

THE BLESSINGS OF PUBLIC WORSHIP

NO. 2395

A SERMON
 INTENDED FOR READING ON LORD'S DAY, JANUARY 13, 1895.
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*“Two men went up into the temple to pray; the one a Pharisee, and the other a publican.”
 Luke 18:10.*

THIS is called a parable, yet it is rather an incident, an anecdote, a statement of facts. You will observe that our Lord never used a fable. Fables may be employed to set forth that which is earth-born, but a *parable*, which is in itself true, is alone adapted to set forth spiritual truths of God. I say this just now because I read, the other day, an assertion that the story of the rich man and Lazarus was only a fable, like that of Jotham. But the most of our Lord's parables are not only parables, but literal facts; and all of them might be facts. I would almost go the length of saying that all of them *have been* actual facts, and in this case there is nothing parabolic at all. It is the statement of an incident which did literally occur, for truth is best illustrated by truth, and as Christ had nothing to teach but what was pure truth, He illustrated it by truth, and never went into the realm of fiction, or invented a tale, or told a story which was not a fact, much less did He ever teach by a mere fable!

There were two men who went into the temple to pray. They prayed in just the way that our Lord describes, and they went away, the one justified, and the other without a blessing. I am not going into the full teaching of the parable on this occasion, but I want to make a few observations concerning public worship in the Lord's house. Commencing to preach, again, on Thursday nights, after my season of rest, I thought that this sermon should be a sort of preface or introduction to our gatherings for prayer, praise, preaching, and hearing the Word. God grant us a blessing in beginning, again, this holy employment; and may we be in health and strength, and spiritual vigor, and be of some use to the people of God!

I. Commencing, then, I would say, first, that IT IS WELL TO WORSHIP GOD IN PUBLIC: “Two men went up into the temple to pray.”

It is good to pray anywhere. He that does not pray in his closet is but a hypocrite when he pretends to pray in the temple. But, though we pray in the closet; though we get into such a habit of prayer and are so full of the spirit of prayer that we can pray anywhere; it is well to go and mingle with others and openly worship God who delights to be thus worshipped. It was written very early in the history of our race, “Then began men to call upon the name of the Lord.” It has been the custom of the godly to meet for worship in all times. The sheep of Christ are gregarious; this is their nature, they love to gather themselves into congregations, to feed in the same pasture, and to enjoy, together, the presence of their great Shepherd. It will always be so. The more pious and godly men are alone, the more will they love associated worship. If it should ever happily come to pass that each feeble one among us should be as David, and every David should be as the angel of the Lord, yet even *then* we would find strength and help in our service for God by meeting together for united worship. The apostolic command is, “Let us consider one another to provoke unto love and to good works: not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as the manner of some is; but exhorting one another: and so much the more, as you see the day approaching.” Public worship is not everything; if there were no private worship, it would be nothing by itself. To go up to the temple is not everything. The man who does not meet God *outside* the temple will not meet God *inside* the temple, he may rest assured of that.

Yet, it is well, it is desirable that it should be said of us as it was said of the men mentioned in our text, “Two men went up into the temple to pray.” For public worship is, first of all, *an open avowal of*

our faith in God, and of our belief in prayer. If we pray in private, nobody knows it. At least nobody *should* know it, for our Lord's direction is very plain, "You, when you pray, enter into your closet, and when you have shut your door, pray to your Father which is in secret; and your Father which sees in secret shall reward you openly." Our acts of personal devotion must be sacred to God and our own souls, but when we go up to the public assembly; whether it is but of two or three, or of many thousands, it matters not; there is, to that extent, an *open declaration* that we believe in God, that, let others do as they may, as for us, we worship Him, we believe in the reality, and power, and usefulness of prayer, and therefore, in the light of day, before all men, we gather ourselves together to pray! I thank God that there are, in this unbelieving London, so many thousands of assemblies of worshipping people; a public testimony constantly borne to the fact that we do believe in God, and that we do believe in prayer!

