

TRAVAILING FOR SOULS

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A SERMON
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“As soon as Zion travailed, she brought forth her children.”
Isaiah 66:8

Israel had fallen into the lowest condition, but an inward yearning of heart was felt in the midst of God's people for the return of the divine blessing. And no sooner had this anxious desire become intense than God heard the voice of its cry and the blessing came.

It was so at the time of the restoration of the captives from Babylon and it was most evidently so in the days of our Lord. A faithful company had continued still to expect the coming of the Lord's anointed messenger. They waited till He should suddenly come in His temple. The twelve tribes represented by an elect remnant cried day and night unto the Most High, and when at last their prayers reached the fullness of vehemence, and their anxiety wrought in them the deepest agony of spirit, then the Messiah came—the light of the Gentiles and the glory of Israel.

Then began that age of blessedness in which the barren woman did keep house and became the joyful mother of children. The Holy Ghost was given, and multitudes were born to the church of God, yea, we may say, a nation was born in a day. The wilderness and the solitary place were glad for them, and the desert rejoiced and blossomed as the rose.

We are not, however, about to enter into the particular application of our text as Isaiah uttered it—the great declarations of revelation are applicable to all cases, and once true, they stand fast forever and ever. Earnestly desiring that God may give a large spiritual blessing to His church this morning, through the subject to which my mind has been directed, I shall first ask you to note that *in order to the obtaining of an increase to the church there must be travail*. And that, secondly, *this travail is frequently followed by surprising results*.

I shall then have to show why *both the travail and the result are desirable*, and pronounce *woe on those who stand back* and hinder it, and *a blessing on such as shall be moved by God's own Spirit to travail for souls*.

I. It is clear from the text, “As soon as Zion travailed, she brought forth her children,” that THERE MUST BE THE TRAVAIL before there will be the spiritual birth.

Let me first *establish this fact from history*. Before there has fallen a great benediction upon God's people, it has been preceded by great searchings of heart. Israel was so oppressed in Egypt that it would have been a very easy, and almost a natural thing for the people to become so utterly crushed in spirit as to submit to be hereditary bond slaves, making the best they could of their miserable lot.

But God would not have it so. He meant to bring them out “with a high hand and an outstretched arm.” Before, however, He began to work, He made them begin to cry. Their sighs and cries came up into the ears of God and He stretched out His hand to deliver them.

Doubtless many a heart-rending appeal was made to heaven by mothers when their babes were torn from their breasts to be cast into the river. With what bitterness did they ask God to look on His poor people Israel and avenge them of their oppressors. The young men bowed under the cruel yoke and groaned, while hoary sires, smarting under ignominious lashes from the taskmaster, sighed and wept before the God of Israel.

The whole nation cried, “O God visit us. God of Abraham, of Isaac, and of Jacob, remember Your covenant, and deliver us.” This travail brought its result, for the Lord smote the field of Zoan with

mighty plagues, and from under the bondage of the sons of Mizraim the children of Israel marched with joy.

As we shall not have time to narrate many instances, let us take a long leap in history to the days of David. The era of the son of Jesse was evidently a time of religious revival. God was honored and His service maintained in the midst of Judea's land in the days of the royal bard.

But it is clear to readers of the Scriptures that David was the subject of spiritual throes and pants of the most intense kind. His bosom throbbed and heaved like that of a man made fit to be the leader of a great revival. What yearnings he had, he thirsted after God, after the living God! What petitions he poured forth that God would visit Zion, and make the vine which He had planted to flourish once again. Even when his own sins pressed heavily upon him, he could not end his personal confession without entreating the Lord to build the walls of Jerusalem and to do good in His good pleasure unto Zion.

Now, David was only the mouth of hundreds of others, who with equal fervency cried unto God that the blessing might rest upon His people. There was much soul travail in Israel and Judah, and the result was that the Lord was glorified and true religion flourished.

