

THE GENERAL CONVOCATION AROUND MOUNT ZION

NO. 1689

A SERMON
DELIVERED ON LORD'S-DAY MORNING, NOVEMBER 5, 1882,
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AT THE METROPOLITAN TABERNACLE, NEWINGTON.

“But you are come unto mount Zion, and unto the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, and to an innumerable company of angels, to the general assembly and church of the firstborn, which are written in heaven, and to God the Judge of all, and to the spirits of just men made perfect, and to Jesus the mediator of the new covenant, and to the blood of sprinkling, that speaks better things than that of Abel.”
Hebrews 12:22-24.

THE whole passage will be considered, but our special central text will be verse twenty-three, “To the general assembly and church of the firstborn, which are written in heaven.”

Paul is displaying the superiority of the new covenant to the old. He tells us what Israel after the flesh came to at their best in the morning hours of the law, and what the firstborn after the Spirit have come to under the Gospel. He pictures the great assembly of the chosen people round about Mount Sinai, and then His inspired mind describes an infinitely larger and happier gathering, to which all believers have come, around Mount Zion. Not only the Hebrews to whom he was writing, but all the people of God are gathered together in one general assembly, of which the blessed God is the center. He shows us the joyful difference between the two gatherings, and the feelings and pursuits of those who compose them.

What we shall want this morning is a little careful attention to the deep meaning of the text, and an intensely earnest desire to actually enter into the enjoyment of the privileges which are herein set before us. Our text contains an incalculable wealth of meaning, it is written according to God's riches in glory by Christ Jesus. Surely it was written as with a pen of diamond upon plates of gold set with jewels. May God of His grace lead us fully into it.

We would not only speak of privilege as possible, but would say with Paul, “We are come unto it.” As surely as we *are not* come to the terrors of the law, so surely we *are* come to the blessings of the Gospel. Read in verse eighteen, “You are not come,” and then in verse twenty-two, “But you are come.” We do not only *hear* of Zion and her festivities, but *we are come* to them. We do not merely know the letter of the Gospel, but we are come into the inner and spiritual meaning of it by personal enjoyment. “We are come.” I would ring out those words as a sort of musical accompaniment to the truths uttered. All through the sermon let our hearts rejoicingly say, “We are come.” “We are come.” We have obtained by faith all that which is set before us in the text.

I. First, I want to set out, as I may be able, A CONTRAST PRESENTED IN THE ENTIRE PASSAGE which we have read—a contrast between the economy of law and the economy of grace.

Every good thing is enhanced in value by its opposite. Light is all the brighter to eyes which have wept in darkness, food is all the sweeter after you have known hunger, and Zion is all the fairer because of Sinai. The contrast between free grace and law makes grace appear the more precious to minds that have known the rigor of the commandment.

The contrast presented here is sevenfold. It may be that the idea of this sevenfold contrast first occurred to Bengel, that prince of critics, but I have ventured to differ from his form of it, and I hope that in so doing I have set forth the contrast as to the seven things more clearly than he has done, so that even the humblest here will catch each point, and retain each contrast in his memory. Notice the contrasts.

First, as to *place* (v. 18), “You are not come unto the mount that might be touched,” (v. 22), “but you are come unto mount Zion, and unto the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem.” Behold Sinai with its rugged crags, scarcely had a human foot ever trodden it, perhaps until that hour in which JEHOVAH descended upon it in splendor it had remained a virgin peak, which the foot of man had never polluted. There was no habitation of man upon it, neither did it yield pasturage for flocks.

The mount of God stood out in terrible sublimity against the sky, holding communion with the stars, but refusing to deal with men. It was sublime, but stern and tempest-beaten. God came upon Sinai with His law, and the dread mount became a type of what the law would be to us. It has given us a grand idea of holiness, but it has not offered us a pathway thereto, nor furnished a weary heart with a resting place, nor supplied a hungry soul with spiritual food.

