

FIRE! FIRE! FIRE!
NO. 397

**A SERMON DELIVERED ON SUNDAY MORNING, JUNE 23, 1861,
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AT THE METROPOLITAN TABERNACLE, NEWINGTON.**

*“When you walk through the fire, you shall not be burned; neither shall the flame kindle upon you.”
Isaiah 43:2.*

BEFORE we explain the metaphor of the text, it may be well for us to remark that we are not sufficiently grateful, I fear, for the preservation which God affords to us from fire. To be startled at the dead of night with the alarming cry, and to find one's self and children and goods in danger of being immediately consumed, must be no small trial. I have felt, myself, extreme gratitude to God that while both on the right hand, and on the left, the flames have raged, He has been pleased to spare to us this temple of our solemnities, this place where we delight to worship. And is it not meet that we should each and all render to Him our hearty thanks for sparing our habitations—preserving the roof under which we rest—enabling us to go out, and to come in in perfect safety? Or, probably, I may be addressing some this morning who have escaped from the very midst of the fires. Let such not only bless God for preservation in the past, but let them celebrate His goodness in plucking them as brands out of the burning. Let them be extremely grateful to God, that while others this day are dying as a black heap of ashes who but yesterday were living men, we are still in the land of the living, unburned and unsinged. I know that many of you, during the past week, and again last night, witnessed a blaze of awful grandeur, in which tongues of flame, mountains of fire, and pillars of smoke made a spectacle to be gazed at with interest, while it produced terrors and apprehensions that could awe the wildest mob into silence. With you and me, it is a common mercy to be preserved day by day, and night by night from the devouring element. Yet, when the dreadful catastrophe is within view—when those we know personally, or by repute, are sufferers—and when at the same time we look on with a sense of our own present security—then, surely, we ought to give more than a common expression of gratitude to God for mercies that at other times we are too apt to pass over unheeded as but the effects of a common providence.

Never was a truer sentence uttered than when one said, “These mercies are not valued until they are lost, and these preservations are not esteemed until they are withdrawn.” Let us thank God while we have the mercies, lest He be provoked by our ingratitude and take forth His rod and scourge us. Then, indeed, might we cry out under the smart, and wish and desire that we had our mercies back again! Thus, much I could not in my conscience withhold at a time when there are judgments around us enough to make us tremble, and mercies enough in the little circles of some to make us exceedingly grateful. Let us now take the text in its real significance. Of course, the walking through the fire here is put for the severest form of trouble—you have, in the commencement of the verse, trouble described as passing through the water. This represents the overwhelming influence of trial in which the soul is sometimes so covered that it becomes like a man sinking in the waves. “When you go through the rivers”; those mountain torrents which with terrific force are often sufficient to carry a man away; this expresses the force of trouble, the power with which it sometimes lifts a man from the foothold of his stability, and carries him before it. “When you pass through the rivers they shall not overflow you.” But going through the fire expresses not so much the overwhelming character and the upsetting power of trouble as the actual consuming and destructive power of trouble and temptation. The metaphor is more vivid, not to say more terrible, than that which is employed in the first sentence, and yet, vivid and awful though it is, it is certainly not too strong a figure to be used as the emblem of the tribulations, temptations, and afflictions through which the church and people of God have been called to pass! We may apprise the richness of the promise in proportion to the astonishing character of the metaphor, and we ought to value the privilege which it confers in the precise ratio of the dreadful character of the danger against which it pre-

serves us. “When you walk through the fire, you shall not be burned; neither shall the flame kindle upon you.”

We shall talk of three things, this morning, as the Holy Spirit may enable us. First of all, a *terrible pathway*—walking around the fire; secondly, an *awful danger*—the danger of being burned and utterly consumed; and thirdly, a *double insurance*—“You shall not be burned; neither shall the fire kindle upon you.”