Remember also the days of Josiah, the king. You know how well the book of the law was found neglected in the temple, and when it was brought before the king, he rent his clothes, for he saw that the nation had revolted and that wrath must come upon it to the uttermost. The young king's heart, which was tender, for he feared God, was ready to break with anguish to think of the misery that would come upon his people on account of their sins.

Then there came a glorious reformation, which purged the land of idols and caused the Passover to be observed as never before. Travail of heart among the godly produced the delightful change.

It was the same with the work of Nehemiah. His book begins with a description of the travail of his heart. He was a patriot, a man of nervous, excitable temperament, and keen sensibility for God's honor, and when his soul had felt great bitterness and longing, then he arose to build and a blessing rested on his efforts.

In the early dawn of Christian history, there was a preparation of the church before it received an increase. Look at the obedient disciples sitting in the upper room, waiting with anxious hope. Every heart there had been ploughed with anguish by the death of the Lord, each one was intent to receive the promised boon of the Spirit. There, with one heart and one mind, they tarried, but not without wrestling prayer, and so the Comforter was given, and three thousand souls were given also.

The like living zeal and vehement desire have always been perceptible in the church of God before any season of refreshing. Think not that Luther was the only man that wrought the Reformation. There were hundreds who sighed and cried in secret in the cottages of the Black Forest, in the homes of Germany, and on the hills of Switzerland.

There were hearts breaking for the Lord's appearing in strange places. They might have been found in the palaces of Spain, in the dungeons of the Inquisition, among the canals of Holland, and the green lanes of England. Women, as they hid their Bibles, lest their lives should be forfeited, cried out in spirit, "O God, how long?"

There were pains as of a woman in travail, in secret places there were tears and bitter lamentations. On the high places of the field, there were mighty strivings of spirit, and so at length there came that grand convulsion which made the Vatican to rock and reel from its foundation to its pinnacle. There has been evermore in the history of the church the travail before there has been the result.

And this, dear friends, while it is true on the large scale, is true also in every individual case. A man with no sensibility or compassion for other men's souls may accidentally be the means of a conversion. The good word which he utters will not cease to be good because the speaker had no right to declare God's statutes. The bread and meat which were brought to Elijah were not less nourishing because the ravens brought them, but the ravens remained ravens still.

A hard-hearted man may say a good thing which God will bless, but as a rule, those who bring souls to Christ are those who first of all have felt an agony of desire that souls should be saved. This is imaged

to us in our Master's character. He is the great Savior of men, but before He could save others, He learned in their flesh to sympathize with them. He wept over Jerusalem. He sweat great drops of blood in Gethsemane. He was, and is, a High Priest who is touched with the feeling of our infirmities.

As the Captain of our salvation, in bringing many sons unto glory, He was made perfect by sufferings. Even Christ went not forth to preach until He had spent nights in intercessory prayer, and uttered strong cryings and tears for the salvation of His hearers.

His ministering servants who have been most useful have always been eagerly desirous to be so. If any minister can be satisfied without conversions, he shall have no conversions. God will not force usefulness on any man. It is only when our heart breaks to see men saved, that we shall be likely to see sinners' hearts broken.

The secret of success lies in all-consuming zeal, all-subduing travail for souls. Read the sermons of Wesley and of Whitefield, and what is there in them? It is no severe criticism to say that they are scarcely worthy to have survived, and yet those sermons wrought marvels, and well they might, for both preachers could truly say,

*“The love of Christ doth me constrain
To seek the wandering souls of men;
With cries, entreaties, tears, to save,
To snatch them from the fiery wave.”*

In order to understand such preaching, you need to see and hear the man, you want his tearful eye, his glowing countenance, his pleading tone, his bursting heart. I have heard of a great preacher who objected to have his sermons printed, “Because,” said he, “you cannot print *me*.” That observation is very much to the point. A soul-winner throws himself into what he says. As I have sometimes said, we must ram ourselves into our cannons, we must fire ourselves at our hearers, and when we do this, then by God's grace, their hearts are often carried by storm.

