everlasting Glory, but the end of the wicked is destruction. Unless, then, you are a hypocrite, there is such a distinction between you and others as only God, Himself, could make—a distinction which originates here and is to be perpetuated throughout eternity! When the social diversities occasioned by rank and dependency, riches and poverty, ignorance and learning, shall all have passed away, the distinctions between the children of God and the child-

ren of men, between saints and scoffers, between the chosen and the castaway, will still exist! I pray you, then, maintain a broad wall in your conduct, as God has made a broad wall in your state and in your destiny!

Remember again, *that our Lord Jesus Christ had a broad wall between Him and the ungodly.* Look at Him and see how different He is from the men of His time. All His life long you observe Him to be a stranger and a foreigner in the land. Truly, He drew near to sinners—as near as He could draw—and He received them when they were willing to draw near to Him. But He did not draw near to their sins. He was “holy, harmless, undefiled and separate from sinners.” When He went to His own city of Nazareth, He only preached a single sermon and they would have cast Him headlong down the hill if they could. When He passed through the street, He became the song of the drunkard, the butt of the foolish, the mark at which the proud shot out the arrows of their scorn! At last, having come to His own and His own having received Him not, they determined to thrust Him altogether out of the camp, so they took Him to Golgotha and nailed Him to the tree as a malefactor, a promoter of sedition. He was the Great Dissenter, the Great Nonconformist of His age! The National Church first excommunicated and then executed Him. He did not seek difference in things trivial, but the purity of His life and the truthfulness of His testimony roused the spleen of the rulers and the chief men of their synagogues. He was ready in all things to serve them and to bless them—but He never would blend with them. They would have made Him a king. Ah, if He would but have joined the world, the world would have given Him the chief place—as the world’s prince said on the mountain—“All these things will I give You, if You will fall down and worship me.” But He drives away the fiend and stands immaculate and separate even to the close of His life! If you are a Christian, be a Christian! If you follow Christ, go outside the camp! But if there is no difference between you and your fellow man, what will you say to the King in the day when He comes and finds that you have on no wedding garment by which you can be distinguished from the rest of mankind?

Moreover, dear Friends, you will find that *a broad wall of separation is abundantly good for yourselves.* I do not think any Christian in the world will tell you that when he has given way to the world’s customs, he has ever been profited thereby. If you can go and find an evening’s amusement in a suspicious place and feel profited by it, I am sure you are not a Christian, for, if you were really a Christian, it would pain your conscience and unfit you for more devout exercises of the heart! Ask a fish to spend an hour on dry land and I think, did it comply, the fish would find that it was not much to its benefit, for it would be out of its element—and it will be so with you in communion with sinners. When you are compelled to associate with worldly people in the ordinary course of business, you find much that grates upon the ear, that troubles the

heart and annoys the soul. You will be often like righteous Lot, vexed with the conversation of the wicked—and you will say with David—

***“Woe’s me that I in Mesech am
A sojourner so long!
That I in tabernacles dwell
To Kedar that belong.”***

Your soul will pine and sigh to come forth and wash your hands of everything that is impure and unclean. As you find no comfort there, you will long to get away to the chaste, the holy, the devout, the edifying fellowship of the saints! Make a broad wall, dear Friends, in your daily life! If you begin to give way a little to the world, you will soon give way a great deal. Give sin an inch and it will take a mile. “Take care of the pence, and the pounds will take care of themselves,” is an apt motto of economy. So, too, guard against little sins if you would be clear of “the great transgression.” Look after the little approaches to worldliness, the little giving in towards the things of ungodliness—and then you will not make provision for the flesh to fulfill the lusts thereof.

Another good reason for keeping up the broad wall of separation is that *you will thereby do most good to the world*. I know Satan will tell you that if you bend a little and come near to the ungodly, then they also will come a little way to meet you. Yes, but it is not so! You lose your strength, Christian, the moment you depart from your integrity. What do you think ungodly people say behind your back if they see you inconsistent to please them? “Oh,” they say, “there is nothing in his religion but vain pretense! The man is not sincere.” Although the world may openly denounce the rigid Puritan, it secretly admires him. When the big heart of the world speaks out, it has respect to the man that is sternly honest and will not yield his principles—no, not a hair’s breadth! In such an age as this, when there is so little sound conviction, when principle is cast to the winds and when a widespread tolerant laxness, both of thought and of practice, seems to rule the day, it is still the fact that a man who is decided in his belief, speaks his mind boldly and acts according to his profession, is sure to command the reverence of mankind! Depend upon it, woman, your husband and your children will respect you none the more because you say, “I will give up some of my Christian privileges,” or, “I will go sometimes with you into that which is sinful.” You cannot help them out of the mire if you go and plunge yourself into the mud! You cannot help to make them clean if you go and blacken your own hands. How, then, can you wash their faces? You young man in the shop, and you young woman in the workroom, if you keep yourselves to yourselves in Christ’s name, chaste and pure for Jesus, not laughing at jokes which should make you blush, not mixing up with pastimes that are suspicious, but on the other hand, tenderly jealous of your conscience as one who shrinks from a doubtful thing as a sinful thing, holding sound faith and being scrupulous of the Truths of God—if you will so keep yourselves, your company in the midst of others shall be as though an angel

shook his wings and they will say to one another, "Refrain from this or that just now, for So-and-So is here." They will fear you in a certain sense. They will admire you in secret. And who can tell but that, at last, they may come to imitate you?

Would you tempt God? Would you challenge the desolating flood? Whenever the Church comes down to mingle with the world, it behooves the faithful few to fly to the Ark and seek shelter from the avenging storm! When the sons of God saw the daughters of men, that they were fair to look upon, *then* it was that God said it repented Him that He had made men upon the face of the earth—and He sent the deluge to sweep them away! A separate people God's people must be and they shall be! It is His own declaration, "The people shall dwell alone; they shall not be numbered among the nations." The Christian is, in some respects, like the Jew. The Jew is the type of the Christian. You may give the Jew political privileges as he ought to have. He may be adopted into the State as he ought to be. But a Jew he is and a Jew he must still be. He is not a Gentile, even though he calls himself English, or Portuguese, or Spanish, or Polish. He remains one of the people of Israel, a child of Abraham, still a Jew, and you can mark him as such—his speech betrays him in every land. So should it be with the Christian! Mixing up with other men, as he must in his daily calling. Going in and out among them like a man among men. Trading in the market. Dealing in the shop. Mingling in the joys of the social circle. Taking his part in politics, like a citizen, as he is. But, at the same time, always having a higher and a nobler life, a secret into which the world cannot enter and showing the world, by his superior holiness, his zeal for God, his sterling integrity and his unselfish truthfulness—that he is not of the world, even as Christ was not of the world! You cannot tell how concerned I am for some of you that this broad wall should be kept up, for I detect in some of you, at times, a desire to make it very narrow and, perhaps, to pull it down altogether! Brothers and Sisters, beloved in the Lord, you may depend upon it that nothing worse can happen to a Church than to be conformed unto this world! Write "Icha-bod" upon her walls, then, for the sentence of destruction has gone out against her. But if you can keep yourselves as—

***"A garden walled around,
Chosen and made peculiar ground"***—

you shall have your Master's company, your graces shall grow, you shall be happy in your own souls and Christ shall be honored in your lives!

II. Secondly, the broad wall round about Jerusalem INDICATED SAFETY.

In the same way, a broad wall round Christ's Church indicates her safety, too. Consider who they are that belong to the Church of God. A person does not become a member of Christ's Church by Baptism, nor by birthright, nor by profession, nor by morality. Christ is the Door into the sheepfold! Everyone who believes in Jesus Christ is a member of the true Church. Being a member of Christ, he is a member, consequently, of the

body of Christ which is the Church. Now, around the Church of God—the election of Grace, the redeemed by blood, the peculiar people, the adopted, the justified, the sanctified—around the Church there are bulwarks of stupendous strength, munitions which guard them safely. When the foe came to attack Jerusalem, he counted the towers and bulwarks, and marked them well. And after he had seen the strength of the holy city, he fled! How could he ever hope to scale such ramparts as those? Brothers and Sisters, Satan often counts the towers and bulwarks of the New Jerusalem! Anxiously does he desire the destruction of the saints, but it shall never be. He that rests in Christ is saved! He who has passed through the gate of faith to rest in Jesus Christ may sing with joyful confidence—

***“The soul that on Jesus has leaned for repose,
I will not, I will not desert to his foes!
That soul, though all Hell should endeavor to shake,
I’ll never, no never, no never forsake!”***

The Christian is surrounded *by the broad wall of God’s power*. As God is Omnipotent, Satan cannot defeat Him. If God’s power is on my side, who shall hurt me? “If God is for us, who can be against us?”

The Christian is surrounded by the broad wall of God’s love. Who shall prevail against those whom God loves? I know that it is vain to curse those whom God has not cursed, or to defy them whom the Lord has not defied, for whomever He blesses is blessed, indeed! Balak, the son of Zippor, sought to curse the beloved people and he went first to one hilltop and then to another, and looked down upon the chosen camp. But, aha, Balaam, you could not curse them, though Balak sought it! You could only say, “They are blessed, yes, and they shall be blessed!”

God’s Law is a broad wall around us and so *is His justice*. These once threatened our destruction, but now the justice of God demands the salvation of every Believer. If Christ has died instead of me, it would not be justice if I also had to die for my sin. If God has received the full payment of the debt from the hand of the Lord Jesus Christ, then how can He demand the debt again? He is satisfied and we are secure!

The immutability of God, also, surrounds His people like a broad wall. “I am God, I change not; therefore you sons of Jacob are not consumed.” As long as God is the same, the Rock of our salvation will be our secure hiding place.

Upon this delightful Truth of God we might linger long, for there is much to cheer us in the strong security which God has given in Covenant to His people. They are surrounded by the broad wall of *electing love*. Does God choose them and will He lose them? Did He ordain them to eternal life and shall they perish? Did He engrave their names upon His heart and shall those names be blotted out? Did He give them to His Son to be His heritage and shall His Son lose His portion? Did He say, “They shall be Mine, says the Lord, in the day when I make up My jewels,” and shall He part with them? Has He who makes all things obey

Him, no power to keep the people whom He has formed for Himself to be His own peculiar heritage? God forbid that we should doubt it! Electing love, like a broad wall, surrounds every heir of Grace!

And oh, how broad is the wall of *redeeming love*! Will Jesus fail to claim the people He bought with so great a price? Did He shed His blood in vain? How can He revive enmity against those whom He has once reconciled unto God, not imputing their transgression unto them? Having obtained eternal Redemption for them, will He adjudge them to everlasting Hell? Has He purged their sins by Sacrifice and will He then leave them to be the victims of Satanic craft? By the blood of the Everlasting Covenant, every Christian may be assured that He cannot perish, neither can any pluck him out of Christ's hands! Unless the Cross was all a gamble, unless the Atonement was a mere speculation, those for whom Jesus died are saved through His death! Therefore "He shall see of the travail of His soul, and shall be satisfied."

As a broad wall which surrounds the saints of God is *the work of the Holy Spirit*. Does the Spirit begin and then not finish the operations of His Grace? Ah, no! Does He give life which afterwards dies out? That is impossible! Has He not told us that the Word of God is the incorruptible Seed which lives and abides forever? And shall the powers of Hell or the evil of our own flesh destroy what God has pronounced immortal, or cause dissolution to that which God says is incorruptible? Is not the Spirit of God given to us to abide with us forever—and shall He be expelled from that heart in which He has taken up His everlasting dwelling? Brothers and Sisters, we are not of their mind whom are led by fear or fallacy to hazard such conjectures! We rejoice to say with Paul, "Being confident of this very thing, that He which has begun a good work in you will perform it until the day of Jesus Christ." We delight to sing—

**"Grace will complete what Grace begins,
To save from sorrows or from sins.
The work that wisdom undertakes
Eternal mercy never forsakes."**

Almost *every Doctrine of Grace* affords us a broad wall, a strong bastion, a mighty bulwark, a grand munition of defense! Take, for instance, Christ's suretyship engagements. He is Surety to His Father for His people. When He brings home the flock, do you think that He will have to report that some of them are lost? Not so!

"Here am I," will He say, "and the children that You have given Me. Of all whom You have given Me, I have lost none." He will keep all the saints even to the end! The honor of Christ is involved in this matter. If Christ loses one soul that leans upon Him, the integrity of His crown is gone—for if there should be one believing soul in Hell, the Prince of Darkness would hold up that soul and say—"Aha! You could not save them all! Aha! You Captain of Salvation, You were defeated here! Here is one poor little Benjamin, are Ready-to-Halt that You could not bring to Glory, and I have him to be my prey forever!" But it shall not be! Every gem shall be

in Jesus' crown! Every sheep shall be in Jesus' flock! He shall not be defeated in any way, or in any measure, but He shall divide the spoil with the strong, He shall establish the cause He undertakes, He shall eternally conquer! Glory be unto His great and good name!

III. The idea of a broad wall—and with this I close—SUGGESTS ENJOYMENT.

The walls of Nineveh and Babylon were broad—so broad that there was found room for several chariots to pass each other. Here men walked at sunset and talked and promoted good fellowship. If you have ever been in the city of York, you will know how interesting it is to walk around the broad walls there. But our figure is drawn from the Orientals. They were accustomed to come out of their houses and walk on the broad walls. They used them for rest from toil and for the manifold pleasures of recreation. It was very delightful, when the sun was going down and all was cool, to walk on those broad walls. And so, when a Believer comes to know the deep things of God and to see the defenses of God's people, he walks along them and he rests in confidence. "Now," he says, "I am at rest and peace. The destroyer cannot molest me. I am delivered from the noise of archers in the place of the drawing of water and here I can exercise myself in prayer and meditation. Now that salvation is appointed for walls and bulwarks, I will sing a song unto Him who has done these great things for me. I will take my rest and be quiet, for he that believes has entered into rest. There is therefore now no condemnation to them which are in Christ Jesus." Broad walls, then, are for rest, and so are our broad walls of salvation!

Those broad walls were also *for communion*. Men came there and talked with one another. They leaned over the wall and whispered their loving words, conversed of their business, comforted one another, related their troubles and their joys. So, when Believers come unto Christ Jesus, they commune with one another, with the angels, with the spirits of just men made perfect, and with Jesus Christ their Lord, who is best of all! Oh, on those broad walls, when the banner of love waves over them, they sometimes rejoice with an unspeakable joy in fellowship with Him who loved them and gave Himself for them! It is a blessed thing, in the Church of Christ, when you get such a knowledge of the Doctrines of the Gospel that you can have the sweetest communion with the whole Church of the living God!

And then the broad walls were also intended for *prospects and outlooks*. The citizen came up on the broad wall and looked away from the smoke and dirt of the city within, right across to the green fields, the gleaming river and the far-off mountains! They delighted to watch the mowing of hay, or the reaping of corn, or the setting sun beyond the distant hills. It was one of the common enjoyments of the citizen of any walled city to come to the top of the wall in order to take views afar. So, when a man once gets into the altitudes of Gospel Doctrine and has

learned to understand the love of God in Christ Jesus, what wide views he can take! How he looks down upon the sorrows of life! How he looks beyond that narrow little stream of death! How, sometimes, when the weather is bright and his eyes are clear enough to let him use the telescope, he can see within the Gates of Pearl and behold the joys which no mortal eye has seen and hear the songs which no mortal ear has heard, for these are things, not for eyes and ears, but for hearts and spirits! Blessed is the man who dwells in the Church of God, for he can find on her broad walls places from which he can see the King in His beauty and the land which is very far off!

Ah, dear Friends, I wish that these things had to do with you all, but I am afraid they have not, for many of you are outside the wall! And when the destroyer comes, none will be safe but those who are inside the wall of Christ's love and mercy. I would to God that you would escape to the gate at once, for it is open. It will be shut—it will be shut one day, but it is now open. When night comes, the night of death, the gate will be shut and you will then come and say, "Lord, Lord, open to us!" But the answer will be—

***"Too late, too late!
You cannot enter now."***

But it is not too late yet! Christ still says, "Behold, I have set before you an open door, and no man can shut it." Oh, that you had the will to come and put your trust in Jesus, for if you do, you shall be saved! I cannot speak to some of you about security, for there are no broad walls to defend you. You have run away from the security. Perhaps you have been patching up with some untempered mortar a righteousness of your own which will all be thrown down as a bowing wall and as a tottering fence. Oh that you would trust in Jesus! Then would you have a broad wall which all the battering rams of Hell shall never be able to shake! When the storms of eternity shall beat against that wall, it shall stand fast forever!

I cannot speak to some of you about rest, and enjoyment, and communion, for you have sought rest where there is none. You have got a peace which is not peace. You have found a comfort which will be your destruction! God make you to be distressed and cause you by sore stress to flee to the Lord Jesus and so to get true peace, the only peace, for, "He is our peace." Oh, that you would close in with Christ and trust Him! Then you would rejoice in the present happiness which faith would give you! But the sweetest thing of all would be the prospect which should then unfold to you of the eternal happiness which Christ has prepared for all those who put their trust in Him!

**EXPOSITION BY C. H. SPURGEON:
PSALM 71.**

Verses 1-8. *In You, O LORD, do I put my trust: let me never be put to confusion. Deliver me in Your righteous, and cause me to escape: incline Your ear unto me, and save me. Be You my strong habitation, whereunto I may continually resort: You have given commandment to save me; for You are my rock and my fortress. Deliver me, O my God, out of the hand of the wicked, out of the hand of the unrighteous and cruel man. For You are my hope, O Lord God, You are my trust from my youth. By You have I been held up from the womb: You are He that took me out of my mother's womb. My praise shall be continually of You.* David had enjoyed the mercy of God from his very birth. We are apt to forget the tender care of God over our infancy, but we ought to remember it—and it will be a great comfort to us if we come to a second childhood, to remember how kindly God took care of us in the first!

7-11. *I am at a wonder unto many, but You are my strong refuge. Let my mouth be filled with Your praise and with Your honor all the day. Cast me not off in the time of old age; forsake me not when my strength fails. For my enemies speak against me, and they that lay wait for my soul. They take counsel together, saying, God has forsaken him: persecute and take him; for there is none to deliver him.* Surely that ought to have been the reason for letting him alone! With right-minded persons it would have been so, but the devil and his children are arrant cowards and their argument is, “Persecute and take him: for there is none to deliver him.” You might as well expect tenderness in a wolf as anything like bravery and chivalry in a persecutor!

12-14. *O God be not far from me: O my God, make haste for my help. Let them be confounded and consumed that are adversaries to my soul; let them be covered with reproach and dishonor that seek my hurt. But I will hope continually, and will yet praise You more and more.* [See Sermons #2318, Volume 39—GOD'S PUPIL, GOD'S PREACHER—AN AUTOBIOGRAPHY and #3271, Volume 57—GOD, THE CHILDREN'S TEACHER—Read/download both sermons, free of charge, at <http://www.spurgeongems.org>.] How was he going to do it? Already his mouth was filled with God's praise, so, surely he would fill his whole life with it, and his actions which would speak more loudly than his words, would bear daily testimony to the goodness of God.

15, 16. *My mouth shall show forth Your righteousness and Your salvation all the day; for I know not the numbers thereof. I will go in the strength of the Lord God—“This shall be my praise; my very movements, my goings, my progress shall be in the ‘strength of the Lord God.’”*

16, 17. *I will make mention of Your righteousness, even of Yours only. O God, You have taught me from my youth.* Here is the same kind of argument again—“O Lord, I went to school to You, so I must teach others what You have taught me.”

17. *And until this time have I declared Your wondrous works.* “You made me a preacher, and I have stuck to my word. Until this time have I declared Your wondrous works.”

18-20. *Now also when I am old and gray-headed, O God, forsake me not until I have showed Your strength unto this generation and Your power to everyone that is to come. Your righteousness, also, O God, is very high, who has done great things: O God, who is like unto You? You, who have showed me great and sore troubles, shall quicken me again. “You shall not merely deliver me from my great and sore troubles, but You shall give me more life, You ‘Shall quicken me again.’”* Divine quickening is the best remedy for a troubled heart.