It can never be the place where congregated multitudes erect a city for themselves, and a temple for the living God, it is not the shrine of fellowship, but the throne of authority and justice. The Jews under the law had that stern hill for their center, and they compassed it about with pale countenances and trembling knees. We gather to quite another center, even unto the palace-crowned steep of Zion. There David dwelt of old, and there David’s Lord revealed Himself. The hill of Zion rose above the city of Jerusalem, and the two together formed the favored spot where JEHOVAH deigned to dwell in solemn state in the midst of His chosen nation, “For the LORD has chosen Zion; he has desired it for his habitation.”

There the service of His sanctuary was carried on, and around it clustered all the palaces of Judah and the habitations of the chosen people. It was called “the city of vision,” and the city of peace. God dwelt in the midst of her, and therefore she was not moved. “Beautiful for situation, the joy of the whole earth, is Mount Zion.” “God is known in her palaces for a refuge.” “God shall help her and that right early.” This is a type of the dispensation in which the Lord comes to man in a vision of peace, and manifests Himself in forgiving grace. The Lord dwells with men in the person of the man Christ Jesus, and we come to Him and find our habitation in Him in all generations. Even as the sparrow has found a house, and the swallow a nest for herself, where she may lay her young, so we do come to dwell at the altars of God, in the city which His grace has founded and His power has garrisoned. The places in their contrast are full of teaching.

This mount that might be touched we are told, in the next place, “*burned with fire.*” God’s presence made the mountain melt and flow down. “The LORD also thundered in the heavens, and the Highest gave his voice; hail stones and coals of fire.” Sinai was altogether on a smoke, innumerable lightnings flashed forth around the summit of the hill, and JEHOVAH revealed himself in flaming fire. What, then, have believers come to instead of fire? Why, to another form of fire, to “an innumerable company of angels”—“He makes his angels spirits, his ministers a flame of fire.” Some of those bright beings are called seraphim, or burning ones, for they come and go like flames of fire.

It must have been terrible to look up to Sinai and see it casting forth its flames, but it is with delight that we look towards the angels who excel in strength, and spend that strength in the service of the Lord and His people. These are a wall of fire round about us. “Are they not all ministering spirits, sent forth to minister for them who shall be heirs of salvation?” Has He not given them charge over us to keep us in all our ways? It is most glorious to think of the position every believer occupies today, for we are all come where the hosts of God encamp about us.

David said, “The chariots of God are twenty thousand, even thousands of angels.” Daniel said, “Ten thousand times ten thousand stood before him.” The prophet flings his thousands about as if they were mere units. Think of JEHOVAH’S legions. Jesus speaks of the Father sending Him twelve legions of angels in a moment. The Lord JEHOVAH has more legions to send to one spot than the Roman Empire could have mustered in all its length and breadth, and every single warrior of these legions is able to destroy a whole army in a single night, as one of them did when he smote Sennacherib.

What mighty spirits, what flaming spirits, what pure spirits, and what glorious spirits they are, and we have communion with them! We have come to an innumerable company of angels. We do not

always realize it as we should, but these loving spirits are about us as surely as they were around Jacob in his dream. If our eyes were opened we should see horses of fire and chariots of fire round about the Lord's servants. "Millions of spiritual creatures walk this earth, both when we wake and when we sleep." God comes to us by them, "He rode upon a cherub, and did fly." Angels contend against evil spirits, and are our defenders. This, then, is our position, we are come to the countless hosts of our Father's messengers, and not to devouring flame.

Pursue the contrast, and you find on Mount Sinai that there was *blackness*, doubtless made the more intensely black as the vivid lightnings flashed out from it. "You are not come unto blackness," says Paul. What is the contrast to this? "But you are come to the general assembly and church of the firstborn, which are written in heaven." Perhaps you do not for a moment see any contrast, but I will soon show it to you. Blackness is the symbol of sorrow, it is the garb of mourning. Everywhere we associate blackness with grief, but now Paul sets before us the grandest embodiment of joy. The word for general assembly in the original suggests a far-reaching festivity. "You are come to the *paneguris*," to a solemn festive assembly, comparable to the National Convocation of the Greeks, which was held around the foot of Mount Olympus every four or five years, when all the Greeks of different states came together to keep up the national feeling by festivities and friendly competitions which I will explain further on.

