

THE SHRILL TRUMPET OF ADMONITION

NO. 761

**DELIVERED ON LORD'S-DAY MORNING, JULY 21, 1867,
BY C. H. SPURGEON,
AT THE METROPOLITAN TABERNACLE, NEWINGTON.**

“Moab has been at ease from his youth, and he has settled on his lees, and has not been emptied from vessel to vessel, neither has he gone into captivity. Therefore his taste remained in him, and his scent is not changed. ‘Therefore, behold, the days come,’ says the Lord, ‘that I will send unto him wanderers, that shall cause him to wander, and shall empty his vessels, and break their bottles.’ ”
Jeremiah 48:11, 12.

FOR a considerable season the country of Moab had been free from the inroads of war and the terrors of pestilence. The nation had, therefore, become so conceitedly secure, that the Lord said, “We have heard the pride of Moab (he is exceedingly proud), his loftiness, and his arrogance, and his pride, and the haughtiness of his heart.” The people became vain, dominating, boastful, and mocked at their afflicted neighbors the Israelites, manifesting ungenerous joy in their sorrows. “For was not Israel a derision unto you? Was he found among thieves? For since you spoke of him, you skipped for joy.”

From this pride sprang luxury and all those other vices which find a convenient lair in the repose of unbroken prosperity. The warriors of Moab said, “We are mighty and strong men of war.” As vainglorious sinners they defied all law and power. Trusting in Chemosh, they despised Jehovah, and magnified themselves against the Lord. The Prophet compares that country to wine, which has been allowed to stand unstirred and unmoved—it settles on its lees, grows strong, retains its aroma, and gathers daily fresh body and spirit. “But,” he says, “the day shall come when God shall shake this undisturbed liquor, when He shall send wandering bands of Chaldeans that shall waste the country so that the bottles shall be broken and the vessels shall be emptied and the proud prosperity of Moab shall end in utter desolation.”

The unusual repose of Moab had been the envy of the people of Israel, but they might well cease to envy when they understood how suddenly a fire should come forth out of Heshbon, and a flame from the midst of Sihon and devour the corner of Moab—and how soon the howling should be heard, “Woe be unto you, O Moab! The people of Chemosh perish: for your sons are taken captive, and your daughters captives.” The fact that continued prosperity breeds carnal security is not only proved by the instance of Moab, but is lamentably confirmed in the history of others.

In the first place, this is the common mischief of ungodly men. In the second place, this is the frequent danger of the most godly.

I. I shall first speak to THE UNCONVERTED, THE GODLESS, THE PRAYERLESS, THE CHRISTLESS. Many of you, though not all, become like Moab. At ease from your youth you are not emptied from vessel to vessel but settled upon your lees, and therefore you grow careless and heedless. This is so common a mischief among the ungodly that the whole world was in this condition immediately before the great deluge which destroyed the ancient race.

We read that “they married and were given in marriage.” They did eat and did drink, and were drunk even until the day when Noah entered the ark, and the floods came and swept them all away. The preacher of righteousness for 120 years warned them that their sins had become intolerable to Heaven, and that vengeance would surely be taken upon their devices, but they laughed the Prophet to scorn. They made “the old Fool,” as they doubtless called him, the butt of their ridicule. The wits quoted him as the chief of fools, and the drunkards in their songs spoke against him.

The disobedient worldlings of those olden times went upon their way as though their jollity would last forever and their sin would go unpunished. How changed their notes when the rains descended with pitiless continuance—not in drops of mercy, fertilizing the thirsty earth, but in cataracts of vengeance, sweeping away every living thing! How deep

their despair when the Lord drew up the sluices of the great “deep which lies under,” and bade the long imprisoned floods leap up from their dens and ravage the earth!

Then, as the despisers saw the Prophet’s ark, alone, secure, and the Prophet’s family, alone, delivered, they beheld and wondered—and *perished* as their long prosperity and carnal ease gave place to utter desolation. The world, however, is so little changed today that if the Lord Jesus Christ should now come, as come He will “in such an hour as you think not,” He would find the mass of men still in the same condition. Even at this day the enquiry is made, “Where is the promise of His coming? For since the fathers fell asleep all things continue as they were.” Whenever our Lord shall come men will be unprepared for His advent, for “as it was in the days of Noah, so shall it be also in the days of the Son of Man.”

