

CHASTENED HAPPINESS

NO. 1636

A SERMON

DELIVERED ON LORD'S-DAY MORNING, DECEMBER 25, 1881

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AT THE METROPOLITAN TABERNACLE, NEWINGTON

*“They shall fear and tremble for all the goodness and for all the prosperity that I procure unto it.”
Jeremiah 33:9*

GOD'S ancient people sadly provoked Him with their idolatries from age to age. He was long-suffering to them to the last degree, but at length He grew weary of them, and according to His own words, “He abhorred his own inheritance.” He caused them to be carried away into captivity, and their land became a desert, or the heritage of strangers.

Israel became a people scattered and peeled, and on the brink of national extinction, for their iniquities had hidden the face of the Lord from them. Yet the Lord, even JEHOVAH, had entered into a covenant concerning them with Abraham His friend, which covenant He had afterwards renewed with His servant David.

This latter covenant the Lord is said by the prophet Jeremiah to remember even when Jerusalem is desolate. We read in the twentieth verse and onward these words—“Thus saith the LORD; If ye can break my covenant of the day, and my covenant of the night, and that there should not be day and night in their season; then may also my covenant be broken with David my servant, that he should not have a son to reign upon his throne.”

Even in Israel's worst days, when her representative man was the weeping prophet Jeremiah, and when her sorrows were greater than even he could express, yet the Lord revealed His love, and promised that blessed days should dawn for the seed of Abraham. These days have not yet come, but they shall surely arrive, for God has not cast away His people whom He did foreknow.

There is yet a history for Israel—her sun is clouded, but it has not set. As surely as stands the covenant with day and night, so surely shall the chosen people return from their captivity and possess the land which the Lord has given unto them. In those days the Lord will build them as at the first, and cleanse them from all their iniquities. Then they shall not be proud or arrogant, for His goodness shall startle and astound them, and they shall be amazed even unto trembling when they see what great things JEHOVAH has done for them.

The memory of their great national offenses, and especially of their long rejection of the Messiah, shall cause them to wear their high dignity without pride—they shall be subdued by love to a child-like fear of again offending—they shall tremble as they see the Lord God of their fathers glorifying all His grace in them. Thus much for the strict connection of the text.

At this time we shall loosen the verse from its stall, and bring it forth to our own pastures. Its primary significance is not only its teaching, for the words of the Lord are full of eyes, and look in many ways. We may use this promise in reference to all the Lord's people, for the promise is sure to all the seed.

That which is true of the Jew one way is true of all the chosen seed in the same sense or in another. No privilege of the covenant is absolutely private either to Jew or Gentile, but in its highest form, if not in its lowest, it is the common property of all the heirs of salvation. We are joint heirs with Christ Jesus, and as He inherits all blessing, so also do we. Paul, in his Epistle to the Galatians, has well-said, “If ye are Christ's, then are ye Abraham's seed, and heirs according to the promise.”

Let me, then, read the text again, and let us appropriate it to ourselves—“They shall fear and tremble for all the goodness and for all the prosperity that I procure unto it.” Such honor and blessing have all the saints.

Our text suggests at the outset the remark that all the good things which make up prosperity are to be traced unto the Lord. Woe unto us if we receive good and perfect gifts, and yet forget the Father of lights from whom they come. These benefits are not from beneath, but from above—let them not be passed by in ungrateful silence, but let us send upward humble and warm acknowledgments. He who forgets mercy deserves that mercy should forget him. God grant we may never be such practical atheists as to receive daily bounties from God, and not return a daily song.

As each gleaming wave of the sea reflects the light of the sun, so let each ripple of our life flash with gratitude for the benediction of heaven. All good comes from the Altogether Good, who is of good the essence, the Creator, and the Giver. Especially is this true of all *spiritual* blessing—of such goodness as comes not so much from benevolence to creatures as from mercy to sinners.

