

SANCTIFIED SORROW

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A SERMON
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*“O thou afflicted, tossed with tempest, and not comforted, behold,
I will lay thy stones with fair colours, and lay thy foundations with sapphires.
And I will make thy windows of agates, and thy gates of carbuncles,
and all thy borders of pleasant stones.”*
Isaiah 54:11-12

WHO can doubt that this promise belongs to the Gentile church, since it has been so richly fulfilled in her history? For many an age the light did not shine upon heathen lands. One spot alone upon all the earth received the genial beams of the Sun of Righteousness. Vast continents, thickly populated, full of life, bustle, and enterprise, lay spread out as a moral waste, barren and neglected. But little revelation of God had found its way among the teeming multitudes of the population. To them the dispensation of the grace of God had not been proclaimed. The mystery of Christ was not as yet made known unto the sons of men.

The Israelites had a monopoly of covenant privileges. But now in these latter days, how wondrously are the tables turned. The branches of the wild olive have been grafted in “that the Gentiles should be fellow heirs, and of the same body, and partakers of his promise in Christ by the gospel.” Thus the Lord has avouched unto Himself a numerous seed once ignored by Israel, “which in time past were not a people, but are now the people of God: which had not obtained mercy, but now have obtained mercy.”

Not after the lineage of the flesh, but according to the nobler lineage of faith, the same are the children of Abraham, and with faithful Abraham do they inherit the covenant mercy of God. This day the barren woman keeps house and is the joyful mother of many children. The Gentile church has her stones of sapphire, God is in the midst of her to make her glad.

Not less fully persuaded am I that this promise belongs to the Jewish church. Among the natural descendants of the old Hebrew Patriarch, the Lord has preserved to Himself a spiritual people. Glory be to His name He has not cast off His people whom He did foreknow. Even at this present time there is a remnant according to the election of grace. Of the Jewish race there is a certain number of disciples, who are witnesses of the truth, rejoicing in Christ Jesus, and worshipping Him as their Messiah.

But the day as yet is dark for Israel, thick clouds encompass her, the veil is still upon the hearts of her children. The converts gathered from her tribes are few in number compared with those from different branches of the Gentiles. Seemeth it not as though her cup of sorrow were not yet drained? God has put the sons of Jacob for a while out of their place as a punishment for their great sin in rejecting Him, whom their own inspired prophets had foretold. But doubt not, beloved, that their future is radiant with hope.

The day will come, and that day may come speedily, when the glory shall return to Zion, and the excellency unto Judah. The fullness of the Gentiles then shall own the Lord when Jewish eyes shall behold and recognize Him, Messiah, Prince of Peace. Well may we look and long with eagerness for that happy era.

If I rightly read the Scriptures, the lost tribes are to be converted first, and gathered afterwards, while the people distinguished among us as Jews are to be restored to their own land, and then convinced by seeing the Man whom they pierced, enthroned with honor and majesty. Here the world’s history reaches a majestic climax.

Once with their day of fearful recompense came our day of grateful visitation. Yes, the day-spring from on high has visited us. What next is unrolled in the scroll of dispensations? If the casting away of them became the reconciling of the world, what shall the receiving of them again be but life from the dead? So let the people to whom this great promise was originally spoken have all the good that was stored up for them in it.

May not, however, this rich consolation be applied to any church that is passing through a time of depression? All the promises of God are like minted gold, of sterling value and intended for circulation. The general principles of the promise may be appropriated by those to whom they are appropriate. Let any faithful church of Jesus Christ be passing through severe trial of persecution and declension, if there be a true likeness to Christ in it, the tempest and storm will eventually exhaust their fury and accomplish their end, afterwards a time of establishing and building up shall follow.

It is said of some persons that they cannot fight losing battles. No such fatality need haunt us. We ought always to stand our ground, for when we have been worsted in the conflict, we have always before us the prospect that we shall at length be conquerors, because our defeats are permitted for our discipline without peril to our destiny. "A troop shall overcome God, but he shall overcome at the last." Where would be the honor of a victory which was gained without a struggle? Is not the prize more welcome when it has been competed for with fag and strain? Do we not account any kind of success the sweeter for the toil expended and the difficulties mastered in reaching it? Are we to expect honor without labor?