They shall still be given to their vanities and indulging themselves in their sins till He shall come in the clouds of Heaven to take vengeance upon the multitude who know not God. This is the abiding state of the world which lies in the Wicked One—settled on its lees, it is not emptied from vessel to vessel—and therefore it dreams itself into presumptuous peace. When pestilence or war do not stir the nations they soon grow bold in sin and provoke the Lord to jealousy.

But, my dear Friends, it is generally very useless to talk about the world at large! Generalities have little effect upon our minds—we must come to *particulars*. We will draw one or two pictures which will represent some who are present here this morning. Perhaps there may be but very few of the first sort—the bold offenders who are at ease in open sin. They began life with iniquity and they have made terrible progress in it. They have taken their degrees in the college of Beelzebub. They have become Masters in the Art of Wickedness, Doctors in Belial, able to teach others also—corrupt and corrupting.

These men are not disturbed in their sins. Their conscience has been seared as with a hot iron. Things which others would tremble at are to them a jest. They make a mockery of sin. They play with burning coals of lust and carry fire in their bosom and boast that they are not burned. They go from iniquity to iniquity, as the vulture from carcass to carcass. They labor in the way of evil, as men dig for hidden treasure.

“And they say, How does God know? And is there knowledge in the Most High?” “And if He does know,” they say, “what do *we* care? Who is Jehovah, that *we* should obey Him? Who is the Almighty, that we should tremble at His word?” Throughout this wicked city there are hundreds and thousands who, having enjoyed until now an immunity in their sins, suppose that their transgressions are as light a thing with God as with themselves. These are they of whom David said, “They are not in trouble as other men; neither are they plagued like other men. Therefore pride compasses them about as a chain. Violence covers them as a garment. Their eyes stand out with fatness. They have more than heart could wish...Behold, these are the ungodly who prosper in the world; they increase in riches.”

Yet, O you haughty ones, take heed, for Pharaoh, who was your prototype in the olden days, found the way of pride to be hard at the end. That haughty prince was like a great dragon with a neck of iron but the Lord tamed him at the Red Sea. When the wheels were taken off his chariots and they dragged heavily while the floods eagerly leaped upon him as their prey—then he knew that none exalts himself against Jehovah to prosper, for He breaks in pieces the mighty in His wrath and destroys them in His hot displeasure.

O you haughty ones, remember the king Belshazzar! He was another of your tribe, and how he grew great with the spoils of the nations. Remember that night of feasting when he drank out of the vessels of God in his daring blasphemy and stained the holy things of Jehovah with his drunkenness. Read yonder handwriting on the wall. Even now, O Despiser, I can see it for you, though you see it not, and this is the interpretation: “You are weighed in the balances and found wanting. Your joy shall soon be taken from you, and your life also, and what shall you do in the day when the Lord requires your soul?”

If there are any here this morning who have lived in sin and grown wanton and have altogether broken loose from Divine control, having taken out of their mouths the bit which restrains other men, let them be ashamed and abased this day, for as the Lord my God lives, before whom I stand, if they will not tremble *now*, they shall tremble *forever*! If the voice of God’s ambassador shall not bring you to seek peace and forgiveness, the Lord shall send another herald, not of peace but of *judgment* who shall come with another voice than mine, a voice which shall make cold sweat stand on your brow and your pulse to wax faint and few, while the still small voice sounds terribly in your ear, “This night your soul is required of you.”

A far more common form of that carelessness which is so destructive is that of men who give themselves wholly up to the world's business. Such men, for instance, as one whom Christ called, "Fool." You know the story—his fields brought forth plenteously, for he was a skillful farmer. He had bought the newest implements. He had tilled his ground after the most scientific fashion. He had doubled the crops, and increased his riches! This was the one object for which he lived. He was a grower of grain and a hoarder of gold, and nothing more. He said within himself that he must build a temple for his god—his god was *himself*—and his temple was his barn.

