

A PASTORAL LETTER NO. 221-A

I AM still a prisoner. Weakness has succeeded pain, and languor of mind is the distressing result of this prostration of my physical powers. It is the Lord's doing. In some sense I might say with Paul, "I am a prisoner of Jesus Christ." But ah, my bonds are easier and less honorable to wear than his! Instead of a dungeon, my lot is cast in an abode of comfort. I am not restrained from my accustomed ministry by a chain forged by man, but by the silken cord of God's providence—no rough jailer, but loving relatives and friends attend upon me in these tedious hours of my bondage. I beseech you therefore, my beloved, let your many prayers to God on my behalf be each and all mingled with thanksgiving! Gratitude should always be used in devotion like salt of old was in sacrifice, "without prescribing how much."

And now, though unable to stand in the pulpit, I will endeavor to give you a short address—or rather, I will attempt to express the feelings of my heart in a few broken sentences.

And first, to you my well-beloved and trusty brothers and sisters in Christ and in the family tie of church fellowship—to you I tender my fondest regards, my sincerest thanks, my sweetest love. I feel refreshed by your sympathy and my heart is overwhelmed at the estimation in which you hold me. It brings the hot blush to my cheek and well it may. Tenderly as a husband thinks of the doting affection of his wife; as a father receives the fond homage of his children; as a brother when he is held in honor by all the family circle—so tenderly and even more tenderly, I remember your care of me. The tone of your supplications during my affliction has been grateful to me beyond measure. I rejoice that you have with humble submission kissed the rod—not impatiently asking my recovery but meekly acquiescing in the providence of our heavenly Father—craving most of all that the Lord would sanctify the pains of your pastor and guard with his own watchful eye the flock. "Grace and peace be multiplied unto you through the knowledge of God, and of Jesus our Lord."

Yet again, in the still chamber of retirement I anxiously remember some who would have been baptized on a profession of their faith and received into membership of the church had not my health been thus impaired. Be not fretful concerning this delay—accept it as an ordained trial of your patience. If a farmer has a field of corn severed by the sickle from its native earth, but not yet housed in the garner, is he not concerned lest he suffer loss? How much more, as a minister of Christ, am I concerned for you—the convert God has given me? Oh, beloved, be steadfast! Commit not the great sin! Beware lest Satan take advantage of you—for we are not ignorant of his devices. Draw not back. It is written in the law, "No devoted thing that a man shall devote unto the Lord, of all that he has, shall be sold or redeemed: every devoted thing is most holy unto the Lord." The Israelite might not retract the beast that he dedicated from his fold for an offering—far less the Christian, when he has resolved to yield up his heart, his life, his soul to Jesus! I speak not thus to grieve you. Think not that my jealousy bodes a suspicion, but rather that it expresses my love. "We are not of them who draw back unto perdition, but of them who believe to the saving of the soul." "My little children, these things I write unto you that you sin not."

To those who have worshipped during the past two years in the Surrey Music Hall—the preacher's greetings and his love. You have heard how the Prophet Samuel set up a stone and called the name of it EBEN-EZER, saying, "Hitherto has the Lord helped us." That stone marked the place where the Lord gave the children of Israel a great victory over the Philistines. But it likewise marked the "very place where, twenty years before, the Israelites were defeated, and the ark of God was taken." Let us rejoice, O my people, with trembling! Two years ago that Hall was the scene of such discomfiture, such dire calamity and death as we hardly dare to think of. Surely that was the night of my heart's bitterest anguish. "Howbeit our God turned the curse into a blessing." For 99 successive Lord's days was I enabled to supply the pulpit; no congregation could have been more evenly sustained. Never were sermons more widely echoed. God has acknowledged these services to the quickening of many souls, to the establishing of many in our most holy faith and by them, through His goodness, has the Blessed Spirit stirred up many of my brothers in the ministry to a righteous emulation. "According to this time it shall be said,

“What has God worked!” Ah, sirs, if you knew in what fear we began and with what anxiety we have continued—if you knew the unrequited exertions of those beloved brothers whose names are unknown to fame but whose good offices were essential to keep the place open—if you knew, once more, how many times your minister has prostrated himself as a broken-hearted sinner before God to renew his first vows of unreserved self-dedication—if you knew these things, you would not be backward in that ascription of praise never more meet to flow forth in liquid strains with weeping eyes—“Not unto us, O Lord, not unto us, but unto Your name give glory.” My beloved brothers and sisters, “Be you steadfast, unmovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, forasmuch as you know that your labor is not in vain in the Lord.”

Yet I have other friends. They are scattered far and wide throughout this country and the sister isles. To you let me drop a word. You have received me kindly. Faster friendships were never surely made in fewer hours than I have cemented with some of you. You are of my kith and kin. I will guarantee you that my God has graciously proportioned my strength to my days while I have been among you “in labors more abundant.” When I have labored most for His glory, I have feasted most on the provisions of His grace. And blessed be God, when oftentimes called to visit a people unknown to me, He has given me the key of David to unlock the secret springs of your hearts. No, He holds the key in His own hand! He opens, and no man can shut! Keep, beloved, the word of His patience, and He will keep you from the hour of temptation which shall come upon all the world to try them who dwell upon the earth.

Finally, my brothers and sisters, I am cheered and comforted beyond measure by the joyous hope that on the coming Sabbath I shall again appear among you. This prospect is as oil to my bones and although I cannot hope to fulfill my ministry with my accustomed vigor, yet to attempt to address you will be as rich medicine—as a tonic to my fluttering heart! Brothers and sisters, pray for me.

Yours in covenant,
C.H. SPURGEON.
 November 2nd, 1858.

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