Take heart, then, you afflicted church, and faint not in the day of adversity, for God has set over against it the day of prosperity, when you shall be built up with all the riches and treasures of His grace, and when your mouth shall be filled with laughter, and your tongue with singing, and then shall you say, "The Lord hath done great things for us, whereof we are glad."

If, now, my text thus stands good to the Gentile church, and to the remnant of Israel, and if it may serve to cheer and encourage the little Christian churches, not in our own land only, but in all the regions of the earth where Christ is preached, may it not in like manner be applied to the experience of individual believers, and may we not find in it a rich draught of consolation for ourselves?

Depend upon it, brethren, our period of trial and suffering will come to a close, and it will be overruled in the gracious providence of God to the promotion of our best prosperity and our highest interests. We may be afflicted and tossed with tempest, but for this very cause ultimately we shall have our foundations laid in sapphire, and our stones with fair colors. I will endeavor to work out this one thought in respect to three kinds of distress which are wont to raise a tempest in the believer's soul.

The first is *the great life storm in which we are turned from darkness to light*, and from the power of Satan to God, the second, *the common life storms in which divers afflictions befall us*, and manifold temptations try our faith, and the third is *the last storm, which brings with it the wreck of our frail bark* after all its tossing on the troubled sea of life, *the death of the body*, then no more fatigue, no more distress, for we shall enter the haven of rest, and enjoy an endless peace.

Now, with regard to—

I. THE DAWN OF OUR SPIRITUAL LIFE.

Is it not true that well-nigh every Christian is born of a storm? We are driven to Christ through stress of weather. We look to Him because we have nowhere else to look for shelter. We drift to Christ, all of us, as mariners that are hard on rocks, with all our righteousness wrecked, and all our other hopes gone to the fore.

That first storm with some of you may have lasted long. For months or years, it may have threatened your destruction. You remember it, and you think of it now that the tempest has spent itself, that the sky is clear, and you have come to rest calmly in Jesus Christ. Do you think that you lost anything by that storm? Do you not know that you gained much? You lost what it was good for you to lose. You gained the very blessings which you were most in need of.

Do I speak to one who is at this hour in the very midst of such a trial? He that sits in the heavens looks down upon you through this storm, and says to you, "O thou afflicted, tossed with tempest, and

not comforted, behold, I will lay thy stones with fair colours.” You are afflicted with a sense of sin, the direst and sharpest of all afflictions. The arrows of adversity are blunt in comparison with those of guilt. Afflictions without sin to aggravate them are as a knife without an edge, they do not cut deep. But when there is sin to whet the blade, then the knife cuts to the very bone.

What are those sins which now wring your hearts with anguish but the very same sins that once fascinated your hearts with delight. Feeling that God is angry with you, every incident or act of providence seems to you a token of judgment. Terrors haunt you in every gust of wind that blows, and you seek in vain to extricate yourself from your present forlorn condition.

Hold on, man, do not despair. Better to be stricken with pain and suffer the smart pangs of a wounded conscience than go on with giddy step, frothy song, and frivolous talk to enjoy the pleasures of sin for a season, and then find out your mistake when it is too late, because you are swept away like the chaff from the threshing floor. Your afflictions, if they lead you to God, will prove the healthiest discipline and the happiest circumstances that ever happened to you. “O thou afflicted one,” saith God, “I will lay thy stones with fair colours,” as if, in the bitterness of repentance, you did meet with the blessedness of remission, and the brightest sunbeams shone upon you just when the darkest shadows crossed your path, and the heaviest clouds loomed over your head.

Fly to your God, O sinner! Haste to Jesus. Look to His atoning sacrifice. For such an afflicted conscience as yours Jesus bled, He came to bind up the broken in heart, and to proclaim liberty to captives such as you are.

Note the next word, “O thou afflicted, *tossed with tempest.*” Does this describe the heaving and flurry of your agitated breast? Are you tossed to and fro? Once you were at ease, becalmed, aground, and you thought yourself as safe as you were quiet. You had a hope of your own, and you said in your heart, “I shall never be moved.” But that hope of yours was no sure anchorage. It served you not in any stead when the clouds began to gather and the fierce winds began to blow. Then were you tossed hither and thither.