"I will pull down my barns and build greater—there will I bestow my goods." This man's case is so common that if you were to purchase his likeness many of you might think it was your own photograph, for do you not, even those of you who come to our places of worship, live unto yourselves? This is the end and object of the most of mankind—to live "respectably," to collect a "competence"—to provide, as they say, for their families, which is the Pharisaic cant phrase for *selfishness*. Do not the mass of men worship their belly and bow down before no other shrine than self? Is not the life of millions clear, transparent selfishness?

"What shall we eat, and what shall we drink, and with what shall we be clothed?" This is the grand object of human research. The religion of the multitude is, "Today or tomorrow we will go into such a city and continue there a year, and buy and sell, and get gain." *Gain* is the world's *summum bonum*, the chief of all mortal good, the main chance, the prime object, the barometer of success in life, the one thing needful, the heart's delight! And yet, O Worldlings, you who succeed in getting gain and are esteemed to be shrewd and prudent—Jesus Christ calls you *fools*—and He is no thrower about of hard terms where they are not deserved!

"You Fool," He said, and why? Because the man's *soul* would be required of him—and then whose would those things be which he had gathered together? Ah, you who have been prosperous all your days, and made money, and risen in the world, and gathered a competence, and lived to gather wealth—if this is the one thing you care about, tremble and expect your doom! O you careless ones, do you dream that you were made to live for *yourselves*? Was *this* the object of your Maker that you should live to gather gold for yourselves and for your children?

Did He send you into this world merely that you might scrape together yellow clay? Has your Maker no claim upon you? The Lord who preserves you in being—has He no demands upon you? And if you do not recognize His rights will He not enquire for them in the day when He makes visitation? I would read the text over to all of you unconverted prosperous people—"Moab has been at ease from his youth, and he has settled on his lees, and has not been emptied from vessel to vessel, neither has he gone into captivity. Therefore his taste remained in him, and his scent is not changed. 'Therefore, behold, the days come,' says the Lord, 'that I will send unto him wanderers, that shall cause him to wander, and shall empty his vessels, and break their bottles.' "

Hear you yet again the word of the Lord by His servant Isaiah; "Rise up, you women that are at ease. Hear my voice you careless daughters. Give ear unto My speech. Many days and years shall you be troubled, you careless women, for the vintage shall fail, the gathering shall not come. Tremble, you women that are at ease. Be troubled, you careless ones."

A third case is more common, still—the man who forgets God and lives in slothful ease. There are many in the world who do not succeed in making money—who do not, indeed, make money their main object. They are content with what they have and go through the world with much satisfaction to themselves. They are well known for their easiness of temper and harmlessness of disposition, and therefore they think themselves better than others. Yet my text, if read correctly, is a dreadful warning for them!

Have you never read of the master who committed to his servants their various talents, giving to one five, and to another two, and to another one? Now the man with the five talents, and he with the two, went both into the market and doubled their master's money, putting it out at interest. And when their Lord returned they presented him with their gains.

But the servant with the one talent was one who loved great ease of mind and did not wish to agitate himself with business. So he took his shovel, and having taken the talent and wrapped it in a clean napkin (for he would treat it with respect, and hide it decorously), he deposited the napkin and the talent in the earth. And having covered it up so that no one should see traces of the burial, he went his way, and was perfectly at ease—a fair picture, indeed, of many who *ought* to be serving God—but they think they have little ability and therefore do not strive even to do what they can.

They are not *openly* sinful. They are not at all objectionable in temper or disposition—they are quiet, easy-going, good-tempered souls—but the talent, where is it? Buried! Alas, it will have a resurrection, and when it rises, all rusty from that rotting napkin, what a witness will it bear and how will the Master say, “You wicked and slothful servant!” Some of you do not reflect enough upon that word—the Master did not say, “You wicked spendthrift!” or, “You base robber!” but, “You wicked and slothful *servant*.” May not that name apply to *you*?