Do any of you desire your children's conversions? You shall have them saved when you agonize for them. Many a parent who has been privileged to see his son walking in the truth will tell you that before the blessing came, he had spent many hours in prayer, and in earnest pleading with God. And then it was that the Lord visited his child and renewed his soul.

I have heard of a young man who had grown up and left the parental roof, and through evil influences had been enticed into holding skeptical views. His father and mother were both earnest Christians, and it almost broke their hearts to see their son so opposed to the Redeemer.

On one occasion, they induced him to go with them to hear a celebrated minister. He accompanied them simply to please them and for no higher motive. The sermon happened to be upon the glories of heaven. It was a very extraordinary sermon and was calculated to make every Christian in the audience leap for joy.

The young man was much gratified with the eloquence of the preacher, but nothing more. He gave him credit for superior oratorical ability and was interested in the sermon, but felt none of its power. He chanced to look at his father and mother during the discourse, and was surprised to see them weeping. He could not imagine why they, being Christian people, should sit and weep under a sermon which was most jubilant in its strain.

When he reached home, he said, “Father, we have had a capital sermon, but I could not understand what could make you sit there and cry, and my mother too.” His father said, “My dear son, I certainly had no reason to weep concerning myself, nor your mother, but I could not help thinking all through the sermon about you, for alas, I have no hope that you will be a partaker in the bright joys which await the righteous. It breaks my heart to think that you will be shut out of heaven.”

His mother said, “The very same thoughts crossed my mind, and the more the preacher spoke of the joys of the saved, the more I sorrowed for my dear boy that he should never know what they were.”

That touched the young man's heart, led him to seek his father's God, and before long he was at the same communion table, rejoicing in the God and Savior whom his parents worshipped. The travail comes before the bringing forth. The earnest anxiety, the deep emotion within, precede our being made the instruments of the salvation of others.

I think I have established the fact—now for a minute or two let me show you *the reasons for it*. Why is it that there must be this anxiety before desirable results are gained? For answer, it might suffice us to say that God has so appointed it. It is the order of nature. The child is not born into the world without the sorrows of the mother, nor is the bread which sustains life procured from the earth without toil. "In the sweat of thy face shall thou eat bread," was a part of the primeval curse. Now, as it is in the natural, so is it in the spiritual. There shall not come the blessing we seek, without first of all the earnest yearning for it.

Why, it is even so in ordinary business. We say, "No sweat no sweet." "No pains no gains." "No mill no meal." If there is no labor, there shall be no profit. He who would be rich must toil for it. He who would acquire fame, must spend and be spent to win it. It is ever so. There must ever be the travail and then the desire comes. God has so appointed it. Let us accept the decree.

But better still, He has ordained this for our good. If souls were given us without any effort, anxiety, or prayer, it would be our loss to have it so, because the anxieties which throb within a compassionate spirit exercise His graces. They produce grateful love to God. They try our faith in the power of God to save others. They drive him to the mercy seat. They strengthen his patience and perseverance, and every grace within the man is educated and increased by his travail for souls.

As labor is now a blessing, so also is soul-travail. Men are fashioned more fully into the likeness of Christ thereby, and the whole church is by the same emotion, quickened into energy. The fire of our own spiritual life is fanned by that same breath which our prayers invite to come from the four winds to breathe upon the slain.

Besides, dear friends, the zeal that God excites within us is often the means of effecting the purpose which we desire. After all, God does not give conversions to eloquence, but to *heart*. The power in the hand of God's Spirit for conversions is heart coming into contact with heart. Truth from the heart goes to the heart. This is God's battle axe and weapons of war in His crusade. He is pleased to use the yearnings, longings, and sympathies of Christian men, as the means of compelling the careless to think, constraining the hardened to feel, and driving the unbelieving to consider.

I have little confidence in elaborate speech and polished sentences as the means of reaching men's hearts, but I have great faith in that simple-minded Christian woman, who must have souls converted or she will weep her eyes out over them. And in that humble Christian who prays day and night in secret, and then avails himself of every opportunity to address a loving word to sinners. The emotion we feel and the affection we bear, are the most powerful implements of soul-winning. God the Holy the Ghost usually breaks hard hearts by tender hearts.

