

ZION'S PROSPERITY

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A SERMON
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AT NEW PARK STREET CHAPEL, SOUTHWARK,
ON A THURSDAY EVENING, EARLY IN THE YEAR 1856.

*“You shall arise, and have mercy upon Zion: for the time to favor her, yes, the set time, is come.
For Your servants take pleasure in her stones, and favor the dust thereof.”
Psalm 102:13, 14.*

A selfish man in trouble is exceedingly hard to comfort because the source of his joy lies entirely within himself and when he is sad, all his springs are dry. But a large-hearted man, a man of benevolence and Christian philanthropy, has other springs from which to supply himself with comfort beside those which are found within himself. He can go to his God, first of all, and there seek abundant help. And we who try to comfort him can use other arguments not relating to himself, but to the world at large, to his country and, above all, to the Church of Christ. The writer of this Psalm seems to have been exceedingly sorrowful. He says, “I am like a pelican of the wilderness: I am like an owl of the desert. I watch, and am as a sparrow alone upon the house top.” And, finding there was no solace in his own circumstances, the only way in which he could comfort himself was to believe that God would arise and have mercy upon Zion. Though he was sad, yet Zion should prosper. However low was his own estate, yet Zion should arise. Christian you can always comfort yourself in God's gracious dealings toward the church at large, but, if the church of which you are a member is in a sad and sickly condition, where shall you comfort yourself? Surely, then, you will be compelled to say with the Psalmist, “I have eaten ashes like bread and mingled my drink with weeping because of Your indignation and Your wrath, for You have lifted me up, and cast me down.”

We shall notice four things. The *nature, necessity, means* and *signs of church prosperity*.

I. THE NATURE OF THE PROSPERITY OF THE CHRISTIAN CHURCH. Here I shall differ from many, for I think that many churches that are called prosperous are far from being so, while some churches, which are despised, are the most prosperous in God's estimation.

We do not conceive it to be, necessarily, a sign of a church's prosperity *when the congregation is large*. We love to see people throng to hear God's Word and to hear assembled multitudes shout aloud the praises of Jehovah. But when we witness these things, we do not take it for granted that the church is prosperous. Concerning some places, we would pray God to empty every seat, for there is in them a going away to Rome, or a wandering from the fundamental principles of God's Word. The building may be full—crammed to its very doors—but there may be a desolating blight inside. There may be more prosperity in a place where but six of Christ's true people meet together than where thousands congregate to worship God in a way which they think to be right, but which is not in accordance with His sacred Word.

Nor do we conceive that *the riches of the people* make a church prosperous. Ask some member of a certain aristocratic community, “Is your church prospering?” “Yes,” he says, “there were 19 carriages waiting outside the other Sunday.” Ask another the same question and he will say, “Yes, So-and-So, who is worth so many thousands, has joined the church.” We say that a rich man's soul is as precious as a poor man's, but, at the same time, could anyone bring to us all the gold mines of Peru, the church would not, thereby, prosper! There are many churches which are rich in wealth, but exceedingly poor in faith, which might well barter all of their riches for the humble piety of the Methodist, or the earnest zeal of the ancient Puritan.

Nor do we think that a church is necessarily prosperous *because the minister is exceedingly eloquent*. The tendency of the present day is toward what is called “intellectual preaching.” I never could see any intellect in it. I have heard literary men preach and I could only say of them what Locke said, “If a man cannot make you understand what he means, very likely it is because there is no meaning in it.” If you cannot understand him at once, just leave him alone, for he probably does not understand himself. We hold it to be a wrong thing that intellectual Rationalism should disgrace our churches—God’s pulpit was meant for God’s Gospel! We have theaters and public halls in which men may teach philosophy if they wish to do so. Take Christianity out of our pulpits and what have we done? The pulpit is the main bastion of the Church of Christ—the Thermopylae of Christendom. Here the great Truths of the Bible must be taught and he that uses not his pulpit to preach the Gospel has disgraced it, even though his talents are almost superhuman! He has disgraced God’s Church in not unceasingly proclaiming the Evangelical principles of the Gospel of Jesus Christ!