I. First, then, let us speak a little upon this TERRIBLE PATHWAY.

The sacramental host of God’s elect has never had an easy road along which to journey. I see the fields on fire—the prairie is in a blaze, the very heavens are like a furnace—and the clouds seem rather to be made of fire than water. Across that prairie lies the pathway to heaven, beneath that blazing sky, the whole Church of God must make its perpetual journey. It started at the first in fire, and its very glory at the last shall take place in the midst of the fiery passing away of all things. When first there was a Church of God on earth, in the person of Abel, it was persecuted. Cain lifted up his cruel club to slay his brother; and when the children of Seth were the representatives of God’s chosen, they were without doubt the subject of the jeer and gibe of the descendants of Cain. Noah, the preacher of righteousness, endured during his 120 years, the hardness of heart, and carelessness of an unthinking world. He and his family, who were the remnant of the church in the latter part of those days, were constantly exposed to the laughter and persecution of men. When God had destroyed the earth with water, and the whole race of man was contained within the ark, you would think that then, certainly, the church within the ark would be secure from molestation. But no, we find Ham ready to detect the failings of his parents, and no doubt a ringleader of everything that was vile and vicious, just as we have reason to hope that some of his brethren adhered to the truest God. From that day forward, whether you read through the life of Abraham, or Isaac, or Jacob, it still stands true, “He that is born after the flesh persecutes him that is born after the Spirit.” Whether we refer you to the history of Israel by the side of the brick-kilns of Egypt, or to the host of God constantly beset by the marauders of the Amalekites, you still find it to be true that through much tribulation, the people of God must wade their way to Canaan!

And if you look further on in history, between David and Saul, between Hezekiah and Sennacherib, between the faithful followers of God after the captivity who would rebuild the Temple, and Sanballat the Horonite, between the Maccabees and Antiochus Epiphanes—there must always be preserved a deadly feud—to let it be seen that the world must hate God’s people, and must harass them and seek to hunt them out, while they, on the other hand, must steadily pursue their onward march through the midst of billows of fire till they come at last to their eternal rest! Find me the abode of the Church of God, and I can smell the furnace not far off! Show me the follower of the God of Abraham, and I shall soon find the host of enemies ready for the attack. Up till the days of the Savior, the kingdom of heaven suffered violence—not only from its friends who would take it—but from those enemies who would assault it. From the blood of Abel down to the blood of Zecharias, the son of Barachias, the pathway of the church has been a blood-besprinkled time! Since that day what tongue can tell the sufferings of the people of God? Since Christ became Martyr as well as Redeemer, has there been a season in which God’s people have not somewhere or other been made to feel that they are not of the world, and that the world does not love them because they are not of the world? In apostolic times, Stephen expires beneath a shower of stones; James is killed with a sword; certain others of the saints are vexed; believers are scattered abroad. The Roman lion takes up the fight; Nero delights in the gore of the Christians, and smears the confessors of that holy faith with pitch, and sets them in his gardens that they might be literally, as they were spiritually, the lights of the world! Let the catacombs of Rome witness to their sorrowful lives, and let the capitol witness to their terrible deaths. Let the old dungeons, some of which still remain, testify to the places where they wore out their dreary lives, and let the blood-stained Campus Martius still show where they cheerfully surrendered those lives for Christ!

Oh, if the lands could speak; if the Earth could vomit forth her blood—what stories could still be told of the way they were slain! Some of them were tortured; others sawn asunder; some stoned and others burnt to death—though of them the world was not worthy. All the Roman Emperors, with but few exceptions, were persecutors; and the Christian emperors were as bad as the Pagan, for the Christian emperors *were not Christians*, nor were they members, as I believe, of a Christian Church! The Chris-