You have tried to find some stay, some grapnel, but alas! you have sought it in vain. You are like a ship which has become the sport of the winds and waves, and now your spirit sinks within you. You reel to and fro and stagger like a drunken man, and you are at your wits’ end. All your wisdom is swallowed up. You cannot lay hold of a promise, you cannot take comfort from any providence, you see not your signs, and yet all this tossing and all this tumult, with the peril in which it places you, are meant for your good.

So, indeed, it shall prove when you cry unto the Lord in your trouble, and He brings you out of your distresses, for notice the prophecy which is spoken by the mouth of the Lord, and say if it should not inspire you with confidence, “I will lay thy foundations in sapphires.” When you shall have a foundation of God’s laying, it will be, verily, a safe foundation, and being of sapphire, this foundation is very precious.

There will be no more sorrow and sadness for you then, but a sacred satisfaction which it were beyond the power of any circumstance to mar. No more shall the buffeting of rough billows and rude breakers toss you to and fro, but throbbings of deep joy, like waves of the mighty sea, shall swell their ceaseless anthem in your ears.

Oh! how you will bless the Lord then that He ever drove you from your refuge of lies, and drew you to a sure foundation upon which you might build, and be built up for eternity. You may be just now the sport of the tempest, high winds may rage within your breast, stormy passions may convulse your soul.

Well do I remember when that same tempest howled through my spirit, sweeping away every fond hope and every fine conceit I had cherished. Ere that I would fain have contented myself with the world and the little ambitions it held out to my view. Ah! I would, but I could not! God’s tempest howled through my soul, and as for me, I was as a tiny leaf in a strong breeze, or as a ball before the whirlwind. Are you passing through such an ordeal? Yield not to the misery and madness of despair.

*“Though plunged in ills, and harassed, too, with care,
'Twere treason to your soul did you despair;
When pressed by dangers and beset by foes,
God will His timely succor interpose.”*

When your present emergencies shall be gathered up into past experience, you will look back upon them as a meet preparation for your better destiny. Every vestige of your own righteousness must be taken away, in order that He may “lay your stones with fair colors, and build up your windows with agate, and your gates with carbuncles.” Are not both in the promise—both the agitation and the salvation. The Lord has promised both.

Mark that word *promised*, how it is used by Paul. “Now he hath promised, saying, Yet once more I shake not the earth only, but also heaven.” Then observe the consequence. The removing of those things that are shaken makes way for another thing, namely, that those things which cannot be shaken may remain. Therefore it is that we, who feel that everything earthly is drifting from under our feet, are favored to receive a kingdom which cannot be moved. Ought not this to reconcile our hearts to trial. Will it not make us rejoice in it, if we have only faith to believe that it will certainly turn out for our good?

The other part of the description—after being tossed with tempest—is this, “*not comforted*.” Is there nothing you can do to get out of this strait? Is there no solace to relieve the stress of your trial? Ah! poor soul! no doubt you have been looking for light, and behold there was darkness, while you have been seeking after relief, your sorrows have been aggravated.

Did you go to the world, and ask sympathy of your neighbors or kinsfolk, the best comfort they could offer you would but wound your feelings. Have you tried the merriments and gaieties of sin, as though you would fain forget the arrows of the Almighty, lo! then, how visions of judgment to come would scare you!

Perhaps you feel you cannot be comforted on earth, then you are in a fair way to get deliverance, for you shall be comforted by the God of heaven. If your sore is such that no plaster of man could ever cure it, glory be to God, for blessed be His name, He delights to find those cases which baffle all human skill. There shall be seen the power of His grace, and then will He send His Word and heal you.

Your extremity of anguish is a token for good, a token that God means to bless you. If your soul refuses to be comforted by man—if you are brought to a stand, in which you wait only for God—then of you is it spoken, “I will lay thy stones with fair colours, and thy foundations with sapphire.” He will perform all things for you and do on your behalf what you cannot do for yourself.

Every Christian will, I think, join with me in confessing that the dealings of the Lord with us have always baffled our own understanding, until we have been brought to see the end of the Lord, as Job saw it, that the Lord is full of pity, and of tender mercy. Our heaviest losses have thus enriched us with our choicest gains. The things which, as they happened, caused us the most terror, have fallen out to the furtherance of our best interests, and in the same manner, I believe, the more you feel the burden of sin, the majesty of the law, and the inflexible claims of divine justice, the sweeter afterwards will be your apprehension of guilt removed by the blood of Christ, of the law fulfilled by His obedience, and of justice satisfied by His suretyship.