The charge of sloth was quite enough. His doom was swift and terrible. The great sentence which our Lord will pronounce upon men at the last is not for doing *wrong*, but for *not* doing *right*. “I was hungry, and you gave Me no meat. I was thirsty, and you gave Me no drink. I was a stranger, and you took Me not in. Naked, and you clothed Me not. Sick, and in prison, and you visited Me not.” “Lord,” they might have said, “we were not immoral or dishonest!” That is not the question. You did no *service* to your Lord. It is not enough to abstain from outward sin and so to be *negatively* moral! Unless you bring forth fruits unto righteousness you have not the life of God in you! And however much you may be at ease, there shall come a rough awakening to your slumbers and the shrill sound of the archangel’s trumpet shall be to you no other than the blast of the trumpet of condemnation because you took your ease when you should have *served your God*.

A still more sorrowful thought burns its way across my mind. There are many in the professing Christian Church who are in the same state as Moab. They called to see the Church officers and asked if they could be accepted into the Church. No objection was made. The pastor conversed with them. They talked very fairly and they deceived him. They have been baptized. So often as the table of communion is spread they sit with God’s people and partake of the emblems of the Savior’s crucified body. But though their profession is a very comely one and their outward conduct exceedingly honorable, yet they lack inward Divine Grace.

They have the virgin’s lamp but they have no oil in the vessel with their lamps. And yet so comfortable are these professors that they slumber and sleep! I have known many a true Believer much troubled for fear he should be a hypocrite—while many a hypocrite has never asked a question! Thousands who have gone safely to Heaven, have, on the road, stopped many times and put their fingers to their brow and said, “Am I a true Believer? What strange perplexities arise! Have I really passed from death to life, or is it a fancy and a dream?”

And yet I say to you that the hypocrite has gone singing on his way, secure, as he thought, of passing through the gate of pearl—until he found himself at last dragged hack to the hole in the side of the hill—which is the secret gate of Hell! Many, who were fair to look upon have been rotten at the core—such fruit as the King could not accept at His table. O you who never ask whether you are Christians, begin to question yourselves! Examine yourselves whether you are in the faith! Let not presumption hold you in its deadly embrace! Remember, you may think yourself a Believer and everybody else may think so, too, and you may fail to find out your error until it is too late to rectify it! You may persevere for years in “the way which seems right unto a man, but the end thereof are the ways of death.” Be you not, O you professors, like Moab, that had settled upon his lees!

Equally true is this of the mass of moral men who are destitute of faith in Jesus. They hear of the convictions and troubles of an awakened conscience, and they inwardly sneer at such fanaticism and boast that they never stooped to such feelings. “Here is a man that snivels out,” as they call it, “a confession of his guilt. I never was so guilty as he,” cries the moralist! “I have no doubt but what it will be all right with me at last. I pay my neighbors their own. I give a guinea to a hospital when they ask me for it. I am a first-rate tradesman. Of course I have sown a few wild oats, and I still indulge a little, but who doesn’t? Who dares deny that I am a good-hearted fellow?”

Plainly this gentleman has not been into *spiritual* captivity. He has never felt the burden of sin, never known what the weight of guilt is. Do you envy him? You may sooner envy the *dead* in their graves because they suffer no pain. You may better envy the man who has fallen into insensibility, or the wretch whose limbs are mortified—how can he feel when death has marked him for its own? Those pangs and throes and bitter regrets, and tossing to and fro of a wounded conscience are signs of the dawn of *spiritual life*!

It is by such things as these that we are led to put our trust in Jesus—and those who have never felt them may well lament before the Lord and pray that they *may* experience them—that they *may* be brought soundly and safely out of their self-righteousness and led to rest upon the finished work of the dear Redeemer! Ah, my dear Hearer, if you, this

morning, have been troubled in your soul, be *thankful* for it! If your circumstances are full of anxiety, if you are not reconciled to God you may be thankful for adversity, and ask that it may drive you to Jesus!