tian Church, and especially that church of which we are still members—which has never defiled its garments, but which, never having had any alliance with the Church of Rome, has never needed to be reformed—that church under its different names, Paulitians, Novations, Albigenses, Lollards, Wyckliffites, Anabaptists, Baptists—has always suffered! It matters not what state, what church may have been dominant—whether it has been Christian or anti-Christian—the pure Church of Christ has always been the victim of persecution! And though she has never persecuted, but has always maintained inviolate disunion from the state, and an utter hatred of all laws which would bind the conscience of man, yet has she been especially destitute, afflicted and tormented, and if she has today a little breathing room, perhaps it is rather owing to the timidity which has made us keep back our sentiments, than to any charity towards ourselves. Find the Church of Christ wherever you will, and you shall find her scorned and despised of man! Find her in Scotland, and her Covenanters have to hide themselves in the midst of the mountains, and read the Word of God by the lightning flash to escape from the dragoons of Claverhouse. Find her in England, and where was she? Not in the cathedrals of her cities, but in the dungeons of her rural towns, like Bedford with John Bunyan! Not among the great and noble who were the persecutors, but among the poor and conscientious who were the persecuted! “If you want to find the drunks and sinners of the worst dye,” said one of our preachers at or before Cromwell’s time, “you can find them in church and state, but if you wish to find the men who are holy, and who serve God, you must look into the felon’s dungeons for them, for that is where they have been cast by the powers that be.” Everywhere, from the first day until now, it is not respectable to be a follower of Christ! If we follow Christ fully and faithfully before God, it is not equitable and praiseworthy before men. To take up His cross, and to perform the ceremonies which He ordains, man hates! To adhere to truths of God which never were, and never can be palatable to the carnal mind of man, is and ever has been, to excite animosity! The pathway of the church, then, has been one of fire and flame. As it has been so with the church, we may suspect there is some reason for it—and that reason has to be found in the great fact that the church is in an enemy’s country! She is not among her friends—she is a pilgrim and a stranger upon the earth. She is a bird that has lost her place, and all the birds round about her are against her because she is a speckled one, and belongs not to the common flock. If we were of the world, the world would love its own, but “because,” said Christ, “you are not of the world, but I have chosen you out of the world, therefore the world hates you.” “We know,” He said, “It hated Me before it hated you.” True Christians are aliens, foreigners—men who speak another speech, men who are actuated by different motives, men who live for different ends—who are governed by different maxima from the rest of the men of this world! Therefore it is that their pathway must be one of trial and opposition. All things the Christian teaches are so dead against the pleasures of the worldling, and his gain, that it is no wonder he opposes us! Men hate the gospel because the gospel does not like them. That church is never true to her Christ, nor true to herself, which does not draw upon herself the hatred of ungodly men by a faithful testimony against their sins!

It has fared well with the church when she has been persecuted, and her pathway has been through fire. Her feet are shod with iron and brass. She ought not to tread on paths strewn with flowers; it is her proper place to suffer. Christ redeemed the world with agonies, and the church must teach the world by the example of her anguish. First of all, the blood of Christ was shed meritoriously, and afterwards, the blood of His Church is shed testimonially, to win the world by suffering. When you hear of the massacre of Christians in Madagascar, weep for their deaths, but do not be utterly cast down. This is a good work! This is the way the church grows! There is no loss in the army of Christ when the best preachers fall, and the mightiest evangelists are put to death. They are not lost—the blood is well shed, and gloriously well spent! It is buying victory. It is procuring crowns for Jesus Christ. It is, after all, accomplishing higher results by *dying* than could have been effected by *doing*. It is under the heaviest fire of artillery that the loyal, the brave, and the true do the most daring feats of prowess. When one hero falls, from his ashes, other heroes arise. The post of danger is the post of honor, therefore fresh aspirants will be found ready to lead the brigade! Moreover, my friends, if the path of fire is always a path of terror, it is often a path of progress. As melancholy as it is to mark the ruins of an inferno while the dying embers smolder, how often you must have observed more majestic edifices raised to replace the structures that have been consumed! Thus, fearful disasters are made to stimulate industry, and nourish enterprise.