Instead of the colors of grim death we see the joyous congregating of all the clans, the glad union of all the children of God who are scattered abroad. We this day, in loving fellowship with the church, are come to the great gathering of God, the holy convocation of saints of every tongue, the central home of all the tribes of His great family. It is a gathering for solemn purposes, for it is a "church," but still for joyous purposes, for it is a national holiday. A solemn joy, a holy delight pervades the atmosphere which the one great church of God is breathing.

You say to me, "Do you mean the church in heaven? "Yes, I mean the church in heaven, but on earth too, why divide it? There is only one church. Here and there, earth and heaven make a little division to our senses, but there is no division in the mind of God, He sees one general assembly of all His people, of all nations, and kindreds, and people, and tongues. Cannot you realize the scene and note the glory of it? Cannot your mind come to the general assembly? Cannot you feel that you are standing in company with all the chosen of God of every age, clime, and place, keeping high holiday with them before the Most High, singing with them His praises continually, and doing Him service with delight? I am so glad not to be alone, but to be one of the general assembly and church of the firstborn, which are written in heaven, I feel ready to shout for joy! What a contrast this—between the blackness of coming sorrow by the law and the joyous whiteness of the garments of those who believe.

Follow the next point of contrast, and you have *darkness* mentioned, "Nor unto blackness, and darkness." The cloud on Sinai was so dark as to obscure the day, except that every now and then the lightning flash lit up the scene. What are we come to in contrast to that darkness? "To God the Judge of all." Possibly it does not strike you with joy when I mention it, but this is perhaps the most joyous of all the clauses of the passage. "God is light, and in him is no darkness at all." What a contrast to the darkness of the law is a reconciled God!

"Oh, but," say you, "he is there as the Judge of all, and that makes us tremble," Why? Wherefore? It makes me leave off trembling when I think that I am come "to God the Judge of all," that Christ has brought me near, even to the Judge, so that I have nothing to dread from Him. What can the Judge do but pronounce sentence of acquittal upon the man for whom Christ has made expiation? What can He do to harm us? Nothing, but much to help us, for rolling every slander away, He will make the righteous to shine forth as the sun in the kingdom of their Father.

We are standing today in the presence of that great God who looks upon His people with delight, and awards to them their several crowns. In this great gathering of the firstborn they wrestle with sin, they run the race of perseverance, they proclaim His honor, and sing His praise. This is, in fact, the highest delight of all the saints—to gather unto their God!

And what follows next? Why, *tempest*. It is said, “You are not come unto the mount that might be touched, and that burned with fire, nor unto blackness, and darkness, and tempest.” All over the top of Sinai there swept fierce winds and terrible tornadoes, for the Lord was there. All heaven seemed convulsed when God did rend it, and descended in majesty upon the sacred mount. But what do you and I see? The very reverse of tempest—“The spirits of just men made perfect,” serenely resting. What more is there for them to do? They are perfect, they have fought the fight, they have run the race, they are crowned, they are full of ecstatic bliss, the light of God is on their brows, the glory of God is reflected from their faces, everything like tempest is far gone from them, they have reached the fair haven, and are tossed with tempest no more.

Today you and I have come where we hold fellowship with the immutably serene, who are resting in the glory which God has appointed them. This is a part of the splendid pageantry of the covenant of grace, and we are come to it.

*“E’en now by faith we join our hands
With those that went before;
And greet the blood-besprinkled bands
On the eternal shore.”*

Faith has brought us into that one communion, in which all saints live, whether they are on earth or in the Father’s house above.