20. *And shall bring me up again from the depths of the earth. “Though I seem to be like a man buried in the depth of the earth, You will bring me up again.”*

21, 22. *You shall increase my greatness, and comfort me on every side. I will also praise You—God blessing us and we in return blessing Him—so it ought to be. The more God does for us, the more we ought to do for Him! Is it not so, Brothers and Sisters? Is not this a good argument? Are you carrying it out? Let your conscience answer.*

22, 23. *With the psaltery, even Your Truth, O my God: unto You will I sing with the harp. O You Holy One of Israel. My lips shall greatly rejoice when I sing unto You. Singing unto God ought to be the happiest of exercises! When it is done in a doleful, dolorous way, it is not singing, but groaning.*

23. *And my soul, which You have redeemed. “The sprinkled blood is on my soul and, therefore, it shall leap for joy. Rescued from captivity, bought back from slavery, “my soul, which You have redeemed, shall greatly rejoice when I sing unto You.”*

24. *My tongue also shall talk of Your righteousness all the daylong: for they are confounded, for they are brought unto shame, that seek my hurt.*

[See Sermon #998, Volume 17—MORE AND MORE—Read/download the entire sermon, free of charge, at <http://www.spurgeongems.org>.]

—Adapted from *The C. H. Spurgeon Collection*, Ages Software, 1.800.297.4307

**PRAY THE HOLY SPIRIT WILL USE THIS SERMON
TO BRING MANY TO A SAVING KNOWLEDGE OF JESUS CHRIST.**

RUBBISH

NO. 1156

***DELIVERED BY C. H. SPURGEON,
AT THE METROPOLITAN TABERNACLE, NEWINGTON.***

***“There is much rubbish; so that we are not able to build the wall”
Nehemiah 4:10.***

REMEMBER that Jerusalem had been totally destroyed by Nebuchadnezzar and what is meant by the destruction by the Babylonians may be inferred from the vast heaps of the dust of powdered bricks and charred wood which have been discovered upon the sites of cities which were utterly razed to the ground by the fierce soldiers of that terrible king. The ruins are frequently so complete that even tradition has forgotten the name of the mound or heap which is the sole memorial to mark the sepulcher of a queenly city. The Babylonians made sure work when they did it, their plowers made deep furrows and their destroyers cried one, to another, “Overturn, overturn, overturn, till not a stone shall abide in its place.”

They reaped a nation with their swords as corn is cut down by the sickle and they beat their cities till the ruins were small as the dust of the summer threshing floor. Do you wonder that on the site of Jerusalem there remained much rubbish? Many modern destroyers have done their desolating work most wonderfully and I may venture to quote what I have seen of their doings as an example of the much rubbish with which the foundations of a ruined city are sure to be covered. I have stood upon the Palatine Mount in Rome, where formerly the pale of the Caesars raised themselves in more than imperial grandeur. But what an Alp of fragments! What a mountain of broken walls and columns, and stones peering upward like the natural rock of mother earth!

Houses, convents, palaces have been built upon the mass and for many seasons trees have bloomed and fruited, and gardens have brought forth their harvests above the spot where once the imperial tyrant was known to awe the nations with a nod. To restore the palaces of the Palatine, the first labor would be the unearthing of the foundations—and this would probably be as huge an undertaking as the rebuilding of the palaces, themselves. A mountain must be carried away before a stone can be laid. If you were able to visit the Forum at Rome, you would see, if you were there today, numbers of laborers with horses and carts continually at work taking away hundreds of thousands of tons of rubbish which have covered up all that still remains of the ancient center and heart of Rome.

Jerusalem, I do not doubt, was one vast heap made up of the debris of its houses, of the tower and armory of David, of the palace of the king, and of the Temple itself. And though now, at the period we are about to speak of, the temple had been rebuilt and modern houses covered the site of the older Jerusalem, yet, when they came to the wall of the city, with the view of thoroughly restoring it, they found it a complete ruin—and

such a ruin that the mass which covered it up was difficult to dig through. They could not build the wall because there was so much rubbish.

Now, this, it seems to me, is intended, or at least may justifiably be used, for a type of the work which God's people have to carry on in the name of Jesus and in the power of His Holy Spirit, in the world. We have to build the walls of the Church for God, but we cannot build it for there is so much rubbish in our way. This is true, first, *of the building of the Church, which is the Jerusalem of God*. And this is equally true *of the temple of God, which is to be built in each one of our hearts*. Full often we feel discouraged. Though we hear the voice that says, "But you, Beloved, building up yourselves on your most holy faith, praying in the Holy Spirit, keep yourselves in the love of God," still we are apt to feel that we cannot build this wall because there is so much rubbish.

I. I shall speak first, then, of the great work comprised in THE BUILDING UP OF THE CHURCH. Now, this enterprise is the work of *God*. He *alone* can build the Church. "When the Lord shall build up Zion, He shall appear in His Glory." And we may build as we may, but "except the Lord build the house, they labor in vain that build it." Still, our full and firm conviction that it is God's working does not at all interfere with the grand Truth of God that He employs *agents* for the building up of His Church in the world! That, in fact, He has commissioned us, His chosen servants, and sent us into the world, each one according to our ability and opportunity, to labor for Him.

We work because God works by us. We are hindered, however, in this service by the fact that there is much rubbish in the way. It was always so. When Paul began to build for God, and the Apostles went forth as wise master builders, there lay before them, in towering heaps, the old Jewish rubbish—hard to remove, heavy to bear away—and in quantity equal to a huge hill. The foundation was there. Thank God we have not to lay that! That is laid in Christ Jesus, and firmly laid, and "other foundation can no man lay." But the Jews, with their traditions, had overlaid the foundations—they had added to the Word of God. They had put glosses upon it. They had taken away its real meaning and put to it a meaning of their own.

They had invented innumerable rites and ceremonies—and dark and mysterious traditions of the fathers, so that though a man should seek to find out the Truth of God—he could not by reason of the abundance of the confused material and traditional superstition with which they had covered it up. The Apostles had to begin their Gospel labor among their fellow countrymen in the midst of this much rubbish. No sooner did they begin to remove the worthless deposits than the lovers of tradition assailed them, raised a great dust, and became their violent persecutors. They followed them from city to city, scandalizing them and committing all manner of violence against them. You cannot remove ruins without awakening the owls and bats.

The most rotten rubbish upon earth is sure to find some defender. By this rubbish many have gained their wealth and they are full of wrath if any threaten to disturb it. The Apostles soon found that they had fallen

upon troublous times, yet by God's help, they cleared away that rubbish and were enabled to build their wall till the New Jerusalem became famous in the earth. They encountered, in the wider world of the Roman empire, the rubbish of old paganism and oh, what rubbish that was! He who is acquainted with the classic writers knows how polluted were the people of their times. Their satirists ascribe vices to them mirthfully which even with tears we would not dare to mention! The superstitions of the age were groveling to a hideous degree—their very gods were monsters of crime—and their sacred rites orgies of lust and drunkenness.

The priests had successfully endeavored to make vice into a *religion* and under the pretence of mysterious worship had devised means for pandering to the most base passions of the most corrupt human nature. It is no small mass of rubbish which the student of today sifts over as he researches the Greek and Roman mythology. Men could not discover God, for many gods and many lords stood in the way. Neither could they believe in the simplicity of Jesus Christ because their foolish heart was darkened. "God made man upright, but he has found out many inventions." And all these inventions helped to turn him from his uprightness and to pervert his judgment. Yet those who went before us labored on amidst that foul and noisome rubbish—and were so successful in their earnest excavations—that at this day no one thinks of worshipping Jupiter, or Saturn, or Venus, or Mercury!

These demon-deities have gone to the limbo from where they came. They have been smitten—smitten by the Gospel—and they have withered like grass so that no man bows himself before them anymore. The God of Truth has come—and these bats and owls of the night have thrown themselves into obscurity and oblivion! This rubbish was cleared away and the foundations were built upon by earnest men that went before us, though they had to lay each stone in martyr blood and cement it with agonies and tears.

Moreover, remember that in those early days the Church, in her building, had to encounter mountains of "much rubbish" of the various philosophies of mankind. There was a kind of "feeling after God" in the heathen mind, but this feeling after God was misdirected and proudly self-confident—and therefore it missed its way—and in the process of thought the more spiritual-minded among men (if I may venture to call men spiritual at all who were not renewed by Divine Grace) invented theories and superstitions which they thought to be exceedingly wise, but which, in fact, were folly, itself, dressed out in the robes of vainglory!

These philosophies had a great following and exercised so powerful an influence that they were felt even in the Church itself. In the writings of the Apostles Paul and John you continually meet with allusions to the great Gnostic philosophy which perverted so many Christians. Ever since that day human wisdom has been a greater curse to the Church than anything else! The ignorance of Christians has never been so evil a thing, bad as it is, as the *vain knowledge*, the *false wisdom* with which men have been puffed up in their fleshly minds. It is an ill day when men know too much to know Christ! It is a great misfortune when men are too manly to be converted and to become as little children, and sit at the feet of the

great Teacher! Yet there are many professors of religion who talk as if this was their condition and as if they were proud of it.

Even at this present time the outside philosophies of unchristian men infect the Church, spoil her, injure her, dilute the wine of the kingdom, overturn the children's milk and, to a great extent, poison the Bread of Life. Sad that it should be so, but the rubbish of philosophy has always been in the way of the building up of the wall of the Church of God. The story of the Apostolic age may serve as a great comfort to us in these evil times. As they were hindered, so are we, but as they persevered and overcame even so will we, by our great Master's aid. After that lot of rubbish had been cleared away, the task was only begun, for soon after Apostolic times and the first zeal of Christians had gone, there came the old Roman rubbish, which in the end proved a worse hindrance than all which had preceded it.

This Popish rubbish was found in layers—first one doctrinal error and then another and then another, and then another, and then another—till at this time the errors of the Church of Rome are as countless as the stars, as black as midnight and as foul as Hell! Her abominations reek in the nostrils of all good men. Her idolatries are the scorn of reason and the abhorrence of faith! The iniquities of her practice and the enormities of her doctrine almost surpass belief! Popery is as much the masterpiece of Satan as the Gospel is the masterpiece of God! There can scarcely be imagined *anything* of devilish craftiness or Satanic wickedness which could be compared with her—she is unparalleled as the queen of iniquity. Behold upon her forehead the name, MYSTERY, BABYLON THE GREAT, THE MOTHER OF HARLOTS AND ABOMINATIONS OF THE EARTH.

The Church of Rome and her teachings are a vast mountain of rubbish covering the Truth of God! For weary years good men could not get at the Foundation because of this very much rubbish. Here and there a Wycliffe spied out the precious Cornerstone and leaped for joy because he could get his foot upon it, and say, "Jesus Christ Himself, elect and precious, is the Stone on which I build my hope." Here and there a John Huss, or a Jerome of Prague, or a Savonarola in the thick midnight, yet, nevertheless, found the Foundation and wept their very hearts out because of the much rubbish which threatened to bury even them while they were seeking Him!

A master excavator was Martin Luther—how grandly he laid bare the glorious foundation of Justification by faith alone! An equally grand worker at this great enterprise was Master John Calvin who laid open long stretches of the ancient foundations of the Covenant of Grace. Well was he supported by his brother of Zurich, Zwingli, and John Knox in Scotland, and others in this land. They cleared away, for a while, some of the rubbish. But there was such a mass of it that they had to throw it up in heaps on either side—and it is beginning to come crumbling down again onto the foundation and to cover it up once more.

A perfect reformation they could not work, and the remnant of the rubbish is now our plague and hindrance. Everywhere the much rubbish is being diligently cast upon the pile by the emissaries of the Evil One, and we can scarcely get to the foundations to build again the gold and silver

and precious stones which God commits to us with which to build up His own house. Alas, there is very, very much rubbish! I saw in Rome that the waggoner which took away the earth from the Forum were marked, "Regia Scava." They belonged to the royal excavations and I long to see royal excavators, employed by the King of Kings, get to work to excavate, again, the foundations of the wall of Jerusalem and cart away some of the tremendous heaps of rubbish that still lie upon the walls. God grant we may see good and great work done in this direction before long.

But, beloved Friends, if this rabbinical, pagan, philosophical and Romish rubbish were all gone, still the work would scarcely have begun, for there is yet very much rubbish of other kinds lying hereabout. There is so much rubbish arising from the world, the flesh and the devil, that we are not able to build the wall. Look at human sin. How that impedes us! Oh, if there were no false systems of religion. If priest and scribe were silent. If false prophets and Antichrist were both out of the way, yet the sins of men are a vast and hideous mass of rotten rubbish—and our labors of love are hindered by them. How hard it is to get at human ears—for the *world* has the first word—and often the last word, with the most of men. Eargate is choked with rubbish!

How harder, still, it is to get at human *hearts*—for there Satan reigns as in his own palace—and takes care to erect huge barricades and earthworks of the rubbish of carnal lust and pride and unbelief! Men are wrapped up in indifference to eternal things, like mummies in their bands and gums. They give all their energy to the answering of the question, "What shall we eat and what shall we drink, and with what shall we be clothed?" Immortal as they are, they live only for mortality! Though their grandest destiny lies in eternity, yet all their efforts are bounded by the narrow space of time. Charm, O you charmer, ever so wisely, but this adder has no ear for you! This people, bent on its lusts, will still follow its own devices.

Though Christ beckons with His pierced hand, yet they turn their back on Him—and even He from Calvary cries—

***"Is it nothing to you, all you that pass by,
Is it nothing to you that Jesus should die?"***

He is despised and rejected of men! They see no form nor comeliness in Him whose countenance contains within itself all celestial beauty. They cannot be got at by love or law, by tears or terrors, by prayers or preaching! They are absorbed in earthly things. We cannot build the wall for their much rubbish. They are wedded to their sins. They cling to their idols. They will not even *think* about their soul, or their God, or their Savior. They choose their own delusions and reject their own mercies. It seems as if everything in the world helped them to be this way—for the business of life, the care and the ease, the quiet and the noise, the tumult and the turmoil, alike, ensnare them—all these things are transformed by their alienated hearts into a mass of rubbish!

With one man it is the pursuit, the arduous pursuit of learning. With another an intense greed for gold. With a third, ambition. With a fourth the lust of pleasure. But in each man the heap of rubbish prevents our getting at the heart. We cannot build the wall. Who among us has not of-

ten gone back to his God and said, "Who has believed our report, and to whom is the arm of the Lord revealed?" And this age of competition seems to make things worse than ever. Some are so poor that they tell us they cannot listen, for they have to work and toil like slaves for their bread merely to keep body and soul together. And as for those who are rich—O God, help the rich! Still it is true and perhaps more true now, than ever, that, "it is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle, than for a rich man to enter into the kingdom of God." The cares of this world and the deceitfulness of riches are a mass of rubbish so that we cannot build the wall.

Oh, how sad is the retrospect of the pastor as he remembers the many in whom he could never reach the conscience because of the intervening rubbish! And how mournful is the prospect that lies before him! Our only consolation is that if we cannot build, there is One who can—and if the rubbish is so much that the strength of the bearers of burdens is decaying, yet there is a Strength which is not decayed! There is an arm which is not weary and can perform all that is needed! I am afraid, dear Brothers and Sisters, that in the work of building up the Church the rubbish does not lie all with the sinners, but there is much of it also with the saints. There is very much rubbish among professors, so that we cannot build the wall.

I would be very patient with all men for I need much patience toward myself, but there are far too many, dear Brethren in Christ, who seem to me to spend all their time in diligently doing nothing. I have heard of a man who had, by dint of great patience and much skill, after many days of work, very splendidly carved the image of Caesar on a cherry stone. What a splendid result to have achieved! The exploit was duly reported and chronicled. But what of it? Truly, I have read books which seemed to me to be elaborately learned about nothing of any practical value and to amount to about as much as a carving on a cherry stone, and no more. What good was to come of it? I am sure I could not tell!

Brothers come out, every now and then, in the religious world, with some new fad and fancy of theirs—some grand discovery that they have made, some wonderful point of doctrine, some marvelous, soul-stirring discovery, as it seems to be to them—and they expect all the world to stand still. They expect all the Churches to be broken up, and I don't know what, until they have exhibited this precious thing—which, when you have carefully looked at it, turns out to be very much like the mouse which was the famous product of the labor of the mountain! It comes to nothing more. There is very much rubbish about, Brothers and Sisters!

And, therefore, for the present distress, if every minister were to keep to preaching Christ and Him Crucified, and nothing else, I think he would do well. And if every Christian man were to just keep to the plain Truths of Scripture and have them worked into his soul by the Holy Spirit—and then speak them out with power and fire for soul-winning, and care for nothing else, *he* would do well. But there is very much rubbish. A whole evening will be spent by Brethren in discussing a question about as valuable as the famous inquiry of the schoolmen—as to how many angels would be able to stand on the point of a single needle! After discussing it

with some little temper, perhaps, and having prayed over it a good deal, too—though I wonder how they dared do so—the whole of it ends in a bag of wind or a bottle of smoke and nothing else.

Had that same time been spent in the visitation of the sick and reclaiming the Arabs of our streets, the lifting up of the ruffianism and the blackguardism of London into something like decency, morality and Christianity, it might have been much better. But there is very much rubbish and I am very much afraid we, all of us, contribute to that rubbish heap a little. We have all some favorite notion, some conceit, some invention of our own, some addition to the Word, some subtraction from it, some impossible theory, some dogma or doctrine of our own inventing than of Bible teaching, and so there is very much rubbish so that we cannot build the wall. Does not one feel inclined, full often, to say, “Oh, how I wish I could get at it—really get at it—get to doing something for God, and Christ, and the souls of men”? Just let the dust cart come and clear the way. These very excellent works upon futurity and profound books upon nothing—yet, let them go, beautifully written as they are—and let us plunge into the middle of affairs and say, “God forbid that I should glory, save in the Cross of our Lord Jesus Christ.”

Now, two or three things about this matter by way of comfort. And the first comfort to us is, well, well, the Foundation is laid! The Foundation is laid—and in addition to the Foundation there are goodly rows of precious stones built up. The Lord has not yet laid all the 12 jeweled courses, but the instructed eye may see some of the lower bands of precious stones. Looking back in history I can see a foundation of martyrs built upon Christ, who with the Apostles and confessors make up the lower foundations of jasper and sapphire and chalcedony. I can already see the glitter of those rows of gems upon the wall. Read in the book of Revelation and see how they are described. For the last 1800 years, stone upon stone, without sound of hammer, they have been built and the walls are still rising!

Glory be to God, the Gospel is a success! Notwithstanding the sneer of Sanballat and the cruel speech of Tobiah, the Ammonite, the wall is being built and the Divine eye is upon it! It is God’s great piece of architecture and He regards it with delight. Concerning it, it may be said, “I the Lord do keep it. I will keep it every moment, lest any hurt it. I will keep it night and day.” There is, for this building, the Divine decree, “Thus says the Lord, Behold the man whose name is THE BRANCH, He shall build the temple of the Lord, even He shall build the temple of the Lord, and He shall bear the glory.” That decree is Omnipotent! It is being fulfilled and shall be fulfilled unto the end!

I see at this moment the master Mason upon the wall and I read concerning Him, “He shall not fail or be discouraged,” and I read yet again of Him, “The pleasure of the Lord shall prosper in His hand.” I see with Him, moreover, a band of men whose hearts the Lord has touched, and these labor day and night, and cease not—neither will they cease till the walls of Jerusalem are finished. He is the great master Builder, and we, each one of us, bearing both sword and trowel, as we are taught by Him, must be

wise builders under His direction. The work is going on, for it is in hands that never weary and it is directed by a mind that never faints!

By firm decrees, also, is it banded and built and cemented, so that it cannot fail, or so much as a stone be cast down. And we have this to encourage us—that God has never yet left a work unfinished! He began the creation. 'Tis true it was not so difficult a task as this building up of His Church, for in the creation, though there was nothing, there was nothing in the way—and He spoke and all things came into existence. Here in the building of the Church there are two works—destruction and creation—the removal of the old and the erection of the new. But, nevertheless, He who said, “Behold, I make all things new,” is quite equal to the task to which He has set Himself. And as He did not leave the world half finished, did not make it a garden without a man to live in it—no, did not leave the man unfinished, but made the woman to be his helpmeet—so He will not leave the work of salvation to which He has once put His hand, unfinished, but course upon course shall the jewels be laid.

Emerald shall follow chalcedony. The sardius shall be piled upon the sardonyx. The beryl upon the chrysolite and the chrysoprasus upon the topaz, till, at length, in the appointed age, the last garnishing of jacinth and amethyst shall crown the wall! And then they shall bring forth the top stone with shouts of, “Grace, Grace unto it.” He did not pause when He made the world because He needed fresh strength. He did not wait and say that the undertaking was too much. But its story ran on gloriously through all those wonderful six evenings and mornings until the seventh day came and the Lord rested from all His work. The six days are passing over us, now, with their evening gloom and morning brightness! The Lord is making the new world and He is building up His Church, slowly, as *we* think—but surely and in fit time and due order.