No doubt the sufferings of the church, and the fact that she has to pass through the fire, must be ascribed to the great truth that, thus, her God is glorified!

Brothers and sisters, you and I do not glorify God much; for we have very little to suffer. The blood red crown of martyrdom is such an object of ambition, or it should be to the believer, that he might almost regret that it is not in his power to coin it. Suffer?! What do we suffer? Somebody slanders our character; what is that? Somebody abuses us in the newspaper; what is that? We are accused of one crime and another; what can it matter to a man who knows his conscience is right in the sight of God? What does he care if all the babbling tongues of all the liars in earth and hell should be let loose against him? He can bear all that, and endure it quietly. It is nothing! When I read the stories of the Book of Martyrs, and note how our great reformers fought for Christ, and manfully won the victory, I blush for ourselves! Why, brothers and sisters, we live in such silken times, that glory is scarcely possible to us. We have much to do but we have nothing to suffer; we cannot prove our love to Christ as they did. They indeed were a highly honored people who were permitted to glorify Christ even in the very fires! Look at it in this light—and the light afflictions you have to endure will seem to be as nothing at all—when you think of the weight of glory which *they* shall bring to your Lord, and to yourself. But as history confirms the statement that the Church of Christ must walk through the fire, so does the history of each individual Christian teach him that he must walk through the fire, too—

*“The path of sorrow, and that path alone,
Leads to the land where sorrow is unknown.”*

Through much tribulation we must inherit the kingdom. Think it not a strange thing when the fiery trial shall happen to you. If you have the common afflictions of the world, do not wonder. You must have them. The same thing happens both to the evil, and to the good. You lose in business, you have reverses and disappointments—do not stagger at these in the way to heaven! You must have these—they are necessary to your spiritual health. Worse than that, you have strange temptations—you are placed in a position where you are constantly exposed to sin. It must be so! This, too, is the pathway of God’s people! You must have these fiery temptations, that, being tried in the fire, you may come forth as “gold seven times purified.” You have mental anxieties. Neither let these seem a wonder to you; they fall to the lot of all the saints of the Most High. Moreover, you will have to endure the attacks of Satan—you must go through the valley of the shadow of death, and fight with Apollyon as Christian did—you are not to be exempted from the hardness of Christian warfare! If you will mount the hill, you must climb; if you are to win the crown, you must win it by sheer might. Think not this a strange thing. And if in doing good, you meet with difficulties, let not that stagger you. It is but right and natural. I tell you again—if there is any pathway in which there is not fire, tremble! But if your lot is hard, thank God for it! If your sufferings are great, bless the Lord for them, and if the difficulties in your pathway are many, surmount them by faith—but let them not cast you down! Be of good courage, and wait on the Lord, setting this constantly in your minds, that He has not promised to keep you *from* trouble, but to preserve you *in it*. It is not written, “I will save you *from* the fire,” but, “I will save you *in* the fire”—not, “I will quench the coals,” but, “They shall not burn you.” Not, “I will put out the furnace,” but, “The flames shall not kindle upon you.” Write it down, brothers and sisters, and expect it to come true—that in this world you shall have tribulation! Only follow your glorious leader, be it through flood or flame!

II. We will now turn to our second point—there is AN AWFUL DANGER.

The promise of the text is based on a prophecy that follows it. As I glance my eyes down the Chapter, I see that it tells us how God taught His people by terrible things in the past; and how He has terrible lessons to teach them in the future. If the judgment of Egypt, and of Ethiopia, and Seba, are behind us, we have startling destinies that rise up to view before us! There is a people to be gathered in, and we are to be the agents in gathering them. Fear not, says the Lord, though you walk through the fire in fulfilling My mission. God speaks to the north, “Give up.” And to the south, “Keep not back. Bring My sons from far, and My daughters from the ends of the earth.” But the manner of Egypt is repeated again. The monarch said, “I will not let them go.” Jealousy is stirred. The fire burns; the coals thereof have a vehement flame. And they who come forth from the bondage of this world must walk through the fire—even as those who came forth from Egypt had to pass through water. The fire of prophecy is no poetic fiction; it is real fire; it *will* burn. If it does not burn the believer, it is not for lack of energy—it is because some

