

THE ARROWS OF THE LORD'S DELIVERANCE

NO. 569

A SERMON
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 AT THE OPENING OF UPTON CHAPEL, LAMBETH

*“Thou shouldest have smitten five or six times;
 then hadst thou smitten Syria till thou hadst consumed it:
 whereas now thou shalt smite Syria but thrice.”*
2 Kings 13:19

THAT deathbed scene speaks volumes for the power of holiness. Elisha was the prophet of God, a man of no honorable station, except that he is always honorable whom God calls to serve Him. Joash the king of Israel—who has often rejected Elisha's admonitions, and continued to worship in the groves of Baal though Elisha had denounced them, and had proclaimed that JEHOVAH alone was their God—now that the prophet is about to die, at the good old age of ninety, comes to weep at his bedside.

It was something remarkable for the king to come there at all. Kings do not often visit deathbed scenes, especially the deathbeds of God's servants. But it was something more remarkable for that king to stand and look upon the decaying form of the aged prophet, and to weep over his face. More notable still was the language in which the king expressed his sense of the value of the prophet to the state—“Oh my Father, my Father, the chariot of Israel, and the horsemen thereof.” He felt as if now all his strength was cut off.

The king had trusted in his cavalry, though he had but a slender force, and he compares the prophet to that which he looked upon as being the strongest arm of his military service. Or he looks upon the state now as being a chariot with wild horses, and no stately prophet to stand erect and hold the reins. Now have the reins dropped, and whither will the chariot go? It will soon be overturned, and the mad coursers will drag it hither and thither. So the king, out of a sort of selfish respect for the prophet—for it was respect and yet it was selfishness—stands and weeps over the prophet's dying bed.

Dear friends, let us seek so to live that even ungodly men may miss us when we are gone. It is possible for us in a quiet, unobtrusive manner, so to adorn the doctrine of God our Savior in all things, that when we die many shall say, “Let me die the death of the righteous, and let my last end be like his.” And men shall drop a tear, and close the shutter, and be silent and solemn for an hour or two when they hear that the servant of the Lord is dead.

They laughed at him while he lived, but they weep for him when he dies. They could despise him while he was here, but now that he is gone they say—“We could have better missed a less-known man, for he, and such as he, are the pillars of the commonweal, they bring down showers of blessing upon us all.”

I would covet this earnestly as a gift, not for the honor and esteem of men, but for the honor and glory of God, that even the despisers of Christ may be compelled to see that there is a dignity, a respect, about the walk of an upright man.

Yet the scene at the deathbed of Elisha, fragrant as it is with the tribute of respect paid to the prophet by an ungodly and unprincipled monarch, is memorable for the lessons there and then taught the king, and not less suggestive is it of profitable instructions to us. I propose therefore, first of all, *to consider the significant sign*, then, I want you to *join with me in censuring the slack-handed king*. After which we shall have no difficulty, I think, in *unanimously justifying the righteous wrath of the prophet*.

I. VERY SIGNIFICANT WAS THE SIGN.

Israel was at that time engaged in warfare against Syria. As a sign that God intended to give victory to His people, the king is bidden to take the bow and arrows. Elisha, as God's representative, puts his hand upon the king's hands, forthwith the window is opened, and the arrow is shot. As it flies through the air, the prophet says that that arrow is the arrow of the Lord's deliverance of His people out of the hand of Syria.

The interpretation of this symbolic act is simple enough. God will save, deliverance is of the Lord, but it must be accomplished by human instrumentality. Joash must take the bow and arrows, but the hands of Joash cannot make the arrow speed, save as Elisha, the representative of God, puts his hands there. So the man, divinely strengthened by God, shoots the arrow and the deliverance comes.

Such, from the beginning of time even until now, has been God's ordinary way of blessing His people and of gathering in His chosen. He works; the instrumentality is nothing without Him. He takes care to elect means which, from their very feebleness convince the most skeptical that the power cannot be in the creature. While at the same time, He rarely effects any great thing for His people apart from human agency.

God, who created all things, is the Agent, but He uses the creatures as tools and weapons in the hand of the skillful and the mighty. He works in us to will and to do of His own good pleasure. It is His pleasure, it is He who works in us, but then it is for us to will and to do, because He works in us.