Then, my Friends, you may ask me how I can tell whether the Church is prospering? I answer—I must consider for what purposes the Church was formed. And if it is not accomplishing that particular objective, it is not prospering. The Church is established for two objectives. First, for bringing God’s wandering sheep back to the fold of Christ. And, secondly, for fostering those sheep that are brought within the fold.

We enter a place where we hear Divine Truth proclaimed. We enquire, “How many have been added to the church this year?” “No addition, no progress.” We enquire again another year—the same reply is received, “No sinners saved, none brought into the fold.” We are very deferential towards all ministers of the Everlasting Gospel—we would sooner receive a bad one as our friend than reject a good one. But we will not flatter our Brother, we will not mind about his congregation—if he does not win souls to Christ, his church is not prospering! If the pool of Baptism has never been opened to receive a convert, if the church doors have never turned upon their hinges to receive souls seeking salvation, if no fresh members are received to sit down at the Table of the Lord, if God’s elect have not been brought in, we have strong suspicions whether that man is a minister of God—we are certain that he is not a successful one! That church is in a sad, sad condition, which never hears the cry of newborn souls in its midst. God forbid we should preach for even a month or a week without winning souls! We think it would be worse than death to live a year and not hear of hundreds brought to Christ. It is true prosperity when the Lord’s children are gathered out from among the ungodly, when God is pleased, by the agency of His Word, to break hard hearts, to bend stubborn wills and to bring the mourners in Zion to rejoice in the love of the Savior. Is *your* church thus increasing? Then it is truly prospering.

We also said there is another reason for the establishment of the Church of Christ, that is, for its own edification. It is a happy church in which the sheep of Christ are fed. Beloved, if God’s people are not fed, we do not think the church is prospering. Some have laughed at the term, “fed.” We have heard people say, “What do they mean by being fed?” Ah, children know the meaning of that word, and our hearers know what is meant by it. They do not care about our garnishing for the platter on which we serve the food, or the manner in which we carve it—we may cut it with a blunt knife, yet the child of God loves it! But if there is no food for the saints, if the members do not grow in Grace, if they are not irreproachable in their conduct, if they have not the spirit of Christ, if they do not enjoy fellowship with Jesus, if they have not attained to the knowledge of the love of God in Christ, if they have not entered into the rest of faith, if they do not live near Jesus and endeavor as much as in them lies to imitate Him—we say the church is not prospering! It may be the wealthiest under Heaven, but it may also be the most impoverished. It may be the most learned, according to human views, but the most heretical, the farthest from prosperity and the nearest to blasphemy!

Let us look at our churches as they ought to be viewed. Are souls saved? Are saints edified and built up? This is the only thing I ask myself. Some say this, some that, and some the other about our church—we care not in the least about the ten thousand opinions people form of us! We only say sinners are saved and we will keep on preaching as long as this is the case. And if we can find men, women and children declaring that they are spiritually fed, we feel that our mission is successful! Is it so in *your* church? Then you have the elements of a prosperous one.

II. We shall now consider THE NECESSITY FOR THE PROSPERITY OF OUR CHURCHES.

What matters that to some? They come regularly to chapel and occupy their pews. But they never ask themselves the question, “Does our church prosper?” Oh, no—that is the minister’s business! The Deacons must look after that matter. Our friend comes to chapel Sunday after Sunday, like a very religious man. He does not go to sleep, that I have upon good evidence! Sometimes the sermon should stir him up, yet it does not. He approves of the idea of everybody minding

his own business and, while carrying out the old maxim, "Charity begins at home," he allows it to end there. Now and then, he prays for the minister, if called upon at the Prayer Meeting, but he does not regard the minister as his Brother, so he does not pray for him at the family altar. He hears that missions are succeeding abroad, but, for all he cares, the mission stations might be closed. He would like the church to prosper, but he would not put himself out of his way even to secure that result and, as to giving up himself, like Curtius of old, and leaping into the gulf to serve the church—oh, no—he would never commit so rash an act! He would not endanger his own life, lest the church should be damaged by losing so good a man!