Public worship is also, in the next place, *a good way of securing unity in prayer.* A number of persons may agree to pray about one thing, yet they may never see each other's faces; their prayers may blend at the mercy seat, but they must lack an emphatic consciousness of unity such as we have who come together to pray. Our Lord Jesus promised His special presence to the united gatherings of His people when He said. "Where two or three are gathered together in My name, there am I in the midst of them." Oh, dear friends, what should we do if we were not able to come together to mingle our sighs and cries and tears and, better still, to blend our joys, our psalms, our shouts of victory? As we are members of one mystical body, it is but right that we should, as members of that one body, worship together, lifting up the joyous song in tuneful harmony and blending our supplications!—

"Around our common mercy seat."

I think, also, that public worship is *a great means of quickening.* At any rate, it is so to me. I never feel that I can pray as well as when I am in the midst of my own dear friends, and oftentimes, when things are flagging within the soul, to get together with brighter spirits, in whom the life of God is more vigorous is a great help to me. It does not seem so very long ago; although these spectacles and my many gray hairs tell me that it must have been long since; that I used to say to my mother that hymn which begins—

*"Lord, how delightful 'tis to see
A whole assembly worship Thee!
At once they sing, at once they pray;
They hear of heaven, and learn the way."*

Dr. Watts put it very well, and I can utter the same sentiment—

*"Lord how delightful 'tis to see
This vast assembly worship Thee!"*

when the house is full from floor to ceiling—

*"At once they sing, at once they pray;
They hear of heaven, and learn the way."*

Those two men, of whom our Savior spoke, did well to go up to the temple to pray! And *we* shall do well not to cease from the habit of assembling ourselves together for public worship in the Lord's house.

Then, dear friends, public worship is *a part of the great system by which God blesses the world.* It has much to do with the gathering, the sustenance, the strengthening, the invigorating and the extension of the Church of Christ. And it is through the Church of Christ that God accomplishes His purposes in the world. Oh, the blessings that come to us in our public assemblies! Are there not, sometimes, days of heaven upon earth? Have we not felt our hearts burning within us when we have been listening to the Word of God, or joining in praise or prayer? Those houses of God where the gospel is truly preached, whatever their architecture may be, are the beauty and the bulwarks of the land! God bless them! Wherever the Lord's people are gathered together, in a cathedral or in a barn—it does not matter where—it is none other than the house of God, and the very gate of heaven when God is there! And who among us would dare to stay away? As long as we have legs to carry us, and health with which to use those legs, let us be found among the waiting assemblies in God's sanctuary!

For, once more, it seems to me that public worship on earth is *a rehearsal for the service of heaven.* We shall sing together, there, brothers and sisters, not *solos*, but grand chorales and choruses! We shall take parts in the divine oratorio of redemption—it will not be some *one* melodious voice, alone, that shall lift up the eternal hallelujah! I spoke playfully of our Brother Mayers singing the Hallelujah Chorus

all by himself, but neither he nor any other man can do that! We shall all have to take our parts to make the harmony complete. I may never be able to rise to certain notes unless my voice shall be wondrously changed, but some other sinner, saved by grace, will run up the scale; nobody knows how high, and what a range of melody the music will have in heaven! I believe that our poor scales and modes of singing, here, are nothing at all compared with what there will be in the upper regions! There, the bass shall be deeper and yet the notes shall be higher than those of earth. Even the crash of the loudest thunder shall be only like a whisper in comparison with the celestial music of the new song before the throne of God! John spoke of it as “the voice of many waters.” The waves of one ocean can make a deafening, booming noise, but in heaven there shall be, as it were, the sound of sea on sea, Atlantic upon Pacific, one piled upon another, and all dashing and crashing with the everlasting hallelujahs from the gladsome hearts of the multitude that no man can number! I expect to be there, and I remember that verse in one of our hymns that says—

*“I would begin the music here,
And so my soul should rise;
Oh, for some heavenly notes to bear
My passions to the skies!”*

But you cannot sing that heavenly anthem alone, because however well you can sing by yourself, that is not the way you will have to sing in heaven—there you will have to sing in harmony with all the blood-washed hosts. Therefore let us often come up to the Lord’s house, and when we are gathered together, let us again take up the words of Dr. Watts, and say—

*“I have been there and still would go,
’Tis like a little heaven below.”*

That little heaven below shall help to prepare us for the great heaven above!