Besides, the travail qualifies for the proper taking care of the offspring. God does not commit His new born children to people who do not care to see conversions. If He ever allows them to fall into such hands, they suffer very serious loss thereby. Who is so fit to encourage a new-born believer as the man who first anguished before the Lord for his conversion? Those you have wept over and prayed for you will be sure to encourage and assist you.

The church that never travailed, should God send her a hundred converts, would be unfit to train them. She would not know what to do with little children and would leave them to much suffering.

Let us thank God, brethren, if He has given us any degree of the earnest anxiety and sympathy, which mark soul-winning men and women, and let us ask to have more. For in proportion as we have it, we shall be qualified to be the instruments in the hand of the Spirit, of nursing and cherishing God's sons and daughters.

Once more, there is a great benefit in the law which makes travail necessary to spiritual birth, because it secures all the glory to God. If you want to be lowered in your own esteem, try to convert a

child. I would like those brethren who believe so much in free will, and the natural goodness of the human heart, to try some children that I could bring to them, and see whether they could break their hearts and make them love the Savior. Why, sir, you never think yourself so great a fool as after trying in your own strength to bring a sinner to the Savior.

Oh! how often have I come back defeated from arguing with an awakened person, whom I have sought to comfort. I did think I had some measure of skill in handling sorrowful cases, but I have been compelled to say to myself, "What a simpleton I am! God the Holy Ghost must take this case in hand, for I am foiled."

When one has tried in a sermon to reach a certain person who is living in sin, you learn afterwards that he enjoyed the sermon which he ought to have smarted under. Then, you say, "Ah, now I see what a weak worm I am, and if good be done, God shall have the glory." Your longing then that others should be saved and your vehemence of spirit, shall secure to God all the glory of His own work. And this is what the Lord is aiming at, for His glory He will not give to another, nor His praise to an arm of flesh.

And now, having established the fact, and shown the reasons for it, let us notice *how this travail shows itself*.

Usually when God intends greatly to bless a church, it will begin in this way—two or three persons in it are distressed at the low state of affairs, and become troubled even to anguish. Perhaps they do not speak to one another or know of their common grief, but they begin to pray with flaming desire and untiring importunity.

The passion to see the church revived rules them. They think of it when they go to rest. They dream of it on their bed. They muse on it in the streets. This one thing eats them up. They suffer great heaviness and continual sorrow in heart for perishing sinners. They travail in birth for souls.

I have happened to become the center of certain brethren in this church. One of them said to me the other day, "O sir, I pray day and night for God to prosper our church. I long to see greater things. God is blessing us, but we want much more." I saw the deep earnestness of the man's soul, and I thanked him, and thanked God heartily, thinking it to be a sure sign of a coming blessing.

Sometime after, another friend, who probably now hears me speak, but who did not know anything about the other, felt the same yearning and must needs let me know it. He too is anxious, longing, begging, crying, for a revival. And thus from three or four quarters I have had the same message and I feel hopeful because of these tokens for good.

When the sun rises, the mountaintops first catch the light and those who constantly live near to God will be the first to feel the influence of the coming refreshing. The Lord give me a dozen importunate pleaders and lovers of souls, and by His grace, we will yet shake all London from end to end yet. The work will go on without the mass of you, Christians—many of you only hinder the march of the army, but give us a dozen lion-like, lamb-like men, burning with intense love to Christ and souls, and nothing will be impossible to their faith.

The most of us are not worthy to unloose the laces of ardent saints. I often feel I am not so myself, but I aspire and long to be reckoned among them. Oh, may God give us this first sign of the travail in the earnest ones and twos.

By degrees the individuals are drawn together by sacred affinity and the prayer meetings become very different. The brother who talked twenty minutes in what he called prayer, and yet never asked for a single thing, gives up his oration and falls to pleading with many tears and broken sentences. While the friend who used to relate his experience, and go through the doctrines of grace, and call that a prayer, forgets that rigmarole and begins agonizing before the throne. And not only this, but little knots here and there come together in their cottages and in their little rooms they cry mightily to God.