As a being, I am grateful that my Creator is kind to me. But as a sinner, if my Judge smiles upon me, I admire His exceeding grace. His justice had left me unblest to perish through my sin, if His mercy had not found a way to spare and to cleanse. You who know not only your insignificance, but also your unworthiness, are held under special bonds to lift up your hearts in fervent gratitude to the Lord.

I remark next, that temporal mercies are always best when they come in their proper order. I have no doubt our text includes both temporal and spiritual good, but certainly the temporals are arranged in the second rank, for the eighth verse runs—“I will cleanse them from all their iniquity, whereby they have sinned against me; and I will pardon all their iniquities, whereby they have sinned, and whereby they have transgressed against me.”

And after this we have mention of goodness and prosperity. After pardon, peace and plenty are golden blessings—without it they might prove a curse. To an unforgiven sinner the richest enjoyments of this life are as the food which fattens the bullock for the slaughter. But when sin is pardoned, common mercies become tokens of a Father’s love, and ripen beneath the sun of divine love into an inexpressible sweetness.

The children of God bless God for bread and water, because God has made these things matters of promise, and they come as covenant provisions. Cheered by grace, the child of poverty finds contentment in that which else might seem but prison fare. Much or little must depend upon the way in which you look upon it, and what to the believer is enough, might be to the worldling a mere pittance, because grace has not trained his mind to rejoice in the will of the Lord.

Blessed be God if He has given to us first the fruits of the sun of grace, and then the fruits put forth by the moon of providence. The main thing is to be able to sing, “Bless the LORD who forgiveth all thine iniquities, who healeth all thy diseases,” and after that it is most pleasant to add, “who satisfieth thy mouth with good things.”

What shall I say of the happiness of those persons who have spiritual and temporal blessings united, to whom God has given both the upper and the nether springs, so that they possess all things needful for this life in fair proportion, and then, far above all, enjoy the blessings of the life to come? Such are first blessed in their spirits, and then blessed in their basket and in their store.

In their case, double favor calls for double praise, double service, double delight in God. Let them take for their example the psalmist in the seventy-first Psalm, who found himself increased in greatness, and comforted on every side, and then exclaimed, “I will also praise thee with the psaltery, even thy truth, O my God: unto thee will I sing with the harp, O thou Holy One of Israel. My lips shall greatly rejoice when I sing unto thee; and my soul, which thou hast redeemed.”

And yet, and yet, and yet—if we are very happy today, and though that happiness be lawful and proper, because it arises both out of spiritual and temporal things in due order—yet in all human happiness there lurks a danger. There is a wealth which has a sorrow necessarily connected with it, and I

ween that even when God makes rich, and adds no sorrow therewith, yet He makes provision against an ill which otherwise would surely come.

Let me remind you of that memorable passage, “There the glorious LORD will be unto us a place of broad rivers and streams.” The Lord is all that to His believing people. But then broad rivers and streams have a danger appertaining to them, for these are waterways by which the pirates of the sea approach a city and plunder it—and hence for Zion’s protection it is added, “Wherein shall go no galley with oars, neither shall gallant ship pass thereby.”

Thus the Lord gives the benefit without the danger naturally attendant upon it. He gives peace, but prevents carnal security. And He gives happiness, but prevents the pride and presumption which are too apt to grow out of it.

The text speaks of goodness and prosperity procured for us, and then tells us that all danger which might arise out of it is averted by a gracious work upon the heart. The Lord sends a chastened joy—“They shall fear and tremble.” Instead of unduly exulting in their possessions, and becoming high-minded and vain-glorious, the Lord’s people are kept lowly and self-distrustful, and thus their happiness brings glory to God, and the Lord’s Word is fulfilled, “It shall be to me a name of joy, a praise and an honour before all the nations of the earth, which shall hear all the good that I do unto them.”

This, then, is our subject—the sanctifying and mellowing of our joy. We shall try to see the Lord’s loving wisdom in this matter, that we may the more wisely love Him, and the more intelligently estimate His prudent conduct towards us. We shall first notice this *toning down of our joy*. And then, in the second place, we shall observe *the feelings by which this chastened effect is produced*. And thirdly, we shall look to *the measure in which most of us can enter into this experience* of a joy, toned and tinted by fear and trembling.