That is our first observation, then. It is well to worship God in public.

II. Secondly, IT IS WELL TO HAVE A REASON WHEN WE GO UP TO PUBLIC WORSHIP.

“Two men went up into the temple *to pray*.” They went there for that express purpose.

Now, whenever we go to the assembly of God’s people, we should have some good reason; and the right reason is that which these two men had—they went up to the temple to *pray*. I would rather that you came with a bad reason than that you did not come at all. I have known people come to pick pockets, and yet they have gone away with a blessing. I am sorry if any of you came, tonight, for that reason, yet I am glad that you are here. Perhaps friends will prevent you from committing the sin of theft by taking a little extra care of their pockets! I have known persons go into the house of God out of sheer mockery, and yet God has blessed them, for His ways are strangely sovereign. But that is to be ascribed to matchless mercy, and it is not the way we ought to appear before the Lord!

When we go to the sanctuary, we should go for a reason, we should go up to pray; *we should not go merely from custom*. Do we not often do that? Not so much on Thursday nights, I think, for people come, then, because they like to come. But on Sundays it is such a proper thing with certain persons to go to a place of worship that they almost wish it was *not* so proper, and they would like to have a good excuse for staying home! Well, if you come only out of custom, and you do not get a blessing, I pray you do not wonder at it! If you do not come for anything, and you do not *get* anything, do not be disappointed! If you go to a shop across the road, and do not mean to buy anything, do not be surprised if you come out with nothing; and if you come here and do not need anything, very well, you will go away with nothing! Is it not just what you might have expected? He who goes to the river and takes no rod or net with him, will have no fish in his basket, even though there may be shoals of them in the water! So, if we want to be blessed in our worship, we must come with a reason, even as these two men went up into the temple “to pray.”

Neither do I think that we should come up to the assembly of God’s people *merely to hear sermons*. The proper thing is to come “*to pray*.” “But we do hear sermons,” says one. Yes, but I hope that does not hinder your praying! Somebody said, the other day, that people who go to church go to pray, but that we who go to chapel go to hear sermons. My dear friend, that remark shows what sort of sermons you get at church, because those who come to hear us preach pray while we are preaching, and they find that there is nothing that helps them to pray as much as a good sermon does! In fact, there is no worship of God that is *better* than the hearing of a sermon! I venture to say that if a sermon is well heard, it puts

faith in exercise as you believe it, it puts love in exercise as you enjoy it, and it puts gratitude in exercise as you think of all the blessings that God has given to you! If the sermon is what it should be, it stirs all the coals of fire in your spirit, and makes them burn with a brighter flame and a more vehement heat. To imply that hearing a sermon is not worship is really to slander your minister! It must be a very bad sermon in which there is, as it were, a jerk out of the prayers to get into it, for the supplication should lead up to the sermon, and then the discourse should be a continuation of the prayer that has preceded it, and bring it back upon the mind, again, so that all present may pray the better and worship God the more acceptably because of the sermon to which they have been listening.

Still, if anybody comes to hear a sermon, especially as, perhaps, some of you came while I was away, to criticize the preacher, that is not the way to get a blessing! I do not mind if you criticize *me*—you may do that when you like—only you will not get blessed by doing it. But when there are other preachers here, and someone says that he does not like this one, and another says that he does not like the other, then, if you do not get a blessing out of the service, who is to blame? “Two men went up into the temple *to pray*.” And if we go to the house of God and seek to turn the whole of the worship into a prayer, we shall not come away without a blessing! The main objective in all worship is that we get near to God and really pray to Him.

Neither do I think that we should go to the house of God *merely to get comforted and cheered*. That is a very sweet result from hearing the Word of God, but it should not be our main objective in going to hear it; we should meet together that we may draw near to God. If it is the Lord’s will not to comfort, but to rebuke us, and if it is His purpose not to cheer but to cast us down, we shall still feel, “What I received came from God. I prayed to Him, and He spoke to me, and I had special fellowship with the living God, while I was also in communion with my brothers and sisters in Christ. That is what I went for, and that is what I have had.”