Wait in patience and possess your souls, for there shall yet come that Millennial Sabbath in which, again, the sons of God shall shout for joy and the angels shall sing because the Word of God is accomplished and His work is done! Have courage, my Brothers and Sisters! Bear your burden in removing the rubbish! Use your sword and your trowel, for the work is the Lord's and it shall be accomplished! If it were ours, woe were the day in which it was laid upon such feeble shoulders! But since it is *His* we need not indulge a solitary trembling thought, but arise and be of good cheer!

II. Now I change the subject to OURSELVES, awhile, and may God grant we may speak to profit for a few minutes upon that branch of our topic. There is a building going on in *us*. It is the Spirit's work to edify us. That is to say, to build us up in Divine Grace, and that building up is carried on by the Grace of love. “Knowledge puffs up, but love builds up.” We are, each one of us, called to be builders—builders in God's strength, as I have said before—and let that not be forgotten.

But, Beloved, I am afraid most of us have to say, “There is much rubbish, so that we are not able to build the wall.” Do you not often feel that you cannot be built up in heavenly Graces because of the rubbish of your own corrupt nature? Oh, What a fall the Fall was! What a total ruin did it make of our moral nature! Brothers and Sisters, do you not discover—I

do, almost every day—some fresh heap of rubbish which you hardly knew was there? Points in which we thought ourselves strong turn out to be our weaknesses! There was an infirmity from which we half indulged the thought that we were clear and therefore we were rather severe upon others for having such an infirmity and sin. But at last it broke out in *ourselves*! It always had been in us, but it had not had the occasion and opportunity. At length the provocation came and the hidden evil was revealed.

Ah, Brethren, much more of such rubbish remains in us! Oh, the rubbish of pride, of unbelief, of evil lusting, of anger, of despondency, of self-exaltation! Brothers and Sisters, it is not worth while to stir it, it is such a foul heap! I have no desire to turn a cinder sifter to it, for there is never a jewel in it that will pay for the sifting! But there it is and the building of Divine Grace does not advance as we would wish because of the corruption which still abides in us, notwithstanding all that some may say.

Then there is oftentimes in Christian people the old rubbish of legal thought, of legal actions, and legal fear. In our old estate we were going to be saved by our own merits. That was our notion. Since our conversion, we doctrinally abhor the idea of any thought of human merit, but experimentally we indulge in it. The legal spirit will come in—like an ill weed it springs up spontaneously in the garden from which Grace uprooted it. Though we are not children of the bondwoman, but of the free, yet the flesh often tries to put the old yoke of bondage upon us, so that if Paul were here he would say to us, “Having begun in the Spirit, are you now made perfect by the flesh?”

Ishmael tries to domineer over Isaac, Though driven out of the house, he shows his tyrant face at the window. We get the bond slave’s dread, yes, and sometimes entertain the bond slave’s hope and think that we are to *work* for wages instead of understanding that the *gift* of God is Eternal Life, while the only wages we could earn would be the wages of sin, which is death. Oh, the old legal tendency! How deep-seated! How prone to revive! It will scarcely be conceived that sinners should, at the same time, be self-righteous and guilty—but yet it is so, that, abounding as we do in the tendency to sin—we equally abound in the tendency to fancy that in us, that is, in our flesh, there dwells some good thing. Therefore arises another heap of rubbish!

And then old habits—what rubbish they are! You who have been, before your conversion, guilty of gross sin, do you not often find the remembrance of those old times coming over you like a hideous dream? I know some, who, when a hymn is given out, cannot help remembering an old song which they used to sing, which is suggested to them by, perhaps, the holiest word in the Psalm. Yes, and a text of Scripture has sometimes conjured up before their memory a sin which they wished with all their hearts had never occurred, and which they would give their eyes to forget! Yes, the old habits win struggle for mastery and if we do not fall into them, as I pray God we never may, yet will they vex and trouble us! And here, also, the much rubbish prevents the building up of the wall of the Divine life.

So is it with worldly associations. Do you not find that even the common associations of business into which you are obliged to enter do very

much heap rubbish upon the wall of your spirit? You have to meet with ungodly men. You cannot commend their tongues—you may rebuke their language when it becomes profane, but there is very much of talk which is not profane and which we could not very well rebuke—but which, nevertheless, is not sweet with godliness, or savory with Grace, and it damages us. We wish, sometimes, that we were altogether away from worldly men. We cry, “Woe is me that I dwell in Hesech, and tabernacle in the tents of Hedar!” And so, again, as the result of our being in the world, there is very much rubbish.

And I will tell you another kind of rubbish that I think some Brothers and Sisters have quite enough of, if not too much. That is the idea that they have come to be somebody, after all. Many acquire that notion if they are getting on in the world. If God prospers them, they say, “Ah, now I really am a great one and worthy of much honor. I am not now like my poorer Brethren.” It is sad to see what fine airs certain prosperous professors give themselves. They forget the rock from which they were hewn. They lift up their horn on high, as if they were more than mortal! That is rubbish, indeed.

And there are some others who have had choice seasons of fellowship with Christ and they have been, for a while, free from temptation. There has been some great breaking up of the great deep of corruption within them and, therefore, they say, “Ah, now I am getting on! I think, somehow, I am getting up to the higher life. I should not wonder that I should be perfect one of these days.” Rubbish, Brothers and Sisters! It is all rubbish! Every bit of it—it is not worthy harboring for an instant! It may be very glittering rubbish—it looks amazingly like gold—but, “all is not gold that glitters.” Any notion of our own attainments which could lead us, for a moment, to speak of what we are with any degree of complacency is only rubbish! For my own part, I desire constantly to stand at the foot of the Cross, with no other testimony concerning myself than this—

***“I the chief of sinners am,
But Jesus died for me.”***

Personal holiness is to be sought for with all our hearts, and it can only be obtained by faith in Jesus Christ—by simple faith in Him.

He gives us power to overcome sin through His precious blood, but, depend upon it, the moment we conclude that we have overcome and can say what Paul could *not* say—that he had attained and was already perfect—we are in an evil case! Our pride has overpowered our judgment and we are fools! If anyone here is in a condition in which he is able to open his mouth wide in his own praise, I would advise him to fetch a big dust cart, or rather all the dust carts in the parish and take that boasting, every shovel full of it, away! It is of no use to him and it will very soon make such dust as to fly in the eyes and ears of his Christian Brothers and Sisters. We cannot build the wall while there is so much of this proud rubbish!

“In me, that is in my flesh, there dwells no good thing.” Low down at the foot of the Cross, in the dust, is still our place—for we are, in ourselves, less than nothing—emptiness, vanity, death! That is our place. Christ is made of God unto you, “wisdom, righteousness, sanctification

and redemption.” In Him is all your glorying—and in Him, alone—for if not so, the rubbish will cover up the foundation. Now, I will suppose that some of you are mourning tonight—some of God’s people—because of all this rubbish. I want to say this to you. First, dear Brothers and Sisters, thank God that you have the Foundation surely laid. Are you sure of that? I pray you rest not till you are certain of it—

***“I know that safe with Him remains,
Protected by His power,
What I’ve committed to His hands
Till the decisive hour.”***

“I know whom I have believed.” None but Jesus, none but Jesus! *There* rests our souls’ only hope—upon His precious blood and righteousness—every other hope we heartily abhor. Well, the Foundation is laid. Blessed be God for that! When a man is brought to rest alone in Jesus, then there is laid for him in Zion a sure foundation stone, and to that he is cemented by Sovereign Grace.

Now, let us thank God, again, that the building up of His temple in us is His own work. He began it. He dug out and made clear to us our own emptiness. He cast out our self-righteousness and He laid Christ where our self had once been. The Lord did that and He has done everything else which has been done in us that has been worth the doing. I cannot, I am sure no Brother or Sister here can, look upon any step he has ever taken as a real advance in Divine life which was taken in any strength but in the strength of God. Whatever we have done of ourselves had been much better undone, for all that Nature spins will have to be unraveled sooner or later. “Salvation is of the Lord.” Jonah learned that in the whale’s belly. It was worthwhile getting into the whale’s belly to learn. We need to know it through and through. Salvation is of the Lord, alone, and unto Him must be all the praise.

And there is our comfort! It is His work to save us—we are not our own saviors—Christ is the Savior. It is the Spirit’s work to make us meet to be partakers of the inheritance of the saints in light. It is the Bridegroom, not the bride, that is to make the bride fit for her Husband. So says the Scripture. “Christ loved the Church and gave Himself for it, that He might sanctify and cleanse it with the washing of water by the Word, that He might present it to Himself, a glorious Church, not having spot, or wrinkle, or any such thing.” It is He that presents the bride to Himself and He that makes her fit to be presented. Blessed be God, the work is in sure and competent hands!

And therefore, finally, let us, by Divine Grace, work on in faith, with diligence. In faith, I say, believing our work of faith and labor of love are not in vain in the Lord—believing that prayer is not a vain exercise, that drawing near to God in communion is not a vain thing, that trusting in the Lord is no idle dream—but that surely He will complete what He has begun. But let us add to faith the most earnest endeavors—let us diligently strive to throw away this rubbish! Whatever bad habit obstructs our edification, God help us to conquer it! Whatever sin there is about us, may the blood of Jesus enable us to subdue it!

Let us press forward, dear Brothers and Sisters, never content, never satisfied till we wake up in His likeness! And, as we have not all His likeness—not satisfied with ourselves, let us press forward, looking to that which is before us—and forgetting that which is behind. Faith and diligence, by God’s good Grace, shall allow us to be built up on our most holy faith—not with wood and hay and stubble—but with gold and silver and precious stones which will abide the fire! Make sure you are built on the Foundation! That is the last and yet the first question—Are you on the Foundation? Some build very rapidly, but they are not on the Foundation. Yes, you have a fine character and you make a noble profession, but is the palatial structure based on the Rock, or on the sand?

Our little children at the seaside will build very fine castles with their wooden spades. But the next tide sweeps all away because it is sand built on sand. I am afraid the religion of multitudes is just like that—sand built on sand. Is that your religion, dear Hearer? Does it consist of Church attendance, or going to Chapel and Prayer Meetings, and receiving sacraments, and all that? Well, then, it is sand built on sand! But if you are a poor and needy *sinner* and you have rested your soul on Jesus, and then, renewed in heart by His Spirit, have been zealous for good works—then is it no longer sand built on sand—but the work of the Spirit of God upon the one Foundation which God laid from all eternity, in the Person and the work of His only-begotten Son!

The Lord bless you, every one of you, for Jesus’ sake. Amen.

**PORTION OF SCRIPTURE READ BEFORE SERMON—*Nehemiah 4*.
HYMNS FROM “OUR OWN HYMN BOOK”—623, 641, 665.**

MESSAGE:

This sermon I have revised at Mentone after an attack of severe pain from which I am recovering, by God’s good hand. I beg, in my great feebleness, to ask the prayers of my friends that I may return to my beloved sphere of labor free from the disease which is my constant cross and that every personal trial may work in me for the good of others by rendering my ministry more deeply experimental. From this delicious retreat I desire Christian love to all the people of God, of whom I am both the servant and friend.

C. H. SPURGEON.

Adapted from *The C.H. Spurgeon Collection*, Ages Software, 1.800.297.4307.

THE TWO GUARDS PRAYING AND WATCHING NO. 2254

**INTENDED FOR READING ON LORD'S-DAY, MAY 1, 1892.
DELIVERED BY C. H. SPURGEON,
AT THE METROPOLITAN TABERNACLE, NEWINGTON,
ON THURSDAY EVENING, JULY 24, 1890.**

***“Nevertheless we made our prayer unto our God, and set a watch against them day and night, because of them.”
Nehemiah 4:9.***

NEHEMIAH and the Jews with him were rebuilding the walls of Jerusalem. Sanballat and others were angry with them and tried to stop the work. They determined to pounce upon the people on a sudden and slay them—and so put an end to what they were doing. Our text tells us what Nehemiah and his companions did in this emergency—“Nevertheless we made our prayer unto our God, and set a watch against them day and night, because of them.”

These people had not only to build the wall of Jerusalem, but to watch against their enemies at the same time. Their case is ours. We have to work for Christ. I hope that all of us who love Him are trying to do what we can to build up His Kingdom—but we also need to watch against deadly foes. If they can destroy us, of course they will also destroy our work. They will do both if they can. The powers of evil are mad against the people of God. If they can in any way injure or annoy us, you may rest assured that they will do so. They will leave no stone unturned if it can serve their purpose. No arrows will be left in the quivers of Hell while there are godly men and women at whom they can be aimed. Satan and his allies aim at our hearts every poisoned dart they have!

Nehemiah had been warned of the attack that was to be made upon the city. The Jews who lived near these Samaritans had heard their talk of what they meant to do and they came and told Nehemiah of the plotting of the adversaries. We also have been warned. As our Lord said to Peter, “Simon, Simon, Satan has desired to have you, that he may sift you as wheat,” so has He, in His Word, told us that there is a great and terrible evil power which is seeking our destruction. If Satan can do it, he will not only sift us as wheat, but he will cast us into the fire that we may be destroyed! Brothers and Sisters, “we are not ignorant of his devices.” You are not left in a fool’s paradise to dream of security from trial and to fancy that you are past temptation!

It was well for these people, also, that, being in danger and being aware of the malice of their enemies, they had a noble leader to incite them to

the right course to be pursued. Nehemiah was well qualified for his work. He gave the Jews very shrewd, sensible and yet *spiritual* advice—and this was a great help to them in their hour of need. Beloved, we have a better Leader than Nehemiah! We have our Lord Jesus Christ, Himself, and we have His Holy Spirit who dwells in us and shall abide with us. I beg you to listen to His wise and good advice. I think that He will give it to you through our explanation of the text. He will say to you what Nehemiah, in effect, said to these people, “Watch and pray.” Although the adversaries of the Jews conspired together—and came to fight against Jerusalem and to hinder the work of rebuilding the wall—Nehemiah says, “Nevertheless, we made our prayer unto our God, and set a watch against them day and night, because of them.”

In the text, I see *two guards*. First, *prayer*—“We made our prayer unto our God.” The second guard is *watchfulness*—“We set a watch.” When I have spoken on these two subjects, I shall take, as my third topic, *the two guards together*. “We prayed and we set a watch.” We must have them both if we would defeat the enemy!

I. First, then, dear Friends, think of THE FIRST GUARD—“We made our prayer unto our God.”

Speaking of this prayer, I would hold it up as a pattern for our prayers in a like condition. It was *a prayer that meant business*. Sometimes when we pray, I am afraid that we are not transacting business at the Throne of Grace. But Nehemiah was as practical in his prayer as he was in the setting of the watch. Some Brethren get up in our Prayer Meetings and say some very good things—but what they really ask for, I am sure I do not know! I have heard prayers of which I have said, when they were over, “Well, if God answers *that* prayer, I have not the least idea of what He will give us.” It was a very beautiful prayer and there was a great deal of explanation of doctrine and experience in it, but I do not think that God needs to have doctrine or experience explained to Him! The fault about the prayer was that there was not anything asked for in it. I like, when Brethren are praying, that they should be as business-like as a good carpenter at his work. It is of no use to have a hammer with an ivory handle unless you aim it at the nail you mean to drive in up to the head! And if that is your objective, an ordinary hammer will do as well as a fine one—perhaps better.

Now, the prayers of Nehemiah and the Jews were petitions for Divine protection. They knew what they needed and they asked for it definitely. Oh, for more definiteness in prayer! I am afraid that our prayers are often clouds and we get mists for answers. Nehemiah’s prayer meant business. I wish we could always pray in this way. When I pray, I like to go to God just as I go to a banker when I have a check to be cashed. I walk in, put the check down on the counter, the clerk gives me my money, I take it up and go about my business. I do not know that I ever stopped in a bank five minutes to talk with the clerks—when I have received my change, I go away and attend to other matters. That is how I like to pray. But there is a way of praying that seems like lounging near the Mercy Seat, as though one had no particular reason for being found there. Let it not be so with

you, Brothers and Sisters. Plead the promise, believe it, receive the blessing God is ready to give and go about your business. The prayer of Nehemiah and his companions meant business.

In the next place, it was *a prayer that overcame difficulties*. The text begins with a long word, “nevertheless.” If we pull it to pieces, we get three words—never the less—when certain things happen, we will pray never the less. On the contrary, we will cry to our God all the more! Sanballat sneered, but we prayed, never the less, but all the more because of his sneers! Tobiah uttered a cutting jest, but we prayed, never the less, but all the more because of his mocking taunt. If men make a jest of your religion, pray none the less. If they even become cruel and violent to you, pray none the less—never the less, not a word less, not a syllable less, not a desire less and not any faith less! What are your difficulties, dear Friend, in coming to the Mercy Seat? What hindrance lies in your way? Let nothing obstruct your approach to the Throne of Grace. Turn all stumbling stones into steppingstones and come, with holy boldness, and say, notwithstanding all opposition, “never the less, we made our prayer unto our God.” Nehemiah’s prayer meant business and overcame difficulties.

Notice, next, that it was *a prayer that came before anything else*. It does not say that Nehemiah set a watch and *then* prayed, but, “nevertheless we made our prayer unto our God, and set a watch.” Prayer must always be the fore horse of the team! Do whatever else is wise, but not until you have prayed! Send for the physician if you are sick, but first pray. Take the medicine if you have a belief that it will do you good, but first pray. Go and talk to the man who has slandered you, if you think you ought to do so, but first pray. “Well, I am going to do so and so,” says one, “and I shall pray for a blessing on it *afterwards*.” Do not begin it until you have prayed! Begin, continue and end everything with prayer, but especially *begin* with prayer. Some people would never begin what they are going to do if they prayed about it first, for they could not ask God’s blessing upon it. Is there anybody here who is going out of this Tabernacle to a place where he should not go? Will he pray first? He knows that he cannot ask a blessing on it and, therefore, he ought not to go there! Go nowhere where you cannot go after prayer! This would often be a good guide in your choice of where you should go. Nehemiah first prayed and then set a watch.

Once more, it was *a prayer that was continued*. If I read the passage aright, “we made our prayer unto our God, and set a watch against them day and night,” it means that, as long as they watched, they prayed. They did not pray their prayer and then leave off and go away, as naughty boys do when they give runaway knocks at a door. Having begun to pray, they continued praying. So long as there were any enemies about, the prayer and the watching were never parted. They still continued to cry to Him who keeps Israel as long as they set the watchman of the night to warn them of the foe.

When shall we leave off praying, Brothers and Sisters? Well, they say that we shall do so when we get to Heaven. I am not clear about that. I do not believe in the intercession of saints for *us*, but I remember that it is

written in the Book of Revelation that the souls under the altar cried, "How long, O Lord?" Those souls were waiting for the Resurrection, waiting for the coming of Christ, waiting for the triumph of His Kingdom, and I cannot conceive of their waiting there without often crying, "O Lord, how long? Remember Your Son, glorify His name, accomplish the number of Your elect."

But certainly, as long as we are here, we must pray! One lady, who professed that she had long been perfect, said that her mind was in such complete conformity with the mind of God that she need not pray any longer. Poor creature! What did she know about the matter? She needed to begin at the first letter of the alphabet of salvation and pray, "God be merciful to me, a sinner!" When people imagine they need not to pray, the Lord have mercy upon them!—

***"Long as they live, let Christians pray,
For only while they pray they live."***

The prayer which Nehemiah offered was, next, *a prayer that was homemade*. There may be some of you who like prayers made for you and it may be that, if all the congregation are to join in the supplication, and every voice is to speak, the prayer must be prepared even as a hymn is. But ready-made prayers always seem to me very much like ready-made clothes—they are meant to fit everybody and it is very seldom that they fit anybody. For real business at the Mercy Seat, give me a homemade prayer, a prayer that comes out of the deeps of my heart, not because I invented it, but because God the Holy Spirit put it there and gave it such a living force that I could not help letting it come out! Though your words are broken and your sentences are disconnected, if your *desires* are earnest, if they are like coals of juniper, burning with a vehement flame, God will not mind how they find expression! If you have no words, perhaps you will pray better without them. There are prayers that break the backs of words—they are too heavy for any human language to carry.

This prayer, then, whatever it may have been as to its words, was one the pleaders made—"We made our prayers unto our God."