Review the whole history of the church as you find it in Scripture, and you will see that this has ever been the fact. When God would save an elect company out of the mass of corruption grown at last too fetid for even His patience to endure, He saves the chosen eight—how? By a miracle? Call it a miracle if you will, but it was mechanical enough when Noah begun to lay timber upon timber, fastened them with nails, and constructed the ark. It was a simple act of faith and a very rational act too, to build a ship, yet in that ship God's chosen eight were preserved. You see the grace of God and the obedience of Noah. You know that the Almighty devised the ark, and human hands fashioned it according to the pattern He had given.

Go further on, to a yet more stupendous work of divine power, when God brought up His people out of Egypt with a high hand and with an outstretched arm. When He led them through the sea as through the wilderness, and made the depths stand upright as a heap, as though they were congealed in the heart of the sea. Here was God gloriously manifested, so that the whole song was unto JEHOVAH, and to JEHOVAH alone, "Sing unto the LORD for he hath triumphed gloriously, the horse and his rider hath he thrown into the sea!"

Still, still, see you not that calm, meek man, rod outstretched, the symbol of abiding human instrumentality in the midst of JEHOVAH's wonders. God divides the sea, not Moses, but God divides not the sea without Moses' rod. So, too, when the rock gave water in the wilderness, Moses' voice, and afterwards Moses' rod, must fetch the water out of that rock.

And when Jordan was divided, the feet of the priests went first down to the river's edge, and then—"What ailed thee, O Jordan, that thou wast driven back?" Did the priests speak to it? Who dreams of such a thing? And yet God did it not without the priests.

So was it with the capture of the various cities under Joshua. In that first and memorable one, the taking of Jericho, they did but little when the walls fell flat to the ground on the seventh day. But you will remember that those walls did not fall until the people had compassed the city the seven days, nor did they fall without the sound of the rams' horns, and the shouts of the multitude.

So again, turn to the time of the Judges, and how did God deliver His people then? Why, my friends, you find at one time it is the ox-goad of Shamgar, and at another time it is the jawbone in the hand of Samson, sometimes it is Gideon's lamp and pitcher, and then it is Jephthah's good and true sword. Ever is it true that God has means, selecting for His purposes things of earth to execute the fiats of heaven.

But I might, perhaps, weary you with mentioning the history of the kings, and running on through the prophets, therefore let us come at once to apostolic times. Old Rome was to be subdued, the deep-seated idolatries of ages were to be rooted up, and the fabulous deities were to be shaken from their

pedestals. The Spirit of the Lord could do it in a moment. He might have convinced all men of the folly of idolatry, silently breathing upon human minds they might have been convinced of sin, and turned to the great Father of Spirits. A revelation of Christ might have been given to every man without a single minister. But did He choose to do it? No, my brethren, He did not. The twelve fishermen must first proclaim the Word, and afterwards such men as Timothy, and those who were the true “successors of the apostles,” must in every region preach the words of truth.

Or point me to a single period in the history of the church where God has worked without instrumentality, and I will tell you that I suspect whether God has worked at all if I do not see the instruments He has employed.

Take the Reformation, can you think of it without thinking of God? At the same time, can you mention it without the names of Luther, and Calvin, Zwingli, and Melancthon? Then in the later Reformation in England, when our slumbering churches were suddenly started from their sleep, who did it? The Holy Ghost Himself, but you cannot talk of the revival without mentioning the names of Whitefield and Wesley, for God worked by means then, and He works by means still.

I used to notice a remark which was made concerning the revival in the north of Ireland, that there seemed to be no prominent instrumentality. The moment I saw that, I mistrusted it. Had it been God's work more fully developed through instrumentality, I believe it had not so speedily come to a close. We grant you that God can work without means, and even when He uses means He still takes the glory to Himself, for it is all His own. Yet it has been the rule, and will be the rule till the day of means shall come to an end, that just as God saved man by taking upon Himself man's flesh, so everywhere in the world He calls men by speaking to them through men of their own flesh and blood.

God incarnates Himself—if I may use so strong an expression in a restricted sense—in His Spirit, incarnates Himself in the chosen men, especially in His church, in which He dwells as in a temple, and then through that church He is pleased to bless the world.

Now we must hold this ever. We are not to let the arrows lie still and say, “God will do His own work, Elisha will shoot the arrows.” This is idleness. We have had enough of this. Look at those churches which say, “God will do His own work.” You will find that the more these people talk about God's doing His own work, the more they sink into a fatal apathy. No Sunday school, no care for the conversion of souls, but bigotry, bitterness of spirit, carping and backbiting against all those who are willing to labor in the Master's vineyard.