But I trust that some of you have a regard for the church's prosperity. If not, you ought to have. Let me remind you why. Even selfish as we may be, we ought to care for the success of the church, first, *for our own sakes*. If we do not, by Divine Grace, live and labor for our fellow-creatures, their decline will have a deleterious influence upon our own piety. The coldness of the church of which I am a member tends to chill me. The lukewarmness of my fellow Christians has a tendency to pull me down. But if I belong to a church which is rich in Grace, the tendency will be to fill my mouth with marrow and fatness—and to make me rejoice in the ways of the Lord!

Your families, too, are deeply interested in the prosperity of the church. I know that many sons and daughters do not attend the chapels where their parents go—their parents do not ask them to do so—they would not like them to go there. "It does very well for us," they say, "but it would not suit them." Then, there must be something amiss there! What is good for the parent is good for the child, and what is good for the child is good for the parent. I like what Robert Hall once said when he had been preaching a doctrine which he was told was suitable for old women—"If it is so," he replied, "then it is suitable for everybody, and I shall preach that doctrine again." Now, if you love your families and would see them brought into Christ's Church, you must labor with God in prayer for them and ask that He would be pleased to have mercy upon Zion, that her set time may come, that her servants may take pleasure in her stones and favor the dust thereof.

Also, *for the sake of the neighborhood in which you live*, labor for God, seeking His blessing, that your church may prosper. Wherever a minister's voice is raised in the cause of his Master, all around there ought to be a green spot, as in the desert, where water is to be found, there is an oasis where the traveler can rest, so, where a House for God is built, there ought to be a green spot where the efforts of the tract-distributor and the Sunday school teacher should tend to keep the soil fertile.

Again, *for the sake of our nation*, seek the prosperity of Zion. If we are to be a prosperous nation, we shall not accomplish that result by our commerce, or by the force of arms, but by our Christianity! As long as ever Christ's Church remains faithful in this land, old England shall stand in the front of the nations. England has been the cradle of the Gospel and, therefore, has she flourished. And, rest assured that as the true faith grows strong, England shall be mighty. The flag of old England is nailed to the mast, not by our sailors, but by our God! England is safe as long as she keeps fast by the true Protestant principles of the Everlasting Gospel. Her ministers need never fear for her, for firm as the eternal hills, strong as the mighty mountains shall this, our happy land, forever rest while she is true to Christ! God grant that the Church may prosper for old England's sake!

But, most of all, we want to see the Church prosper *for Christ's sake*. He is everything to us! Compared with Christ, our nationality is less than nothing and vanity. But, oh, when we think of all our Savior did and suffered for us here below, surely we can desire nothing less than for Him to see of the travail of His soul and to be abundantly satisfied. When you bend your knees in prayer to God to bless His Church, think that you hear Christ groaning in Gethsemane, that you see Him in agony in the garden. Think of Him when the thorns were placed on His head. Think of the shame, the spitting, the plucking off the hair that He endured. Yes, when you pray for the Church, think, then, that you behold the Lamb of God expiring on the Cross. Think that you hear Him cry, "Eloi, Eloi, lama Sabachthani"—"My God, My God, why have You forsaken Me?" When you think of these things, surely you will say, "Did Jesus suffer thus to win a crown, and shall I not pray that that crown may rest on His head? Did Jesus thus die that His children might be ransomed and His elect saved, and shall I not pray that He may realize that desire?"

For your Master's sake—for your Lord's sake—for His blood and agonies' sake, I beseech you, pray always for Zion, "pray for the peace of Jerusalem." "They shall prosper that love her."