It is very important to notice that it was *a prayer that went to the home of prayer*—"We made our prayer unto our God." You have heard of the man who prayed at Boston, "the hub of the universe," and the report in the paper the next morning was, that "The Rev. Dr. So-and-So prayed the finest prayer that was ever addressed to a Boston audience." I am afraid that there are some prayers of that sort, that are prayed *to* the congregation! That is not the kind of prayer that God loves. Forget that there is anybody present! Forget that a human ear is listening to your accents and let it be said of your prayer, "Nevertheless we made our prayer unto our God."

It is a very commonplace remark to make that prayer must go to God if it is to be of any use, but it is very necessary to make it. When prayer does not go to God, what is the good of it? When you come out of your closet and feel that you have only gone through a form, how much are you benefited? Make your prayers unto your God! Speak in His ear, knowing that He is there, and come away knowing that He has replied to you, that He

has lifted up the Light of His Countenance upon you! That is the kind of prayer we need for our protection against our enemies both day and night.

Only once more upon this first point. I gather from the words before me that it was *a prayer saturated with faith*. “We made our prayer unto—“God”? No, “unto *our* God.” They had taken Jehovah to be their God and they prayed to Him as their God. They had a full assurance that, though He was the God of the whole earth, yet He was especially *their* God—and so they made their prayer unto the God who had given Himself to them and to whom they belonged by Covenant relationship! “We made our prayers unto our God.” Those two little words carry a vast weight of meaning. The door of prayer seems to turn on those two golden hinges—“our God.” If you and I are to be delivered from the evil that is in the world—if we are to be kept building the Church of God—we must have for our first guard, mighty, believing prayer such as Nehemiah and his Jewish friends presented unto the Lord.

II. I have now to speak to you about THE SECOND GUARD—“We set a watch against them day and night, because of them.”

This setting of the watch was *a work appointed*. “We set a watch.” Nehemiah did not say, “Now, some of you fellows go and watch,” leaving the post of watchmen open to any who chose to take it. But they, “set a watch.” A certain number of men had to go on duty at a certain point, at a certain hour, remain for a certain length of time and be on guard against the adversary. “We set a watch.” Brothers and Sisters, if we are to watch over ourselves—and we must do so—we must do it with a definite purpose. We must not say, “I must try to be watchful.” No, no! You *must* be watchful and your watchfulness must be as distinct and definite an act as your prayer. “We set a watch.” Some of you have seen the guards changed in the barracks—there is a special time for each company to mount guard. When you go to bed at night, pray the Lord to guard you during the darkness. In the morning, set a watch when you go to your business. Set a watch when you go to the dinner table. Set a watch when you return home. Oh, how soon we may be betrayed into evil unless we set a watch!

It was *a work carefully done*, for Nehemiah says, “We set a watch against them day and night, because of them.” Those three last words would be better rendered, “over against them,” that is, wherever there was an enemy, there he set a watch. They are likely to come up this way. Very well, set a watch there. Perhaps they may shift about and come up this way. Very well, set a watch *there*. Possibly they may come climbing over the wall in front here. Well, set a watch there. “We set a watch over against them.” One brother has a very hot temper. Brother, set a watch there! Another is very morose at home, critical, picking holes in other people’s coats. Brother, set a watch there! One friend has a tendency to pride, another to unbelief. Set a watch wherever the foe is likely to come! “We made our prayer unto our God, and set a watch over against them.”

It was *a work continued*. Nehemiah says, “we set a watch against them day and night.” What? Is there to be someone sitting up all night? Of course there is! If Sanballat had told them when he meant to attack them, they might have gone to sleep at other times, but as he did not give them

that information, they had to set a watch “day and night.” The devil will not give you notice when he is going to tempt you—he likes to take men by surprise—therefore, set a watch day and night.

It was *a work quickened by knowledge*. They knew that Sanballat would come if he could, so they set a watch. The more you know of the plague of your own heart, the more you will set a watch against it. The more you know of the temptations that are in the world through lust, the more you should set a watch. The older you are, the more you should watch. “Oh!” says an aged friend, “you should not say that—it is the *young* people who go wrong.” Is it? In the Old Testament or in the New, have you an instance of a young Believer who went astray? The Bible tells us of many old men who were tripped up by Satan when they were not watching. So you have need to set a watch even when your hair turns gray, for you will not be out of gunshot of the devil until you have passed through the gate of pearl into the golden streets of the New Jerusalem!

You and I, dear Friends, have need to set a watch against the enemies of our holy faith. Some people ask me, “Why do you talk so much about the ‘Down-Grade?’ Let men believe what they like. Go on with your work for God and pray to Him to set them right.” I believe in praying and setting a watch. We have to guard with jealous care “the faith once for all delivered to the saints.” When you find, as you find now, professing Christians and professing Christian *ministers* denying every article of the faith, or putting another meaning upon all the words that they must have been understood to bear, and preaching lies in the name of the Most High, it is time that *somebody* set a watch against them! A night-watchman’s place is not an easy berth, but I am willing to take that post for my blessed Master’s sake. Those professed servants of Christ who enter into an unholy alliance with men who deny the faith will have to answer for it at the Last Great Day. As for us, Brothers and Sisters, when our Lord comes, let Him find us watching as well as praying!

But, dear Friends, to come home to ourselves, we must set a watch against our own personal adversaries. I hope that, in one sense, you have no personal enemies, that you owe nobody a grudge, but that you live in peace and love towards all mankind. But there are Christian people here who will go to homes where everybody in the house is against them. Many a godly woman goes from the sanctuary to a drunken husband. Many children, converted to God, see anything but what they like to see in their homes. What are they to do in such circumstances? Set a watch!

Dear Woman, how do you know but that you shall be the means of saving your unconverted husband? If so, you must set a watch—do not give him a bit of your mind—you will not convert him that way. And you, dear Children, who have come to Christ and joined the Church, mind that you are dutiful and obedient, for otherwise you will destroy all hope of bringing your parents to the Savior. Set a watch. “Oh!” you say, “if I do a little wrong, they magnify it.” I know they do and, therefore, set a watch—be more careful. Set a watch over your temper, set a watch over your tongue, set a watch over your actions. Be patient, be gentle, be loving. May the Spirit of God work all this in you!

But there is another set of enemies much more dreadful than these adversaries that are outside us—the foes *within*—the evil tendencies of our corrupt nature, against which we must always set a watch! Perhaps you say, “How can I do this?” Well, first, know what they are. People who are beginning the Christian life should seek to know where their weak points are. I should not wonder, dear Friend, if your weak point lies where you think that you are strong. Where you think, “Oh, I shall never go wrong *there*”—that is the very place where you are likely to fall! Set a watch wherever any weakness has appeared and, if you have, in the past in your Christian life, grieved the Holy Spirit by anything wrong, set a double watch there! Where you have tripped once, you may trip again, for you are the same man.

Set a watch, also, dear Friend, whenever you feel quite secure. Whenever you feel certain that you cannot be tempted in a particular direction, that proves that you are already as proud as Lucifer! Set a watch, set a watch, set a watch! Avoid every occasion of sin. If any course of conduct would lead you into sin, do not go in that direction. I heard a man say, as an excuse for drinking, “You see, if ever I take a glass of beer, I seem to lose myself and I must have two or three more.” Well, then, if that is the case with you, do not take a glass of beer. “But,” one says, “if I get into company, I forget myself.” Then, do not go into company! Better go to Heaven as a hermit, than go to Hell with the multitude! Pluck out your right eye and cut off your right hand sooner than that these should cause you to fall into sin! Do not go where you are likely to be tempted.

“Well,” says one, “but my *business* calls me into the midst of temptation.” I grant you that your business may compel you to go where there are ungodly men, for how could some live at all if they had not to come into contact with the ungodly?—they would have to go out of the world! Well, then, if that is your case, put on the whole armor of God and do not go without being prepared to fight the good fight of faith. Set a watch, set a watch, set a watch!

Watch against the beginnings of sin. Remember, Satan never begins where he leaves off—he begins with a little sin and he goes on to a greater one. When he first tempts men, he does not aim at all he hopes to accomplish—he tries to draw them aside little by little—and he works up by degrees to the greater sin he wants you to commit. I do not believe that, at the present time, a Christian man can be too precise. We serve a very precise God—“the Lord your God is a jealous God.” Keep out of many things in which professing Christians now indulge themselves. The question is whether they are Christians at all! If we must not judge them—at any rate, let us judge ourselves and settle it, once and for all, that we dare not go where they go—indeed, we have no wish to do so!

Watch for what God has to say to you. In your reading of the Bible, if the Holy Spirit applies a text of Scripture to you with special force, regard it as a hint from your heavenly Father that there is a lesson in it for you. I am often surprised at the way in which the morning text will often instruct me through the whole day. Persons who come to hear the Word of God preached often find that, within two or three days, there is a reason

why the preacher delivered that particular sermon—and a reason why they were led to hear it.

Whenever you see a professing Christian going astray from the way of holiness, do not talk about it and so increase the mischief. “It is an ill bird that fouls its own nest.” Instead of speaking of another’s fall, set a watch for yourself and say, “That is where he slipped and that is where I may stumble if the Grace of God does not keep me.” Remember our Savior’s words to the three disciples with Him in Gethsemane, “Watch and pray, that you enter not into temptation.”

III. I finish by putting THE TWO GUARDS TOGETHER. “We made our prayer unto our God, and set a watch against them.”

Dear Friends, neither of these two guards is sufficient by itself. *Prayer alone* will not avail. To pray and not to watch is presumption. You pretend to trust in God and yet you are throwing yourself into danger, as the devil would have had Christ do, when he tempted Him to cast Himself down from the pinnacle of the Temple! If you pray to be kept, then be watchful.

Prayer without watchfulness is hypocrisy. A man prays to be kept from sin and then goes into temptation—his prayer is evidently a mere piece of mockery, for he does not carry it out in practice.

Sometimes, however, ignorance may lead to prayer without watching. There are other things which ought not to be omitted. Let me tell you a simple story. There was a little schoolgirl who did not often know her lessons. And there was another girl who sat near her, who always said her lessons correctly. Her companions said to her, “Jane, how is it that you always know your lessons?” Jane replied, “I pray to God to help me and so I know them.” The next day, the other little girl stood up, but she did not know her lesson—and afterward she said to her friend, “I prayed to God about my lesson, but I did not know it any better than I did yesterday.” Jane said, “But did you try to learn the lesson?” “No,” she said, “I prayed about it, and I thought that was sufficient.” Of course she did not know her lesson without learning it! In the same manner, you must watch as well as pray. There must be the daily guard put upon tongue, thought and hands—otherwise prayer will be in vain.

I have known some people run great risks and yet say that they have prayed to the Lord to preserve them. I have heard, dozens of times, these words, “I made it a matter of prayer,” and I have been ready to grow angry with the man who has uttered them! He has done a wrong thing and he has excused himself because he says that he made it a matter of prayer! A young man married an ungodly young woman and yet he said that he made it a matter of prayer! A Christian woman married an ungodly man and when someone blamed her for disobeying the Word of God, she said that she made it a matter of prayer! If you had really sought Divine guidance, you would not have dared to do what the Scriptures expressly forbid a child of God! Prayer without watching is not sufficient to preserve us from evil.

On the other hand, dear Friends, *watching without praying* is equally futile. To say, “I will keep myself right,” and never pray to God to keep you, is self-confidence which must lead to evil. If you try to watch and do

not pray, you will go to sleep and there will be an end to your watching. It is only by praying and watching that you will be able to keep on your guard. Besides, watching grows wearisome without prayer, and we soon give it up unless we have a sweet interlude of prayer to give us rest and to help us to continue watching.

I will not keep you longer when I have said this, *put the two together*, “Watch and pray,” or, as my text has it, “Pray and watch.” One will help the other. Prayer will call out the watchman, prayer will incite him to keep his eyes open. Prayer will be the food to sustain him during the night, prayer will be the fire to warn him. On the other hand, watching will help prayer, for watching proves prayer to be true. Watching excites prayer, for every enemy we see will move us to pray more earnestly. Moreover, watching *is* prayer. If there is true watching, the watching, itself, is prayer. The two blend the one into the other. Beloved Friends, I send you away with my text ringing in your ears, “We made our prayer unto our God, and set a watch against them day and night.”

But I have not been speaking to all who are here. Some of you do not pray. Some of you cannot set a watch. The message for you is, “You must be born again.” You cannot attempt Christian duties till *first* you have the Christian life. And the only way to get the Christian life is to have faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. Come to the Fountain which He has filled with His precious blood! Wash there and be clean! And then, quickened by His Spirit, set a watch. I am looking to see some people brought to Christ at this service, for although I have been preaching to God’s people, if they will watch for you and pray for you, there will come a blessing to you through their watching and praying!

The Lord grant that it may come to many of you! “Seek you the Lord while He may be found, call you upon Him when He is near.” May many seek and find the Lord tonight—and may many call upon Him in truth! “Whoever shall call upon the name of the Lord, shall be saved.” God grant that it may be so to everybody here, for Jesus’ sake! Amen.

Portion of Scripture Read before Sermon—Nehemiah 4.
HYMNS FROM “OUR OWN HYMN BOOK”—994, 999, 668.

EXPOSITION BY C. H. SPURGEON
NEHEMIAH 4:1-23

Verse 1. *But it came to pass, that when Sanballat heard that we built the wall, he was angry and took great indignation, and mocked the Jews.* It was necessary to rebuild the wall of Jerusalem which had been lying in ruins. They went on pretty briskly, for everyone had a mind to work. There never was a good work yet but what there were some to oppose it—and there never will be till the Lord comes! Sanballat heard what the Jews were doing and he was very angry. “He was angry and took great indignation.” He was all on fire with anger that God’s work was being continued.

2. *And he spoke before his brethren and the army of Samaria, and said, What are these feeble Jews doing?* The enemies of God's people generally take to sneering! It is a very easy way of showing opposition.

2. *Will they fortify themselves? Will they sacrifice? Will they make an end in a day? Will they revive the stones out of the heaps of the rubbish which are burned?* No doubt these questions were thought to be very witty and very sarcastic. The enemies of Christ are generally good hands at this kind of thing. Well, if it amuses them, I do not know that it need hurt us much—for, after all—it is their way of paying homage to God's power!

3. *Now Tobiah the Ammonite was by him.* Such a man as Sanballat never lacks friends. If there is a bad man anywhere, there is sure to be another close at hand. The devil does not make a fire with one stick. When he has set the first one alight, he can generally find more wood to put near it. Tobiah the Ammonite, who was tarred with the same brush as Sanballat the Horonite, was by him.

4, 5. *Hear, O our God; for we are despised: and turn their reproach upon their own head, and give them for a prey in the land of captivity; and cover not their iniquity, and let not their sin be blotted out from before You: for they have provoked You to anger before the builders.* This was righteous indignation, but Nehemiah is not a perfect model for us. He was not only stern, but he mingled with his severity a measure of bitterness in his prayer that we must not imitate. Sometimes, when we have seen men plotting against God, seeking to ruin the souls of others and trying to stop us in our endeavor to build up the Church of God, we have felt such language as this trembling on our lips. It were better, however, for us to bow the knee in humble imitation of our Lord upon the Cross and cry, "Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do."

6. *So built we the wall.* You half expected to read, "So we stopped building the wall and answered Sanballat and Tobiah." Not a bit of it. They kept to their work and let these two men scoff as they pleased!

6. *And all the wall was joined together unto the half thereof: for the people had a mind to work.* They built the wall as high as they meant it to be, ultimately, but they carried it all round and joined it well together. If we cannot do all we would like to do, let us do what we can—and let us endeavor, as far as possible, to finish off the part that we do, waiting for better times to carry the walls higher.

7. *But it came to pass, that when Sanballat, and Tobiah, and the Arabians, and the Ammonites, and the Ashdodites, heard that the walls of Jerusalem were made up, and that the breaches began to be stopped, then they were very angry.* They were "angry" before—now they were "very angry." If a work has no opposition from Satan, we may be half afraid it is good for nothing! If you cannot make the devil roar, you have not done him much harm—but the more he roars, the more cause there is for the angels singing the praises of God before the Throne of God!

8. *And conspired all of them together to come and fight against Jerusalem, and to hinder it.* It is amazing how unanimous bad men can be. It has always struck me as a very startling thing that you have never heard of any division among the devils in Hell. There are no sects among the dev-

ils—they seem to work together with an awful unanimity of purpose in their wicked design. In this one thing they seem to excel the family of God. Oh, that we were as hearty and united in the service of God as wicked men are in the service of Satan!

9, 10. *Nevertheless we made our prayer unto our God, and set a watch against them day and night, because of them. And Judah said—*Judah, you know, was the lion tribe. Christ is “the Lion of the tribe of Judah.” But Judah, instead of being lion-hearted, made a noise more like a mouse than a lion, and Judah said—

10. *The strength of the bearers of burden is decayed, and there is much rubbish; so that we are not able to build the wall.* Poor Judah! He ought to have been bolder and braver, but he was not. It is the same today—some who seem to be pillars prove very weak in the hour of trial—and by their cowardice discourage the rest.

11. *And our adversaries said, They shall not know, neither see, till we come in the midst among them, and slay them, and cause the work to cease.* While some were discouraging the people within the city, their enemies, outside the walls, were plotting to take them by surprise and slay them.

12. *And it came to pass, that when the Jews which dwelt by them came, they said unto us ten times, From all places whence you shall return unto us they will be upon you.* These Jews ought to have been helping to build the wall, but they did not come to the help of the Lord’s people. Still, they were sufficiently friendly to tell Nehemiah of the plot that was being hatched by his enemies. God knows how, when His enemies are sinking a mine, to undermine them! If secrecy is necessary to the success of evil, somebody speaks out and tells the story, so that the plot is discovered.

13. *Therefore set I in the lower places behind the wall, and on the higher places, I even set the people after their families with their swords, their spears, and their bows.* When Nehemiah knew the danger to which the people were exposed, he took measures to guard against it. I like the commonsense of Nehemiah. He kept families together. “I set the people after their families, with their swords, their spears, and their bows.” Beloved Friends, I have no greater joy than such as I had last Tuesday when I received five children of one family, all brought to Christ! May the Lord make our families to be the guards of the Church!

14. *And I looked, and rose up, and said unto the nobles and to the rulers, and to the rest of the people, Be not afraid of them.* Fear may waken us, but it must never be allowed to *weaken* us. We should put on the armor and take the sword and spear and bow when there is cause for fear—we should never dream of running away.

14, 15. *Remember the Lord, which is great and terrible, and fight for your brethren, your sons, and your daughters, your wives, and your houses. And it came to pass, when our enemies heard that it was known unto us, and God had brought their counsel to nothing, that we returned all of us to the wall, every one unto his work.* There was no fighting, after all! As soon as the enemy knew that their plot was found out, they did not make any assault. One commentator says—“Some men, if they had been

delivered from danger, would have returned, every one to the ale-house, but these men returned, every one, to his work." They went back to their building and continued still in the service of the city.

16, 17. *And it came to pass from that time forth, that the half of my servants worked in the work, and the other half of them held both the spears, the shields, and the bows, and the habergeons; and the rulers were behind all the house of Judah. They which built on the wall, and they that bore burdens, with those that laded, every one with one of his hands worked in the work, and with the other hand held a weapon. The sword and the trowel both guarded the city and built the wall!*

18. *For the builders, every one had his sword girded by his side, and so built. And he that sounded the trumpet was by me. What the trumpet was for, we are told directly.*

19, 20. *And I said unto the nobles, and to the rulers, and to the rest of the people, The work is great and large, and we are separated upon the wall, one far from another. In what places, therefore you hear the sound of the trumpet, resort you there unto us: our God shall fight for us. That is a grand sentence! The moment you hear the trumpet, you are to leave your place on the wall and come to the point where the enemy is attacking us. But Nehemiah does not say, "You shall fight for us," he puts it much better, "Our God shall fight for us." So He will!*

21. *So we labored in the work: and half of them held the spears from the rising of the morning till the stars appeared. They made long days. Christian people do not want merely eight hours a day for Christ. We can sometimes do 18 hours' work for Him in a day—and we wish that we could do twenty-four.*

22, 23. *Likewise at the same time said I unto the people, Let everyone with his servant lodge within Jerusalem, that in the night they may be a guard to us, and labor on the day. So neither I, nor my brethren, nor my servants nor the men of the guard which followed me, none of us put off our clothes. Nehemiah was a good leader. He did not say, "Go." He said, "Come"—and he bore the brunt of the service! Like Alexander, who went with the Macedonians into the rough places, and did the hard work, so did Nehemiah. He and those with him did not put off their clothes, even for sleeping.*

23. *Saving that every one put them off for washing. Which was necessary, for cleanliness is next to godliness. May the Lord send us more Nehemiahs and plenty of people to work with them who can endure hardness as good soldiers of Jesus Christ, and who will also be good builders of the Church of God!*

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WITNESSES AGAINST YOU

NO. 2123

A SERMON INTENDED FOR READING ON LORD'S-DAY EVENING,
JANUARY 19, 1890.