The publican teaches us what we should go to the house of God to do and to say. There should be, in God’s presence, *confession of sin*. We should, each one of us, when we draw near to the Lord, bow down in His presence with reverent awe. If the very angels veil their faces when they come near Him, we must humbly bow before Him when we come to worship in His house! He is in heaven, and we are upon earth. He is our Father, but He is also our Father who is in heaven—and we poor sinful creatures can never come into the light of His presence without perceiving that we are full of sin. I have heard some people talk about “walking in the light as God is in the light,” as if that meant that they had no sin. Listen to what the apostle John says, “If we walk in the light, as He is in the light, we have fellowship one with another.” And then, “the blood of Jesus Christ His Son,” is still needed, for even then it “cleanses us from all sin.” Without its continual application, there would be no walking in the light—and the more walking in the light of God there is, the clearer will be the perception of every speck and stain in the character! So, the truer our worship is, the more certain shall we be to *make confession of sin*.

Communion with God and confession of sin should always be remembered by us when we come up to the house of God.

Then there should be *asking for mercy*. We should come as paupers seeking relief. We should come as rebels craving pardon. We should come as pardoned ones still asking renewed tokens of forgiveness; as men, once washed, who still come, that their feet may be cleansed; that they may be clean every whit as they pursue their course on the journey of life.

In the publican’s prayer there is, in the Greek, *a reference to sacrifice*. He cried, “Lord, be propitious to me, the sinner.” “Have mercy upon me for the sake of the great propitiation, the great expiation.” They who come up to God’s house for the right reason, come to find Jesus, to prove the power of His precious blood, to be perfumed with the incense of His all-sufficient merit, and to be covered with His matchless righteousness! That is the right way of coming up to the assembly of God’s people, to speak with Him humbly, for we are sinful; prayerfully, for we are full of need; believingly, for Jesus has offered a sacrifice, and we are accepted in and through Him.

That, dear friends, is the second division of my discourse—it is well to have a reason when we go up to public worship. I will pause, here, and pass a few questions round for everyone to ask, “Did I come, tonight, for such a reason? Is that my general habit, to go up to my place of worship for such a reason?”

Or do I go jauntily, as if it were an ordinary transaction to go up for the worship of God?" I will not propose any answers to you; your own consciences will be able to give the reply. Only let them speak, and God bless the inquiry to you all!

III. Thirdly, IT IS POSSIBLE TO GO UP TO PUBLIC WORSHIP WITH A GOOD REASON AND YET TO FORGET IT. "Two men went up into the temple to pray; the one a Pharisee, and the other a publican."

It was very remarkable that a Pharisee should forget his reason; that is the one point concerning him to which I am going to call your attention: he went up to the temple to pray, but he did *not pray*. He never prayed a word, but he did something else. If it had been written, "Two men went up into the temple to boast," I would give the Pharisee the palm, for he certainly did that magnificently! But as it is said, "Two men went up into the temple *to pray*," then it is certain that this Pharisee quite forgot why he had come, for he never prayed at all!

Well, now, who was the gentleman that forgot his reason? It was *the person who ought especially to have remembered it*, for he was a Pharisee! By profession he was a separatist from others because of his supposed peculiar holiness. He was a man amazingly acquainted with the Word of God, at least, with the letter of it. He wore some little black boxes between his eyes with texts of Scripture inscribed upon them, and he wore others round his wrist. And he had very broad blue borders on his garments, for he was particularly observant of what he read in the law of Moses. And, generally, a Pharisee was a teacher. He was first cousin to a Scribe, and often was a Scribe, himself. He had written out a copy of the law, and he had its precepts at his fingertips! Now, surely, if there is anybody who goes up to the temple to pray, this is the man who will pray. If anybody forgets why he came, it will not be this person! But, listen. That was the very man who *did* forget all about it, and this may be true of a minister, a deacon, an elder, one of the brothers and sisters who prays at prayer meetings, the leader of a Bible class, a teacher in the Sunday school, the best sort of people. "Oh," you exclaim, "we cannot say anything but what is honorable of them!" And yet it was one of this class who forgot why he went up into the temple! Let me remind you church members who make a loud profession, that it was a great professor who went up to the temple to pray and did not do it! What would you say to your boy, who went to a shop, and then came home and said that he had forgotten his reason? And what will you say to yourself, dear friend, especially if you happen to be somebody notable, if it should be *you* who went up to the temple to pray, and did not pray? Oh, do not let it be so in your case! Do not, tonight, leave this house till you have had real fellowship with God, through JESUS CHRIST His Son, if you have never had it before!