III. We notice, next, THE ONLY MEANS OF REVIVAL IN GOD'S CHURCH.

What is it? We may hear of some great evangelist going through the land—surely *he* will revive the churches! We will hold a convocation of the clergy and *they* shall devise means of reviving the churches! Not so, thinks the Psalmist—he says, “You shall arise,” as if God had nothing to do but to arise and then His Church would arise, too! For, when God arises, Zion begins to prosper! How easy are the methods by which God accomplishes His great works! No doubt, if we had had to devise means for lighting up this earth, when the darkness of the evening first came upon it, we would have recommended some fifty thousand great lights hung about in various parts of the world. But look at God’s wondrous means of lighting the globe—the sun rises, the light shines and all is done! So is it with God’s plan of reviving His Church. We devise this plan and the other, but God only arises and has mercy upon Zion—and “the time to favor her, yes, the set time is come.”

Let us learn this lesson—if our church is to be made to prosper, God must do it! If we are to grow up in Christ and see great revival in these latter days, God must do it! Can the minister revive the Church? Can the people revive it? Certainly not! God alone can accomplish that great work. He must arise and have mercy upon Zion. There are means which He puts into the hands of His people and wishes them to use, but still, the ultimate reason of a church’s growth is that God arises and has mercy upon her! If the prosperity of a church consists in the salvation of sinners, must not God arise to save? If the building up of God’s elect is another part of spiritual prosperity, must not God arise to build up His people in their faith, for, “except the Lord build the house, they labor in vain that build it”? You may bring me a man filled with the Holy Spirit, possessing the zeal of Peter, or the eloquence of Paul, but no prosperity will there be in God’s Church unless God Himself bestows the heavenly shower and sends salvation down! What our churches need, just now, is not simply men of God, but we need more of God’s own Presence and Power in our midst!

We think we have our God among us, but I fear we have not so much of His Presence as our forefathers used to have. I am inclined to look back with holy envy upon the olden times—the days of George Whitefield, or of Rowland Hill—there was then a larger influx into the Church than there is now and a more visible manifestation of God’s Holy Spirit. We are multiplying our places of worship and doing very much towards evangelizing the world, but we have not the shout of a King in our midst as we used to have! We have our soldiers clad in steel—their arms bright and glittering, their swords of the best metal—but the great lack is we have not the King’s Presence as we once had. I am sure, having passed through many churches, there is a sad lack of the influences of the Holy Spirit. There is a lack of vital godliness and earnest piety. There is some supplication, but not that prevailing prayer which thunders in the ears of God and brings copious blessings from on high. Where are the Elijahs who can stop up the bottles of Heaven? Where are there on the earth those who can face a multitude and prophesy to the dry bones, knowing that when they speak, souls shall be saved?

Go into many Prayer Meetings in London—I hope it is not so generally throughout the country—the minister is obliged to say that he has not enough people present to ring the changes and he, himself, has to pray twice to fill up the time. By all his preaching he cannot get the people to pray! Shame upon such a church! This state of things proves that God is not in our midst as He was formerly. When God shall arise, His Church shall arise in earnest, fervent prayer, for the time to favor Zion, yes, the set time will then have come!

IV. Now, Beloved, let us consider the fourth point—THE SIGNS THAT GOD’S CHURCH IS BEING BLESSED. “For Your servants take pleasure in her stones, and favor the dust thereof.”

What are the “stones” of Zion? The Church of God is built of living stones—that is, *the children of God*. And it is a good sign when God’s servants take pleasure in one another and “favor the dust”—that is, not the ministers, nor the deacons, but *the poor members*. In these degenerate times, we do not take so much pleasure in each other as we ought. There is little Christian sociability, but it is a happy sign when the members meet in a cordial spirit and begin to talk of what the Savior did and suffered here below, and of Jesus’ charming name which has a sweeter sound than the most melodious music! It is profitable, indeed, when Christians begin to speak often, one to another, and God Himself turns eavesdropper to His children. He listens and hears, and a Book of Remembrance is written—the Lord, Himself, becomes a reporter and records the conversation of them that fear Him and that think upon His name! We shall be sure the church is prospering when all the members love each other and the poorer ones are not overlooked!