DELIVERED BY C. H. SPURGEON,
AT THE METROPOLITAN TABERNACLE, NEWINGTON.

*"I set a great assembly against them."
Nehemiah 5:7.*

THE facts are these. At the time when certain of the Jews returned with Nehemiah to Jerusalem, many of them were in very straitened circumstances and, contrary to the Jewish Law, the richer Jews lent them money charging usurious interest amounting to the hundredth per month, or 12 per cent per annum. They took from their poorer brethren their lands, or put a heavy mortgage upon them. And in some cases they took the men, themselves, to be slaves for debts which they had unavoidably incurred. Now, as you know, every Jew was a landholder and his land, if mortgaged for a time, must return free to him in the 50th year—and though a Jew might for a while become a servant to his Jewish brother—yet he must go out free at the end of the 7th year. He could only be bound for a short period of servitude.

Nehemiah called to him, therefore, the elders, nobles and rulers of Jerusalem and showed them how wrong they were to hold their poorer brethren in bondage. "You exact usury, every one of his brother," he said. And he rebuked them sharply for it. When he found that his own words were scarcely powerful enough with them, he gathered together the people and let them all have a voice, for in the many voices there was power. "I set," said he, "a great assembly against them."

Some persons are deaf to the voice of justice until it is repeated loudly by thousands of their fellow men. The silent voice of principle and right they will not hear and the gentle rebuke of some faithful friend they will despise—but when righteousness enlists public opinion on its side—when many are seen to be its advocates, then these very persons will show that they have relics of conscience left and they yield to right demands because they see them not only to be just but to be popular. This is the main point with those of the feebler sort and we turn the scale, if, like Nehemiah, we, "set a great assembly against them."

Now it struck me tonight that I could most properly, without any difficulty whatever, set a great assembly against every unconverted person here and, in addition to calling upon him in the name of God and by the claims of the Truth of God to consider his ways and turn to God, I might summon a great assembly who should testify against the evil course which the unconverted are pursuing. I shall try to act upon this plan tonight in reference to *those who remain unconverted*. I would set a great assembly against you! You have not repented of your sins. You have not

accepted the salvation which is provided in Christ Jesus. You live without prayer—you seek your own, instead of seeking God.

I set against you the great assembly of all the godly that are upon the earth. They all testify against you! They look upon you with love and anxiety and desire to see you converted. But, while you are as you are, they are against you. Does not *the consistent life* of every true Christian rebuke you? When you see humble persons devout, gracious—though nothing is said and though they are not eloquent in speech—is not their *life* eloquent? Do you not feel it? Have you never felt, even in your most careless moods, that it would be better for you if you were as they are?

And when you have seen them remain true and upright under temptation, have you not said within yourself, “After all, there is something in them which I admire and I wish that I possessed the same strong principles to keep me right in the hour of trial”? Every man, after all, in the bottom of his soul, feels the power of godliness—he cannot help it. In the assembly of the righteous, God is greatly feared. The wicked know God’s Presence among His people and they fear it, whether they confess it or not. In fact, slander, ridicule and persecution are a form of homage which rebellion pays to obedience—which sin pays at the footstool of righteousness. The evil hate the good because it condemns their evil! They try to make themselves despise it because it makes them despise themselves.

The righteous do not only stand against you in the consistency of their character, but *their joy in God* rebukes you. If you happen to be an unconverted man and to have had a godly mother, the subject of much weakness and pain, you cannot have forgotten the sacred cheerfulness with which she bore her life-long affliction. Or, if you have lost a Christian wife who enjoyed but little comfort in her life with you, you cannot but remember that pale yet happy face when it bade you adieu and entered into its rest! You know there was a calm about that woman in the time of trouble which you could not imitate—that she took pain patiently which would have startled you into madness—for the power of Divine Grace was in her and made her strong. She, and such as she was, children of God, made calm, peaceful and happy—I set them in an assembly against you and they bear witness against you—because you obey not the living God.

Moreover, they not only bear witness but *their very horror at your sin* and at your state is a witness against you! I often think that if I really could know the condition of my unconverted hearers, (thoroughly know it), it might be impossible for me to address them. I try to realize the position of some of you and to project my mind into the future which awaits you if you die without God and without hope. I am not about to give any terrible descriptions of the world to come, but remember, the most terrible I could give would fall infinitely short of what the reality must be!

If I could realize that dreadful future more fully, this tongue might be silent through the horror of my heart’s emotions. I pray you, therefore, by that terror which we experience in speaking to you, let it stand as a witness against the sin which will bring upon you such misery! We cannot bear to think of that which awaits you! Holy Whitefield, when he began to touch upon that subject, would, with tears streaming down his cheeks,

cry, "The wrath to come! The wrath to come!" It was too much for him—he could but repeat those words and there cease!

We feel for you, if you will not feel for yourselves. There are those present who never bow the knee at night without praying for the unconverted with great burden of spirit. I know some here—strong men—whom I have seen overcome with sacred passion when they have agonized for you and for the souls of the ungodly. It has not been merely a plentiful stream of tears bedewing their manly cheeks but their *hearts* have heaved within their bosoms and their whole being has been convulsed with agony of spirit, lest, perhaps you should perish.

All the praying people in the world I set as an assembly against you! Shall they pray for you and will you never pray for yourselves? Shall horror seize them on account of *your* sins and shall no horror ever seize *you*? Shall a godly mother waste—no, it is not waste—shall she spend nights in tears for your soul and will you never weep the tear of repentance? Shall we plead with you with all the eagerness our heart is capable of and search for words with which to plead with you—and feel that we have done all too little when we have done our best to persuade you—shall we do all this and yet will you say, "It is nothing to me. It is nothing to me"? Well, then, if it must be so, I can only say that I set the whole assembly of the living saints upon earth against you! May God let them have some influence over you.

"Ah!" you say, "But there are many hypocrites among them." Very well, they shall go over to your side—you shall be welcome to them—but all the *sincere* I set against you. "But it is not the sincere, only, that pray." Very well, you shall have all the insincere. Poor company! I wonder you should claim them! But still, every sincere Believer does, as it were, when he pleads with God, protest against you that your knees are never bent and your hearts never cry to God as the Father of spirits.

Some live week after week, and month after month, and year after year without prayer. The very Muslims and heathen rebuke you—*they* dare not live a single day without their prayers. You are worse than they are! The little chick, as it drinks at the stream, lifts its head as though to thank God. You are worse than the poor fowls. You have become like the swine under the oak which search for the acorns but never think of the tree. You receive the mercies of God but never give thanks to the Giver. O Conscience, if there is conscience left, cry shame upon the man who dares to live without God! I set the prayerful, then, against you.

But next, I have another mighty squadron to call. I set against unconverted men *all the inspired writers of the Old and New Testaments*. Let them come up, one by one, and speak as they desire to do. Not one has a word of comfort for a man that will not repent of his sins. "Mercy," they will all cry, to the man that accepts the atoning Sacrifice. But if he will not believe in Jesus—with one chorus all the Prophets and the Apostles, too, will say—"Woe, woe, woe, woe unutterable to the man that lives and dies without Christ!" The universal consent of all the men that ever spoke as the Spirit moved them is against the ungodly.

But I mention a larger host than either of these and that is *the departed saints*. Oh, could you see them this day in their white robes! Could you

hear their sacred song, it were a sight worth dying to behold! And the sound—it were worth losing all the voices of earth in the silence of death to hear! But suppose you, an unconverted person, should seek a friend among that blood-washed host? I will picture you beholding them as they stand in their glorious ranks and you say, “I am an enemy to God. I am prayerless. I am impenitent. I am graceless and I intend to remain so—which among you all will be a friend to me?”

Not an eye will glance upon you except with indignation! Not a hand will be put out to grasp you. There! March down that long file—look into those joyous faces and see if you can find among them all a *trace* of sympathy with your obstinate rebellion! Ask them. Plead with them to come and assist you in your sins, or to comfort you in your impenitence. Is there one that will do it? I set the whole assembly against you! But there stands one—you remember her—for though she is strangely changed and the Beatific Vision makes every part of her shine so gloriously, yet you know her. It was your mother who wept over you in childhood and who died with prayers for you upon her lips!

Ask her whether, if you live and die unconverted, she will be your friend! And that face which you have often gazed upon with affection and which was always full of love to you, is turned from you. What has she to do, even with her child, if that child is an heir of wrath? She loves the Savior too much to side with the Savior’s enemies! On earth she could weep and pray for you—in Heaven she has other work to do and has undergone such an absorption into the will of God that if your spirit should pass into another world unrenewed, she, with those dear lips, would say, “Amen!” most solemnly to your condemnation! She, too, will confess with all the army of the faithful that the sentence would be just! There is not one of all you knew on earth who is now in Heaven who can love you unless you are renewed and changed in heart.

I have sought with many of you, many times, to put the Truth of God as plainly as I could and to speak as earnestly as I could. But, once past the portal and you are gone into another world, no preacher shall ever trouble you *there*. Go down to the shades of death and Hell and no earnest voices shall ever plead with you *there*. You shall have nobody to ridicule as a fanatic *there*! You shall hear no sermons of which you can say, “How the man seems to rave!” Ah, no! You shall have other company and other engagements—but all God’s ministers will be against you. And, as long as you remain ungodly here, they are against you. I set the whole host of the redeemed in Heaven before you now and challenge you, by all their glory, to turn from the error of your ways lest that glory should only increase your misery by contrast.

I have to add to all these saints on earth and glorified spirits in Heaven, *the whole company of the angels*. They are the friends and companions of the saints, but they are by no means the friends of the ungodly. They would rejoice over you if you repented—but, while you do not repent, it seems to me as if full often the angels, as they fulfill their errands among us, must feel tempted to cry—“Great God of vengeance, let us draw our swords and let us smite these rebels!”

There stands a man who the other day cursed God and dared Him to blast his limbs. If there had been an angel passing by, and doubtless it might have been so, I wonder why he did not pause, suspended in mid-air in very horror! I should not wonder if he felt in his soul that it was poison to him to be near such a man and would gladly have drawn the mighty sword which seraphs wield to cut the man down! The angels are against you. No one of the sacred host is friend to the man who is the foe of God.

The worst is to come—*God is against you*. “The face of the Lord is against them that do evil, to cut off the remembrance of them from the earth.” He would have you saved. He has sworn with an oath, “As I live, says the Lord God, I have no pleasure in the death of the wicked; but that the wicked turn from his way and live.” But if you will not turn, you must burn! If you will not repent, you must perish! God has said it and He will not lie. Justice demands it and the Judge of all the earth must be just.

And, to crown all, *Jesus Christ, the Son of God, is against you* if you resolve to be the enemy of God. He loves sinners—He died for sinners. He is ever willing to receive them, but as long as they remain impenitent and unbelieving He cannot love their sin—He cannot love *them*, viewing them in the light of willful, persistent rebels. And when He comes in the latter days, you know what will happen to those that loved not Christ—they will be *Anathema Maranatha*—cursed by His coming. He Himself will say it and it appalls me to have to remind you of the fact—He Himself, whose gentle lips were like lilies dropping sweet-smelling myrrh, tender as a woman’s—He Himself, when He comes, will say, “Depart from Me, you cursed, into everlasting fire prepared for the devil and his angels!”

You will find no friend in Christ in that last tremendous day! He will break you in pieces with a rod of iron as potters’ vessels are broken into shivers. So, then, I set this great assembly against you—saints on earth and saints in Heaven—the angels and God, and Christ Himself against you. Who is there for you? Who is there on your side, O enemies of God? It is as dreadful to think of those who are for you as of those who are against you—for those who are for you and on your side are the ungodly like yourselves—and the lost in Hell who are now what you will be, unless you escape!

Is anyone else for you? The devil and his angels, themselves punished for their sins! A grim assembly, surely, those that are for you! I think a man should rise up and say—“I cannot abide in such company as this! Do I sail in this pirate’s vessel with such a dreadful crew on board? And Satan for captain? In God’s name I will jump overboard and swim to another ship—in this vessel I will never stay and under this black flag I will never fight, let the bribe be as high as it may! I cannot serve Satan, and I will not.”

Friends, if such is your language, I stand here, as a servant of Jesus Christ and hold above you the blood-stained banner of Christ’s Cross. Oh, you who will take the enlisting money, here it is—come and take it, for whoever receives Christ—receives Him by trusting Him—to him is given power to become a servant of Christ and a soldier of the Cross! And then I shall have no assembly to set against him, but the same august assembly

shall be on the side of the man saved by faith in Jesus! God grant that these words may be found useful and Christ shall have the glory!

For a few minutes I will vary the strain but keep closely to the same idea. *Some say that sin is a very pleasant and profitable thing.* Indeed, *many* profess to be of that opinion nowadays. I may have some here, particularly some young men just commencing life who are fascinated by the charms of London life and have begun to sip of the dangerous wine which is vended in the house of the strange woman. To them it seems that vice is pleasure. O young Man, I wish I had you in a room alone that I might speak to you, for some things that I would say earnestly to you in private I must but hint at in a public assembly! The results of sin are not such as I can speak of here.

You are under great delusions. If you think sin will give you pleasure, I will set an assembly against you concerning this dream. Oh, what an assembly it would be if I could bring up from the hospitals the wretches who are suffering an earthly Hell from their sins! Have I not seen them? Have I not seen them crawling through the earth—creatures that dare not look up—broken down with hypochondria and desponding and despairing with that despair which nothing but vice ever brings on man? Have I not seen them when their very bones have rotted through their sin? There are diseases which are the stamp and seal of the curse of the Eternal upon transgression. There are diseases which are the first big drops of the everlasting rain of Hell's tremendous tempest!

If there were a physician or a surgeon here, he could tell you that there are sins which are commonly practiced, which bring on men, even in this life, a penalty most terrible. The furnace of Hell devours, but, like Nebuchadnezzar's guards, men in this life are made to fall down—slain by the powerful heat that glows from the eternal burnings—when God suffers a *portion* of the results of sin to come upon them in this life. Could I not bring up here tonight, if it were fit and proper, spendthrifts who squandered their early days in all manner of dissoluteness and who have brought themselves to rags and disease?

Go over the Casual Ward—enter the Union House! Spend an evening in a low lodging house and sit down and hear the tales of sons of ministers, of sons of gentlemen, of sons of noblemen—of men that once were merchants, traders, lawyers, doctors—who have brought themselves down by nothing else than their own extravagance and sin. They now eat the bread of pauperism and know the lack, even, of that bitter fare. Don't tell me sin is pleasure! If it is, you can have too much of it and it is bitterness before long—and they are wise who flee from it.

"Well, well," cries one, "We are not all lovers of *that* kind of sin." Indeed, I hope you are not! I, too, refused such sins, but I had other sins—the world would not call them sins, but they were such—and when, before I found the Savior, I began to discover what sin was, (I speak what I know), my sins, to me in my consciousness, were a little Hell. I know that men who are not saved, sometimes on a dark night, or in sickness, or in trouble, or when alone will permit conscience to work and they feel dreadfully uneasy.

Have I not seen your cheeks blanch when you have been told that your friend was dead? When the funeral knell has been tolling—have you not wished yourself in the depths of the forest that you might not hear it? When you have been compelled to sit a little while, alone, you feared to allow your mind to meditate upon eternity—you tried to fly off again to the frivolities of time, though you felt there was nothing in them. Sin is a wretched thing, unsatisfying at best! Even painted sins, with their Jezebel faces, are not truly beautiful. What men call immoralities are wretched in themselves upon the outside—and a grain of common sense will enable a man to see that their misery far exceeds their pleasure. I set an assembly against the man who declares that there is pleasure in iniquity.

On the other hand, *it is said that true religion makes people miserable*. I would set an assembly against *anybody* who dares to say that. It was in my mind to ask you who are unhappy through being Christians to bear witness tonight against Christianity—and then I thought, perhaps, I would put it the other way—and let those of you who love the Savior and find consolation and happiness in Him, sing with me one of our joyous hymns! And I guarantee you, Sirs, we would make this great dome resound with hearty music!

Unhappy? Unhappy through being Christians? I have suffered as much of bodily pain as most here present and I know also about as much of depression of spirit at times as anyone—but my Master's service is a blessed service and faith in Him makes my heart leap for joy! I would not change with the most healthy man, or the most wealthy man, or the most learned man, or the most eminent man in all the world if I had to give up my faith in Jesus Christ—tried as it sometimes is! Ah, it is a blessed thing to be a Christian and all God's people will tell you so!

It is oftentimes our lot to go to see the sick, but sick Believers usually cheer our heart. There is a seat just below that used to be occupied by a Beloved Sister, well-known to you, whom I went to visit in her sickness—and I do assure you, when she was in a consumption and near death—I never spent a happier hour than I did with her! And only last week, or 10 days ago, when I sat down with her and she could scarcely speak, yet what she did say was as full of sacred joy as words could compass! She is in Heaven now and Heaven was in *her* then.

“So much farther on have I got,” said she, “to the better land—so many the fewer of these hard breaths to fetch and so many the fewer of these hard pains to bear. I shall soon be where Jesus is!” And she talked as freely about dying and going Home as I should talk of going to my own house when this service is ended. Before she fell asleep yesterday, about 12 o'clock, she said to those about her she felt strangely as if she were going through a river. At one time she said she was in the midst of it, the floods were round about her and soon she said, in intervals of consciousness, “I am going up the other side. The waters are shallower—I am mounting the other bank.”

At length she cried, “Jesus is coming for me! I can hear the music of Heaven!” Her heart seemed to be overpowered with some sweet mystic melody which, if it did not enter her soul by the ear, at any rate reached her inmost spirit by some other channel. “I can hear them sing! I can hear

them sing!” she said, “And when Jesus comes, don’t keep Him waiting for me! Don’t wish me to stop. Let me go.” She is gone. Never one, I think, suffered more in dying and never had more difficulty in breathing. Thank God they do not often suffer as much as she did—yet there was never one more calm, more comfortable and more joyous on the bed of death than this daughter of affliction!

I believe in God without any evidence except Himself and His own revelation of Himself to my soul—yet I thank God for evidences—and among those most helpful to me are the deathbeds of Believers. It does my soul great good to see the Lord’s people depart this life. I grieve that you should be taken away to Heaven, for we need you here, but ah, if the departure of any of you shall be so sweet as those I have been privileged to witness of late, I shall come to my pulpit boldly!

If the religion that I teach makes men and women die like this, I am not ashamed to preach it! If the faith that I have delivered to them, by the power of the Holy Spirit, makes them so triumphant in the last article of death, I will deliver nothing else but still continue to tell them to trust simply in the substitutionary Sacrifice of Jesus Christ and rest wholly and only there. I say, then, by the living saints that do rejoice and by the dying saints who die without a fear, I set an assembly against the man who dares to slander true religion by saying that it does not make men happy!

I had many other things to say, but it were well to leave you where you are, only praying that you, by the shortness of time, by the suddenness of death, by the certainty of judgment, by the terrors of Hell, by the glories of Heaven, by the value of your own souls, by the blood of Jesus and by the glory of the eternal God will cease being His enemies. Seek His face. “Let the wicked forsake his way and the unrighteous man his thoughts: and let him return unto the Lord, and He will have mercy upon him, and to our God, for He will abundantly pardon.” “Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and you shall be saved.” “He that believes and is baptized shall be saved; but he that believes not shall be damned.” From that, God save you! Amen.

**PORTION OF SCRIPTURE READ BEFORE SERMON—*Isaiah 1:1-20.*
HYMNS FROM “OUR OWN HYMN-BOOK”—387, 34, 514.**

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A GOD READY TO PARDON NO. 1272

**A SERMON DELIVERED ON LORD'S-DAY MORNING, JANUARY 9, 1876,
BY C. H. SPURGEON,
AT THE METROPOLITAN TABERNACLE, NEWINGTON.**

***“You are a God ready to pardon.”
Nehemiah 9:17.***

WHEN a man's conscience is so awakened to the existence of sin that he cannot perceive any plea for mercy within himself, it is his wisdom to look for a plea in the Nature and Character of God. Now, Brothers and Sisters, if we search ourselves through and through, we cannot find anything in our fallen nature which can recommend us to the Most High. If we think that we have a claim upon God's goodness, we are in darkness and deceive ourselves. When the true light comes, it reveals our bareness of all merit or excuse and shows that there is nothing in human nature but that which provokes the Lord.