How do we know that this man forgot his reason? We know it by what he said. *He did not pray at all*. He said, "God, I thank You that I am not as other men are, extortioners, unjust, adulterers, or even as this publican. I fast twice in the week, I give tithes of all that I possess." By his words he must be judged, as you and I will be; and his words go to prove that he forgot why he went up to the temple. He acted as though he was in his own house, praising himself, instead of being in God's house, where the Lord, alone, is to be praised!

Why did this man fall into this great blunder and forget why he went up to the temple? He did it because *he was so full of himself that there was no room for God in his heart*. He was so satisfied with himself that he felt no need of prayer. He already had all that he required, and he had so much that he could only stand still and overflow with a kind of gratitude to the one to whom he owed everything, namely, *himself*. Though he said, "God, I thank *You*," He did not mean it—he meant all the praise for himself! He was so fine a bird, and had such rich feathers that he felt that everybody ought to admire him as much as he admired himself!

Well now, brothers and sisters, you will say to me, "Has this any bearing upon us?" Listen. Do you ever feel perfectly satisfied with yourselves? Are there not times when there is no sin that burns the conscience, when you think that you are *somebody*, a pattern saint, a highly experienced good old man, a rare Christian matron, and so on? The devil tells you all that, does he not? And you believe him! Or else you say that you are such a smart young man; you have only lately joined the church, yet you have already got into the Lord's work in a wonderful way; there must be a great deal in you. You do not put this boasting into English, because we do not talk English to our hearts when we get proud; it is a sort of Greek which we talk, by which we try to conceal our own meaning from ourselves! Then we feel, per-

haps, that we are getting *perfect*, and that is the time when we forget to pray! And we go into the house of God, and when we come out, we make some remark about the preacher's manner, or about sister So-and-So, whose bonnet is really too smart for a Christian woman to wear, or about our friend, So-and-So, who spoke rather roughly to us. We—WE— WE—we are so good that we can find fault with all others and say, "God, I thank You that I am not as other men are, or even as this publican!" And then we do not pray.

Whenever you get one inch above the ground in your own esteem, you are that inch too high! The way to heaven is down, down, down! As to self, it must sink. Our sense of sin must grow deeper and deeper, and a sense of obligation to grace must be more and more fully impressed upon our heart until we are able to say with great emphasis, though it is in the deep silence of the soul, "God be merciful to me, the sinner!" Otherwise, we shall come to the temple on the reason of prayer, and we shall forget it. We shall go to the closet to pray, and yet shall not pray. Or we shall read the Bible and not find anything upon which to feed our *souls* because we are not hungry, but full. We shall not seek true wealth, because we shall fancy we are not poor, but rich. We shall not go to the source of all might because we shall imagine we are not weak, but strong. If we go up to the temple as the Pharisee did, there will be nothing for us, even in the place where prayer is known to be made.

IV. So I close this discourse with a fourth observation. IT IS POSSIBLE TO CARRY OUT OUR REASON FOR GOING TO PUBLIC WORSHIP. We *can* go up to the temple to pray and *really* pray!

Who is the man who is most likely to pray? According to this parable, it was the publican. *It was a man under a sense of sin.* It was a man who felt that he was *the* sinner, even if nobody else was a sinner. It was this man to whom sin was a reality, not a fiction, and to whom the mercy of God was a real need, and not a mere doctrine, who craved that mercy at the throne of God, and felt that only sovereign grace could give it! It was this man who pleaded the precious blood of the propitiation and felt that only by that way could he receive pardon. That was the man who truly prayed! Oh, have I not, sometimes, gone to pray with a breaking heart, groaning, crying, and longing to see my Lord's face, and to have a sense of acceptance in the Beloved? And I have come away and felt that I had not prayed because I could not use language and words such as I would wish to use; and yet, on looking back, I have seen that it was *then* that I prayed most!