There are some chapels where a Christian Brother and Sister are divided by that rail in the center—they have sat there for years—yet they do not know each other’s names! They did show each other the hymn one day, when one came

late, but they have never shaken hands. They are members of the same church and one of them may be poor and starving—but the other knows nothing about it because he does not, “favor the dust thereof.” But, when God arises, and has mercy upon Zion, His people say—

*“Have You a lamb in all Your flock
I would refuse to feed?
Have You a foe, before whose face
I fear Your cause to plead?”*

It is a good sign for a church when its members “take pleasure in her stones, and favor the dust thereof.”

The next translation we will give of this word, “stones,” is the *Doctrines of the Bible*. By the term, “Doctrines,” I do not mean merely some three or four particular points, but *all* the Doctrines which build up the Church of Christ. In these days it is usual to hear people say, “Doctrines are of no importance. You may believe this or that, but you will go to Heaven all the same.” It is not so, Beloved! God has given us a Bible, common sense and judgment—and if we foolishly say, “It does not matter what we believe,” we thereby sin against God! It is important that we should be right in Doctrine, though not so important as that we should be right in heart. The tendency of this age is toward what is called, “charity.” I hold that charity is not for us to give up our convictions, but for each of us to preach them boldly! The charity of this age wants us to get rid of our angles and points. It says, “Do not say anything to offend such-and-such an individual.” Nonsense! True charity is for me to boldly speak my views and for my Brother of an opposite opinion to do the same—and for me to love him, if he holds the Head, Christ Jesus—but it is no charity to put a gag on us all. There is a great evil in the universal charity of the present day—it is Satan transforming himself into an angel of light! He sees us divided into different camps and he says, “*Put down your flags! No sectarianism!*” He means, “*No religion.*” But let us all keep to our own regiments and fight manfully for them, yet combining against the common enemy. Let us hold God’s Truth, but not with a slippery hand. If a Doctrine is true, let us grip it fast, though the earth shake or the heavens fall!

Christian, where there is a love for God’s Truth, God will bless His Church. But because this is a time-serving age, because we have not come out plainly with those things which distinguish us from each other, because we have paid too much deference to each other’s views and have not boldly declared the great Truths of His Word—these are the reasons why God has, to some extent, deserted us.

You say, “I do not see so much in Doctrines, after all.” Then you will not see much prosperity! I love so much what I believe to be true that I would fight for every grain of it! Not for the “stones” only, but for the very “dust thereof.” I hold that we ought not to say that any Truth of God is non-essential—it may be non-essential to salvation, but it is essential for something else! Why, you might as well take one of the jewels out of the Queen’s crown and say it is nonessential, she will be Queen all the same! Will anyone dare to tell God that any Doctrine is non-essential? O gracious Spirit, have You written what is non-essential? Have You given me a Book respecting which I say, “My father and mother believed it all, but it is not necessary for me to believe it”? God has given me a judgment—am I to follow in the wake of other people, thinking I shall be sure to be right and that God will never ask me what I was? An easy kind of religion this! It was not so in the days of good old John Bunyan and Berridge—they sang a far different song! But now people are saying, “I can listen to So-and-So and So-and-So”—men who contradict one another! We cannot think much of people who can hear opposite opinions and yet believe both to be correct! We cannot expect much growth unless you hold the Truth of God and take pleasure in the stones of Zion and, “favor the dust thereof”—every atom of it!

Once again, the stones of Christ’s Church are *the ordinances* and God’s people ought to take care that they love her “stones,” and favor her “dust.” For those two Divine Institutions—Baptism and the Lord’s Supper, and the observance of them as handed down to us from Apostolic times—there ought to be an intense love in the hearts of God’s people, that we may be kept from the innovations of men. Let us always love what God has given us! It may be thought by some to be antiquated, yet let us never let it go, for then will God build up the ruined walls of Zion.