I. Let us think a little about THE TONING DOWN OF OUR GREAT JOYS.

As I have said, we need grace in enjoying both temporal and spiritual prosperity, and therefore I shall speak upon them both. Even when we are filled with holy delight it is hard to carry a full cup with a steady hand. When most lifted up with spiritual joy, we are not beyond gunshot of the enemy. We need the armor of God on the right hand as well as on the left. Even when we serve the Lord, it must be with fear, and in His glorious presence we must rejoice with trembling.

In the cup of salvation there are drops of bitterness, and so must it be—for *unmixed delight in this world would be dangerous*. Unbroken prosperity in worldly things has proved perilous to many Christians. It is no theory, but a matter of sad fact, that many men, as they rise as to one world, sink as to another. I am even afraid that long-continued health of body is not always for the health of a man’s soul. And that to be without care and trouble is not the readiest way to soul-prosperity.

When the sea is smooth, the ship makes poor sailing. Men are bird-limed by their rest and ease, and have small care to fly heavenward. We are apt to lose our God among our goods. Is it not so? If the world’s roses had no thorns, should we not think it paradise, and forego all desires for the gardens above?

If Israel in Egypt had dwelt luxuriously, would a cry for deliverance have ever gone up to heaven? And had Pharaoh been content to ease their burdens, would they ever have marched for Canaan? Alas, we are apt to chill in our desires for heaven when we get to the warm side of the hedge, and hear the smooth side of the world’s tongue. When the flowers of earth charm us, we cast our eyes downward, and forget the stars of heaven—at least, the danger lies that way.

Wise men dare not ask for unmingled prosperity, for they are not sure they can bear it. When first we travel to the south, and escape this land of fog, we delight without measure in the sunshine, and are anxious to bask in it throughout the livelong day. Do you wonder? Yet before long, experience suggests a sunshade, for the stranger finds that his head cannot endure the full rays of the sun.

In the same way, many a man has suffered a sunstroke in his mind, and heart, and character, by making money too fast and prospering too much.

There is a danger of another kind in a spiritual experience which is all smooth and pleasant. You all remember the fate of Moab who had been at ease from his youth, and had become settled upon his lees—may it never be ours. Yet I have seen professors lose their balance while filled with delight. I am not one of those who would speak evil of excitement in religion—men get excited about politics—why should they not be excited about eternal things?

Still, there is a kind of delirious religion abroad which I would have men avoid. Its joys are not calm and quiet, but fanatical and noisy. Be ye sober. Do not give up the reins of your judgment and permit your feelings to run away with you.

Some Christians have been so uniformly joyous that they have grown elated and self-conceited, even as Jeshurun waxed fat and kicked. A few have even supposed themselves to be absolutely perfect while in the flesh—a mere supposition, disproved by their own want of modesty. We have seen brethren carry their heads so high that they could hardly understand a poor believer who was wrestling against sin, and in the strength of God overcoming his corruptions.

They have become censorious, and have condemned their brethren as if they had been appointed to be judges in Israel to set up whom they would, and put down whom they chose. Repose of mind, caused as much by sound bodily health as by spiritual joy, has made men think uncharitably of sick and sorrowful saints, who have been very dear to Jesus, though very doubtful to themselves. Alas! a succession of excitements has, in some cases, bred self-sufficiency, and this has made men light-headed, and they have been carried away by different heresies.

Ecclesiastical history will tell you that some who have boasted of their high spiritual delights have gone far in vain imaginings, and have ended in the worst forms of immorality. It is an extraordinary fact that super-spirituality has often been found to dwell next door to sensuality, and men have turned the wine of holy love into the vinegar of lust.