And when they have entangled brethren whose conversion was effected under other ministries than their own, they talk as if they had been re-converted, and did not know the truth till they heard the particular, excellent, superfine, hot pressed Gospel which they deliver. There is all that sort of thing among them, you see a spirit the reverse of amiable, a mind palpably contrary to that which was in Jesus Christ.

On the other hand, it is an equally dangerous error to suppose that we are to take the arrows and shoot without God. This is, in fact, the more dangerous of the two. Although, if I have to compare two devils together, I know not which is the worst of these evil spirits, the spirit that idly says—“Leave it to God,” or the spirit which goes about God's work without depending on Him. O Lord of hosts, it is not by might, nor by power, but by Thy Spirit, nevertheless the love of Christ constrains us to spend and be spent in His cause.

II. And now, secondly, let us CENSURE THE SLACK-HANDED KING.

The prophet gave him the bow and the arrows, and bade him shoot down upon the ground. It was left to him. God foreknew, and had predestinated how many victories he should win, but still, at the same time, it is marvelous how our free actions tally exactly with God's predestination. He is bidden to shoot and he shoots once. He draws his bow, and shoots again. A third time he draws the bow, and then throws it down slack upon the ground, the prophet is angry with him, for he will only have three victories. If he had smitten the ground six times he would have had six victories, but inasmuch as he only shot the three times, he is only to have three triumphs.

The king is to be censured and censured severely. But as he is dead and gone, and our censure cannot much affect him, let us censure those who now imitate him, and we think that we can find very many of the same sort.

How many believers *have but little faith, and seem quite content to have but that little*. They cannot grasp the promise of God and believingly expect to have it fulfilled. They scarcely know their own interest in Christ, they are safe enough, but they are generally wretched enough. They cannot take God at His word, and therefore their temporal troubles and their spiritual cares press very heavily upon them.

Oh that they had grace to smite the ground six times! Oh that they knew how to cast all their burdens on Him who cares for them! Oh that the Lord would give them new faith, so that they would trust Him implicitly, and leave their souls in the hands of Him who shed His heart's blood that He might redeem them from wrath!

Why, I do not know, dear friends, that there is any necessity for us to be always doubting, and fearing and trembling. Some think there is, but this is because they have not a high idea of the standing of the child of God, and of the position which God would have him attain unto. They shoot the three arrows, and they say—"I am saved, that is enough. I shall get to heaven." Oh that they would go on shooting till they could get a heaven below, till they could begin by strong faith to—

*“Read their title clear,
To mansions in the sky,”*

and “rejoice with joy unspeakable and full of glory!”

Then you see another class of people who are just the same *as to their knowledge*. They do not understand the deep things of God. They are content to know that which saves the soul from ruin, and the remedy which is provided in Christ, but they do not know, and perhaps do not care to know the doctrine of God's electing love. They never dive into the doctrine of God's immutable faithfulness to His chosen people. They let the deep things of God lie still for strong men, but they themselves are content to be babes.

Oh, dear friends, how much they miss who neglect to study God's Word, and what blessings do they cast away from themselves who are willing to be ignorant of the sublimer truths of revelation! I would that instead of shooting three times, they would have grace to shoot more, and more, and more, till they comprehend with all saints what are the heights, and depths, and lengths, and breadths, of the love of Christ which passeth knowledge.

You will see, perhaps, these same people, or others like them, *who are very content about their daily walk and conversation*. They are not drunkards, they do not swear, they are scrupulously truthful, they commit no breach of the Sabbath day, but when you have said this, you have said about as much as you can say of them.

Their religion seems to have made them moral, but it would be difficult to perceive that it has made them holy. There is very little family prayer, not much interest taken in the conversion of the children. There is an angry temper, perhaps which is somewhat curbed, but still the brother thinks that it is impossible to curb it any more, and so he tolerates himself in the occasional indulgence of it.

There is much which is not inconsistent, perhaps, in the eye of the world, but which is most certainly not consistent in the mind of the Spirit of God. These brethren have, in fact, shot three times, and they have smitten the ground once or twice, but they have not made a clean sweep of their besetting sins. They still tolerate some of them. They have not reached to a high point of holiness.