Follow the contrast further, and you come to *the sound of a trumpet*. This resounded from the top of Sinai. Clarion notes most clear and shrill rang out again and again the high commands of the thrice-holy God. You are not come to that. Instead of a trumpet, which signifies war and the stern summons of a king, you are come unto “Jesus the Mediator of the new covenant,” and the silver tones of “Come unto me, all you that labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest.” Here is nothing to disturb the ear, for “He shall not cry, nor lift up, nor cause his voice to be heard in the streets. A bruised reed shall he not break, and the smoking flax shall he not quench.”

No message thunders out, “Stand off!” but holy affection cries, “Come, and welcome! for God has come to you in the person of the Mediator, the man Christ Jesus.” In the person of Jesus we see nothing to alarm, but everything to encourage. Oh, for faith to see with joy the Mediator of that new covenant which does not so much command as work in us to will and to do! Is not this one of the choicest blessings of the position we now occupy, that instead of the trumpet we hear the sweet and saving voice of Jesus bidding us repose in His salvation and be eternally blessed?

The seventh contrast lies in this—together with the trumpet there sounded out *a voice*, a voice which was so terrible that they asked that they might not hear it again. They cowered down under it, like poor, frightened children, terrified by the penetrating sound. They could not endure another word, they begged that the voice would be silent. We have come to another voice, the voice of “the blood of sprinkling, that speaks better things than that of Abel.”

There is a voice from Zion; there is a voice that rolls over the heads of the innumerable company of angels, a voice of the Lord that is full of majesty, and exceedingly comfortable to the “general assembly and church of the firstborn,” who know the joyful sound. The blessed Word speaks life, pardon, reconciliation, acceptance, joy, eternal bliss! Happy people, whose ears have discerned this heavenly voice! “They shall walk, O Lord, in the light of your countenance!” The more of this voice the better—it never wearies the ear, nor distresses the heart—

*“Blood has a voice to pierce the skies,
'Revenge,' the blood of Abel cries;
But the dear blood of Jesus slain
Speaks peace as loud from every vein.”*

We are come to it, for we have been washed in it, and its sweet, prevailing note is filling our heart with music even now.

Now, dear friends, I have set forth the contrast, and I want you to think it out by the help of the ever-blessed Spirit. To all that was transacted at Sinai the people could not come, nor did they wish to come, they kept at a distance, for they were afraid, but to all that is displayed on Zion we may come, nay, what is better, I hope we can say with the apostle, "We are come." We now enter into it, and delight in it, it has become our life and our joy. All that the people saw at Sinai distressed them, all that we see at Zion electrifies us with delight—we scarcely know how to bear ourselves as we think of the wondrous glory of love. We are not warned off, we are not driven into fear and bondage, but we come unto the mount of God, and there we feast, rejoicing in Him, even in all that He is and does. The veil is torn from the top to the bottom, and we have access to God through Jesus Christ our Lord. There I leave the instructive contrast. May the Holy Spirit bless it.

II. I beg you, in the second place, to follow me in what may not perhaps so much strike you, but it is certainly worthy of your attention, namely, A COMPARISON IN OUR MORE CENTRAL TEXT.

Our position is that "We are come to the general assembly and church of the firstborn, which are written in heaven." It is a comparison, not with anything Jewish, for that would not have been suitable, but with a Gentile festival, which more readily lent itself to the apostle's great thought. Let me give you, first of all, a rough sketch.

In Greece, in her happier times, in order to preserve a national unity, the various states, kingdoms, or republics, which constituted Greece proper, held at the foot of Olympus a great gathering, to which none came as participators except citizens of the various Greek nationalities. The object of the gathering was that every part of the Greek nature might be educated and displayed, and the unity of the Greek race be remembered. Poets came and sang verses which they had composed with care, orators stood and discoursed to gain the crown for eloquence, men of all kinds of mental attainments were there emulating each other. At the same time all sorts of athletic exercises for the development of the body were going on.