supernatural restraint is laid on it, or some supernatural protection vouchsafed to the saint. My brothers and sisters, the church has had very painful experiences that persecution is a fire which does burn. How many ministers of Christ, when the day of tribulation came, forsook their flocks, and fled? When King Edward the Sixth was on the throne, there were many who professed to be Protestants, and preached justification by faith. When Mary returned, the Vicar of Bray was but a specimen of a great class—his principles being to keep alive! When again Elizabeth was upon the throne, there were plenty who found it to be profitable to profess the reformed faith; but when the Acts of Conformity were passed afterwards—by which those who had before had a Christian freedom in the Church of England—were driven out! There were some who said they did not love prelacy, but hated it! And others who had before professed the old Puritan doctrines—finding that their livings were to be lost thereby—held fast to this world, and let the things of the next world shift for themselves. Too many have forsaken the church as Demas forsook Paul! Their piety would not stand the fire—they could walk with Christ in silver slippers—but they could not go barefoot. They had no objection whatever to accompany Him to His throne, but they had some slight difficulties about going with Him to His cross. They would not mind bearing the weight of His glory, but the weight of the cross of tribulation was much too great for their constitutions. Persecution is a fire which *does* burn!

Again—I see iniquity raging on every side. Its flames are fanned by every wind of fashion. And fresh victims are being constantly drawn in. It spreads to every class. Neither the palace, nor the hovel are safe. Nor the lofty piles that are raised for neither merchandise, nor the graceful edifice that is constructed for worship. Iniquity, whose contagion is fearful as fire, spreads and preys upon all things that are homely and comely—things useful, and things sacred are not exempt. We must walk through the fire! We who are God’s witnesses must stand in its very midst to pour the streams of living water upon the burning fuel—and if not able to quench it—at least we must strive to prevent its spread. There are young men whose youthful lusts, inflammable as they are, have not yet ignited. They are in imminent danger. “Fire! Fire!” we may well cry. We may give the alarm this morning to you young men who are in the midst of indecent companions. I may cry, “Fire!” to you who are compelled to live in a house where you are perpetually tempted to evil. I may cry, “Fire!” to you who are marked each day, and have to bear the sneer of the ungodly—“Fire!” to you who are losing your property, and suffering in the flesh, for many have perished thereby. Oh, may God grant you strength! I see today before my mind’s eyes, the blackened skeletons of hundreds of fair professions. Multitudes—multitudes have perished in the valley of temptation that once, to all human judgment, had bid fair for heaven, and made a show in the flesh! How many, too, have fallen under the attacks of Satan! This is a fire that truly does burn! Many a man has said, “I will be a pilgrim.” But he has met Apollyon on the road, and he has turned back. Many a man has put on the harness, but he has given up the battle quickly—put his hand to the plow and looked back. There are more pillars of salt than one! If Lot’s wife were a solitary specimen, it would be well—but there have been tens of thousands who, like she, have looked back to the plains of Sodom! And like she has, as they are in their spirit, have stood forever what they were—lost souls. We ought not to look upon our dangers with contempt; they are dangers; they are trials; we ought to look upon them as fires. Oh, they are fires! If you think they are not fires, you are mistaken. If you enter then, in your own strength, saying, “Oh I can bear them,” you will find that they are real fires, which, with forked tongues, shall lick up your blood, and consume it in an instant—if you have not some better guard than your own creature power.

III. I will not tarry longer here, because I want to get to the pith and marrow of the promise. “Though you walk through the fire, you shall not be burned; neither shall the flame kindle upon you.” Here is A DOUBLE INSURANCE.