Did you sink as low as Jonah sank, when he was in the fish’s belly, and cried by reason of his affliction unto the Lord, when, as he testifies, “Out of the belly of hell cried I, and thou heard my voice,” then you might purge yourselves of all false confidence, as Jonah did, saying, “They that observe lying vanities forsake their own mercy,” then, too, with the voice of thanksgiving you would pay your vow as Jonah did, when he said, “Salvation is of the LORD.”

Take heart now, O you afflicted ones, tossed with tempest and not comforted. Pour no fresh bitters into your cup by murmuring against God and repining at His dispensations. Rather cry mightily and pray earnestly, that the God, who has made your experience tally with the first verse of the text, may give you

to realize the fullness of that recompense which is promised in the next verse. And so shall your sighs be turned into songs. So shall you sing with David, “Thou which hast showed me great and sore troubles shalt quicken me again, and bring me up again from the depths of the earth. Thou shalt increase my greatness, and comfort me on every side.” Happy day, dear soul, when you are delivered from this first storm.

Yet there are—

II. OTHER STORMS OF LIFE WHICH THE CHILDREN OF GOD HAVE TO ENCOUNTER.

After we find Christ we meet with many afflictions, we are “tossed with tempest, and not comforted.”

It seems to me that the prophet has used a very remarkable metaphor. Suppose you have a home—a house rendered dear to you by a great many pleasant associations. Into this cheerful abode one night there comes a fire. You stand with tears in your eyes and see it all ablaze, and you watch it as it goes, story by story, room by room, till all your precious treasures are consumed. You go away and sit down, and wring your hands in agony, for all is burnt up, not a vestige remains. But with the first dawn of the morning an angel appears to you and says, “Come with me to the place where your home once was.”

You go and find that all the stones that made up your house have been turned into jewels, and all the lime and cement have been transmuted into bright scarlet, lustrous colors, and the pavement and flagstones have become sapphire. You go to the door, there are jewels—carbuncles, you look out of the windows, and instead of their being, as before, common sashes and sills, you find agates all sparkling. You are looking almost as if you had Aladdin’s wonderful lamp, which transformed everything.

Well, now I think that is just the thought of this verse, let us read it over again. “I will lay thy stones with fair colours, and lay thy foundations with sapphires; and I will make thy windows of agate, and thy gates of carbuncle, and all thy borders of pleasant stones.” “Well,” you say, “that is the fact, and no fancy or dream to me, I have realized it. A fire kindled on me which raged in my soul, till it reduced to ashes all the goods I prided myself in, my hopes were laid waste, and I was left desolate, my nights were sleepless, and every bone in my body was full of pain, this have I proved.

Then of a sudden there has been wrought in me a marvelous change. My soul has had such joy—such blessing—such nearness to Christ—such delight in His Word—such up-growings of a spiritual temple, richer far than all the palaces of Oriental imagination, springing up from a furnace of affliction as no common language would describe.” Let us just turn over these things one by one, as they are painted to us by the tongue of inspiration.

You are tossed and not comforted, bear it patiently, knowing that good will come to you in a far better and richer shape. Observe how it begins with *edification*. “I will lay thy stones in fair colours.” In the time of trial we not only get the proof, but we get the profit of experience, and these results are laid in fair colours. Do you think it possible for me to relate to you all the salutary lessons that I have acquired in affliction? The truth is learnt thus after quite a different manner from anything taught in the Sunday school.

You may afterwards renounce all the credit you ever professed in the teaching, which stands merely on the authority of the teacher, but when God’s affliction brands the truth into your inmost soul, then you are bulletproof against all heterodoxy, and it is not possible that the doctrine in which you have been rooted and grounded can ever forsake its hold upon you. It has found an entrance into your very soul, is not that a grand means of steadfastness?

Such strong holding cement binds the stones of which your spiritual temple is built, and by such personal experience your character becomes shaped and fashioned according to the truths of the Gospel. Thus, as affliction is not sent without design, one benefit you are to expect from it is that a fundamental, solid groundwork shall be wrought in you.

But, brethren, you will not fail to notice that, while the Word of the Lord is addressed to the afflicted, *the hand of the Lord is engaged very particularly on their behalf*. “I will lay thy foundations with sapphire.” Times of public calamity try our foundation, and so do all times of private affliction.