The territory in which this was held was considered to be sacred. Though the states were often at war with one another, they never carried the war into that particular region. It was a quiet, peaceful, neutral spot. Do you not espy a parallel? No man was allowed to compete in any of the exercises and contests except he had been at least ten months or more in preparation for them. Those who were conquerors had no gold given them as reward, a simple crown of olive leaves was all, but it was thought quite sufficient reward for the most exhausting feats, and for the greatest self-denial, such as resistance unto blood and dislocation of bones.

When the conquerors went home, we are told that they were drawn into their own cities with horses in great state, and the gates were not opened to them, but a breach was made in the city wall that they might be admitted with unusual pomp. The whole business of the paneguris was held in high esteem by the Greek people, and religion lent its rites and ceremonies to render the gathering the more imposing. The apostle, I do not doubt, had seen it, at any rate, the words which he uses properly and naturally suggest it.

Think for a moment! Before us stands the city which is the center of this unrivalled congregation of the firstborn, Jerusalem stands in her place, and the Acropolis, Mount Zion, looks down upon the scene. To the city of the living God the living children of God have come. See how the presence of the Lord brings together an innumerable company! Far as imagination can fly the space is filled with shining ones, who compose the court of the Most High.

Observe the freeborn burgesses of the holy city, enrolled by God that they may participate in the exercises which make illustrious this noblest of all assemblies. See, yonder are the runners and the wrestlers. Perhaps you do not think there can be much festivity about engagements which involve so much of endurance as running and striving for the mastery, but the Greeks were of another mind, and these contests were a part of the pleasures of the festival. How much I wish that we could look upon all

the conflicts, sufferings, and troubles of this mortal life as occupations of the great festive gathering which is now being held in heaven and in earth around the city of our God.

See, yonder is the Judge, the great Umpire of His people's efforts, ready to award the crowns. And who are those sitting in their seats, and looking on? These are they who have taken their turn in these grand displays, and having won their crowns, there they sit, "the spirits of the just made perfect," "the cloud of witnesses." Today, my brethren, you are participating in that great international gathering of all the people of God. Are you not glad to be here?

When I was visiting one of our sick friends he uttered a sentence which stuck to me, and indeed suggested my subject. He said, "I have had some education for heaven in attending the Tabernacle." "How is that?" "Because I have been used to worshipping with a great company of godly people, used to join in the songs of great multitudes, and I shall feel at home among the number that no man can number." Yes, it is sweet to go up with the multitude who keeps holy day, the number adds a charm to the worship, and gives to our hearts a tone of exhilaration which else they might have lacked. Behold, then, the countless bands of the redeemed assembled around the chosen mount!

Brethren, you are not around a blazing mount, nor do you compose a trembling assembly of persons who, like slaves, are afraid of their great and terrible master, but you are come today to the great festival in which earth and heaven unite. That assembly is one and indivisible. Around the throne of the Most High the apostle represents all the saints as gathered to hold one glorious feast. "Has it begun?" say you. Yes, it is going on now, and you are come to it, if you are living by faith as you ought to live you are now engaged in it. "Oh, but," say you, "I am wrestling." That is a part of the festival. "I never thought of that," cries one. But it is even so.

When the national meeting was held at Olympus there were contests of all kinds, and these were not regarded with sorrow, but with exultation. "What! would you have me look at my sufferings and wrestlings as part of a festival?" Yes, I would have you glory in them, and view them in the same high and heroic light in which the apostle sets them forth, in the figure before us. The exercises are now proceeding. The sacred orators are now doing their part, you heard the singers just now. I count it a high honor to hold your attention while I tell you of the glory of my Lord and Master, who Himself contended here, and endured the cross, despising the shame.

Thousands of others are discoursing as I do, for the assembly abounds in the rich gifts of utterance, and everywhere chosen spokesmen are telling out the wonderful wisdom and love of God. Many at this meeting have hymns to sing, or books to write, and all are doing their best to make the assembly a notable one. Look at another class of chosen men, and mark how they are struggling with temptation, warring against error, running in the course, or bearing heavy weights! Yes, that is all a part of the grand display which the Lord is making before all intelligent beings, wherein the power of love, the energy of faith, the splendor of grace, and the triumph of good are being made manifest to the glory of God by us.