I may also mention that it is a good sign of the church’s prosperity when *the ministry of the Word and the Prayer Meeting* are well attended—especially the latter. A friend of mine said, the other evening, “I shall go to the lecture tonight, but I did not go on Monday, for it was only a Prayer Meeting.” Why, that is the best service in the week! What is to become of your minister, in the other services, if you do not meet to pray for him? Yet many professing Christians never think of meeting for prayer—they leave that duty to the old members—those who always speak about “the unthinking horse rushing into the battle.” A Prayer Meeting ought to be regarded as superior to any other service and

there should be at least all the members met together to pray. If you say, "It is only a Prayer Meeting," even that is the "dust" of Zion, and God's people "take pleasure in her stones, and favor the dust thereof"—the little services as well as the great services. "You shall arise, and have mercy upon Zion: for the time to favor her, yes, the set time, is come. For Your servants take pleasure in her stones, and favor the dust thereof."

And now, dear Friends, you may not agree with me as to my ideas of a church's prosperity, but there must be one thing you have observed as the great need of the churches in the present day. That is the need of more prayer, more firm attachment to the walls of Zion and greater love to the Doctrines of the Bible. And I beseech you, be henceforth doubly in earnest in seeking for God's Spirit to enable you to cling, heart and soul, to every "stone" and every grain of "dust" in God's Temple of Truth, and let nothing be given up to please men—cleave fast to all that God has ordained and He will prosper and bless you!

EXPOSITION BY C. H. SPURGEON:
EZEKIEL 34:11-31.

The former part of the chapter contains a prophetic denunciation against the evil shepherds—the men who fed not the flocks, but fed themselves—who fouled, with their filthy feet, the waters where the flocks drank, and trod upon the soft grass that otherwise might have afforded pasture for the sheep. After pronouncing judgment upon them, the Lord turns His thoughts to His sheep and gives this precious promise—

Verse 11. *For thus says the Lord God, Behold, I, even I, will both search My sheep and seek them out.* The shepherds did not do this. They left the sheep to wander and many were lost on the mountains. But where men fail, God proves Himself all-sufficient. My Hearer, are you sitting under an unprofitable ministry? Then look to the Chief Shepherd and not to the man who is unfaithful as an under-shepherd!

12. *As a shepherd seeks for his flock in the day that he is among his sheep that are scattered; so will I seek out My sheep, and will deliver them out of all places where they have been scattered in the cloudy and dark day.* It does not matter where the place is, the Lord will find His sheep. If it is the castle of Giant Despair, He will find them. If it is the worst dungeon in Doubting Castle, He will discover them there! They may have wandered upon the mountains of Despondency and Dejection. They may have been lost in the gorges of some dark Valley of Desperation, but the Lord says, "I will both search My sheep and seek them out." And, mind you, He does not seek without finding! He discovers them, for He knows where they are. Oh, is not that a "cloudy and dark day" wherein we wander from God and know not how to return to Him? But clouds and darkness are banished when we see the light of His face!

13-15. *And I will bring them out from the people, and gather them from the countries, and will bring them to their own land, and feed them upon the mountains of Israel by the rivers, and in all the inhabited places of the country. I will feed them in a good pasture, and upon the high mountains of Israel shall their fold be: there shall they lie in a good fold, and in a fat pasture shall they feed upon the mountains of Israel. I will feed My flock, and I will cause them to lie down, says the Lord GOD.* There is a blessed state of rest! God's flock are not only to be fed, but they are to lie down while they feed! You have sometimes noticed a flock, at noontide, when the sun is hot, lie down upon the grass and feed while they rest. That is what God's people are to do. They are to lie down in tranquility of spirit. They are to lie down in a state of placid submission to His will, in a state of perfect security—a state, not of idleness from the Master's service, but still a state in which they know there is nothing for them to do for their own security since Christ has accomplished the whole of their salvation! "I will feed My flock, and I will cause them to lie down, says the Lord God." It is not everyone of God's people that has attained to this blessed experience, to be able to lie down in quiet confidence and rest—

*"Thousands in the fold of Jesus,
This attainment never can boast.
To His name eternal praises,
None of these shall ever be lost."*

Deeply engraved on His heart their names remain. If you are His sheep, yet even if you have never come to lie down in peace, if you cannot say, "I know and am confident," and cannot rest while you feed, it is still comforting for you to feel that all Christ's sheep are His sheep, whether they are lying down or standing up, or even wandering from Him!