Now, I am as far as anybody from believing that a man ever will be perfect in this life, but I will never be satisfied till I am, and if I cannot be perfect, I will seek by God's grace to get as near to it as possible. And this should be the labor of every Christian. Not in order to save himself, but because he is saved, he should labor after the very highest degrees of holiness, and seek that God might shine through him as through a lamp, and that men may take knowledge of him that he has been with Jesus and learned

of Him. High faith, high knowledge, high living—oh what blessed Christians would we have if these three went together!

So too, there are many Christians who do not shoot more than three times, inasmuch as *they are content with very low enjoyments*. Oh the many, the many professors who all their days are subject to bondage! Now, Christ came to deliver such from the fear of death, and yet though Christ came to do it, it is not done in their case. They do not receive the Spirit of adoption, but they seem to have received the spirit of bondage again to fear, and they think that this is the rule with God's people.

When they read of some saints who have climbed the mountains and have had sweet fellowship with Christ, they say, "Ah! such men are uncommon, and such experiences are like angels' visits, few and far between, we cannot get up to this." I do believe dear friends, that this spirit creeps over us all.

We read the biography of such a man as Brainerd, and we shut up the book, and sigh, and say, "Oh I could never be so devoted as he was!" We have turned over the life of Whitefield, and when we have read it, we have said, "Ah! a very extraordinary man—a very extraordinary man! it is not likely that I shall ever get his zeal."

And when we turn to the Old Testament and read of Abraham, we say, "Yes, Abraham's faith was very wonderful, but we do not look upon him as a pattern which we are to imitate. We believe that his faith is something set up high in a niche, to which we can never get."

My brethren, this is all wrong. I believe that the Christian ought not to be content to be equal with Abraham, because Abraham lived in the dark, before the sun had risen. It was at least, but twilight in Abraham's day, and yet if he had so much faith when he could only see through the dim smoke of sacrificial rams and bulls, how much more faith and confidence in God ought you and I to have when we see Christ Himself, and when God speaks to us through His Son! Shame on us that we are content to be such dwarfs when we might grow into giants—that we are here frittering away our time when we might immortalize ourselves and glorify our Lord.

How is it that we are content to bring forth a lean ear, and then a scanty ear, when there should be seven ears upon one stalk, like the plenty of Egypt. How is it that we have here and there a cluster, when instead thereof, if we did but shoot more, if we had more faith and more confidence in God, we might be like the grapes of Eshcol, whose clusters were too heavy for one man to carry?

Yes, I am afraid there is in this Christian land very, very much of this stopping short of what we might be. We do not press on and reach to that which is before, but saying, "I am saved," we are therewith content, and sit down before we reach the goal, or have apprehended that for which we were apprehended of Christ Jesus.

Now, I want your attention for just a moment, while I try to show some of the reasons why the king did not shoot more.

I cannot tell certainly, but I think some of the reasons which I am going to give you may be correct. *Perhaps he felt rather tender towards the Syrians*. It is just possible that he felt he did not want to hurt them too much. He would to be victorious, he wanted to get his enemy under his feet, but if he did more he would crush him outright, and he hardly wanted to do that. So I do think that some professors do not want to be too hard with their sins. They have a sort of hidden tenderness towards their own corruptions.

O, dear friends, how very angry we get when somebody tells us a little too plainly about our faults! and how angry we are with anything which seeks to cut the throat of our favorite sin. Ah, we do not know how tender we are to our sins, any of us, whereas the viper's brood should be crushed in the nest! We are often saying, as we wound them, "Yes, keep them under, but no—I could not give them all up—I could not—no, I must have just a little indulgence, there must be this and that."

The laying of the axe to the root of the tree is not pleasant work. Lop the big boughs off if you like, but laying the axe to the root—no, we do not quite like that. There is in us, after all, through our natural corruptions, a hankering attachment to our sins. The old man says, "Spare them," and it needs much grace, and triumphant grace too, to say, "No; hew even Agag in pieces before the LORD, and let not even the best of the sheep or of the cattle be spared."

Tenderness to sin will always check us in any great growth in grace. We shall not use God's bow as much as we should if we once begin to pamper self-indulgence, to cultivate our own ease, and make provision for the flesh.

Again, perhaps the king did not go on to shoot because *he thought it was hardly his business to be employed as a Bowman*. "Why should I stay here forever," says he, "shooting arrows? I did not object when the prophet's hand was upon me to shoot, but to stand here and keep smiting the ground is hardly the occupation for a king."