This is the fact as to our condition while we are unregenerate and, oftentimes, the true Believer, when darkness gathers around him, finds himself to be in much the same condition. His evidences burn dimly, the candle of the Lord seems quenched within his spirit and, worst of all, the sun of Divine favor is not discernible. Then, groping all around, he can discover nothing in himself but that which causes him to sigh and groan. In such a plight he should cast overboard the great anchor of faith and escape from himself to his God. It were well for him *always* to do so, but especially in the cloudy and dark day.

To whom should he turn for light but to the Sun of Righteousness? Where look for Grace but to the God of all Grace? Where for all but to the All in All? If what I am makes me despair, let me consider what *God in Christ* is and I shall have hope. That God is merciful, becomes, to sinners, the first point upon which they can fix their hope! That the mercy of God endures forever affords to the saints a most blessed stronghold when inward sin assails the soul. But from where do we learn this supremely consoling Truth of God? How do we know that God is merciful? I scarcely think we could have inferred from His worlds the readiness of God to show mercy.

I have heard a great deal about the attributes of God in Nature—I have, indeed, heard a great deal more than I have ever been able to see. To “go from Nature up to Nature's God” is a very common expression, but it is a very long step, mark you, from the highest Alp of Nature to the footstool of the Throne of God! It will be found much easier to go down from God to Nature, when you once know the Lord, than ever it can be to ascend from the works to the Maker. It is more than questionable whether the best instructed mind could have discovered much of God's Nature from the universe around—His goodness to obedient creatures we might have gathered—but His mercy to the guilty is there but dimly revealed.

Look at this visible universe and you perceive that it is governed by certain fixed laws. If a man offends against these laws, do the laws bend and make allowance for his mistake? Not so—they operate immutably and every violation of them is avenged. The captain makes a mistake of a few points in his steering—there is a current which he has not perceived, or perhaps his compass, itself, is out of gear. Anyway, he is, without any fault on his part, drifted upon a rock. Does the rock move, or is it softened? Or when the ship strikes, is there some miracle by which the timbers are held together? Does some angelic hand undergird the ship and preserve the precious lives?

No, amidst the howling of the pitiless storm, the vessel breaks up and those who struggle best are unable to survive the fury of the sea. Is there any sign of mercy here? Or take another case—the simple countryman, in his ignorance of the laws of electricity, is overtaken by a pelting storm, and to escape from the drenching rain he runs beneath some lofty tree to screen himself beneath its spreading branches. It is a law of Nature that elevated points should attract lightning—the man does not know this—he does not intend to defy his Maker's natural law—but for all that, when the death-dealing fluid splits the tree it leaves a senseless corpse at the foot of it.

The law does not suspend its operations though that man may be the husband upon whose life the bread of many children may depend, though he may have been one of the most guileless and prayerful of mankind, though he may have been utterly unconscious of having exposed himself to the force of a physical law of God, yet still he dies, for he has placed himself in the way of a settled law of Nature. There is scant trace of mercy here! Or it may be that a physician in the pursuit of discoveries which shall alleviate pain, with no ambition except to serve his fellow creatures, no mercenary motive swaying him, endeavors to penetrate into the secrets of Nature and imbibes or inhales a certain noxious drug or pernicious vapor. Will the noxious drug or destructive gas stay its deadly office because of the generosity of the motive of the man who exposes himself to its influence? Ah, not so. The precious life is sacrificed and we hear the sad news that a great physician is no more—Nature having stood fast and firm—and no mercy having been shown to the breaker of her laws.

Now, seeing that these laws move on immutably like the great wheels of a mighty machine, and he that is entangled in those wheels is ground to powder, it does seem as if we had little or no evidence of the mercy of God if we look to Nature, alone—certainly not enough to calm the conscience or allay the fears of the guilty! We admit that there are some tokens for good to the offender, even in Nature, for does not the Lord teach man to set up his beacons upon the headland and anchor his light ships near the sands? And has He not led us up to the formation of lifeboats whereby multitudes of lives have been saved? In the case of death by lightning there is reason to believe that the death is more certainly painless than any other and, again, loftiness need not remain a danger, for the lightning rod has warded off the bolt of Heaven from multitudes of elevated buildings.

In the case of most poisons there are antidotes which save lives if they are taken speedily enough and even the poisons, themselves, in certain compounds, turn out to be healing medicines. So there *are* traces of the pardon of offenses in the mitigating or the removing of penalties even under the iron rule of natural law. Never is a law changed, mark you, in Nature, except in the few instances of miraculous interpositions. And in the *moral* universe never is a Law changed at all, for Heaven and earth shall pass away but not one jot or one tittle of the Law shall fail. Still, there are laws which counteract, full frequently, the roughness and the crushing power of other laws and these, like their counterparts in the moral universe, prove that God is merciful.

But, all this being allowed, the light which Nature affords us is, upon this subject, rather conjecture than assurance. My Brothers and Sisters, let us thank God we are not left to mere guesses upon this point. Be thankful we are not left to the sun and to the moon to give us light upon this matter—we have a more sure word of testimony from which you do well if you take heed as unto a light that shines in a dark place. We have this book of Holy Scripture, written by the pen of the Holy Spirit, which tells us over and over again that the God whom we have offended is a God ready to pardon, a God whose mercy endures forever!

I would call your attention to the expression, “*a God ready to pardon.*” Not a God who may *possibly* pardon, neither a God who, upon strong persuasion, and earnest pleading may, at length, be induced to forgive. Not one who, perhaps, at some remote period, after we have undergone a long purgation, may manifest a mercy which is now in the background, but a God “ready to pardon.” He is a God willing and more than willing—ready, standing prepared, or to use another Scriptural expression, “waiting to be gracious.” We have a God who stands like a host at a festival which is all provided and prepared, saying, “My oxen and My fatlings are provided, all things are ready, come to the supper.”

Not only are all things ready but God Himself is ready! His own heart and hand are ready to bestow pardon upon the guilty ones who come before Him. There is forgiveness with Him that He may be feared. *This blessed Truth of God*, in the first place, *was remarkably seen in the story of Israel*—on that we will dwell. And secondly, *it is equally true of the Lord at all times*. May the Holy Spirit, in mercy, lead us to feel the power of mercy while we speak thereon.

I. First, then, I shall ask your attention to THE HISTORY OF ISRAEL AS SINGULARLY ILLUSTRATING THE READINESS OF GOD TO PARDON. Brethren, the Israelites seem to have been set forward as a picture of all God’s people. As the foot of the altar was made of the looking glasses of the women, the polished brass of the mirrors being melted down, so it seems to me as if Israel was intended to be a looking glass in which every one of us might look and see his own image.

I am sure that when I speak of Israel you will perceive that the record speaks of you and draws your portraits to life. They were, in the first place, *a people very specially favored, but they were a people as equally ungrateful*. To what other nation did God give the oracles of His Truth?

What other tribes did He separate unto Himself to be a people in whose midst He would show forth His Glory? What other nation did He bring forth out of the house of bondage with a high hand and an outstretched arm? For what other people did He pour out of Heaven the dread artillery of all His plagues, striking their foes with judgments most terrible? For what other race did He divide the sea that He might lead them through the deep as through a wilderness?

What other armies of men had food to eat which dropped from Heaven? What other hosts were led and guided for 40 years and supplied, without their own labor, without sowing or planting, or reaping, or gathering into barns? Surely the Lord, Himself, was with them and they were favored above all the rest of mankind! Who is like unto you, O Israel, a people chosen of the Lord? But they were just as equally sinful. It scarcely seems to us as if any other nation ever existed who provoked the Lord so much, for they transgressed against light and love—against instruction and illumination, against wooing and warning—against entreaty and rebuke. They rebelled though they knew that they were highly favored and were conscious that they were a distinguished and elect people.

Their iniquities were committed against a God whose hand they had seen and whose voice they had heard, as He spoke to them from the top of Sinai. They lived amid a blaze of miracles and walked a pathway of marvels. God was in their camp! His Glory shone forth between the cherubim and under the symbol of the fiery cloudy pillar His Presence was revealed to them all. God was round about them for a wall of fire and as the Glory in their midst! And yet, with the Lord before their eyes, they refused to see Him and with all His wonders before them they refused to believe.

You know, dear Friends, that we are always particularly wounded by the unkindness of any to whom we have been especially attentive and generous. We complain, "It was not an enemy, for then I could have borne it, but it was you, a man, my acquaintance, my friend." It hurts to be injured by a child for whom you have endured much self-denial and to whom you have rendered tender love. "Sharper than an adder's tooth is an unthankful child." After this fashion Israel offended and, speaking after the manner of men, the Lord felt it keenly. He was grieved at His heart, because His great goodness to them had been so basely misused. He cries, "O that they had hearkened unto Me," and in another place, "Hear, O heavens, and give ear O earth, I have nourished and brought up children and they have rebelled against Me." Such is the language which Scripture puts into the mouth of the Lord and yet He forgave His provoking people times without number—was He not, indeed, ready to pardon?

Again, the Israelites were *absolutely dependent upon God for everything and yet they were proud*. Read in the 16th verse, "They and our fathers dealt proudly." If any people in the world ought to have been humble, surely the Israelites were they! They had been slaves in Egypt and lay among the pots in degraded bondage—brick makers all of them. Their backs were raw with the lash of the slave driver and they cried out under the sore oppression. The Lord chose them in the ignorance and debasement which always come with slavery. When He brought them out, they

had no treasures but such as they had demanded of their former masters. Their stock of food was very slender and they had to traverse the arid wilderness. Tied up in bundles on their shoulders, they carried a little food, but that was soon spent and every day they had to receive bread fresh from God's own ovens, while as for water they would have perished had it not been for the Rock, whose streams followed them all their way.

They were not a people acquainted with commerce. They had no opportunities for hunting. There were no means for farming and, therefore, if, day by day the manna had not fallen, they would have utterly starved. Yet though they were pensioners upon the daily charity of God and were both fed and clothed by His bounty, still they were proud! I know some others who are much in the same condition and perhaps they are proud, too. Paupers and yet proud! Living on alms and yet boastful! Ah, Brothers and Sisters, this in Israel was very provoking to God, even as it is in us. Those vagrant mendicants thought themselves something and, when they were a little tried, they began to murmur against Moses and to accuse their God of bringing them out into the desert to die!

They were a proud lot, and with full stomachs they rebelled against Moses and their God—though the food in their stomachs was a gracious gift! They refused to do menial tasks as though they were some great ones, while all the while they were no better than so many birds of the air, which have to gather what God's generous hand is pleased to scatter for their daily food. Was He not a God ready to pardon, to have mercy upon a proud people? Is it not always very hard to forgive a haughty-spirited offender? If the offender will humble himself before you, there is less difficulty, but if, being absolutely dependent upon you for everything, the offender, nevertheless, insults you with high words, it becomes very difficult to keep your temper with him. Pride is irritating, yes, abominable! O Lord, when You did forgive the haughtiness of Your erring people, You were, indeed, ready to pardon.

These people, again, *deliberately rebelled*, for the 16th and 17th verses tell us they, "hardened their necks, and hearkened not to Your commandments, and refused to obey." It was not that they made mistakes. It was not that they fell into errors or were misled. They did not *want* to do right and refused to know what God's will and mind were. They stopped their ears and closed their eyes. When they asked that the words which the Lord spoke from Sinai might not be spoken to them any more, it was but natural that they should dread the terror of the trumpet sound. But deep down in their hearts there was, also, a distaste for a Law so pure, so holy. Their hearts were set on mischief and they were not to be led in the way of obedience.

They had a ready ear for Korah, Dathan and Abiram, who preached sedition. They were ready to be led into idolatrous ceremonies and lustful acts by Moabite women. But before the Lord they were as bullocks unaccustomed to the yoke! Anybody and everybody they would hearken to, except their God! To Him they had such small regard that they cast His ordinances and precepts behind their backs and sinned again and again with resolute deliberation. They often went astray though often reprov-

It was not mere error and mistakes—the set and current of their heart was towards evil. Deliberation adds greatly to the heinousness of sin and it is a sad thing when we have to charge ourselves with this. The repetition of the same offense also shows a state of heart very near akin to determination, for it has all the appearance of a deliberate refusal to watch against temptation and of a fixed resolve to treat the voice of God with indifference. Alas, that we should be so readily decoyed by the baits of evil and so feebly held by the cords of goodness! Lord, when we provoke You in this way be pleased to show Yourself a God ready to pardon.

More than this, we are told that the Israelites were *unmindful of what the Lord had done for them*—“Neither were mindful of Your wonders that You did among them.” They were, by this unmindfulness, led into the great crime of unbelief. You think, my Brothers and Sisters, that if you had seen the Red Sea divided and Israel’s hosts led through—while Pharaoh’s army was drowned—you would have trusted God all your life. “Oh,” you say, “if I had been present and really gathered the manna and eaten it, I could not, I am sure, with such a demonstration before my eyes, have ever fallen into unbelief again.”

Well, I leave that question, whether you would or not, having a very shrewd suspicion that your heart is by no means better than that of the ancient unbelievers. At any rate, Israel soon fell back into her chronic unbelief. Within a few days after they had seen the whole host of Pharaoh destroyed, they began to murmur against God and against Moses. And though every day they ate the manna and drank the miraculously given water, yet continually they asked, “Is the Lord among us or not?” And they were perpetually putting questions such as made Moses demand of them, “Is the Lord’s hand waxed short?” They were cankered to the heart with unbelief. For a moment they had a sort of faith but in another moment they relapsed into infidelity—

***“Now they believe His Word,
While rocks with rivers flow.
Now with their lusts provoke the Lord,
And He reduced them low.”***

At the slightest peril, the slightest trouble to themselves, they began to think that now they were come to a difficulty out of which the Lord could not deliver them and they cried, “Surely, He means to destroy us. He will never bring us into the promised land.” Do you know any other people like this? I only need to put out my hand to touch one of the same order! At any rate, since the Lord forgave His people Israel, though they angered Him with their ungenerous mistrust, we see most clearly that He is “a God ready to pardon.”

Further on we read that these people *committed, in spirit, an act of utter apostasy*. They made unto themselves a captain to return to their bondage. They said they would go back to Egypt since there was no hope of their ever conquering Canaan, for the Canaanites were too strong for them. What? Back to slavery? Back to making bricks without straw? Leaving God and His tabernacle and the Glory of His Presence? What do you think they would go back for? What was the attractive bait which lured them? They would return to their taskmasters for the sake of the leeks

and the garlic, and the onions, the flavor of which was still in their mouths!

Their soul lusted after the fleshpots of Egypt and they would, to sit down by those savory cauldrons, go back to the ignoble condition of slavery, again, and leave the Lord and all His guardian care. They would forego the goodly land which was but a little way beyond. O foolish people! Ah, Brethren, this is madness, but, alas, is there not in us, even in *us*, an evil heart of unbelief in departing from the living God? And have there not been times when we, also, have been tempted to return to the beggarly elements of the world and seek contentment in the groveling joys of earth?

Perhaps it was worst of all that the Israelites *did accidentally fall into shameful idolatry*. They set up the figure of a calf to represent God! They compared their Glory unto the image of an ox that eats grass and they said, "These are your gods, O Israel, that brought you out of the land of Egypt." God was incensed at this, as well He might be. Nevertheless, at the entreaty of Moses, He did not utterly destroy them. Oh, Brothers and Sisters, it is a shameful thing when we love the creature more than the Creator and dare to set up anything which is dear to us in Jehovah's place! "Little children keep yourselves from idols," but if you have had idols and have been forgiven, then you can see in this history and in your own experience, that the Lord is ready to pardon.

For a minute I desire to show you the opposite side, namely, the Divine goodness. While God forgave this people, He showed His readiness to pardon in the following ways. First, *He continued while they were in all these sins to guide them both by night and by day*. The 19th verse says, "Yet You, in Your manifold mercies, forsook them not in the wilderness: the pillar of the cloud departed not from them by day, to lead them in the way; neither the pillar of fire by night, to show them light, and the way wherein they should go." Only think of it, that very day they made a calf, when the sun went down the fiery pillar still lit up the camp!

At that very hour in which they said, "We will make to ourselves a captain, and go back to Egypt," the cloud was covering the camp and screening them from the burning heat of the sun! They sinned beneath the shade of special mercy! Oh, if the Lord had said, "Now I will leave you, I will give you no more guidance. Since you will not follow My commandments, go which way you will," should you have wondered? If He had left them to faint in the heat of the day and grope in the darkness of the night, would you have been surprised? Ah, but let us wonder to think that the Lord has guided *us* as pilgrims through this desert land! He has still been both sun and shade to us, even to this day, notwithstanding all our sins. Had he deserted us, what countless evils had befallen us! Blessed be the mercy which fails not!

Another marvelously gracious fact was that *He continued, still, to teach them*. I am more surprised at this than at the other. Read the 20th verse—"You gave, also, Your good Spirit to instruct them." I should have thought He would have said, "Moses, take down the tabernacle, roll up the curtains, put away the Ark. No more morning sacrifices, no more evening lambs. Aaron, go home, take off your breastplate and your ephod, and all

your garments which were made for glory and for beauty. This people shall be taught no longer, they are incorrigible. It is in vain that I dwell among them and walk among them.”

No, but still He made known His ways among them and maintained the testimony of His servant, Moses, and gave them, still, those matchless types which set forth so fully the way of salvation. My Brothers and Sisters, bless, also, the Lord that though He has often chastised you and given you the bread of affliction and the water of affliction, yet He has not taken away your teachers from you, nor quenched the light of Israel! Still does His good Spirit enlighten and instruct the people. Is He not a God ready to pardon?

Nehemiah also notices that *God did not stint them in their daily provisions*, notwithstanding their offenses. “Yes,” he says, “You withheld not Your manna from their mouths and gave them water for their thirst.” I am struck with wonder to think that God should have caused His manna to continue to fall! They provoked Moses and they set up Korah, Dathan and Abiram, but that *very morning* God’s bread was in their mouths! They came up to speak against God and against His servant and their tongues would have been cleaving to the roof of their mouths for thirst if that very morning they had not drunk of the water which God had given them! When dependent persons will persist in disregarding our complaints and violating our rules, we are driven to stop the supplies.

But the Lord did not stop the supplies even in this urgent case. Would not famine and drought have brought them to their senses? If there had been no food for the women and children, and no drink for the strong men, would not *that* have tamed them? Even lions and savage beasts may thus be subdued. But no, their bread was given them and their water was sure. Was He not a God ready to pardon? One other remark here, and it is this—*He did sustain them to the end and ultimately bring them into the land of promise*. “Yes, 40 years did You sustain them in the wilderness, so that they lacked nothing: their clothes waxed not old, and their feet swelled not. Their children, also, You multiplied as the stars of Heaven and brought them into the land, concerning which You had promised to their fathers that they should go in to possess it.”

Yes, and I know a people who, despite their sins, have already taken possession of many a gracious promise, so that they already dwell in the midst of Covenant blessings. I know a people, too, who, notwithstanding their sins, shall enter into rest. “He shall surely bring them in,” for He will bring His chosen into His Glory and they shall see His face with joy! Is He not a God ready to pardon? My tale is all too long for me to tell it. I must cease from this portion of the history and ask you to meditate upon it. And as you do so, I ask you to admire our pardoning God!

II. Secondly, IT IS EQUALLY TRUE THAT THE LORD AT ALL TIMES IS A GOD READY TO PARDON. It is true of Him *by Nature*, for mercy is an essential attribute of God. We must never think that our Lord Jesus died to *make* God merciful—on the contrary, the death of the Lord Jesus is the *result* of the mercy of God. When man sinned, God was willing, enough, to pardon him, for the death of a sinner is no pleasure to Him. Judgment is

His strange work. The way in which He came to Adam, at the first, showed His mercy.

He came, if you remember, in the cool of the day—not at the instant the crime was committed. God is not in a hurry to accuse man or to execute vengeance upon him. He, therefore, waited until the cool of the day. He did not address rebellious man in the language of indignation, but He kindly said, “Adam, where are you?” And when he had questioned the guilty pair and convicted them, and the sentence was passed, it was terrible, certainly, but oh, how mildly tempered! The curse was as much as possible made to fall indirectly—“cursed is the ground for your sake.” Though the woman was made to feel great sorrows, yet those were connected with a happy event which causes the travail to be forgotten.