When the natural emotions are violently excited, all the beliefs and sentiments, all the hopes and aspirations to which men have clung in calmer days, are put to the test, and if they are not well and truly based, they can easily be shifted. This, therefore, is one of the salutary effects of sanctified affliction, in the process of such discipline we get to have the foundation of our faith laid by a divine hand. “I will lay thy foundations.”

The Lord draws near to us and works in us after His own sovereign good will, imparting to us the true faith and the ardent love which are consonant with the truth. Then we have foundations hard as sapphire, and as precious, as unbreakable, as divine. We feel that now we have received the truth, not in the mere abstract, but in its vital power, its moral influence, and its spiritual beauty, as the substratum of our souls, and as a foundation of our hope, which can never be removed.

What a lovely change, too, is made in our outlook! “Thy windows of agate!” Before I was afflicted I looked through the lattices of carnal sense, well contented, though the things of this life and the objects near at hand bounded my view, but now I have been taught to look upwards, and to long for the life to come and the land that is afar off. Now my soul says, “Oh! that I had wings like a dove, that I might fly away and be at rest,” and as I open the window towards the new Jerusalem, I sing—

*“Brief life is here our portion,
Sorrow and short-lived care:
The life that knows no ending,
The tearless life is there.”*

It is wonderful how affliction cleans the windows of the soul. I find the word “windows” here might be much better translated “bulwarks,” “defenses,” as if to show the manner in which we are fortified against temptation, and enabled to resist the destructive force of those strange vicissitudes and perilous undulations that are common to this stormy life.

Have you learned, beloved, to fly to the Rock for shelter? Have you come to hide behind the dying Savior? Do you know the tune of David’s psalm, “Blessed be the LORD my strength, which teacheth my hands to war, and my fingers to fight: my goodness, and my fortress; my high tower, and my deliverer; my shield, and he in whom I trust”? Then your godly sorrow has produced some happy results, not in vain has your spirit been overwhelmed within you. This is a lesson to be acquired in the school of adversity whereby we are brought to rest in the Lord more abidingly than we ever did aforetime, and thus we prove that He has made our bastions of agate.

Still further it is said, “I will make thy gates of carbuncle,” as if to intimate *more close and intimate communion with God*. We come nearer to Christ, think more of Him, spend more time in meditation, get to understand more of His work and His person, set our hearts more fully towards Him and the good things of His grace after the tempest has spent its fury, and the clear shining has followed. Surely, if affliction did nothing more for us, it would be a great boon. It takes away the doors of iron and wood, and it gives us gates of carbuncle, and we say—

*“Come, then, oh! thou sweet affliction,
Thus to bring our Savior near.”*

Right sure I am that many of our tossing and buffeting have produced a permanent benefit which has given tone to our character, and shed a hallowed light over our whole career. Find me a Christian whose conversation is full of rich savor, whose judgment is tempered with charity, one whose fervent zeal is blended with the meekness of wisdom, and I will warrant you, as a rule, he has seen much affliction.

“They that go down to the sea in ships, that do business in great waters, these see the works of the LORD and his wonders in the deep.” Physicians often recommend a sea voyage to their patients. Do you think it is merely for the fresh air they breathe? Nay, I can tell you there is more than that in the prescription. It breaks the links that bind one to everyday life. There is a solitude on that broad expanse

of waters which does not admit of the newspaper or the post office breaking in upon the stillness of your reflections. Your country, your office, your friends, your home, are all at a distance. The communications you are wont to hold with them are broken. And is it not so with Christ's disciples, when He constrains them to get into a ship, and leaves them a while to be tossed with waves in the midst of the sea? Do not they then feel a profound solitude which changes the hue of all their thoughts?

Mind you not what he said who was the saddest of all the old Hebrew prophets—Jeremiah in his lamentations bears this witness—"It is good for a man that he bears the yoke in his youth; he sitteth alone and keepeth silence because he hath borne it upon him." There is no room to doubt it, friends, sorrow is salutary. God's brightest gems have had the most polishing on the lapidary's wheels. The purest, cleanest wheat is that which has had the most winnowing.