And then the thought, perhaps, *that he should have three victories and that would be enough*. "Why, it will be something wonderful! Three victories, one after another, will be quite enough to crown me with everlasting renown, and I do not want more than that," and so he did but shoot three times.

And how many a believer seems to say, "Can I always be keeping watch over my corruptions? Am I to be so precise, and to live so near to God? What, am I to be so much in prayer? Am I to be such a Bible student and to be so much occupied? No, if I can overcome some of my sins, and be a respectable church member, and do a little in the Sunday school, and get to heaven, that is enough."

You do not want, you see, to be made good. You do not want to be made Christ-like, you do not want to be able to triumph over your sins, you mistake your high calling. You think you are called to be a slave, when you are called to reign. You fancy that you are called to wear sackcloth, when you are bidden to put on scarlet and fine linen. You think that God has called you to a dunghill, whereas He has called you to a throne. You imagine that you are to be but here and there, the skirmishers in the battle, when He has called you to stand in the front rank, and to fight constantly for His cause.

I think, also, that the king *may have begun to doubt whether the victories would really come*. He knew very well that he had not many soldiers, and that Syria was very strong, so he thought, "Well, it takes some faith to think that I shall beat them three times, but it is not likely I shall do it the fourth." He doubted the divine power and the divine promise, because of his own weakness, and many a Christian does that.

I think, brethren, that we who are in the ministry might do vastly more for God than we do, if, remembering our own weakness, we did not let that overshadow God's strength. Why, what cannot a man do when he has faith in God? Without Christ, we can do nothing, but do remember the converse of that proposition, that with Him we can do all things. If He will be with me I can do all things, or can bear all sufferings. Let us not forget this, and never let a sense of human weakness mar our clear perception of the might and majesty of God. Let us shout often, for as often as we shout, God will answer our faith.

And do you not think, too, that it is very likely that *the king despised the prophet's plans*. Why, he seemed to say, this was absurd, smiting the ground in this way! If there were any men to be shot at, he would not spare the arrows, but to smite the ground in this way—absurd! Ridiculous! So, too often, we miss a blessing because we do not like God's plans. We have got some new scheme of our own. It is not preaching the Gospel—that is old-fashioned, we will try something else, it is better than going out into the highways and hedges, and compelling them to come in.

No, we want a shorter cut than that. We keep fancying that if we were to give up some ordinance, perhaps, if we held our tongues about baptism, if we were to cut about this doctrine and that, we should get on better.

Ah! this is all wrong, dear friends. Carnal policy may take its place in the cabinet and in the government of the land, but never in the house of God. If right be right, pursue it. If God commands, do it, and leave the consequences to Him. If He bids you shoot on the ground, do you shoot on the ground. You may see no Assyrian there, but every time you shoot, that arrow finds the heart of your enemy, and shall lay him low.

I would, dear friends, that I could so speak tonight as to give the members of this church a very high and noble ambition to do much and to get much for God, to get much grace, to have much holiness, to

do much work. In fine, I wish I could bring them into such a state of heart as the prophet wished to see in Joash, that they would take the arrows, and shoot them off.

III. THE RIGHTEOUS WRATH OF THE PROPHET is our third point, and we think **WE CAN WELL JUSTIFY HIS ANGER.**

We do not like to see either an old man, or a dying man angry, but I think the prophet here did well to be angry, even though at the hour of death. Oh how he loved the people, and how he wept to think that their king was standing in their light, and was robbing them of precious privileges!

Now when I look, dear friends, upon many church members, and see how utterly idle and careless they are about Christ's cause, and how many professors seem to be as dead as the seats they sit upon, and to have no more grace than worldlings, I think if my soul were warmed with something like a holy passion against them, I might say, with more truth than Jonah, "I do well to be angry."

How much Israel suffers from the slack-handedness of the king. Oh, Christians, you suffer yourselves, you miss a thousand comforts! What you might do for God you are unable to do. What you might sit down and feed upon yourselves you utterly miss, because you will not go on farther and seek higher attainments. And all your brethren suffer too. Your prayers at the prayer meeting have not that fervor and unction which they would have if you lived nearer to God. Your experience is not as profitable to them as it would be if you walked nearer to Christ. The whole church treasury is robbed by you.

Church membership is a sort of joint-stock company, we, each one of us, take out of that stock and put into it. There is a prayer treasury. We all want to be prayed for, there is taking out of it. We must all put prayers into the treasury, and those members who do not pray—and are there such?—and those members who do not yearn over souls—and are there not such?—those members who have no zeal for God—and there are such?—rob the treasury of God. And I know not why I might not compare them to Ananias and Sapphira, for they keep back a part of the price. God have mercy upon them for this, but the church has greatly suffered on this account.