Next to the sense of *sin*, the publican had *a sense of need*. When the need is felt the heaviest, prayer is truest. When the soul is lowest, then the flood of supplication is the highest. I am sure you pray best when you have least satisfaction with yourself, and you get nearest to God when you get farthest from self. When you feel that you are not worthy to lift up your eyes to heaven, it is *then* that heaven's eyes look down on you! The sorrowful thought of a broken heart is immeasurably better than the indifference of a callous spirit. Bless God for a humble mind that trembles at His Word—it is much better than that presumption which puts aside all feeling. There are some who will go to heaven questioning their own state all the way, yet they will arrive there safely. And there are some who never doubted their state who may have to doubt it when it is too late! Anyway, it is a deep sense of *sin*, a deep sense of *need*, a deep sense of *dependence* upon sovereign grace that helps a man to come to the house of God, and to go away with his mission accomplished.

Let us all try to bring our needs before God. Let us sink ourselves in His presence into the very depths, and then let us come and joyfully take what He freely offers to all who trust His dear Son! Let us receive grace at His hands, not as courtiers who have a right, but as those who feel like dogs under the table and yet cry, "Lord, even the dogs eat the crumbs that fall from the master's table."

The publican excites our pity as we hear his groans and sighs, and see him smite upon his breast. But when we know that this is the man whom God blessed, and that he went to his house justified, rather than the other, we no longer pity him, but we seek to emulate *his repentance and his grace*, and we pray the Lord to help us, thus, to come to His feast with a hearty appetite, thus to come to His wardrobe conscious of our own rags, thus to come to His fullness admitting our own emptiness, thus to come to the fountain of eternal life feeling that apart from it we are dead! Then shall we truly pray, even as this despised publican did!

Poor soul, almost in despair, you think, "I have no right to be here. I am so guilty, I am so vile." You are the very sort of sinner Christ died to save! Not sham sinners who have to pretend to be sinners, but

you miserable sinners, you real sinners! Not you who make marks on your skin, like some beggars do, that you may seem to be wounded, but you who are as bad as you can be—you who have sinned so deeply that you feel as if you were already lost, you who lie at hell's dark door, you who are dragged about by the hair of your head by the foul fiend of the pit; you who are in your own esteem the worst of all men! Come to Christ tonight! Make way for them! Stand back, for these are the people He came to save! He has come "to seek and to save that which was lost." Believe that Christ died to save you, and you are saved! Throw yourself on His atoning sacrifice, and it avails for you at once! Glorify Him by trusting Him for your salvation! Let Him be your High Priest, and from first to last, your Savior, and He is yours as surely as you are a living man or woman! Go your way justified rather than the other who does not need the propitiation of the Lord Jesus Christ. The Lord bless you! Amen.

EXPOSITION BY C. H. SPURGEON:
PSALM 122; LUKE 18:1-14.

We will read two portions of Scripture relating to public worship. The first will be Psalm 122, one of David's "Songs of degrees."

Psalm 122:1. *I was glad when they said unto me, Let us go into the house of the LORD.*

"I was glad for my own sake, for I hungered and thirsted to go into the house of the Lord. I was glad for the sake of those who offered to go with me, for I delight to see in others a longing desire to profit by the means of grace. I was glad when they said unto me, 'Let us go into the house of the Lord.'"

2, 3. *Our feet shall stand within your gates, O Jerusalem. Jerusalem is built as a city that is compact together.*

So is every true church of God when it is in a healthy state. There are no divisions, no schisms: "*Jerusalem is built as a city that is compact together.*" It is not a long straggling street, a dislocated village, but all the houses are rightly and regularly placed, and surrounded with strong munitions of defense against the adversary. May this church always be blessed with such unity that it shall be as a city that is compact together!