"Oh," you say, "I cannot look at my sorrows in such a light." No doubt the men who were wrestling or racing found that for the present it was not joyous, yet they did not shun it, for they had earnestly desired the day when they might be allowed to share in the national display, they counted it a high honor to be permitted to take part even in the roughest contests. None but a Greek could do so. You also have put your name down for a place in the church of God, this is a high honor, to which none but the twice-born, whose names are written in heaven, can be admitted, accept the hardship with the honor.

"Oh, but," you say, "I have run a long time. I have run for fifty years!" Splendid running this! I do not believe that even at Olympus they ever saw a man run for fifty years at a stretch. Keep on! Do not suffer the glory of the day to fail. You say this sheds a strange light upon Christian life. Say, a blessed light, which will delight the eyes and hearts of enthusiastic believers. The Father of all takes delight in this assembly, it is the joy of Christ to look down upon His champions, whose faith He sustains, whose faith He accepts. He is saying to devils, "Look on, and see what lovers of right can do." Look on, you innumerable company of angels, and see what grace can do in the hearts of poor, feeble men and women, making them strong to do exploits.

My brethren, see what feats were performed of old, read the eleventh chapter of this epistle. Remember how the Lord's own elect stood at the stake, and burned to the death without yielding. Think how they were stretched on racks, but would not deny their Lord, were dragged at the heels of wild horses, were roasted over slow fires, or were stung to death by wasps. Their endurance is more glorious than all that can be told of the heroes of Greece. What wonders men have done through grace! God has glorified His name by what He has enabled men to bear and do. This our Lord would have us look at and unite in.

Now, what can we do? God help us to do our best. Oh for grace to suffer more, to give more, to work more, to be more firm in resisting temptation, more pure in all godly conversation! Champions, shall the day of glory decline? The feast has scarce reached its greatest day, let not courage, or patience, or faith begin to flag. May we be jealous for the honor of the chosen race, to which we belong.

Our text adds to the term "general assembly" that of the "*church of the firstborn.*" "Oh," say the commentators, "this is tautology." Not so. The apostle felt bound, after having used such a remarkable comparison, to call us back to the solemnity of the matter, and remind us that it is "*a church*" which is gathered. You and I have come to a great church meeting, where all the saints of God are met at this moment. What makes a church? An *ecclesia*?

These words may help you—they are, first, a people *chosen*, next, a people *called*, then a people *culled*, then a people *consecrated*, and then a people *congregated*. So they do become the church of the living God, separated unto God by His electing love, called out from the world by His effectual calling, culled out by being separated through a work of grace, congregated and gathered together into one in Christ, and evermore consecrated to divine service. This is what you and I have come to. Oh for words with which to speak our joy for admission into such a company!

Brethren, notice that Paul was writing to Hebrews, and the Hebrews no doubt gloried in their great feasts, when all the tribes came up to Jerusalem. Yes, Paul knew all about those feasts, and all that they meant, but this is an assembly to which the Jewish ritual offers us no parallel. Hebrews come to that festival, but it is by no means peculiarly theirs. "They shall come from the east, and from the west, from the north, and from the south." Just as at Olympus, Spartans, Thebans, Athenians, and Corinthians, all came, and melted into Greeks, so will they come—Jews, Gentiles, men of this church, and of that, and they will all melt into one general assembly. It is not a peculiar assembly of Hebrews, but a general assembly of all the firstborn.

Note dear friends, the individuals who compose the company. They are all high born, for they are all *firstborn*. There is but one emphatically firstborn, namely, Jesus Christ Himself, the firstborn of every creature, but being one with Him we become the firstborn of God through the new birth. By our union to Christ, and by the blessed processes of grace, we are made and known to be the firstborn of God.