How easy the triumph that might have been achieved. Why, if this king had shot more arrows, Syria would have been quite overcome and cut in pieces. But because he was slack in this, Syria waves her proud banner over captive maids and sorrowing widows, whose husbands have been slain in battle, and weep in the streets of Samaria.

The devil rejoices when he sees slumbering Christians. The world laughs in its sleeve at professors nowadays, because it says, "In the old Puritan times, when we saw a Christian we were afraid of him. Ah! when a man joined the church in those days, he was a man who meant what he said. But ah! there are so many of them now who only join the church to be respectable. And they only go to a place of worship because of custom, that the people may trade with them and be cheated, that they may talk with them, and hear such idle talk as they would not hear from men in the streets, who never profess anything. Ah! we have almost overcome and destroyed the church when we see her members behaving so."

It is these people, who may be Christians, but who are only half-Christians. These people who are not altogether cold, but who still are not hot. These people whom I would not shovel away with the dross, but who nevertheless are so adulterated with base metal that you can scarcely call them pure gold. It is these people who make the daughter of Philistia to rejoice, and the sons of the adversary to triumph.

How JEHOVAH's name was dishonored. In Assyria's streets they laughed at JEHOVAH. They said that their gods were greater than He. Oh what a shame it is that you and I should ever put Christ to more shame than He endured for our sakes!

My brothers and sisters, what do we think of ourselves if we have ever in any measure crucified the Lord afresh, and put Him to open shame? It is not only inconsistent Christians who do this, but those Christians who do not seek to come up to the standard, who are content to be poor in grace when they might be rich. I believe that such persons bring much dishonor to Christ by their doubtings, by their hard

thoughts of Christ, by their miserable countenances, and often, too, by their want of zeal, their want of prayer, and their shallowness in the ways of God.

Look abroad and see how busy men are in the world! When a man wants to make money, see how he rises early, and sits up late, and eats the bread of carefulness! It is wonderful what ingenuity men put forth to get a fortune, what desperate attempts they make, how they will go to India and sweat under the burning sky, and brave the fever there. Why, there are thousands of England's sons who do this year by year.

See how at the North Pole bold and brave men have sacrificed their lives to force a passage. Men have been willing in scientific experiments to sacrifice social comforts, risk their health and forfeit their lives. It seems to me that everybody is enthusiastic except Christians, and that men can get their blood hot on any subject except religion, that in these days the ice has been given to the church of God, and the fire has been cast upon the world.

Look at the devil's advocates, how they compass sea and land to make one proselyte. If you are dead and dull they will not be so here at your next-door neighbors—St. George's Cathedral. You may be careless about the poor, but they will not be. You may perhaps, cease to be much in prayer and much in action, but you will find that they will not cease their incantations.

Why, when the devil comes to a man he will say to him, "Come with me. I want you to leave your wife and children tonight, come with me," and away the man goes to some low pot-house. "I want you to go in here," says the devil, and the man goes in—perhaps a respectable man, as the world has it. "Now," says the devil, "I want you to drink ale and stout. It will make your brain reel. It will make your eye red tomorrow morning, and perhaps send you into *delirium tremens*."

"I will do it," says the man, and he drinks it pleasantly and sweetly as though he were drinking draughts of heaven's own nectar. It may be that he goes reeling home, or has to be carried there, but he is quite ready to go again and again, though he may beggar his children, and see his weeping wife and his starving family. He does it all so cheerfully, and thinks, in fact, that he is a very fine fellow, and is only enjoying himself, though he brings untold miseries unto his family.

You will sometimes see a man go into vice, and bring his own body to the verge of the grave, and make himself a mass of rotteness at the command of the devil, and yet he never grumbles at his master, never thinks of running away from him.

And here is my Lord, whose service is perfect freedom, who gives us to eat and to drink of better food than angels ever tasted, who the more we do for Him the more He rewards us, and the more strength He gives us to work with, and yet we are cold, and dull, and dead. And if we are asked to do something, we say we have so many calls. Or if we are asked to go upon some enterprise which has a little dishonor or discomfort connected with it, we go back, would lie in bed and take our ease!