If sin has become nauseous to you. If the pleasures which once satisfied your spirit have now lost their savor. If you cannot enjoy yourself with the world as you did once, I am glad of it! God loves you too well to let you build your nest here. He means to flog you out of your sins if you will not be drawn out of them by the gentler cords of His love. He is putting thorns into the nest that the bird may mount up to Heaven! Fly to your heavenly Father as the prodigal of old when he could not fill his belly with the husks which the swine did eat! Better to suffer a present disturbance which will end in *life*, than enjoy the ease which is, itself, a protracted *death*. God give you to be saved through Jesus Christ!

II. We shall pause a minute and then speak to THE BELIEVER. It is one of the most common and most dangerous of all evils that can happen to a Christian, to fall into a state of carnal security in which he grows self-confident, insensible, careless, inactive, and worldly. Beloved in the Lord. My fellow Christians, I speak to you this morning very earnestly—the more so because *I* have experienced and *I* fear at the present moment I am suffering from the disease of which I am about to speak to you.

John Bunyan tells us that on many occasions he preached as a man in chains preaching to men in chains—that is to say—the evil which he warned them of he felt in his own soul. It is much so this morning with me. But before I plunge into the subject, let me utter one note by way of caution. These lips shall never say a word against the full assurance of faith and against the holy confidence which the Holy Spirit gives to the people of God!

You can not be too confident in God. You can not be too sure of your salvation if you base that salvation upon the work of Christ. Therefore I will not speak a *syllable* against holy quietness and assurance forever, which are the special privileges of the elect. The danger I am to warn you of I will now endeavor to describe. A Christian man finds himself for a long time without any remarkable trouble. His children are spared to him. His home is happy, his business extremely prosperous—he has, in fact, all that heart can wish. When he looks round about him he can say with David, “The lines are fallen unto me in pleasant places; yes, I have a goodly heritage.”

Now, the danger is that he should think too highly of these *secondary* things, and should say to himself, “My mountain stands firm, I shall never be moved.” Some of God’s children are tossed to and fro, and vexed every morning. But if we are not, the flesh will whisper, “There must be something *better* in me than in them. Perhaps they are chastened on account of sins which I have not fallen into. I am a special favorite.”

And then, though the man would never dare to put it in words, yet an indistinct feeling creeps over him that there is no need for him to be so watchful as other people—he would be sure not to fall if he were tempted. In fact he wonders how some of his Brethren can live as they do live—he is sure he could not do so. He feels that he could fight with any temptation and come back more than a conqueror. He has grown so strong that he feels himself a Samson! He knows much more now than he used to, and thinks himself too old a bird to be caught with chaff, as he might have been some years ago. “Ah,” he thinks, “I am a model Christian.”

He does not say as much, but that lurks in his mind. His heart is much hampered with earthly things, and his mind much bloated with self-conceit. He has not been poured from vessel to vessel. He has not been sternly tried by Providence, or sorely tempted by the devil. He has not been led to question his own conversion. He has fallen into a profound calm, a deep, dead, peace—a horrible lethargy—and his inmost heart has lost all spiritual energy. The great disease of England is consumption, but I suppose it would be difficult to describe the causes and workings of consumption and decline.

The same kind of disease is common among Christians. It is not that many Christians fall into outward sin and so on, but throughout our Churches we have scores who are in a spiritual consumption—their powers are all feeble and decaying. They have an unusually bright eye—they can see other people’s faults exceedingly well—and sometimes they have a flush on their cheeks which looks very much like burning zeal and eminent spiritual life, but it is occasional and superficial. Vital energy is at a low ebb—they do not work for God like genuinely healthy workmen.

They do not run in the race of His commandments like athletic racers, determined to win the prize. The heart does not beat with a throb moving the entire man as a huge engine sends the throbbing of its force throughout the whole of the machinery. They go slumbering on, in the right road, it is true, but loitering in it. They serve God, but it is by the day, as we say, and not by the piece. They do not labor to bring forth much fruit—they are content with here and there a little shriveled cluster upon the topmost bough.

That is the state of mind I want to describe, and it is produced in 99 out of every 100 Believers by a long course of prosperity and absence of spiritual trouble. The rapid results of this consumption are just these—a man in such a state soon gives up communion with God. It is not quite gone at first, but it is suspended. His walk with God is broken and occasional. His prayers very soon suffer. He does not forget his morning and evening devotions—perhaps if he did conscience would prick him—but he keeps up that form. However, he has lost the *soul* of prayer and only retains the shell. There is no *wrestling* prayer now.