Dr. Alexander, an eminent and most admirable American commentator, says there appears to be some mistake in the translation here, because he thinks the two sentences are an anti-climax. “You shall not be burned.” And then follows, “neither shall the flame kindle upon you.” It strikes me, however, that in the second clause, we have the higher gradation of a climax. “You shall not be burned,” to the destruction of your life, nor even scorched to give you the most superficial injury, for “the flames shall not kindle upon you.” Just as when the three holy children came out of the fiery furnace, it is said, “Upon their bodies the fire had no power, nor was a hair of their head singed; neither were their coats changed,

nor had the smell of fire passed on them.” So the text seems to me to teach that the Christian Church under all its trials has not been consumed, but more than that—it has not lost anything by its trials! The Lord’s Church has never been destroyed yet by her persecutors and her trials; they have thought they crushed her, but she lives still. They had imagined that they had taken away her life, but she sprang up more vigorous than before. I suppose there is not a nation out of which Christ’s Church has ever been utterly driven! Even Spain, which seemed at last to have accomplished it by the most persevering barbarities, still finds a few believers to be a thorn in the side of her bigotry! And as for our own denomination—in the very country where, by the most frightful massacres it was believed that the sect of Anabaptists had been utterly extinguished—our good and esteemed brother, Mr. Oncken, has been the means of reviving it, so that throughout all Germany, and in parts of Denmark and Prussia, and Poland and even Russia itself, we have sprung up into a new, vigorous and even wonderful existence! And in Sweden, where, under Lutheran government, the most persecuting edicts have been passed against us, we have been astonished to find within 10 years, 300 churches suddenly spring up—the truth has in it a living seed which is not to be destroyed!

But I have said that the church not only does not lose her existence, but she does not lose anything at all. The church has never lost her numbers. Persecutions have winnowed her, and driven away the chaff, but not one grain of wheat has been taken away from the heap. No, not even in visible fellowship has the church been decreased by persecution! She is like Israel in Egypt. The more they were afflicted, the more they multiplied. Was a minister put to death today? Ten young men came the next morning before the Roman proctor, and offered themselves to die, having that very night been baptized for the dead minister, having made their confession of faith that they might occupy his position. “I fill up the vacancy in the church, and then die as he did.” Was a woman strangled or tortured publicly? Twenty women appeared the next day, and craved to suffer as she suffered, that they might honor Christ! Did the Church of Rome in more modern times burn one of our glorious reformers—John Huss—yet did not Martin Luther come forward, as if the ashes of Huss had begotten Luther? When Wycliffe had passed away, did not the very feet of Wycliffe being persecuted help to spread his doctrines—and were there not found hundreds of young men who in every market-town in England read the Lollard’s Scriptures, and proclaimed the Lollard’s faith? And so depend upon it—it shall always be! Give a dog a bad name, and you hang him; give a Christian a bad name, and you honor him! Do but give to any Christian some ill name, and before long a Christian denomination will take that name to itself, and it will become a title of honor. When George Fox was called, “Quaker,” it was a strange name, one to laugh at—but those men of God who followed him called themselves Quakers, too—and so it lost its reproach! They called the followers of Whitefield and Wesley, “Methodists”—they took the title of Methodists, and it became a respectful designation! When many of our Baptist forefathers, persecuted in England, went over to America to find shelter, they imagined that among the Puritans they would have a perfect rest. But Puritan liberty of conscience meant, “The right and liberty to think as they did, but no toleration to those who differed.” The Puritans of New England, as soon as ever a Baptist made his appearance among them, persecuted him with as little compunction as the Episcopalians had the Puritans! No sooner was there a Baptist, than he was hunted up, and brought before his own Christian brethren! Mark you, he was brought up for fine, for imprisonment, confiscation, and banishment before the very men who had themselves suffered persecution! And what was the effect of this? The effect has been that in America, where we were persecuted, we are the largest body of Christians! Where the fire burnt the most furiously, there the good old Calvinistic doctrine was taught, and the Baptist became the more decidedly a Baptist than anywhere else—with the most purity, and the least dross. Nor have we ever lost the firmness of our grip upon the fundamental doctrine for which our forefathers stained the baptismal pool with blood—by all the trials and persecutions that have been laid upon us—and by God’s grace never shall we!