The result will be that the minister, even if he does not know of the feeling in the hearts of his people, will grow fervent himself. He will preach more evangelically, more tenderly, more earnestly. He will be no longer formal, or cold, or stereotyped. He will be all alive. Meanwhile, not with the preacher only will be the blessing, but with his hearers who love the Lord.

One will be trying a plan for getting in the young people. Another will be looking after the strangers in the aisles, who come only now and then. One brother will make a vehement attempt to preach the Gospel at the corner of the street. Another will open a room down a dark court. Another will visit lodging houses and hospitals—all sorts of holy plans will be invented and zeal will break out in many directions. All this will be spontaneous, nothing will be forced.

If you want to get up a revival, as the term is, you can do it, just as you can grow tasteless strawberries in winter by artificial heat. There are ways and means of doing that kind of thing, but the genuine work of God needs no such planning and scheming. It is altogether spontaneous.

If you see a snow-drop next February in your garden, you will feel persuaded that spring is on the way. The artificial flower-maker could put as many snow-drops there as you please, but that would be no index of coming spring.

So you may get up an apparent zeal, which will be no proof of God's blessing. But when fervor comes of itself, without human direction or control, then is it of the Lord. When men's hearts heave and break, like the mold of the garden under the influence of the reviving life which lay buried there, then in very deed a benediction is on the way. Travail is no mockery, but a real agony of the whole nature. May such be seen in this our church and throughout the whole Israel of God.

II. Now, with great brevity, let us consider that THE RESULT IS OFTEN VERY SURPRISING.

It is frequently surprising for *rapidity*. "As soon as Zion travailed, she brought forth her children." God's works are not tied by time. The more spiritual a force is the less it lies within the chains of time. The electric current, which has a greater nearness to the spiritual than the grosser forms of materialism, is inconceivably rapid from that very reason, and by it time is all but annihilated.

The influences of the Spirit of God are a force most spiritual and more quick than anything beneath the sun. As soon as we agonize in soul, the Holy Spirit can, if He pleases, convert the person for whom we have pleaded. While we are yet speaking, He hears and before we call, He answers.

Some calculate the expected progress of a church by arithmetic, and I think I have heard of arithmetical sermons in which there have been ingenious calculations as to how many missionaries it would take to convert the world, and how much cash would be demanded.

Now, there is no room here for the application of mathematics—spiritual forces are not calculable by an arithmetic which is most at home in the material universe. A truth which is calculated to strike the mind of one man today may readily enough produce a like effect upon a million minds tomorrow. The preaching which moves one heart needs not to be altered to tell upon ten thousand. With God's Spirit our present instrumentalities will suffice to win the world to Jesus. Without Him, ten thousand times as much apparent force would be only so much weakness.

The spread of the truth, moreover, is not reckonable by time. During the ten years which ended in 1870, such wondrous changes were wrought throughout the world that no prophet would have been believed had he foretold them. Reforms have been accomplished in England, in the United States, in Germany, in Spain, in Italy, which according to ordinary reckoning, would have occupied at least one hundred years. Things which concern the mind cannot be subjected to those regulations of time which govern steamboats and railways. In such matters, God's messengers are flames of fire.

The Spirit of God is able to operate upon the minds of men instantaneously—witness the case of Paul. Between now and tomorrow morning, He could excite holy thought in all the minds of all the thousand millions of the sons of Adam, and if prayer were mighty enough and strong enough, why should it not be done on some bright day? We are not straitened in Him, we are straitened in our own hearts. All the fault lies there. Oh for the travail that would produce immediate results.

But the result is surprising, not only for its rapidity, but for *the greatness of it*. It is said, "Shall a nation be born at once?" for as soon as ever Zion was in distress about her children, tens of thousands came and built up Jerusalem, and re-established the fallen state.