There was tenderness in the dread utterances of an offended God and mainly so because almost as soon as He declared that man must labor and die, He promised that the, “Seed of the woman should bruise the serpent’s head.” Assuredly, the Lord our God is, by Nature, very pitiful and full of compassion! This Truth is evident when we remember that God was abundantly ready to pardon, for *He, Himself, removed the impediment which lay in the way of forgiveness*. Being Judge of all the earth, it was essential to Him in that office that sin should never be treated as a light thing, but should be duly punished, lest others rush into it, hoping to escape judgment.

For the good of all His creatures, as well as for the Glory of His own Character, God must not allow sin to go unpunished. A judge may be willing, enough, to pardon the culprit, but He is *the Judge*, and as such He must condemn the guilty. The readiness of God to pardon was seen in this, that on His own, He provided a way by which His mercy might be consistent with justice. From His own bosom He took His only begotten Son, His own Self, for He is One with Him, and God, in the Person of His Son, suffered that which has honored Justice, vindicated the Law, and enabled God to be just and yet the Justifier of the ungodly. Oh, as I see the adorable Father giving up His Well-Beloved, to bleed and die for men, I know beyond all question that He is a God ready to pardon!

And now, *the Atonement being made*, and Justice being unable, any longer, to offer any protest to boundless Mercy, *God stands ready to pardon*. By the blood of His dear Son, He is able to blot out offenses. Through the sweet savor of the sacrifice of Jesus He smiles on guilty men. He delights, now, to blot into oblivion the transgressions of all them that seek His face! The Lord’s readiness to pardon is very conspicuous to sinners, because He sends His message of love to them while they are yet in their sins. He presents perfect pardon through Jesus Christ to them even while they are sinners, for “Christ died for the ungodly.”

I love to think that the Gospel does not address itself to those who might be supposed to have helped themselves a little out of the mire—to those who show signs of lingering goodness—but it comes to men ruined in Adam and doubly lost by their own sin! It comes to them in the abyss where sin has hurled them and lifts them up from the gates of Hell! “Jesus Christ came into the world to save sinners.” “The Son of man is come

to seek and to save that which was lost.” Jesus Christ’s salvation is like the good Samaritan—it goes where the wounded man is and pours in its oil and wine into his bleeding wounds. The readiness of God to pardon is to be seen in the fact that He makes no hard conditions with sinners. He does not say, “I will pardon if you suffer this or endure that penance. I will pardon if you perform this act of heroism or that deed of consecration.”

No, He, Himself, says, “Believe in the Lord Jesus Christ and you shall be saved.” Receive what is freely given—that is the Gospel precept and nothing else! Only confess your transgressions, or, in other words, admit your emptiness and then trust your Savior and you are saved! That He is ready to forgive appears in this yet more glorious fact, that what God demands of man by the Gospel, He also works in him by His Spirit! As for confession of sin, He puts the words into the sinner’s mouth. As for repentance, He works in it the sinner’s heart—and saving faith, His own Spirit creates in the sinner’s soul! Is He not ready to forgive when even what might be called the condition of pardon in one light is under another aspect a *gift* of free Grace? See you not His readiness to forgive when He accepts even the very lowest grade of the necessary Graces?

Of repentance, so long as it is sincere, He accepts a tear or a sigh. Of faith, though it is but as a grain of mustard seed, He accepts it if it is but true. And notwithstanding all the faults that are in the sinner—though his heart is neither as tender as it ought to be, nor his knowledge so clear, nor his eye of faith so bright, nor his conversion so complete as it should be—yet God looks not at any of these faults except to forgive them! The ignorance and shortcoming, God winks at—He only looks at what He can see of Christ in the sinner. The sinner’s plea on his lips is, “for Jesus’ sake.” The sinner’s hope in his heart is, “for Christ’s sake”—and it is *this* that the Father looks at! When He sees that the poor trembling soul has embraced Jesus, His own dear Son, the Father puts the sin away at once without a word and says, “Be of good cheer, your sins are forgiven you, go in peace.” Oh, He is, indeed, a God ready to pardon!!

Dear child of God, this text has a bearing upon you and you can see it in yourself. Observe how the Lord chastens you. “Why is that?” you ask. Why, because you have been offending Him! You are His child and He is your Father, and He desires to forgive you, but there is a hindrance. Have you never felt a difficulty about expressing forgiveness to your own child when he has done wrong again and again? There is no difficulty in your heart, for you love him well, but still, you do not wish him to think lightly of the fault. And you are afraid that if you at once tell him that you forgive him he may, perhaps, think that he may transgress with impunity. Therefore you chasten him so that after the chastening has been endured it may be safe for you to pardon—I mean safe as far as *he* is concerned!

He will not be tempted to go into the sin through the readiness with which you forgive him, for he will remember the smarts which your love inflicted. Look upon *your* chastening as a proof that God is ready to forgive because He executes, in wisdom, that discipline which is necessary for a safe forgiveness. Think, too, how lightly He chastens—

“He will not always chide,

***And when His strokes are felt,
His strokes are fever than our crimes,
And lighter than our guilt.”***

That rod of His, ah, He never loves it. He does not afflict willingly, nor grieve the children of men. But when He does use it, how quickly He puts it up again. Brothers and Sisters, note how ready the Lord is to pardon us, for when we have sadly fallen, He graciously sets us on our feet again. “He restores my soul.” If you have wandered, like Noah’s dove flying over the waste of waters, the Lord will receive you, even as Noah received the weary bird. He put out his hand at once and plucked her in unto him, into the ark and even thus does the good Spirit pluck us in to himself. He fills our empty spirits again, revives our dying hope, relights the candles of our joy and makes us, once again, what we had been and, perhaps, more.

And then He comes and restores to us His own Presence, oh so soon! He says, “For a small moment have I forsaken you, but in great mercy will I gather you. In a little wrath I hid My face from you for a moment, but with everlasting mercy will I have pity upon you.” Very loath is He to hide His face, but very swift is He to come on wings of mercy to restore joy to His mourners! Is He not ready to pardon?

I have almost done when I have answered a question on the behalf of the unconverted and the same on behalf of the children of God. A poor seeker says to me, “You tell us God is ready to pardon, why is it, then, that I have prayed so long for mercy and have not found it?” That was a question I asked once, when my prayers went up to Heaven and seemed to strike upon a dome of brass, and were reverberated in years. Listen! Do you know to what God has promised to give pardon? To prayer? I think if you will read aright, He promised pardon to confession, to repentance and to faith. Have you acknowledged your iniquity? Will you renounce your sins? Have you believed on the Lord Jesus Christ? Come, will you now trust Jesus Christ? If so, you shall have pardon *now!*

But if your prayers are unbelieving prayers, you are going the wrong way to work. You may as well hope to win Heaven by your works as by your prayers, for, indeed, your prayers are but a kind of work—salvation is by *believing*—not by praying. If *faith* is mixed with your prayers, then you will succeed. Believing is essential and if you believe, you shall have mercy, *now*, at once. “Still,” says another, “I *have* believed in Jesus Christ and I hope I am saved from guilt, but how is it, if God is ready to pardon, that I am still suffering from the result of sin.” This, my Friend, you must bear so long as God wills it. God does not make a man healthy if he has brought his body to sickness by sin. Neither does He fill a man’s pocket if he has spent his money in profligacy.

This, my Brothers and Sisters, is left to be a thorn in your side—not as a token of anger—but because you are not to be trusted with health or wealth and, therefore, God will not lead you into temptation again. Accept this from the Lord’s hand as a gentle chastening. Remember, if He saves your soul, it little matters about the rest, for it will be better for you to enter into life crippled or maimed than to have all your limbs and all the world, and lose your soul! Accept sickness, or whatever else comes, as the

result of sin, and do not think it, by any means, proves that God has not pardoned you—on the contrary it may be that He loves you enough to chasten you.

A child of God now says to me, “If God is so ready to pardon, how is it I am still a sufferer, I am still poor and so on?” Ah, my dear Friend, perhaps that is not a rod at all, for remember, “every branch that bears fruit, He purges it.” Not because it did not bear, but to make it bring forth *more* fruit. You are God’s child and you have a cross to carry. Do not look at it as a token of anger. Was God angry with Simon, the Cyrene, who carried Christ’s Cross after Him? No, He was conferring an honor upon him—

***“Shall Simon bear the Cross alone,
And all the rest go free?
No, there’s a cross for everyone,
And there’s a cross for me.”***

Take it up, for, “through much tribulation” we shall “inherit the kingdom.” Look at affliction in this light and you will see that there is nothing of anger in it.

“But,” says one child of God, “I am under a cloud. I cannot see the face of God. Why does He hide Himself from me?” Not because He is not ready to pardon, but, perhaps, because you are not ready to forsake the sin which He is aiming at. Perhaps you have not searched your heart. There is still hidden, under the camel’s furniture, some idol or other. Make Rachel get up and search even in the secret places. Cry, “Why do You contend with me?” for, if like David and Job you have to say that you are chastened every morning and plagued every evening, there is a reason for it. If you have walked contrary to God, He is walking contrary to you. Take your Achan and stone him and then the Lord will come into the camp again. Tear down the idol and you shall have Jehovah’s Presence once more!

But mark my word—whatever your experience may be, this is true—He delights in mercy and He is a God ready to pardon. May the Holy Spirit bless this Truth of God to your souls, for Jesus’ sake. Amen.

***PORTION OF SCRIPTURE READ BEFORE SERMON—Nehemiah 9.
HYMNS FROM “OUR OWN HYMN BOOK”—907, 106 (PART II), 101.***

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THE JOY OF THE LORD, THE STRENGTH OF HIS PEOPLE NO. 1027

A SERMON DELIVERED ON LORD'S-DAY MORNING, DECEMBER 31, 1871,
BY C. H. SPURGEON,
AT THE METROPOLITAN TABERNACLE, NEWINGTON.

*"The joy of the Lord is your strength."
Nehemiah 8:10.*

*"And the sinners sang aloud, with Jezrahiah their overseer. Also that day they offered great sacrifices, and rejoiced: for God had made them rejoice with great joy: the wives also and the children rejoiced: so that the joy of Jerusalem was heard even afar off."
Nehemiah 12:42, 43.*

Last Sunday morning I spoke of the birth of our Savior as being full of joy to the people of God, and, indeed, to all nations. We then looked at the joy from a distance. We will now in contemplation draw nearer to it, and perhaps as we consider it and remark on the multiple reasons for its existence, some of those reasons may operate upon our own hearts. And we may go out of this House of Prayer ourselves partakers of that exceedingly great joy. We shall count it to have been a successful morning if the people of God are made to rejoice in the Lord, and especially if those who have been bowed down and burdened in soul shall receive the oil of joy for mourning.

It is no mean thing to comfort the Lord's mourners. It is a work especially dear to the Spirit of God, and therefore, not to be lightly esteemed. Holy sorrow is precious before God, and is no bar to godly joy. Let it be carefully noted in connection with our first text that abounding mourning is no reason why there should not speedily be seen an equally abundant joy—for the very people who were bid by Nehemiah and Ezra to rejoice were even then melted with penitential grief—"for all the people wept when they heard the Words of the Law."

The vast congregation before the water gate, under the teaching of Ezra were awakened and cut to the heart. They felt the edge of the Law of God like a sword opening up their hearts—tearing, cutting, and killing—and well might they lament. Then was the time to let them feel the Gospel's balm and hear the Gospel's music, and, therefore, the former sons of thunder channeled their notes and became sons of consolation, saying to them, "This day is holy unto the Lord your God; mourn not, nor weep. Go your way, eat the fat, and drink the sweet, and send portions unto them for whom nothing is prepared: for this day is holy unto our Lord: neither be you sorry. For the joy of the Lord is your strength."

Now that they were penitent, and sincerely turned to their God, they were bid to rejoice. As certain fabrics need to be dampened before they will take the glowing colors with which they are to be adorned, so our spirits need the bedecking of repentance before they can receive the radi-

ant coloring of delight. The glad news of the Gospel can only be printed on wet paper. Have you ever seen clearer shining than that which follows a shower? Then the sun transforms the raindrops into gems. Then the flowers look up with fresher smiles and faces glittering from their refreshing bath, and the birds from among the dripping branches sing with notes more rapturous because they have paused awhile.

So, when the soul has been saturated with the rain of penitence, the clear shining of forgiving love makes the flowers of gladness blossom all around. The steps by which we ascend to the palace of delight are usually moist with tears. Grief for sin is the porch of the House Beautiful where the guests are full of "The joy of the Lord." I hope, then, that the mourners, to whom this discourse shall come, will discover and enjoy the meaning of that Divine benediction in the sermon on the mount, "Blessed are they that mourn, for they shall be comforted."

From our text we shall draw several themes of thought, and shall remark—first, *there is a joy of Divine origin*—"The joy of the Lord." Secondly, *that joy is to all who partake of it a source of strength*—"The joy of the Lord is your strength." Then we shall go on to show that *such strength always reveals itself practically*—our second text will help us there—and we shall close by noticing, in the fourth place, *that this joy, and, consequently, this strength, are within our reach today.*

I. THERE IS A JOY OF DIVINE ORIGIN—"The joy of the Lord." Springing from the Lord as its source, it will necessarily be of a very elevated character. Since man fell in the garden, he has too often sought for his enjoyments where the serpent finds his. It is written, "upon your belly shall you go and so shall you eat dust all the days of your life"—this was the serpent's doom. And man, with infatuated ambition, has tried to find his delight in his sensual appetites and to content his soul with earth's poor dust. But the joys of time cannot satisfy an undying nature, and when a soul is once quickened by the eternal Spirit, it can no more fill itself with worldly mirth, or even with the common enjoyments of life than can a man snuff up wind and feed on it.

But, Beloved, we are not left to *search* for joy. It is brought to our doors by the love of God our Father—joy refined and satisfying, befitting immortal spirits. God has not left us to wander among those unsatisfactory things which mock the chase which they invite. He has given us appetites which carnal things cannot content, and He has provided suitable satisfaction for those appetites. He has stored up at His right hand pleasures forevermore, which even now He reveals by His Spirit to those chosen ones whom He has taught to long for them. Let us endeavor to analyze that special and peculiar pleasure which is here called "The joy of the Lord."

It springs from God, and has God for its object. The Believer who is in a spiritually healthy state rejoices mainly in God Himself. He is happy because there is a God, and because God is in His Person and Character what He is. All the attributes of God become well-springs of joy to the thoughtful, contemplative Believer. For such a man says within his soul, "All these attributes of my God are mine. His power is my protection. His wisdom is my guidance. His faithfulness, is my foundation. His Grace is

my salvation.” He is a God who cannot die, faithful and true to His promise. He is all love, and at the same time infinitely just, supremely holy. Why, the contemplation of God to one who knows that this God is His God forever and ever is enough to make the eyes overflow with tears because of the deep, mysterious, unutterable bliss which fills the heart.

There was nothing in the character of Jupiter, or any of the pretended gods of the heathen, to make glad a pure and holy spirit. But there is everything in the Character of Jehovah both to purify the heart and to make it thrill with delight. How sweet is it to think over all the Lord has done—how He has revealed Himself of old, and especially how He has displayed His Glory in the Covenant of Grace—and in the Person of the Lord Jesus Christ. How charming is the thought that He has revealed Himself to me personally, and made me to see in Him my Father, my Friend, my Helper, my God.

Oh, if there is one word out of Heaven that cannot be excelled, even by the brightness of Heaven itself, it is this word, “My God, my Father,” and that sweet promise, “I will be to them a God, and they shall be to Me a people.” There is no richer consolation to be found—even the Spirit of God can bring nothing home to the heart of the Christian more fraught with delight than that blessed consideration. When the child of God, after admiring the Character and wondering at the acts of God, can all the while feel, “He is *my* God. I have taken Him to be *mine*. He has taken *me* to be His. He has grasped me with the hand of His powerful love, having loved me with an everlasting love, with the bands of loving kindness has He drawn me to Himself. My Beloved is mine and I am His”—why, then, his soul would gladly dance like David before the ark of the Lord, rejoicing in the Lord with all its might.

A further source of joy is found by the Christian who is living near to God in *a deep sense of reconciliation to God, of acceptance with God, and yet, beyond that, of adoption and close relationship to God*. Does it not make a man glad to know that though once his sins had provoked the Lord, they are all blotted out, not one of them remains? Though once he was estranged from God, and far off from Him by wicked works, yet he is made near by the blood of Christ? The Lord is no longer an angry Judge pursuing us with a drawn sword, but a loving Father into whose bosom we pour our sorrows, and find ease for every pang of heart. Oh, to know, Beloved, that God actually loves us! I have often told you I cannot preach upon that theme, for it is a subject to muse upon in silence—a matter to sit by the hour together and meditate upon. The Infinite to love an insignificant creature, an ephemera of an hour, a shadow that declines! Is not this a marvel?

For God to *pity* me I can understand. For God to condescend to have mercy upon me I can comprehend. But for Him to *love* me? For the Pure to love a *sinner*—for the infinitely Great to love a *worm*—is matchless, a miracle of miracles! Such thoughts must comfort the soul. And then, add to this, that the Divine love has brought us Believers into actual relationship with God, so that we are His sons and daughters—this, again, is a river of sacred pleasure. “Unto which of the angels said He at any time,

You are My son”? No minister of flame, though perfect in obedience, has received the honor of adoption.

To us, even to us frail creatures of the dust, is given a benefit denied to Gabriel, for through Jesus Christ the First-Born, we are members of the family of God. Oh, the abyss of joy which lies in sonship with God, and joint heirship with Christ! Words are vain here. Moreover, the joy springing from the spirit of adoption is another portion of the Believer’s bliss. He cannot be an unhappy man who can cry, “Abba, Father.” The spirit of adoption is always attended by love, joy, and peace, which are fruits of the Spirit. For we have not received the spirit of bondage again to fear, but we have received the spirit of liberty and joy in Christ Jesus. “My God, my Father.” Oh how sweet the sound!

But all men of God do not enjoy this, you say. Alas, we grant it, but we also add that it is their own fault. It is the right and portion of every Believer to live in the assurance that he is reconciled to God, that God loves him, and that he is God’s child. And if he does not so live, he has himself to blame. If there are any starving at God’s table, it is because the guest stints himself, for the feast is superabundant. If however, a man comes, and I pray you all may, to live habitually under a sense of pardon through the sprinkling of the precious blood, and in a delightful sense of perfect reconciliation with the great God, he is the possessor of a joy unspeakable and full of glory!

But, Beloved, this is not all. The joy of the Lord in the spirit springs also from *an assurance that all the future, whatever it may be, is guaranteed by Divine goodness*. Being children of God, the love of God towards us is not of a mutable character, but abides and remains unchangeable. The Believer feels an entire satisfaction in leaving himself in the hands of eternal and immutable love. However happy I may be today, if I am in doubt concerning tomorrow, there is a worm at the root of my peace.

Although the past may now be sweet in retrospect, and the present fair in enjoyment, yet if the future is grim with fear, my joy is but shallow. If my salvation is still a matter of hazard and jeopardy, unmingled joy is not mine, and deep peace is still out of my reach. But when I know that He whom I have rested in has power and Grace enough to complete that which He has begun in me, and for me—when I see the work of Christ to be no half-redemption, but a complete and eternal salvation—when I perceive that the promises are established upon an unchangeable basis, and are yes and amen in Christ Jesus, ratified by oath and sealed by blood—then my soul has perfect contentment.

It is true, that looking forward there may be seen long avenues of tribulation, but the Glory is at the end of them. Battles may be foreseen, and woe unto the man who does not expect them, but the eye of faith perceives the crown of victory. Deep waters are mapped upon our journey, but faith can see Jehovah fording these rivers with us, and she anticipates the day when we shall ascend the banks of the shore and enter into Jehovah’s rest. When we have received these priceless Truths of God into our souls we are satisfied with favor and full of the goodness of the Lord.

There is a theology which denies to Believers this consolation. We will not enter into controversy with it, but sorrowfully hint that a heavy chas-

tisement for the errors of that system of doctrine lies in the loss of the comfort which the Truth would have brought into the soul. For my part, I value the Gospel not only for what it has done for me in the past, but for the guarantees which it affords me of eternal salvation. "I give unto My sheep *eternal* life, and they shall never perish, neither shall any pluck them out of My hand."