4. *Where the tribes go up, the tribes of the LORD, unto the testimony of Israel, to give thanks unto the name of the LORD.*

We should go up to the house of God, then, for two purposes. First, "unto the testimony of Israel," that is, to hear what *God* testifies to us, and also to publicly testify our confidence in Him. And, next, we should go up "to give thanks unto the name of the Lord." Especially should we do this when we have been restored from beds of languishing sickness and pain, or when we come up from the house of mourning. But what is there in God's house that should tempt us to go there?

5. *For there are set thrones of judgment, the thrones of the house of David.*

The preaching of the gospel is like the setting up of a throne of judgment, "for the Word of God is quick, and powerful, and sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing, even, to the dividing asunder of soul and spirit, and of the joints and marrow, and is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart." And long before the last great judgment day arrives, and the final assize begins, the ministry of the gospel is God's judgment seat at which ungodly men may learn what they are in the sight of the Judge of all—what their present state of condemnation is, and what it will finally be unless they repent!

6. *Pray for the peace of Jerusalem.*

Ask that she may be free from persecution without, and from anything like disturbance within: "Pray for the peace of Jerusalem."

6. *They shall prosper that love You.*

Neglect of the means of grace is the death of all soul-prosperity. But an earnest love of the house of God, and all who belong to God will bring us true spiritual prosperity.

7-9. *Peace be within your walls, and prosperity within your palaces. For my brethren and companions' sakes, I will now say, Peace be within you. Because of the house of the LORD our God I will seek your good.*

Now let us read a short passage out of the gospel according to Luke.

Luke 18:1-7. *And He spoke a parable unto them to this end, that men ought always to pray, and not to faint; saying, There was in a city a judge which feared not God, neither regarded man: and there was a widow in that city; and she came unto him, saying, Avenge me of my adversary. And he would not for a while: but afterward he said within himself, Though I fear not God, nor regard man; yet because this widow troubles me, I will avenge her, lest by her continual coming she weary me. And the Lord said, hear what the unjust judge says. And shall not God avenge His own elect which cry day and night unto Him, though He bear long with them?*

He hears their prayer a long time because it does not weary Him. It pleases Him! He loves to hear their sighs and cries, but will He not yield to their entreaties? What do you think? Shall not the good, gracious, loving God yield, at length?

8. *I tell you that He will avenge them speedily. Nevertheless when the Son of man comes, shall He find faith on the earth?*

Faith enough to make such prayers as this? Faith enough to pray with importunity? Oh, if we had faith enough to resolve to have a blessing and determined never to cease crying to God *until we had it*, we should have far more favors than we have so far gained from our God!

9-12. *And He spoke this parable unto certain which trusted in themselves that they were righteous, and despised others: two men went up into the temple to pray; the one a Pharisee, and the other a publican. The Pharisee stood and prayed thus with himself, God, I thank You, that I am not as other men are, extortioners, unjust, adulterers, or even as this publican. I fast twice in the week, I give tithes of all that I possess.*

A fine peacock, truly! See how he spreads out his feathers and struts before God, glorifying himself?

13. *And the publican, standing afar off, would not lift up so much as his eyes unto heaven, but smote upon his breast, saying, God be merciful to me a sinner.*

“The sinner,” it should be—it is emphatically so in the Greek. There is a Pharisee, *the* righteous man according to his own estimate, and all the rest were sinners. Here is the publican, he is *the* sinner, and he thinks everybody else is righteous. These were two very conspicuous individuals, the self-righteous man and the sinner! And they are both here tonight! I will not ask them to stand up, but no doubt they are both of them present. Now what became of them?

14. *I tell you, this man—*

The sinner.

14. *Went down to his house justified rather than the other: for everyone that exalts himself shall be abased; and he that humbles himself shall be exalted.*

It is God’s usual method to reverse what man does, and to turn things the other way around: “Every-one that exalts himself shall be abased; and he that humbles himself shall be exalted.” You remember how the Virgin Mary, in her song, praised the Lord for this very habit of His: “He has put down the mighty from their seats and exalted them of low degree. He has filled the hungry with good things; and the rich He has sent away empty.” That is His regular way of working, and He will continue to do so!

HYMNS FROM “OUR OWN HYMN BOOK” — 122 (SONG 1), 999, 607.

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