So in answer to prayer, God does not only give speedy blessings, but great blessings. There were fervent prayers in that upper room, "before the day of Pentecost had fully come," and what a great

answer it was when, after Peter's sermon, some three thousand were ready to confess their faith in Christ and to be baptized.

Shall we never see such things again? Is the Spirit straitened? Has His arm waxed short! Nay, verily, but we clog and hinder Him. He cannot do any mighty work here because of our unbelief, and if our unbelief were cast out, and if prayer went up to God with eagerness, and vehemence, and importunity, then would a blessing descend so copious as to amaze us all.

But enough of this, for I must pass on to the next point.

III. THIS TRAVAIL AND ITS RESULT ARE ABUNDANTLY DESIRABLE, pre-eminently desirable at this hour.

The world is perishing for lack of knowledge. Did anyone among us ever lay China on his heart? Your imagination cannot grapple with the population of that mighty empire, without God, without Christ, strangers to the commonwealth of Israel. But it is not China alone. There are other vast nations lying in darkness. The great serpent has coiled himself around the globe and who shall set the world free from him?

Reflect upon this one city with its three millions. What sin the moon sees! What sin the Sabbath sees! Alas! for the transgressions of this wicked city. Babylon of old could not have been worse than London is, nor so guilty, for she had not the light that London has received.

Brethren, there is no hope for China, no hope for the world, no hope for our own city, while the church is sluggish and lethargic. It is through the church the blessing is bestowed. Christ multiplies the bread and gives it to the disciples. The multitudes can only get it through the disciples. Oh, it is time, it is high time that the churches were awakened to seek the good of dying myriads.

Moreover, brethren, the powers of evil are ever active. We may sleep, but Satan sleeps never. The church's plough lies yonder, rusting in the furrow. Do you not see it, to your shame? But the plough of Satan goes from end to end of his great field. He leaves no headland, but he ploughs deep, whilst sluggish churches sleep. May we be stirred as we see the awful activity of evil spirits and persons who are under their sway.

How industriously pernicious literature is spread abroad and with what a zeal do men seek for fresh ways of sinning. He is eminent among men who can invent fresh songs to gratify the lascivious tongue or find new spectacles to delight unclean eyes. O God, are Your enemies awake and only Your friends asleep? O Sufferer, once bathed in bloody sweat in Gethsemane, is there not one of the twelve awake, but Judas? Are they all asleep except the traitor? May God arouse us for His infinite mercy's sake.

Besides this, my brethren, when a church is not serving God, mischief is brewing within herself. While she is not bringing others in, her own heart is becoming weak in its pulsations and her entire constitution is a prey to decline. The church must either bring forth children unto God or die of consumption. She has no alternative but that.

A church must either be fruitful or rot, and of all things a rotting church is the most offensive. Would God we could bury our dead churches out of our sight, as Abraham buried Sarah, for above ground they breed a pestilence of skepticism, for men say, "Is this religion?" And taking it to be so, they forego true religion altogether.

And then, worst of all, God is not glorified. If there be no yearning of heart in the church, and no conversions, where is the travail of the Redeemer's soul? Where, Immanuel, where are the trophies of Your terrible conflict? Where are the jewels for Your crown? You shall have Your own, Your Father's will shall not be frustrated. You shall be adored, but as yet we see it not.

Hard are men's hearts and they will not love You. Unyielding are their wills and they will not own Your sovereignty. Oh! weep because Jesus is not honored. The foul oath still curdles our blood as we hear it and blasphemy usurps the place of grateful song. Oh, by the wounds and bloody sweat, by the cross, and nails, and spear, I beseech you, followers of Christ, be in earnest, that Jesus Christ's name may be known and loved through the earnest agonizing endeavors of the Christian church.

IV. And now I must come near to a close, by, in the fourth place, noticing THE WOE WHICH WILL SURELY COME TO THOSE WHO HINDER THE TRAVAIL OF THE CHURCH and so prevent the bringing forth of her children.