I need not go to ancient chronicles to prove this—a word to the wise suffices. Even spiritual joy needs a dash of salt, if not of wormwood, to be mingled with it. Holy delight needs to be coupled with sacred grief. Repentance must go with faith, patience with hope, humility with full assurance, and conscious self-emptiness with a sense of the all-sufficiency of Christ.

I would remind you next, that *unmixed joy would be fallacious*, because there is no such thing here below. If a man should become perfectly content with the things of this world, it would be the result of a false view of things. This is an error against which we should pray, for this world cannot fill the soul—and if a man thinks he has filled his soul with it—he must be under a gross delusion.

What is the best thing of earth—but a bubble, tinted with rainbow hues, but unsubstantial as a dream? Every earthly joy has within it the seeds of its own destruction. Oh man, if you did but know yourself, much more your God, you would be assured that visible things can never satisfy the desires of a spiritual being.

As to spiritual joy, I say that in no man's experience can it be long without admixture and yet be true. Never, at any moment, can a Christian be in such a position that he has not some cause either for dissatisfaction with himself, or fear of the tempter, or anxiety to be faithful in service. Our streams of joy blend with currents of fear.

Blessed be God, my sin is forgiven me—this joy calls up its balancing thought—Oh that the Spirit of God may help me not to sin again. Again I sing—Blessed be God, I have gotten the victory over an evil habit. But my song is followed by the prayer—Lord, enable me to conquer all evils, even those which as yet I know not. Thus joy and fear hang like the two scales of a balance—I mean not the fear which love casts out, but the filial fear which love fosters.

If God has preserved His servant in the day of battle, he has no room to boast, for here comes another enemy. Temptations come wave after wave, and having breasted one, we prepare for another. We cannot yet shout the victory, for, lo, the foes advance, squadron upon squadron. Their routed battalions are succeeded by new armies, and it behooves us to quit ourselves like men.

We dwell where in our God we have the utmost reason for delight, but where in all things we perceive the most weighty arguments for solemnity. Rejoice evermore, but cease not to fear and tremble for all the goodness and all the prosperity that the Lord has procured for you.

Once more, *unmixed delight on earth would be unnatural*. We are not in heaven yet, and perfect bliss lives not beneath these cloudy skies, nor within the pale sway of the moon. While we are in this body we groan, though we have the first fruits of the Spirit, for we are in a creation which together groans and travails in pain together until now. Our years must have their winters while the world revolves.

When the Dutch had the trade of the East in their hands, they were accustomed to sell birds of paradise to the untraveled people of these realms. These specimen birds had no feet, for they had craftily removed them, and the merchants declared that the species lived on the wing and never alighted. There was so much of truth in the fable that, had they been really and veritably “birds of paradise,” they would not have found a place for their feet upon this globe. Truly, birds of paradise do come and go, and flit from heaven to earth, but we see them not, neither can we build tabernacles to detain them.

While you are here expect reminders of the fact that this is not your rest. If you could attain to perfect joy on earth you might be justified in saying, “I have no longing for heaven. I am perfectly clear of sin, and care, and trouble—I may as well stay where I am. What need to go further if I can fare no better?”

Let no man dream that things will ever come to this with him. Ah, you lovely flowers of spring, this year you have looked forth too soon. It is strangely mild weather for December, but spring has not yet arrived. Possibly it is so with some of my hearers—because the Lord is smiling upon you, it is very mild weather with your souls—and you dream that the winter of trouble is ended, and that your heaven has begun. Be not deceived. You are not yet—

*“Where everlasting spring abides
With never-withering flowers.”*

Perhaps a touch of frost may do you good by preventing your getting into an unnatural and unsound condition.

Thus much, then, upon the first point, the toning down of our joys, which is wisely managed by our Father’s wisdom and prudence.

II. Secondly, we are to see how this toning down is done, and observe THE FEELINGS BY WHICH THIS SOBERING EFFECT IS PRODUCED—“They shall fear and tremble for all the goodness and for all the prosperity that I procure unto it.”