16. *I will seek that which was lost, and bring again that which was driven away.* Ah, one little thinks, perhaps, that there should be such a thing as a poor sheep driven away, but it is sometimes true! A legal preacher drives Christ's sheep away from Christ. A seeking soul would gladly come to Jesus, but he is told that he must *be* something and *do* something before he can come. The poor sinner would trust in Jesus, but he is told, first, to get such-and-such a state of heart. He is told, "You are not the man who should be encouraged to come to Christ—you must have some deeper *experience* before you come." But, blessed be God, the Good Shepherd says, if Satan has driven you away, or a legal preacher has driven you away, "I will seek that which was lost, and bring again that which was driven away."

16. *And will bind up that which was broken, and will strengthen that which was sick: but I will destroy the fat and the strong; I will feed them with judgment.* Those who boast of being fat and strong, who glory in themselves—these, God will destroy! But the poor, weak, sick souls shall be fed with kindness tempered with judgment.

17, 18. *And as for you, O My flock, thus says the Lord GOD; Behold, I judge between cattle and cattle, between the rams and the he goats. Seems it a small thing to you to have eaten up the good pasture, but you must tread down with your feet the residue of your pastures? And to have drunk of the deep waters, but you must foul the residue with your feet?* Oh, how many there are, even of God's sheep, that foul the waters! They come up to God's House, where, perhaps, they get some sweet morsel in the sermon, but there are some things in it with which they do not quite agree. They are walking home with some young Christian and he is thinking how blessedly he felt under the sermon, while, perhaps, that old professor is grumbling the whole time and stirring up the waters with his feet! If the pasture is not good enough for you, you should let the lambs eat of it without treading it down! Others like it, though you may not, and if you do not like it, you can always leave it! But what is the use of finding fault with it and treading it under your feet and not letting others eat of it? It is a great crime, says God—"Seems it a small thing" to tread it down under your feet, to spoil the spiritual enjoyment of your Brothers and Sisters? It seems, to some, of very little consequence what harm they do to God's weak ones—but it is not so—it is a great sin to tread down with your feet the residue of your pastures, so you quibblers and critics had better beware!

19-21. *And as for My flock, they eat that which you have trodden with your feet; and they drink that which you have fouled with your feet. Therefore thus says the Lord GOD unto them; Behold, I, even I, will judge between the fat cattle and between the lean cattle. Because you have thrust with side and with shoulder, and pushed all the diseased with your horns, till you have scattered them abroad.* I wish some people would not thrust so much with side and shoulder in their controversies with their brethren. It may be all very well for a man to be honest and faithful, and push with his horns, but there are some diseased ones who cannot stand rough usage when they are only coming in all simplicity to drink at the Fountain of Life.

22, 23. *Therefore will I save My flock, and they shall no more be a prey; and I will judge between cattle and cattle. And I will set up one shepherd over them.* There is only one Shepherd. As for the rest of us, we are only under-shepherds. There is only one Shepherd, our Lord Jesus Christ—we are simply the men He employs to look after His sheep a little. He is the Great Shepherd and when He shall appear, we also shall appear with Him in Glory. "I will set up one shepherd over them."