He used to rise in the night to plead with God and he would wrestle till the tears fell fast, but it is not so now. He *does* pray, but not with that Divine energy which made Jacob a victor at Jabbok's brook. By degrees his conversation is not what it used to be. He was once very earnest for Christ and would introduce religious topics in all companies. He has become discreet now, and holds his tongue. He is quite ready to gossip about the price of wheat and how the markets are, and the state of politics, and whether you have been to see the Sultan—but he has no words for Jesus Christ, the King in His beauty.

Spiritual topics have departed from his general conversation. And now, strange to say, “the minister does not preach as he used to do.” At least, the backslider says so. The reason why I think he is mistaken, is that the Word of God itself is not so sweet to him as it once was and surely the Bible cannot have altered! He used to read it and feast on the promises. He used to carry a pocket Testament with him wherever he went, and take it out that he might have a sip by the way. Where is his Testament now?

As for going to hear the Word of God, now it is dull work. He does come, he would not like to be away—if David's seat were empty, he would begin to be pricked in his conscience—he is there, but he is there in vain. There is little savor about the Word to him. Hymns which used to be delightful for their melody now pall upon his ears, and he is now noticing the tune or whether somebody else sings correctly. The prayers in which he used to join with so much fervency are very flat to him now. He is poring over his ledger even in the House of God.

These are the gray hairs which come upon a man, and sometimes, for want of self-examination, multiply rapidly, and the man knows it not till spiritual senility has come upon him. After awhile the professor slackens a good deal in his liberality. He does not think the cause of God is worth the expense that he used to spend upon it. And as to his own personal efforts to win souls, he does not give up his Sunday school class, nor his street preaching, nor distributing of tracts, perhaps, but he does all mechanically—it is mere routine. He might just as well be a robot and be wound up, only the fault is that he is *not* wound up and he does not do his work as he should. Or, if he does it outwardly, there is none of the life of God in what he does.

Do you know such a man? He who speaks to you knows him and has wept over him. That man has sometimes been himself! I do not think I am less earnest than the most of my fellow Christians, and indeed, I could not bear to be like some of them. But still, I am very far from being content with myself. I pray God that I may never sink down to the dishonorable depths of indolence which some Christians live in. Sooner may my right hand forget her cunning and my tongue speak no more my Master's Word—I were utterly unworthy to be His minister if such were the case.

But oh, I pray to be baptized in fire and live in it as in my element, and breathe the immortal flame of zealous love to Jesus! But I cannot as I would. This heavy heart, this sluggish clay still make me move heavily when I would gladly fly as a seraph in my Master's service. Brethren, do you ever feel the same? I know some of you do, for I can see the traces of it. Very much of this sluggishness is brought on by long-continued respite from trouble—

***“More the treacherous calm I dread
Than tempests rolling overhead.”***

It were better to be in perpetual storms and to be driven to-and-fro in the whirlwind, and to cling to God than to flounder at sea in the most peaceful and calm days. I would sooner be blown to pieces in battling with the devil and his crew than be put out of commission and left to rot, plank by plank, and timber by timber, in inglorious ease.

Dear Friends, the great secret danger coming out of all this is that when a man reaches the state of carnal security he is ready for *any* evil! What heart-breaking news is sometimes brought to us who are set over the Christian Church. Such-and-such a man, whom we knew as a high professor and who has sat with us at the table of fellowship and seemed to be greatly advanced in spiritual things, has fallen into some act of vice which is positively disgusting—from which the soul revolts! And this is the very man with whom we took sweet counsel and went up to the House of God in company!

If the history of these great offenders could be traced, it would be very much like this—they began well, but they slackened by degrees—till at last they were ripe for foul sin. We have heard of two Negroes who were accustomed to go into the bush to pray and each of them had worn a little path in the grass. Presently one of them grew cold and was soon found in open sin. His Brother warned him that he knew it would come to that because the grass grew on the path that led to their place of prayer.