Why fear and tremble? Is not this in part *a holy awe of God’s presence*? Remember that text, “Work out your own salvation with fear and trembling, for it is God which worketh in you both to will and to do of his good pleasure.” The argument for fear and trembling is the work of God in the soul. Because God is working in you, there must be no trifling. If the eternal Deity deigns to make a workshop of my nature, I too must work, but it must be with fear and trembling.

So, then, the blessed presence of God is the believer’s joy, and the very fact that He has worked it in him is a cause for the fear and trembling which comes over the spirit of the joyous believer. And that, I think, is the first meaning of our text.

God has been very good to me, unspeakably good to me, and I have plainly seen the traces of His fatherly hand in my life. Yes, I have so seen them that I have cried out with adoring amazement in many a Bethel, “How dreadful is this place! It is none other than the house of God and the very gate of heaven.”

So has it been with you, dear friends. When God has come very near to you in a blaze of mercy, when He has done things that you looked not for, when your mouth has been filled with laughter, and your tongue with singing because of His goodness, have you not at the same time felt overcome by the

excess of His favor? Have you not been able to sympathize with Peter when, at the sight of his boat full of fish, he cried, “Depart from me, for I am a sinful man, O Lord”? Have you not felt a solemn trembling like Manoah when he feared that he must die because he had seen an angel of the Lord?

I know it has been so with you. A little mercy would have made you sing, but a great mercy has made you sit in silence before the Lord, or fall on your knees in adoration. A common providence would have charmed you, but an extraordinary providence has overwhelmed you. You have lain in the dust at Jesus’ feet, feeling yourself to be but dust and ashes—and yet every particle of dust has been full of wondering love to God.

This is one way in which God keeps His people right in the days of their joy—where a shallow drink might have intoxicated—He gives so deep a draught that the danger is past, and holy wonder takes the place of unholy pride.

But next to that there rises up in the mind of every favored Christian *a deep repentance for past sin*. He asks himself this question, “How could I have lived as I have done when God has entertained such love towards me?” When I discovered the election of God’s grace, and when I saw at what a price I had been redeemed by our Lord Jesus, I was ashamed of all my evil ways.

When I read my name inscribed on the palms of Jesus’ hands, when I understood that I was united to Him by a union that never could be broken, I said to myself, “What a thousand fools I have been to have lived forgetful of my highest glory, unmindful of my dearest friend!” To have lived year after year in open enmity against my Lord seemed like a grim and ghastly dream—almost too horrible to be true.

Have you not felt the same? Have you not felt ashamed and confounded at the memory of your former life? Have you not felt as if you could never open your mouth any more because of all your unkindness to your heavenly friend? Such penitent reflections keep the Lord’s people right, by creating a fear and trembling in the presence of His overflowing goodness.

Let me ask you another question. Has not your *deepest sense of unworthiness* come upon you when you have been conscious of superlative mercy? When the Lord has scourged and chastened you, you have seen your sins in your sorrows, and have been ashamed, but by the memory of His great goodness, you have been far more corrected and humbled.

When our secret sins are set in the light of God’s countenance, it is a light, indeed! Oh, the shame my soul has known when the Lord has caressed me, when He has kissed me with the kisses of His mouth. Then I have said, “Ah, Lord, whence is this to me? What am I that You deal thus lovingly with me?”

It was when JEHOVAH came and showed Himself to Job, not in chastening, not with fire of God, or whirlwind, nor with sore boils and blains, but as his own dear covenant God—it was then that Job said—“Now mine eye seeth thee, therefore I abhor myself in dust and ashes.” Love makes the crimson of sin more red than ever. Blood-bought pardon makes sin look black as sackcloth of hair. I tell you, sirs, it is not the flames of hell, but the glories of heaven that most of all fill us with trembling before the Lord.

Nothing touches the heart like undeserved and unexpected love. Love’s glance flashes to the very core of the heart, and makes the offender, like Peter, go forth and weep bitterly. Do we not each cry, “Would God I could never sin again. Oh, that I could perfectly serve my God without a slip, even to my last day, because of His great love for me.” We tremble and are afraid, because of the unutterable grace which has met our utter unworthiness and rivaled it, until grace has gotten unto itself the victory.