We do grow in grace, doubtless, in our times of joy, but I think it is slow work. There are precious fruits put forth by the moon as well as precious fruits brought forth by the sun. Bright days would wither us if there were no shady nights to temper our gaiety. We are like the sycamore tree. Unless we had trials we should never come to spiritual perfection.

Well! we have cause to be thankful if, speaking experientially, we can say, "All the storms we have hitherto encountered have been blessed to us—all our tossing and tempests have furthered our good speed, and all the convulsions that have shaken our house have thus far contributed to its being built up with stones laid in fair colors upon a foundation of sapphire.

And now, lastly—

III. THE SAME HAPPY ISSUE OUT OF ALL OUR AFFLICTIONS WILL HAPPEN, IN A GRANDER SENSE WHEN THE LAST HURRICANE SHALL BLOW.

Then shall this frail tabernacle totter and fall. Then eye, and ear, and hand, and foot, shall fail us. Then back to mother earth shall this feeble flesh return. I know the earthly house of my tabernacle shall be dissolved, I expect it I look for it. The affliction may take the form of grievous disease, the tossings to and fro on my couch may be distracting, it may be that no anodyne can relieve my pain or comfort me. But oh! the glory that is to follow!

This very body of ours—who shall tell what it shall be like? That it shall be transformed and made like unto the glorious body of Christ Jesus our Lord we know. We may patiently endure the cross, since we shall so soon receive the crown, we may placidly go down to the grave, since we shall so triumphantly come up from it, we may cheerfully take leave of our lodgings here, since we have a home in prospect where our kindred shall all be gathered, and our Sire never absent.

Brethren, we are, as it were, in a ship at sea today, tossed with tempest, but we are to be in a palace ere long. You observe how the figure changes, never tossed again, never again put forth on a tempestuous sea. Like buildings and mansions, we shall be fixed and permanent. In that land of our inheritance is a freehold with its foundation of sapphire, with its windows of agate, with its gates of carbuncle. What a sweet surprise for the sons of poverty on earth!

Those jewels, since jewels are always connected with rank or royalty, are meant to betoken the honors in the next world to those who are humble and faithful in their sacred calling here. You shall have such palaces as Oriental extravagance could never emulate. Does it belong to kings to dwell in palaces? You shall be kings and priests unto God. A few more days of languishing, with their faint hopes and fretting fears, their throbbing temples and feverish pulse, ere Christ does bids you come The Master calls for you. You must obey the summons. And what next? Forever with the Lord.

I think I hear you say, "Amen, so let it be." Do notice how three times here, it is repeated, "I will," "I will," "I will." God has said it, and He will do it. Believe and rejoice therein therefore, for it is no fiction, but a fact. Yet a little while and you shall leave your cottage for a mansion, your toil shall be exchanged for rest, your dishonor for glory, your pain for infinite pleasure. You shall find new company and better in yonder world of light. Though you close your eyes on fair prospects below, fairer scenes await you above. Be comforted!

Notwithstanding any distress the last tempest may occasion you, depend upon it, “to die is gain.” You shall lose nothing that it were worth your while to keep. You shall gain all your “capacious powers can wish, more than your imagination can paint.” Press forward, beloved, and may the confidence of a joyous future make you bold to brave the tempest and the storm. Peace be with you.

Alas! then, if you are not in Christ, if you are not a child of God, this promise melts away before your eyes. You have no part or lot in it. May God change your hearts, renew your nature, lead you to receive Christ and believe in Him, then will He give you to be His sons and daughters. So shall your heritage be secure forever and ever. Amen.

EXPOSITION BY C. H. SPURGEON

ISAIAH 54:1-16

Try and suck all the sweetness that you can out of this chapter while we read it. The personal application of a promise to the heart by the Holy Spirit is that which is wanted. The honey in Jonathan’s wood never enlightened his eyes until he dipped the point of his rod into it and tasted it. Try and do the same. This chapter is the wood wherein every bough drips with virgin honey. Sip, taste, be satisfied.