23-25. *And he shall feed them, even My servant David; he shall feed them, and he shall be their shepherd. And I the LORD will be their God, and My servant David a prince among them; I the Lord have spoken it. And I will make with them a Covenant of peace, and will cause the evil beasts to cease out of the land: and they shall dwell safely in the wilderness, and sleep in the woods.* Those who have seen the watching of flocks by night in the East could give you quite a picture of the meaning of this verse. Sometimes the shepherds will sit down in the midst of bushes and briars that may grow at the side of the woods and, taking some of them for firewood, they will light a fire in the night. And when the wolves come around them, the sheep are quite safe. I have read of this in books of travel—and what a beautiful thing it seems to sit, with the full moon shining down on the forest, and the fires alight, feeling that, notwithstanding all the wolves, the sheep are quite safe with the shepherds there to protect them! So is it with God's people. They must always expect, while they are in the woods of this world, to have a scratch, now and then, from the briars and thorns, but, "they shall dwell safely in the wilderness, and sleep in the woods." God will always take care of His own, for, "the Lord knows them that are His."

26. *And I will make them and the places round about My hill a blessing; and I will cause the shower to come down in his season; there shall be showers of blessing.* My earnest prayer is that this church may be a great blessing to all who are around us—and I firmly believe it will be so, by God's Grace!

27. *And the tree of the field shall yield her fruit, and the earth shall yield her increase, and they shall be safe in their land, and shall know that I am the LORD, when I have broken the bands of their yoke, and delivered them out of the hand of those that served themselves of them.* The Jews will know that God is the Lord when they shall return to their own land. The poor tired sinner, best of all knows that God is God when he gets the bands of his neck broken off him! By nature, we all have bands about our necks—it is only God who takes them off. Pilgrim, you know, lost his burden when he looked at the Cross—it rolled away down into the sepulcher. And if you had asked him then, “Is God, God?” “Yes,” he would have said, “otherwise, I should not have had the bands of my neck loosed.” No man who has had the bands taken off him will ever doubt that there is a God! Let him experience that holy calm which springs from the fact of his having been set at Gospel liberty and he will say, “This is the work of God! No man, no human power could have done it.” I can never be an Arminian as long as I feel myself a sinner. I am obliged to come back to this—Lord, I must be saved by Sovereign Grace, or not at all. A single day's experience is enough to take all the self-conceit out of a Christian if the Lord should leave him to his own unaided strength. We best know that God is God when we have had the bands broken off our necks. How many are there sitting here with bands on their necks—slaves, wearing the yoke upon their shoulders? They cannot see it, but it is there, nevertheless. Who is there who can say, “My bands are broken from my neck”?—

*“My sins are drowned, as in a flood,
Of Jesus' pure and matchless blood.”*

I am finally discharged; the bands are broken off my neck, verily, God is God.”

28, 29. *And they shall no more be a prey to the heathen, neither shall the beast of the land devour them; but they shall dwell safely, and none shall make them afraid. And I will raise up for them a garden of renown.* Jesus is “a garden of renown,” because you may go to Him at all times and you will always find fruit on Him. That is more than you can say of any other garden. You may go to Him and you will always find the sort of fruit you need. Is He not “a garden of renown”? You will find healing virtue in His leaves and satisfying fruits hanging in clusters upon Him. He is “a garden of renown” because His Father planted Him, because He has food enough for all His saints and a gracious variety for all their tastes! And He will blossom through eternity! Because of the multitude who sit under His shadow and rejoice therein, He is “a garden of renown” to His people, for under His shadow they are begotten and brought forth! The greatest transactions of their lives have taken place beneath the shadow of that old tree, “the garden of renown.”

29, 30. *And they shall no more be consumed with hunger in the land, neither bear the shame of the heathen any more. Thus shall they know that I, the LORD their God, am with them, and that they, even the house of Israel, are My people, says the Lord God.* Thus shall they know it. Do you know it? Has God told it to you? Have you the witness of the Spirit within your spirit that you are born of God? My Hearers, never be satisfied till you get this, for you will never be truly at rest until you know that you are God's people and until you can, each one, say, “My God, my God, you are my God.”

31. *And you My flock, the flock of My pasture, are men, and I am your God, says the Lord GOD.* “However much I may have lifted you up, you are only men, after all. But I am not a man, I am your God,” says the Lord. And we rest more upon what God is, than upon what man is, for He, “is able to do exceeding abundantly above all that we ask, or think.”

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