Have you never noticed how the Lord brings His people to their bearings, and keeps them steady, under a sense of great love, by suggesting to their hearts the question, “*How can I live as becomes one who has been favored like this?*”

Did you ever feel that the glory of the palace of love made you afraid to dwell in it? When you have put on your best apparel, those garments which are whiter than any fuller on earth could make them—the matchless righteousness of God—have you not felt fearful of defiling your robes?

Did you ever see yourselves adorned as a bride for her husband in all the gifts and graces of the Holy Spirit, and have you not said to yourselves “What manner of people ought we to be?” You have scarcely known which way to turn, or how to move. You feared to walk lest you should defile those silver sandals, and those feet so newly washed. You did not know what to touch for fear you should stain those hands which Christ had jeweled with His love, and made white as ivory with His effectual cleansing.

Have you not felt as if you dared not speak till you had prayed, “Lord, open thou my lips”? You have been afraid to look for fear your eyes should glance on evil, and therefore you have prayed, “Turn mine eyes away from beholding vanity.” There has been such a fear, such a caution, such a holy jealousy upon you that instead of being lifted up by favor, you have been humbled by it.

Grace never makes a man vain. When a soul is adorned with glory and beauty, and made to shine like the star of the morning, it owns its borrowed comeliness and brightness—and is mildly radiant with reflected rays. When raised up by the special favor of our God into communion with Himself, we are afraid of trespassing against the decorum of almighty love, fearful of violating the propriety of sovereign grace.

The Lord our God is a jealous God, and He will be had in reverence by those who are round about Him. This fact has made us feel like those apostles who were filled with fear as well as with great joy. To know how to behave ourselves in the house of God has been our anxiety. We have felt like a poor countryman, bred and born in the wilds, who finds himself in a court, and feels strange in such a place. Thus have we been clothed with humility as we have worn the garments of praise. Exalted to be kings and priests, our kingdom and priesthood have called forth our careful thought, and vainglory has thus been banished.

And have you never felt *a fear lest God’s goodness should be abused by you?* I have been smitten to the very heart as with a secret blow in moments of delight, when I have thought, “And suppose, after all, I should not serve God faithfully in my favored position, and should not be approved of Him at the last? What if I should seem to be an apostle and prove to be a Judas? What if I should speak of Christ, and yet be nothing better than a sounding brass or a tinkling cymbal?”

That heart-piercing fear will wound pride if anything will. Have you never been thus put to the question by your conscience? Have not other questions arisen of a similar character? You have seen your children around you, and you have been happy with them, but have you not thought, “What if I should not train them aright, and they should grow up to be a sorrow to me, and a dishonor to the church of God?”

When prospered in business, have you never said to yourself, “What if I should become a worshipper of the golden calf? What if covetousness should eat out the heart of my devotion? What if, when my Master calls me to account for my talents, He should cast me away for having hid them in a napkin?”

Have you never been tried by such thoughts? If you have never thus examined yourself, you had better do so at once. He who has never questioned his own condition had better make an immediate inquiry. He who has never felt great searchings of heart needs to be searched with candles. It is idle to take things for granted, for all of us must be tried by fire, and even “the righteous scarcely are saved.” No man’s hell shall be more terrible than that of the self-confident one who felt so sure of heaven that he would not take the ordinary precaution to ask whether his title deeds were genuine or no.

One more thought may also occur to the most joyous believer. He will say, “*What if after rejoicing in all this blessedness I should lose it?*” “What,” cries one, “do you not believe in the final perseverance of the saints?” Assuredly I do, but are we saints? There’s the question.

Moreover, many a believer who has not lost his soul has, nevertheless, lost his present joy and prosperity, and why may not we? The good man has shone as a star of the first magnitude, but suddenly he has dwindled into darkness. He has been unwatchful, and in consequence, by the dozen years together, he has had to go softly in the bitterness of his soul.