Ah, we do not know to what we may descend when we begin to go downhill! Down, down, down, is easy and pleasant to the flesh, but if we knew where it would end we should pray God that we might sooner die than live to plunge into the terrors of that descent! Who would think that David, the man after God's own heart, should come to be the murderer of his friend Uriah, to rob him of his wife? O David, are you so near to Heaven and yet so near to Hell?

There is a David in every one of our hearts, and if we begin to backslide from God we do not know to what extent we may slip! Just as in certain constitutions there is a readiness for cholera and other pestilential disorders through their bad state of health, so there is a state of mind in which a professor is most likely to be betrayed into foul sin. When the seed of temptation is floating in the air, the backslider is the man who will receive it and nurture it in his soul till it brings forth evil fruit. God save us from this by His Holy Spirit!

I must pass on to observe God's cure for this malady. His usual way is by pouring our settled wine from vessel to vessel. If we cannot bear prosperity, the Lord will not continue it to us. We may pamper our children and spoil them, but the Divine Father will not. If we cannot bear the sweets He will give us the bitters. When the Lord takes down His rod—earthly parents may play at chastening their children, but God does not—He is in earnest and I warrant you we smart when God lays on the rod! But we make the rod ourselves! We force our Father to smite us because we cannot be obedient and humble without it.

Staying for awhile in the valley of Aosta in Northern Italy, we found the air to be heavy, close, and humid with pestilential exhalations. We were oppressed and feverish—one's life did not seem worth a pin. We could not breathe freely. Our lungs had a sense of having a hundred atmospheres piled upon them. Presently, at midday, there came a thunderclap, attended by big drops of rain, and a stiff gale of wind which grew into a perfect tornado, tearing down the trees. Then followed what the poet calls "sonorous hail," and then again the lightning flashes and the thunder, peal on peal, echoing along the Alps.

But how delightful was the effect! How we all went out upon the veranda to look at the lightning and enjoy the music of the thunder! How cool the air and bracing! How delightful to walk out in the cool evening after the storm! Then you could *breathe* and feel a *joy* in life!

Full often it is thus with the Christian after trouble. He has grown to be careless, lethargic, feverish, heavy and ready to die—and just then he has been assailed by trouble—thundering threats have rolled from God's mouth. Flashes of lightning have darted from Providence! The property vanished, the wife died, the children were buried, trouble followed trouble—and then the man has turned to God—and though his face was wet with tears of repentance, yet he has felt his spirit to be remarkably restored!

When he goes up to the House of God it is far more sweet to hear the Word than before. He could not pray before but now he leans his head on Jesus' bosom and pours out his soul in fellowship! Eternity now exerts its heavenly attractions and the man is saved from himself! Have you ever dreamed that you were trying to walk and could not? You felt as though you could not move a foot and someone was about to overtake you who would do you serious mischief—and you longed to run and could not stir an inch!

That is the state of mind in which we get when we would, but cannot pray. When we would, but cannot repent. When we want to believe and cannot. When we would give a world for one single tear, would almost pawn our souls to obtain a quiver of spiritual feeling, but are insensible, still—

*“If nothing is felt, 'tis only pain
To find 'I cannot feel.' ”*

Do you ever sink into that petrified condition? It is horrible! Horrible indeed! Horrible! If you can be its victim and yet be happy, I tremble for you! If you see your danger and betake yourself to earnest prayer, you shall come off more than a conqueror—but it will need more than *man* to do this—it will need *God within us* to keep us from such a tremendous peril.

What ought we to do if we are prospering? We should remember that *prevention* is better than cure and if God is prospering us, the way to prevent lethargy is to be very grateful for the prosperity which you are enjoying. Do not pray for trouble—you will have it quickly enough without asking for it. Be *grateful* for your prosperity, but make use of it. Do all you possibly can for God while He prospers you in business. Try to live very closely to Him. It ought not to be so difficult for us to cling close to Jesus when Providence is favorable to us.