An earnest spirit cannot complete its exhortations to zeal without pronouncing a denunciation upon the indifferent. What said the heroine of old who had gone forth against the enemies of Israel, when she remembered coward spirits? “Curse ye, Meroz, saith the angel of the LORD, curse ye bitterly the inhabitants thereof; because they came not to the help of the LORD, against the mighty.”

Some such curse will assuredly come upon every professing Christian who is backward in helping the church in the day of her soul’s travail. And who are they that hinder her? I answer, every worldly Christian hinders the progress of the Gospel. Every member of a church who is living in secret sin, who is tolerating in his heart anything that he knows to be wrong, who is not seeking eagerly his own personal sanctification, is to that extent hindering the work of the Spirit of God.

Be you clean that bear the vessels of the Lord, for to the extent that we maintain known unholiness, we restrain the Spirit. He cannot work by us as long as any conscious sin is tolerated. It is not overt breaking of commandments that I am now speaking of, brethren, but I include worldliness also—a care for carnal things, and a carelessness about spiritual things, having enough grace just to make us hope that you are a Christian, but not enough to prove you are.

Bearing a shriveled apple here and there on the topmost bough, but not much fruit. This I mean, this partial barrenness, not complete enough to condemn, yet complete enough to restrain the blessing, this robs the treasury of the church and hinders her progress. O brethren, if any of you are thus described, repent and do your first works, and God help you to be foremost in proportion as you have been behind.

They are also guilty who distract the mind of the church from the subject in hand. Anybody who calls off the thoughts of the church from soul-saving is a mischief maker. I have heard it said of a minister, “He greatly influences the politics of the town.” Well, it is a very doubtful good in my mind, a very doubtful good indeed.

If the man, keeping to his own calling of preaching the Gospel, happens to influence these meaner things, it is well, but any Christian minister, who thinks that he can do two things well, is mistaken. Let him mind soul-winning and not turn a Christian church into a political club. Let us fight out our politics somewhere else, but not inside the church of God. There our one business is soul-winning, our one banner is the cross, our one leader is the crucified King.

Inside the church there may be minor things that take off the thoughts of men from seeking souls—little things that can be made beneath the eye that are microscopical, to swell into great offenses. O my brethren, let us, while souls are perishing, waive personal differences, “It must be that offenses come, but woe unto him by whom the offense comes.”

But after all, what can there be that is worth taking notice of, compared with glorifying Christ. If our Lord and Master would be honored by your being a doormat for His saints to wipe their feet on, you would be honored to be in the position. And if there shall come glory to God by your patient endurance, even of insult and disgrace, be glad in your heart that you are permitted to be nothing that Christ may be all in all. We must by no means turn aside to this or that, not even golden apples must tempt us in this race! There lies the mark, and until it is reached, we must never pause, but onward press, for Christ’s cause and crown.

Above all, my brethren, we shall be hindering the travail of the church if we do not share in it. Many church members think that if they do nothing wrong and make no trouble, then they are all right. Not at all, sir, not at all. Here is a chariot and we are all engaged to drag it. Some of you do not put out your hands to pull.

Well, then, the rest of us have to labor so much the more, and the worst of it is we have to draw you also. While you do not add to the strength which draws, you increase the weight that is to be drawn. It is all very well for you to say, “But I do not hinder.” You do hinder, you cannot help hindering. If a man’s leg does not help him in walking, it certainly hinders him.

Oh, I cannot bear to think of it. That I should be a hindrance to my own soul's growth is bad indeed, but that I should stand in the way of the people of God, and cool their courage, and damp their ardor—my Master, let it never be! Sooner let me sleep among the clods of the valley, than be a hindrance to the lowliest work that is done for Your name.

V. And now I shall close, not with this note of woe, but with A WORD OF BLESSING.

Depend upon it, there shall come a great blessing to any of you who feel the soul-travail that brings souls to God. Your own heart will be watered. You know the old illustration, so often used that it is now almost hackneyed, of the two travelers who passed a man frozen in the snow, and thought to be dead. And the one said, "I have enough to do to keep myself alive, I will hasten on." But the other said, "I cannot pass a fellow creature while there is the least breath in him."