Now, Beloved, I have not yet taken you into the great deeps of joy, though these streams are certainly, by no means, shallow. There is an abyss of delight for every Christian *when he comes into actual fellowship with God*. I spoke of the truth that God loved us, and the fact that we are related to Him by ties most near and dear. But, oh, when these doctrines become *experiences*—then are we, indeed, anointed with the oil of gladness! Then we enter into the love of God, and it enters into us. When we walk with God habitually, then our joy is like Jordan at harvest time, when it overflows all its banks.

Do you know what it means—to walk with God—Enoch's joy? To sit at Jesus' feet—Mary's joy? To lean your head upon Jesus' bosom—John's familiar joy? Oh yes, communion with the Lord is no mere talk with some of us. We have known it in the chamber of affliction. We have known it in the solitude of many a night of broken rest. We have known it beneath discouragements and under sorrows and defamations, and all sorts of ills. And we reckon that one dram of fellowship with Christ is enough to sweeten an ocean full of tribulation. Only to know that He is near us, and to see the gleaming of His dear eyes—would transform even Hell, itself, into Heaven—if it were possible for us to enjoy His Presence there. Alas, you do not and cannot know this bliss, you who quaff your foaming bowls. Listening to the sound of stringed instruments you do not know what this bliss means—you have not dreamed of it, nor could you compass it though a man should tell it unto you.

As the beast in the meadow knows not the far-reaching thoughts of him who reads the stars and threads the spheres, so neither can the carnal man make so much as a guess of what are the joys which God has prepared for them that love Him, which any day and everyday, when our hearts seek it, He reveals unto us by His Spirit. This is "the joy of the Lord"—fellowship with the Father and with His Son Jesus Christ. Beloved, if we reach this point, we must labor to maintain our standing, for our Lord says to us, "abide in Me." The habit of communion is the life of happiness.

Another form of "the joy of the Lord" will visit us practically everyday in *the honor of being allowed to serve Him*. It is a joy worth worlds to be allowed to do good. To teach a little child his letters for Christ will give a true heart some taste of the joy of the Lord, if it is consciously done for the Lord's sake alone. To bear the portion to those for whom nothing is prepared, to visit the sick, to comfort the mourner, to aid the poor, to instruct the ignorant—any, and all of such Christian works—if done in Jesus' name, will in their measure array us in Jehovah's joy. And happy are we, Brethren, if when we cannot work we are enabled to lie still and suffer, for acquiescence is another silver pipe through which "the joy of the Lord" will come to us.

It is sweet to smart beneath God's rod, and feel that if God would have us suffer it is happiness to do so, to fall back with the faintness of nature, but at the same time with the strength of Grace, and say, "Your will be done." It is joy, when between millstones crushed like an olive, to yield nothing but the oil of thankfulness. When bruised beneath the flail of tribulation, still to lose nothing but the chaff. And to yield to God the precious grain of entire submissiveness. Why, this is a little Heaven upon earth!

To glory in tribulations, also, this is a high degree of climbing up towards the likeness of our Lord. Perhaps the usual communions which we have with our Beloved, though exceedingly precious, will never equal those which we enjoy when we have to break through thorns and briars to be at Him. When we follow Him into the wilderness, then we feel the love of our espousals to be doubly sweet. It is a joyous thing when in the midst of mournful circumstances we yet feel that we cannot mourn because the Bridegroom is with us. Blessed is that man, who, in the most terrible storm, is driven in not from his God, but even rides upon the crest of the lofty billows nearer Heaven. Such happiness is the Christian's lot. I do not say that every Christian possesses it, but I am sure that every Christian ought to do so.

There is a highway to Heaven, and all in it are safe. But in the middle of that road there is a special way, an inner path, and all who walk it are *happy* as well as safe. Many professors are only just within the hedge. They walk in the ditch by the road side, and because they are safe there they are content to put up with all the inconveniences of their walk. But he who takes the crown of the causeway, and walks in the very center of the road that God has cast up shall find that no lion shall be there, neither shall any ravenous beast go up. For there the Lord Himself shall be his companion, and will manifest Himself to him.

You shallow Christians who do but believe in Christ, and barely that, whose Bibles are unread, whose closets are unfrequented, whose communion with God is a thing of spasms—you have not the joy of the Lord—neither are you strong. I beseech you, rest not as you are, but let your conscious feebleness provoke you to seek the means of strength—and that means of strength is to be found in a pleasant medicine, sweet as it is profitable—the delicious and effectual medicine of "the joy of the Lord."

II. But time would fail me to prolong our remarks upon this very fruitful subject, and we shall turn to our second head, which is this—that **THIS JOY IS A SOURCE OF GREAT STRENGTH**. Very rapidly let us consider this thought. It is so because this joy arises from considerations which always strengthen the soul. Very much of the depth of our piety will depend upon our thoughtfulness. Many persons, after having received a doctrine, put it away on a shelf. They are orthodox, they have received the Truth of God, and they are content to keep that Truth on hand as dead stock.

Sirs, of what account can this be to you, to store your garners with wheat if you never grind the corn for bread, or sow it in the furrows of your fields? He is the joyful Christian who uses the doctrines of the Gospel for spiritual meat as they were meant to be used. Why, some men

might as well have a heterodox creed as an orthodox one for all the difference it makes to them. Having the notion that they know, and imagining that to know suffices them, they do not consider, contemplate, or regard the Truths which they profess to believe, and, consequently, they derive no benefit from them.

Now, to contemplate the great Truths of Divine election, of eternal love, of covenant engagements, of justification by faith through the blood of Christ, and the indwelling and perpetual abiding of the Holy Spirit in His people—to turn over these things is to extract joy from them! And this also is strengthening to the mind. To press the heavenly grapes by meditation, and make the red wine flow forth in torrents is an exercise as strengthening as it is exhilarating. Joy comes from the same Truths which support our strength, and comes by the process of meditation.

Again, “the joy of the Lord” within us is always the sign and symbol of strong spiritual life. Holy vivacity betokens spiritual vigor. I said that he who had spiritual joy gained it by communion with God, but communion with God is the surest fosterer of strength. You cannot be with a strong God without getting strength yourself, for God is always a transforming God. Regarding and looking upon Him, our likeness changes till we become in our measure like our God. The warmth of the South of France, of which you often hear so much, does not spring from soft balmy winds, but from the sun—at sunset the temperature falls. You shall be on one side of the street in Italy and think it May. Cross the street into the shade and it is cold as January. The sun does it all.

A man who walks in the sunlight of God’s countenance, for that very reason is warm and strong. The sunlight of joy usually goes with the warmth of spiritual life. As the light of joy varies, so does the warmth of holy strength. He who dwells in the Light of God is both happy and strong. He who goes into the shade and loses the joy of the Lord becomes weak at the same time. So the joy of the Lord becomes our strength, as, being an indicator of its rise or fall. When a soul is really vigorous and active, it is like the torrent which dashes down the mountain side, which scorns in winter to own the bonds of frost—in a few hours the stagnant pools and slowly moving streams are enchained in ice. But the snow king must bring forth all his strength before he can manacle the rushing torrent. So when a soul dashes on with the sacred force of faith, it is hard to freeze it into misery, its vigor secures its joy.

Furthermore, the man who possesses “the joy of the Lord,” finds it his strength in another respect, that it fortifies him against temptation. What is there that he can be tempted with? He has more already than the world can offer him as a reward for treachery. He is already rich—who shall ensnare him with the wages of unrighteousness? He is already satisfied—who is he that can seduce him with pleasing baits? “Shall such a man as I flee?” The rejoicing Christian is equally proof against persecution. They may well afford to be laughed at who win at such a rate as he does. “You may scoff,” says he, “but I know what true religion is within my soul, and your scoffing will not make me relinquish the pearl of great price.”

Such a man is, moreover, made strong to bear affliction. For all the sufferings put upon him are but a few drops of bitterness cast into his cup of

bliss to give a deeper tone to the sweetness which absorbs them. Such a man becomes strong for service, too. What can he not do who is happy in his God? By his God he leaps over a hill, or breaks through a troop. Strong is he, too, for any kind of self-sacrifice. To the God who gives him all, and remains to him as his perpetual portion, such a man gives up all that he has, and thinks it no surrender. It is but laying up his treasure in his own peculiar treasure house, even in the God of his salvation. A joyous man, such I have now in my mind's eye, is to all intents and purposes a strong man. He is strong in a calm, restful manner. Whatever happens he is not ruffled or disturbed. He is not afraid of evil tidings, his heart is fixed, trusting in the Lord.

The ruffled man is ever weak. He is in a hurry, and does things ill. The man full of joy within is quiet, he bides his time and crouches in the fullness of his strength. Such a man, though he is humble, is firm and steadfast. He is not carried away with every wind, or bowed by every breeze. He knows what he knows, and holds what he holds—and the golden anchor of his hope enters within the veil, and holds him fast. His strength is not pretentious but real. The happiness arising from communion with God breeds in him no boastfulness. He does not *talk* of what he can do—he does it. He does not say what he could bear, but he bears all that comes. He does not, himself, always know what he can do—his weakness is the more apparent to himself because of the strength which the Holy Spirit puts upon him.

But when the time comes, his weakness only illustrates the Divine might, while the man goes calmly on, conquering and to conquer. His inner Light makes him independent of the outward sun. His secret granaries make him independent of the outer harvest. His inward fountains place him beyond dread though the brook Cherith may dry up. He is independent of men and angels, and fearless of devils. All creatures may turn against him if they please, but since God, Himself, is his exceeding joy, he will not miss their love or mourn their hate. He stands where others fall. He sings where others weep. He wins where others flee. He glorifies his God where others bring dishonor on themselves and on the sacred name. God grant us the inward joy which arises from real strength and is so linked with it as to be in part its cause.

III. But now I must hasten on to notice in the third place that THIS STRENGTH LEADS TO PRACTICAL RESULTS. I am sure I shall have your earnest attention to this, because in many of you I have seen the results follow of which I now speak. I would not flatter anyone, but my heart has been full of thanksgiving to the God of all Grace when I have seen many of you rejoicing in the Lord under painful circumstances and producing the fruits of a gracious strength.

Turn then to our second text, and there you shall observe some of the fruits of holy joy and pious strength. First, it leads to *great praise*. “The singers sang aloud,” their minstrelsy was hearty and enthusiastic. Sacred song is not a minor matter. Quaint George Herbert has said—

“Praying’s the end of preaching.”

Might he not have gone further and have said, *praising’s the end of praying*? After all, preaching and praying are not the chief end of man, but the glorifying of God, of which praising God vocally is one form. Preaching is

sowing, prayer is watering, but praise is the harvest. God aims at His own glory—so should we.

And “who so offers praise glorifies Me says the Lord.” Be you diligent, then, to sing His praises with understanding. We have put away harps and trumpets and organs—let us mind that we really rise above the need of them. I think we do well to dispense with these helps of the typical dispensation. They are all inferior, even in music, to the human voice. There is assuredly no melody or harmony like those created by living tongues. But let us mind that we do not put away an atom of the joy. Let us be glad, when in the congregation, we unite in psalmody. It is a wretched thing to hear the praises of God rendered professionally, as if the mere music were everything.

It is horrible to have a dozen people in the table pew singing for you, as if they were proxies for the whole assembly. It is shocking to me to be present in places of worship where not a tenth of the people ever venture to sing at all, and these do it through their teeth so very softly, that one had need to have a microscope invented for his ears to enable him to hear the dying strain. Away with such mumbling and murdering of the praises of God! If men’s hearts were joyous and strong, they would scorn such miserable worship. In this house we all try to sing, but might we not have more praise services?

We have had a praise meeting every now and then. Ought we not to hold a praise meeting every week? Should not the Prayer Meeting be more than ever cheered by praise? The singing of God’s people should be, and if they were more full of Divine strength would be, more constant and universal. How sinners chant the praise of Bacchus in the streets! You can hardly rest in the middle of the night, but what unseemly sounds of revelry startle you. Shall the votaries of wine sing so lustily, and shall we be silent? We are not often guilty of disturbing the world with our music. The days in which Christian zeal interfered with the wicked seems to have gone by. We have settled down into more orderliness, and I am afraid also into more lukewarmness. Oh for the old Methodist shout!

Brethren, wake up your singing again! May the Lord give us again a singing time, and make us all praise Him with heart, and with voice, till even the adversaries shall say, “The Lord has done great things for them.” And we shall reply, “Yes, you speak the truth. He has done great things for us, and we are glad.” Perhaps there has not been so large a blessing upon the churches of England because they have not rendered due thanksgiving. In all the time in which we are in trouble we are anxious and prayerful. When a prince is sick, bulletins are issued every hour or so, but ah, when the mercy comes, very few bulletins are put out calling upon us to bless and praise the name of God for His mercies! Let us praise the Lord from the rising of the sun unto the going down of the same, for great is the Lord, and greatly is He to be praised!

The next result is *great sacrifice*. “That day they offered great sacrifices and rejoiced.” What day is that in which the Church of God now makes great sacrifices? I have not seen it in the calendar of late. And, alas, if men make any sacrifice they very often do so in a mode which indicates that they would escape the inflection if they could. Few make great sacrifices

and *rejoice*. You can persuade a man to give a considerable sum. A great many arguments at last overcome him, and he does it because he would have been ashamed *not* to do it—but in his heart he wishes you had not come that way, and had gone to some other donor. That is the most acceptable gift to God which is given rejoicingly. It is well to feel that whatever good your gift may do to the Church, or the poor, or the sick, it is twice as much benefit to *you* to give it.

It is well to give because you *love* to give—as the flower which pours forth its perfume because it never dreamed of doing otherwise. Or like the bird which quivers with song, because it is a bird and finds a pleasure in its notes. Or like the sun which shines, not by constraint, but because, being a sun, it must shine. Or like the waves of the sea which flash back the brilliance of the sun, because it is their nature to reflect and not to hoard the light! Oh, to have such Grace in our hearts that we shall joyfully make sacrifices unto our God!

The Lord grant that we may have much of this. For the bringing of the tithes into the storehouse is the way to the blessing. As says the Scripture—“Bring you all the tithes into the storehouse, that there may be meat in your house, and prove Me now, says the Lord of Hosts, if I will not open to you the windows of Heaven, and pour you out a blessing that there shall not be room enough to receive it.”

Next to that, there are sure to follow *other expressions of joy*. They “rejoiced, for God had made them to rejoice with great joy.” It was not all singing and giving. When the wheels of the machine are well oiled the whole machine goes easily. And when the man has the oil of joy, then in his business, and in his family the wheels of his nature glide along sweetly and harmoniously because he is a glad and a happy man. There are some professors who imagine the *sorrow* of the Lord to be their strength. They glory in the spirit of bondage and in an unbelieving experience—having great acquaintance with the corruption of their hearts—sometimes of a rather too practical character. They make the deformities of the saints to be their beauty spots, and their faults to be their evidences. Such men denounce all who rejoice in the Lord and only tolerate the unbelieving. Their strength lies in being able to take you through all the catacombs of Nature’s darkness, and to show you the rottenness of their evil hearts.

Well, such strength as that let those have who will, but we are persuaded that our text is nearer to wisdom—“The joy of the Lord is your strength.” While we know something of our corruption, and mourn it. While we know something of the world’s troubles, and sometimes lament as we bear them, yet there is a joy in the perfect work of Christ, and a joy in our union to Him which uplifts us far above all other considerations. God becomes to us such a strength that we cannot help showing our joy in our ordinary life. But then the text tells us that holy joy leads to *family happiness*. “The wives also and the children rejoiced.”

It is so in this Church. I have lately seen several children from households which God has blessed, and I have rejoiced to see that father and mother know the Lord and that even the last of the family has been brought to Jesus. O happy households where the joy is not confined to

one, but where all partake of it! I dislike much that Christianity which makes a man feel, "If I go to Heaven it is all I care for." Why, you are like a German stove which I found in the room of an hotel the other day—a kind of stove which required all the wood they could bring up merely to warm itself, and then all the heat went up the chimney. We sat around it to make *it* warm, but scarce a particle of heat came forth from it to us.

Too many need all the religion they can get to cheer their own hearts, and their poor families and neighbors sit shivering in the cold of ungodliness. Be like those well constructed stoves of our own houses, which send out all the heat into the room. Send out the heat of piety into your house and let all the neighbors participate in the blessing, for so the text finishes, "The joy of Jerusalem was heard afar off." The joy of the Lord should be observed throughout our neighborhood, and many who might otherwise have been careless of true religion will then enquire, "What makes these people glad, and creates such happy households?" Your joy shall thus be God's missionary.

IV. And now I have to close. THIS JOY, THIS STRENGTH, ARE BOTH WITHIN OUR REACH! "For the Lord had made them glad with great joy." God alone can give us this great joy. Then it is within the reach of any—for God can give it to one as well as to another. If it depended upon our good works or our natural abilities, some of us could never reach it. But if God is the Source and Giver of it, He may give it to me as well as to you, my Brother, and to you as well as to another.

What was the way in which God gave this joy? Well first, He gave it to these people by their being *attentive hearers*. They were not only hearers, but they heard with their ears, their ears were into the Word. It was read to them and they sucked it in, receiving it into their souls. An attentive hearer is on the way to being a joyous receiver. Having heard it, they *felt the power of it*, and they wept. Did that seem the way to joy? It was. They received the threats of the Law with all their terrors into their souls. They allowed the hammer of the Word to break them in pieces. They submitted themselves to the Word of reproof. Oh, that God would incline you all to do the same, for this, again, is the way in which God gives joy. The Word is heard, the Word is felt. Then after this, when they had felt the power of the Word, we see that *they worshipped God devoutly*.

They bowed the head. Their postures indicated what they felt within. Worshipers, who with penitent hearts really adore God, will never complain of weary Sundays—adoration helps us into joy. He who can bow low enough before the Throne shall be lifted as high before that Throne as his heart can desire. We read, also, that these hearers and worshippers *understood* clearly what they heard. Never be content with hearing a sermon unless you can understand it, and if there is a Truth that is above you, strain after it, strive to know it. Bible reader, do not be content with going through the words of the chapter—pray the Holy Spirit to tell you the meaning, and use proper means for finding out that meaning. Ask those who know, and use your own enlightened judgment to discover the sense.

When shall we have done with formalism of worship and come into living adoration? Sometimes, for all the true singing that there is, the song might as well be in Latin or in Greek. Oh, to know what you are *singing*,

to know what you are *saying* in prayer, to know what you are *reading*, to get at it, to come right into it, to *understand* it—this is the way to holy joy. And one other point. These people when they had understood what they had devoutly heard, were *eager to obey*. They obeyed not only the common points of the Law in which Israel of old had furnished them with examples, but they found out an old institution which had been buried and forgotten.

What was that to them? God had commanded it, and they celebrated it, and in so doing this peculiar joy came upon them. Oh, for the time when all Believers shall search the Word of God! When they shall not be content with saying, “I have joined myself with a certain body of Christians, and they do so, therefore I do so.” May no man say to himself any longer, “Such is the rule of my Church.” But may each say, “I am God’s servant and not the servant of man, not the servant of thirty-nine articles, of the Prayer Book, or the Catechism. I stand to my own Master, and the only Law Book I acknowledge is the Book of His Word, inspired by His Spirit.” Oh, blessed day, when every man shall say, “I want to know if I am wrong. I desire to know what I am to do. I am anxious to follow the Lord fully.” Well, then, if your joy in God leads you to practical obedience, you may rest assured it has made you strong in the very best manner.

Beloved Brothers and Sisters, we had, before I went away for needed rest, a true spirit of prayer among us. I set out for the Continent joyfully, because I left with you the names of some eighty persons proposed for Church membership. My beloved Officers, with great diligence, have visited these and others, and next Lord’s Day we hope to receive more than a hundred, perhaps a hundred and twenty fresh members into the Church. Blessed be God for this! I should not have felt easy in going away if you had been in a barren, cold, dead state. But there was a real fire blazing on God’s altar, and souls were being saved.

Now I desire that this gracious zeal should continue, and be renewed. It has not gone out in my absence, I believe, but I desire now a fresh blast from God’s Spirit to blow the flame very vehemently. Let us meet for prayer tomorrow, and let the prayer be very earnest. And let those wrestlers who have been moved to agonizing supplication renew the ardor and fervency of their desires. And may we be a strong people, and consequently a joyous people in the strength and joy of the Lord! May sinners in great numbers look unto Jesus and be saved. Amen, and Amen.

PORTION OF SCRIPTURE READ BEFORE SERMON—Nehemiah 8.

END OF VOLUME 17

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