Some saints have dwelt at ease year after year and have been all the better for it. They have had few troubles and yet lived near to God and why not you? If you will take care that your wealth is laid out for God, that your prosperity is spent in His service, you may have a succession of bright days. Watch the very first symptoms of declining, and fly to Christ, the Great Physician! He will give you the balm of Gilead which will prevent the mischief and you may bear the heat of prosperity as safely as the chill blasts of adversity.

But if you have fallen into such a state, I should say to you, since you cannot use a preventative, now take to the cure—and the *one* cure is the Holy Spirit. Go to the Cross of Christ again, Christian, if you have fallen from your first estate. Go as you hope you went at first. Go with your deadness, and sloth, and lethargy—and put your trust in the precious blood and ask the Lord Jesus to fill you with the Spirit once again—that you may be renewed. Try to get a due estimate of your indebtedness to God’s Divine Grace. Try to see the danger of your lethargy. Think more of eternity and less of time.

Tear yourself away a little from your worldly engagements, if possible. If you can, get a day of fasting and of prayer, certainly of prayer, but the fasting will help you to school your body as well as your soul. Fetch the proud flesh down somehow—make a desperate effort! It were better for you to do this now than for *God* to do it by sharp affliction. Trouble *yourself* that He may not trouble you. Humble *yourself* that He may not humble you. Put away your fancied security, and by strong crying and tears turn again to your former state of nearness to the living God. May the Lord help you, dear Friends, in this.

I have thought that our text describes the state of our country just now, for we are getting into a perfect whirl of excitement. Gaiety and frivolity are leading to sad sin in high places and this is much due to our prosperity. I hope God may never send us war or pestilence, but religion never prospers more than in troublous times. There was never an age when England was so religious as during our Civil War. Perhaps no time when more people were in Church in the City of London since London was London, than during the Plague—for then they all crowded to hear the Gospel—and they would, again, if such a thing should come.

We are growing nationally rich and nationally luxurious. I fear that prophets of evil will soon be sent to us to utter bitter threats. May God have mercy upon us, pardon the horrible crimes done in the name of trade unions, and at the same time teach our princes to reign in righteousness and our great men to care less for vice and vanity and more for the cause of the poor! I am always afraid lest this should become the state of our Church, too. We have had 13 years of such prosperity that we have all wondered at it. And there is one remark that our dear friend, Jonathan George, made when this place was being built which I have never forgotten, and which often comes up in my mind.

He reminded us of this text, “You shall fear and tremble for all the good that God shall make to pass before you.” We have had so much good, so many conversions, so much brotherly love, so much zeal for God that I am always afraid lest we should fall from our present happy state. And the sure way of doing so is by ceasing to *labor* for God—ceasing from zeal and industry. By the way, there are many of you who do not come to the Prayer Meeting as you ought to do. Some of you are getting very lax at week-night services and I know what will come when that is the case.

When week-night services are badly attended, farewell to the life of godliness! If you have good excuses, I need not remind you of them, you will remember them yourselves. But many of you have no justifiable excuses—you are becoming cold and indifferent. We are very much, in our position as a Church, as Esther was to the Jews. If she did not do her part, Mordecai told her, God would do it by somebody else and put her away. And so it is with us—if we lag and loiter in work for Christ, He will put us away as a Christian Church—depend upon it! Not from His eternal love, for that He never will do, but from our position of honor and usefulness.

May it please Him to remove me, His unworthy servant, and give me rest from my labors, before such a catastrophe as that should overwhelm us. My Brothers and Sisters, may we never be settled on our lees. May God always call us to fresh labor and inspire us with new zeal! Or, if He does not do that, may He send clap after clap of thundering affliction. Better that the Church should lose its leaders than lose its life! Better that the pastor’s coffin should be there before you. Better that many should fall into poverty than that this Church should become like so many other Churches—a mere sleeping place for those who need comfort, and a place for Sunday repose.

Eternal God, You who know what our heart feels, keep us from this evil and never suffer us, as a Church, to become like lukewarm Laodicea which You did spit out of Your mouth! Owing You so much, O Jesus, may we love You much in return and be found faithful when You shall come to reward Your people and to be glorified in Your saints. God bless us, dear Friends, according to this, our desire, for Jesus’ sake. Amen.