He stooped down and began to warm the frozen man by rubbing him with great vigor, and at last the poor fellow opened his eyes, came back to life and animation, and walked along with the man who had restored him to life. And what think you was one of the first sights they saw? It was the man who needed to take care of himself frozen to death. The good Samaritan had preserved his own life by rubbing the other man. The friction he had given had caused the action of his own blood and kept him in vigor. You will bless yourselves if you bless others.

Moreover, will it not be a joy to feel that you have done what you could? It is always well on a Sunday evening for a preacher to feel when he gets home, "Well, I may not have preached as I should wish, but I have preached the Lord Jesus, and preached all my heart out, and I could do no more." He sleeps soundly on that.

After a day spent in doing all the good you can, even if you have met with no success, you can lean your head on Christ's bosom and fall asleep, feeling that if souls be not gathered, yet you have your reward. If men are lost, it is some satisfaction to us that they were not lost because we failed to tell them the way of salvation. But what a comfort it will be to you supposing you should be successful in bringing some to Christ. Why it will make all the bells of your soul ring. There is no greater joy, except the joy of our own communion with Christ, than this of bringing others to trust the Savior.

Oh seek this joy and pant after it. And what if you should see your own children converted? You have long hoped for it, but your hopes have been disappointed. God means to give you that choice blessing when you live more nearly to Him yourself. Yes, wife, the husband's heart will be won when your heart is perfectly consecrated. Yes, mother, the girl shall love the Savior when you love Him better.

Yes, teacher, God means to bless your class, but not until, first of all He has made you fit to receive the blessing. Why, now, if your children were to be converted through your teaching, you would be mightily proud of it. God knows you could not bear such success, and does not mean to give it until He has laid you low at His feet, and emptied you of yourself, and filled you with Himself.

And now I ask the prayers of all this church, that God would send us a time of revival. I have not to complain that I have labored in vain and spent my strength for nothing. Far from it. I have not even to think that the blessing is withdrawn from the preaching of the Word, even in a measure, for I never had so many cases of conversions in my life as I have known since I have been restored from sickness.

I have never before received so many letters in so short a time, telling me that the printed sermons have been blest or the sermons preached here. Yet I do not think we ever had so few conversions from the regular congregation. I partly account for it from the fact that you cannot fish in one pond always and catch as many fish as at first.

Perhaps the Lord has saved all of you He means to save. Sometimes, I am afraid He has, and then it will be little use my keeping on preaching to you, and I had better shift quarters and try somewhere else. It would be a melancholy thought if I believed it—I do not believe it, I only fear it.

Surely it is not always to be true that strangers, who drop in here only once, are converted, and you who are always hearing the Gospel remain unaffected. Strange, but may it not be strangely, lamentably true of you? This very day may the anxiety of your Christian friends be excited for you, and then may you be led to be anxious for yourselves, and give your eyes no slumber till you find the Savior.

You know the way of salvation. It is simply to come with your sins and rest them on the Savior. It is to rely upon or trust in the atoning blood. Oh, that you may be made to trust this morning, to the praise of the glory of His grace.

The elders mean to meet together tomorrow evening to have a special hour of prayer. I hope, also, the mothers will meet and have a time of wrestling, and that every member of the church will try to set apart a time for supplication this week, that the Lord may visit again His church, and cause us to rejoice in His name.

We cannot go back. We dare not go back. We have put our hand to the plough and the curse will be upon us if we turn back. Remember Lot's wife. It must be onward with us, backward it cannot be. In the name of God the Eternal, let us gird up our loins by the power of His Spirit, and go onward conquering through the blood of the Lamb. We ask it for Jesus' sake. Amen.

PORTION OF SCRIPTURE READ BEFORE SERMON—ISAIAH 66

Taken from The Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit C. H. Spurgeon Collection. Only necessary changes have been made, such as correcting spelling errors, some punctuation usage, capitalization of deity pronouns, and minimal updating of a few archaic words. The content is unabridged. Additional Bible-based resources are available at www.spurgeongems.org.