Verses 1-3. *Sing, O barren, thou that didst not bear; break forth into singing, and cry aloud, thou that didst not travail with child: for more are the children of the desolate than the children of the married wife, saith the LORD. Enlarge the place of thy tent, and let them stretch forth the curtains of thine habitations: spare not, lengthen thy cords, and strengthen thy stakes; for thou shalt break forth on the right hand and on the left; and thy seed shall inherit the Gentiles, and make the desolate cities to be inhabited.*

You see they are called upon to praise God before the mercy comes. “Sing, O barren,” while yet barren. Sing, O desolate one, while yet desolate, and you who are narrowed and confined for space, thank God that He is about to enlarge you, and begin already to stretch your cords and strengthen your stakes. We ought to act upon faith and sing upon faith. The songs which are made at the sight of mercy are very sweet, but the songs that are sung before the mercy comes are those which are most acceptable to God. We may say of the sonnets of faith, “Blessed are they that have not seen and yet have believed.”

4. *Fear not; for thou shalt not be ashamed: neither be thou confounded; for thou shalt not be put to shame: for thou shalt forget the shame of thy youth, and shalt not remember the reproach of thy widowhood any more.*

The dark past, the dreary past, shall be so obliterated with abounding mercy that they shall forget it. Your memory of it shall not be painful. It shall only be as a foil behind the bright diamond of mighty mercy, if you remember it at all.

5. *For thy Maker is thine husband;*

Bound to you by the dearest, closest, and most enduring ties.

5-7. *The LORD of hosts is his name; and thy Redeemer the Holy One of Israel; The God of the whole earth shall he be called. For the LORD has called thee as a woman forsaken and grieved in spirit, and a wife of youth, when thou wast refused, saith thy God. For a small moment—*

Not “a moment,” but “for a small moment.”

7-8. *Have I forsaken thee: but with great mercies will I gather thee. In a little wrath I hid my face from thee for a moment; but with everlasting kindness will I have mercy on thee, saith the LORD thy Redeemer.*

This belongs to the whole church of God. I know we might refer it all to the church in general, but I invite you tonight to remember that what belongs to the church as a body belongs to every member of that mystical body. Therefore, feast here. Be not afraid. Take these words as spoken to you—even to you—by God the Holy Spirit.

9-10. *For this is as the waters of Noah unto me: for as I have sworn that the waters of Noah should no more go over the earth; so have I sworn that I would not be wroth with thee, nor rebuke thee. For the mountains shall depart, and the hills be removed; but my kindness shall not depart from thee, neither shall the covenant of my peace be removed, saith the LORD that hath mercy on thee.*

What more can He say than to you He has said? What surer pledges can He give? Oh, rest, rest, rest, sweetly rest, on this sure word of covenant love. Then let the mountains move. He told you they would. Then let the hills of your comfort sink. He told you they would. But even then, when the earth itself does reel, and the very pillars of the universe are snapped, He stands still the same. “I have sworn that I would not be wroth with thee, nor rebuke thee.”

11. *O thou afflicted, tossed with tempest, and not comforted, behold, I will lay thy stones with fair colours, and lay thy foundations with sapphires.*

Built with jewels.

12. *And I will make thy windows of agates, and thy gates of carbuncles, and all thy borders of pleasant stones.*

They must be rare sights if the windows are so rare. If the windows be of agate, what are the sights that are seen through them? And if the very gates and doors are carbuncles, what must there be in the house of love within? If the very borders and the outside fringes of the royal domains of heaven be of precious stones, what must it be to be there? Remember that the best thing in this world is trodden under feet in the world to come, for we are told that the streets are paved with gold. Men hunt after it here, and tread on it there, for they have something better there than this world can possibly afford them.

13. *And all thy children shall be taught of the LORD;*

It must be a greater privilege, than windows of agates and gates of carbuncle, to see our children—to see all the children of God—taught by His own Spirit.

13. *And great shall be the peace of thy children.*

That is the most precious pearl of all, with its soft radiance, precious to the soul.

14-15. *In righteousness shall thou be established: thou shalt be far from oppression; for thou shalt not fear: and from terror; for it shall not come near thee. Behold, they shall surely gather together, but not by me:*

Enemies will come, but God will not be with them.

15-16. *Whosoever shall gather together against thee shall fall for thy sake. Behold, I have created the smith that bloweth the coals in the fire,—*

For he cannot blow any more than God lets him. He is God’s creature. The maker of the weapons of war is still in the hands of God.

16. *And that bringeth forth an instrument for his work; and I have created the waster to destroy.*

When he does his worst, he is only doing what I meant he should do. The divine decree of God still, with its mighty circle, does encompass the worst deed of man, and overrules it all for the good of His church.

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