We have known fathers in Israel who have stepped aside, and though they have by deep repentance found their way to heaven, they have gone sorrowing thither.

Look at David's history. Who was happier all the early part of his life? Note that one sin with Bathsheba, and ask who more tried and troubled than David throughout the rest of his pilgrimage? The doctrine of final perseverance was never intended for the comfort of any who are afraid of self-examination, or who are not watchful—for it is by no means at variance with the other doctrine that many who made sure of heaven in their own minds will never enter there, because Jesus never knew them.

Great joy may be only a meteor, great excitement may be a mirage of the desert, great confidence may be a will-o'-the-wisp luring to destruction. The highest seats in the synagogue do not secure for their occupants a place among the shining ones above.

Many rejoicing professors will yet discover that their spot was not the spot of God's people, and their song was not the new song which God puts into the mouth. And what if that should be your case and mine?

So, when I stand upon my high mountain, let me pray, "Lord, hold thou me up." Let him that thinks he stands, take heed lest he fall, for he is the man who is most in danger. He who is fullest of holy delight is still to watch, for did not Jesus say, "What I say unto you I say unto all, watch"? God grant that we may be helped to watch against the arrow which flies by day as much as against the pestilence which walks in darkness.

Thus you see how the Lord, by working upon our innermost feelings, sobers us in the hour of joy, even as the text has it—"They shall fear and tremble for all the goodness and for all the prosperity that I procure unto it."

III. By way of practical application, let us now consider THE MEASURE IN WHICH YOU AND I CAN ENTER INTO THIS EXPERIENCE.

I thought to myself, if I begin to make individual applications I shall have before me a never-ending task, because every man has had a distinct experience of this truth if he has safely stood upon the high places of joy. We have hundreds of us perceived the benefits of the dark lines and shadings of life's picture, and we see how fit and proper it is that trembling should mingle with transport.

As the fruit of experience I have learned to look for a hurricane soon after an unusually delightful calm. When the wind blows hard, and the tempest lowers, I hope that before long there will be a lull—but when the seabirds sit on the wave, and the sail hangs idly, I wonder when a gale will come.

To my mind there is no temptation so bad as not being tempted at all. The worst devil in the world is when you cannot see the devil at all, because the villain has hidden himself away within the heart, and is preparing to give you a fatal stab.

***"More the treacherous calm I dread
Than tempests thundering overhead."***

This general statement may suffice, and as I cannot make an application to each one personally, I think I will apply the truth to this church as a whole.

When this building was not yet ready for opening, we held a meeting in it, and I remember among the speakers there was one who is now with God, Mr. Jonathan George, of Walworth. And he made use of this text in a little speech that he made—he said, "It would be well for us all to remember, when God blesses us with any measure of prosperity, that prosperity is very hard to bear.

"How is that? Cannot Christianity or the grace of God bear it? No, it is because of the extreme carnality and pride of our hearts. Here is a portion of Scripture we should all recollect—'They shall fear and tremble for all the prosperity that I send.'

"It is a blessing when God has succeeded our poor efforts, and poured out a blessing upon us, if we are jealous of our own hearts, and fear and tremble. Oh God, how rich, how beneficent You are! Let us

not lose Your full blessing by our own pride, by pointing to some second cause, and saying, 'It was I. It was ourselves. It was our ministers.'"

Verily I say unto you, the words of the man of God have been fulfilled. How I have feared and trembled because the Lord's mercy to us has been so extraordinary. As a church we have enjoyed so many years of growth, and prosperity, and unity, and happiness, that one is apt to fear that it cannot last much longer. Certainly it cannot be perpetuated except by fresh power from the Lord who is wonderful in working.

One begins to think, "Must not something happen to spoil our concord? Will power always continue with the Word preached? Will not the candle burn low in the socket? Such holy jealousy, if faith be also active, will help to keep us right. Evils may be prevented by the foresight of them. Through grace, by our fear of falling, we may be helped to stand.