Now the firstborn among men had the ascendancy and sway in the household, even as, "the meek shall inherit the earth." The day comes when righteousness shall be to the fore. The firstborn had the excellence. "Reuben, you are my firstborn, my might, and the beginning of my strength, the excellency of dignity, and the excellency of power." The saints are the excellent of the earth, in who is all our delight. The firstborn were consecrated to God, and we, too, are dedicated persons, set apart unto God, "for you are not your own; you are bought with a price."

The firstborn were redeemed, so have we been purchased with the precious blood of Christ. The firstborn had the estate, the throne, and the priesthood. Vast is the inheritance of the firstborn of God—all things are theirs, they are heirs of God, joint-heirs with Jesus Christ. To the firstborn belonged honor, "Such honor all the saints have." There are younger brothers in every family who receive comparatively little if they happen to be descended from great lords, but there are no younger brethren in the family of God. They are all firstborn, all heirs, and what is wonderful to tell, each one of them has all the estate, for so infinite is it that, though if I have all, you can have all too, an innumerable company of this blessed firstborn race can have the whole of God to be their portion forever and ever.

But then it is added that they are *enrolled*. As I have already told you, they enrolled the competitors in the Greek festivals, and a man took care months before to get his name set down for a place. Thus God has enrolled the names of His people. They are written—where? In the earth? No, the wicked are written in the earth, but the names of the Lord’s people are written in heaven. In the divine decree that never changes, in the divine heart that never alters, in the divine memory that never fails, in the divine thought that never forgets, all the names of the godly are written.

I do not know how to set this out, but I want you to feel as if you were standing this morning in that great assembly with spiritual exercises going on around you, such as struggling against sin, striving for the mastery over error, patiently enduring pain, and working holy work. The Judge is looking on, with the crown in His hand, ready to place it upon each conqueror’s head, the air breathes perfume, and is full of music, for all around is joy.

When a man suffers, if he looks upon it as punishment, he feels like a criminal tied up to be lashed, but if he knows that his pain is a necessary part of the road to victory, he bears it without complaint. If we all understand that this period is not comparable to a battle, of which the result hangs in the balance, but comparable to those deeds of prowess with which of old men celebrated a victory, then the face of things is altered, and our toils are transfigured.

Angels come down, and poor men and women are lifted up, in patience triumphing, and giving pleasure to their Lord, and bringing honor to that favored city which God has prepared for them. We are here amid the throng, not as spectators only, but sharing in the overflowing joy. Oh, the bliss of feeling that even now heaven is begun below, and the sufferings of this present life are but a part of the glory of the Lord manifested in His people!

III. We will conclude by noticing the third point, which is—A COMING TO BE ENJOYED.

This is the essence of it all—“*We are come*” unto this general assembly and church of the firstborn. How then do we come? A difficulty meets us at the outset. You that have never thought of this great assembly which my imagination and heart have tried to picture this morning, you cannot come. The porter stands at the barrier, and keeps you back. You cry, “Let me come!” No, you may not come. This festival is only for the firstborn, and you are not that by nature. *You must first be born again*, and become one of the firstborn.

The Spirit of God must make you a new creature in Christ Jesus, and then the porter will open the wicket and say, “Come in, and welcome.” Which part are you going to take in this great gathering? Will you fight against sin? Will you wrestle against error? Will you run for the crown? Will you sing or speak? What will you do in this great congress of all the saints? But these questions do not apply until first you are born from above.

Next, you must be *enrolled*. Your name must be written down, not in our church book, but in the church book of the Lord above. I would to God that some of you would be moved to say, “Oh that my name were written there!” The name of every believer is upon Christ’s heart, and hand, and shoulder. If you believe that Jesus is the Christ, if you are trusting in Him, your name is among the enrolled.

If you believe in Him that rose again from the dead, and He is the Author and Finisher of your faith, then come and welcome, you are one of those whose names are written in heaven. The general assembly would miss you if you were absent, yea, heaven itself cannot be perfect if you do not enter its ranks, for all the saints must be there, or else it will not be a perfect gathering. Would you have them mourning in heaven, and saying, “Such a one is not here!” Why, heaven’s songs would be suspended if one child of the family were left in the outer darkness. There must be a believing in Jesus, and then there will be a reception into the chosen assembly.