Oh what a shame, what a shame this is! Prophet, thou didst well to be angry! I would that some burning spirits would come among us, and speak even bitterly to us, if they could but make us feel that—

"Life is real, life is earnest,"

and that the cause of Christ demands that spirit, soul, and body should be at the highest tension, at the very sternest stretch, spending and being spent even unto blood, resisting sin, and contending for the mastery of Christ.

Well now, I took this text because it seemed to me—I do not know how it seems to you—as if it were a lesson to your minister and to you tonight. Here you are, come into this new chapel, and into a neighborhood new to you. We who are come here from other churches, as the old prayer book version puts it, "Wish you good luck in the name of the Lord." We wish for you the highest and the best prosperity that we desire for ourselves.

But we do want to impress upon you that while God will help you and stand by you, ever remember that the church must be active. Every single individual must take his portion in this sacred fight, in this grand crusade against sin.

I pray brother Evans never to stay his hand from the shooting of the arrows. If God shall bless him in one effort, let him go on to another. If he sees seven souls converted, let him mourn that it is not eight. If he sees the place filled, let him even then not rest satisfied, but let his cry still be for something yet beyond. And as the eagle rests not, but flies upward, always facing the sun, such may his course be—onward and upward and true to the line, until the Master shall take him into His glory in the rest which remaineth for the people of God.

And you who are here, do not you sit still. Do not say, “Well, if we get these seats comfortably filled we shall be content.” I hope you may have them filled, but I hope you will not be content then. No, let it be your aim, then, to pray that God will convert the seat-holders, that the congregation shall become the church. And do not be content then, ask that the aisles may be filled, that God will convert the standers, and that your church may burst the walls of the house in which you meet.

Do not think that your standard of a prayer meeting is to be a low one. Do not begin to say, “If we have twenty or thirty at a prayer meeting that will do.” Why, many of our churches are below even that standard. Do not be content even with fifty, but go on shooting.

Yes, brother Evans, go on, and you members of this church, go on shooting your arrows. Do not ask God for a little, but open your mouth wide, and God will fill it, take care that you open it as wide as ever you can. Ask Him for great things, and when you ask do not ask as though you thought you were very venturesome, no, but ask because He is sure to give.

Believe that God can and will give you a gracious justification for believing in Him. Ask too, because He knows what your hearts cannot even conceive of, for He is able to do exceeding abundantly beyond what you can ask. Do not be content, I pray you, at Upton Chapel, with being a nice, respectable, strong church in the denomination. Do not be content with that.

I say it very sorrowfully, but we have known some churches which did run well. They have got a good place of worship, a very handsome building with little bits of colored glass, and the people's faces on Sundays are all sorts of colors. And when they have got to this pitch they have said, “Well, we are very respectable people, we do not want the poor people, we do not want to go into the lanes, and highways, and hedges, and fetch them in.”

In fact, they get sometimes to be like some of your old servants. You hardly know which is master and which is servant. And so the Lord may hardly know which is master in the church—these people, or Himself, for they will not do what He tells them. They have got too big for that, they could do it once, but they cannot do it now.

Now, that will not be the case here for years to come. I hope it may never be the case here. But may you ever be a faithful church, may you ever be a working church, till the Lord Himself shall come. May God grant that you may keep on shooting your arrows, that you may expect great things, and do great things.

And now, you members of the church, and all of us who are here present, let us consecrate ourselves anew unto God.

Let us bethink ourselves tonight whether we have not been shooting too few arrows, whether we have not thought too much of the little we have been doing, whether we might not have done more, whether we must not do more, whether now for the future we will not believe God's promises more firmly, preach His Word more boldly, tell it to others more frequently, give to God more liberally, pray to God more earnestly, consecrate and devote ourselves to the Lord more perfectly. I am sure there is room for great improvement in the best of us.

O Lord, what a spark is my love to You! Oh that You would blow it into a flame, till it were as coals of juniper! To use the words of an old minister—“David said, ‘The zeal of thy house has eaten me up,’

but it will be a long time before some people are eaten up, it has not begun to nibble at them yet, and there is no fear of their being eaten up.”

Now, I would like to see a man “eaten up” with his religion. I would that the Christian would give himself up so completely to the mighty whirlwind of divine grace, that it might carry him away, and make him but as a particle of straw in its tremendous course. The Lord grant you power and grace thus to be given up to Him, and thus to serve Him.

May God now add His own blessing, for Christ Jesus' sake. Amen.

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.