Brethren, we are just now in a critical time of our life as a church. Whatever of novelty there was about our movements has long since vanished—and those who came among us from curiosity know us no more. Your pastor's ministry cannot be expected to be as fresh and vigorous as it used to be, for upon his head the grey hairs far outnumber the darker ones—and perhaps grey hairs are stealing over his preaching too. If natural vigor fails, now is the time to see whether the power which has sustained us is of God or no. We know what the answer to the text will be—out of weakness we shall be made strong.

Besides, my brethren, certain invaluable helpers who were with us in the beginning—and rare men they were—are going home. One by one our leaders are being called away—will more be found? Will they be of equal worth and weight? I know they will, yet these are solemn questions. We are in the middle of the river now, and in the middle the river is deepest and hardest to ford.

Now we need that underneath us there should be the everlasting arms. I am weaker than ever. You also are weaker than ever—but the eternal God faints not. We have the same old Gospel, and you will not grow tired of it, though it is preached by the same old Spurgeon. The Holy Spirit will abide with us, and that will make up for the weakness of our spirit. You who have been earnest at prayer will not, I hope, lose your zeal, for the mercy seat is still accessible.

To persevere is the difficulty. It would be easy to burn at a stake for five minutes, but to be surrounded with smoldering faggots of green wood, and to burn by slow degrees, would be torture indeed. Yet such is the patience of saints. Keeping up your burning zeal, your personal holiness, your evangelizing efforts, and all your spiritual works after twenty-seven years is no mean test of your faith. He that endures to the end, the same shall be saved.

Yes, brethren, these are the thoughts that come into my mind, and prevent me ever saying we have done well, and may rest on our oars. Far from anything like exaltation or self-congratulation, I feel more than ever inclined to lie low at the feet of my Master, and kiss the very dust He stands upon. I feel more disqualified, more unsuitable, more unable for my Lord's work than ever—and yet I am glad in the Lord, and find joy in His name.

Since there is an everlasting arm that never can be palsied—since there is a brow that knows no wrinkle, and a divine mind that is never perplexed—we go forward in hope, and cast ourselves upon our eternal helper once again.

You have heard of the ancient giant Antaeus, who could not be overcome, because as often as Hercules threw him to the ground, he touched his mother earth, and rose renewed. Such be your lot and mine, often to be cast down, and as often to rise by that downcasting. "When I am weak then am I strong."

Let us glory in infirmity, because the power of Christ does rest upon us. Let us be content to decrease that Christ may increase—to be nothing that Jesus may be all in all. If we do fear and tremble for all the goodness that God has procured for us, it is not a fearing that *He* will change, or a trembling lest *He* should be defeated. The fear and trembling are for ourselves—not for Him.

I have no fear and trembling about the Gospel. I have preached it many years in this place, and its attractive perfume is undiminished. I read the other day of a grain of musk which had been kept for ten

years in a room wherein the air was perpetually changed—it scented that chamber from year to year—and yet when it was weighed by the most delicate scales—no diminution of its bulk was apparent.

So the Gospel continues to be as ointment poured forth, savoring the thousands that come hither year by year—and yet it is as full of fragrance and freshness as ever—and so shall it be even if for a thousand ages it should be our theme.

Come we then with comfort back to the unalterable Gospel, to the undying Spirit, to the unchanging God—here is room for joy unspeakable and full of glory. Up with your banners then! Forward to new victories! In the name of the God of Jacob let us be steadfast, unmovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord. Amen.

PORTION OF SCRIPTURE READ BEFORE SERMON—PSALM 103

HYMNS FROM “OUR OWN HYMN BOOK”—249, 808, 809

Taken from The Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit C. H. Spurgeon Collection. Only necessary changes have been made, such as correcting spelling errors, some punctuation usage, capitalization of deity pronouns, and minimal updating of a few archaic words. The content is unabridged. Additional Bible-based resources are available at www.spurgeongems.org.

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