But you say again, “How am I to get into that assembly? I hope I have been born again, and that my name is written among the Lord’s redeemed people, but I still do not feel as if I were in the festive gathering yet, I feel more like one in the arena contending for very life.” So did many at Olympus. They were fighting and wrestling, and while so engaged they endured great hardships, yet their valiant strife was a part of the grand scene, and they would not have been absent on any account. So, dear friends,

what we must do is this, first—God helping us, let us partake in the joy of the one church. Why should I not be as happy as you angels are? They have not so much reason to be happy as I have, for Jesus never took their nature, or died for you.

*“Never did angels taste above
Redeeming grace and dying love.”*

And you, spirits of the just, why should not I participate in all your joy? What blessing belongs to you which does not also belong to me except the one delight of absolute perfection? Am I not saved? Am I not washed? Am I not clothed? Am I not a child of God—in all things just what you are, except that one finishing stroke—which I am sure to have in due time when I have concluded my wrestling and my running? Let us joy in God today, and surely, even in heaven they know no greater bliss than this. To joy in God through Jesus Christ our Lord is happiness at its highest. May the Spirit of God help us.

If we wish to feel we are among the Lord’s host *let us participate in their service*. There is something for you and for me to do, and to enjoy this holiday we must all take a share in its engagements. Come, brother, quicken your pace, you are not making enough progress in the divine life, hasten your steps, throw away every weight, and cast off the garment which entangles your feet. You, too, dear brother, over there in the workshop, where you hear bad language, and see bad practices—go you in for the wrestling, see what you can do, in the name of the Lord grasp the evil which opposes you, fling an evil custom on its back, and win a victory for purity and truth. Thus shall we each by vying with the rest contribute to the grand result, and share in the general triumph.

And when we are participating in the service, let us next feel that we can *possess the inheritance*. It is “the assembly of the firstborn,” let no man miss his birthright. See how the apostle introduces Esau as a warning, and how he bids us regard our afflictions as chastisements which prove our sonship. Come, then, act as sons, and rejoice in your Father’s riches which are all your own. Let us not remain half-starved through the poverty of our unbelief, but let us be filled to the brim through the richness of the faith which the Spirit of God has wrought in us.

Let us look on all things round about us with quite a different eye, not walking like slaves who dread their taskmaster, and scarcely dare to call their breath their own, but like free men who have even the Judge of all upon their side, and can have nothing to fear in life or death. Deep be our reverence, but high our joy, as we stand in His gracious presence, and with all the blood-bought rejoice with joy unspeakable and full of glory.

At this moment our question is, “Lord, what will you have me to do?” Our cry is—“Here am I; send me.” Use me, my Lord, glorify yourself in me, and while the innumerable company of angels look on, help me to do, and dare, and wrestle, and win, till you shall give to me also the crown of life that fades not away. This will not be a payment of debt, but a gift of grace.

The metaphor of a Greek assembly excludes all notions of wages for work. No mercenary thought entered the mind of a single Greek who strove for the mastery at the assembly. He had nothing to win but a crown of olive. No money was ever given, it would have degraded the paneguris to a common show. Therefore you are not invited to contend that you may win a reward by your own merit. Ours is holiday work which it is joy to perform. Moved by a spiritual chivalry, saints do and dare for Jesus out of love for Him. His service is its own reward. To die for Him is life, to live for Him is heaven. Let others boast their pedigree and nationality; we have reached the august convocation of the ransomed of the Lord who have come to Zion with songs and everlasting joy upon their heads.

PORTION OF SCRIPTURE READ BEFORE SERMON—HEBREWS 12

HYMNS FROM “OUR OWN HYMN BOOK”—885, 852, 889

Taken from The C. H. Spurgeon Collection, Version 1.0, Ages Software. 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.