Upon the entire church, at the last, there shall not be even the smell of fire. I see her come out of the furnace. I see her advance up the hill towards her final glory with her Lord and Master, and the angels look at her garments; they are not tattered. No, the fangs of her enemies have not been able to make a single rent therein. They draw near to her. They look upon her flowing ringlets, and they are not crisp with heat—they look upon her very feet—and though she has trodden the coals, they are not blistered! And her eyes have not been dried up by the furiousness of the seven times heated flame. She has been

made more beautiful, fairer, and more glorious by the fires; but hurt she has not been, nor can she be! Turn, then, to the individual Christian, and remember that the promise stands alike firm and fast with each believer. Christian, if you are truly a child of God, your trials cannot destroy you, and what is better still, you can lose nothing by them. You may seem to lose for today, but when the account comes to be settled, you shall not be found to be a farthing the loser by all the temptations of the world or of all the attacks of Satan which you have endured! No, more, you shall be wondrously the gainer! Your trials having worked patience, and experience shall make you rich. Your temptations, having taught you your weaknesses, and shown you where your strength lies, shall make you strong.

From your first trouble, till the last enemy shall be destroyed, you shall not lose a fraction, jot, or tittle, by anything or everything which God in His providence, or the world in its fury, or Satan in his craftiness, shall ever be able to lay upon you. Upon you, not the smell of fire shall have passed; you shall not be burned, neither shall your clothes, nor your hats—but like the men that you read of in Daniel—you shall be wholly preserved intact from the flame!

I shall close now, having spoken the general truth of God by making some particular applications of this precious promise. There is a brother here who during the last three or four months has had wave upon wave of affliction—everything goes against him! He is an upright, honest, indefatigable merchant, yet, let him do what he will, his substance wastes away like snow before the sun! It appears that for every ship of his, the wind blows the wrong way, and where others win by the venture, he loses all—

*“He sees each day new straights attend,
And wonders when the scene shall end.”*

When I spoke of walking through the fire just now, he said, “Ah that is what I have been doing! I have been walking through it these months—to God and my own soul alone is it known how hot the furnace is.” Brother, will you take home my text this morning? Perhaps God sent you here not for the sermon, but for the text. Perhaps you strolled here today, not being a regular attendant, on purpose that this text might comfort you. “When you go through the fire, you shall not be burned.” When your troubles are all over, you shall still be left, and what is more, “neither the flame shall kindle upon you.” When the finishing time comes, you shall not be any the loser! While you think you have lost substance, you shall find, when you read Scripture, that you only lose shadows. Your substance was always safe, being laid up in the keeping of Christ in heaven. You shall discover in the issue that these trials of yours were the best things that could happen to you. The day shall come when you will say with David, “I will sing of judgment and mercy.” “Before I was afflicted I went astray, but now I have kept Your Word.” Or perhaps there is some young woman here—and the case I am about to paint is a very common one—alas, too common in this city! You love the Savior, my sister, but you are very poor, and you have to earn your living by that sorriest of all means. When the sun rises in the morning, He sees you with that needle in your hand—

*“Sewing at once with a double thread
A shroud as well as a shirt,”*

and all day long you have scarcely time to rest for meals. And in the evening, when your fingers are worn, and your eyes are heavy, you shall have need to refrain from sleep because the pittance is so small, that you can scarcely live upon it. We know hundreds of that class who always constrain our pity because they work so hard for so little wage. Perhaps your mother is dead, and your father does not care about you. He is a drunken sot, and you would be sorry to meet him perhaps in the street. You have no helper, no friends. You do not care to tell anybody. You would not like to take anything if charity should offer it to you. You feel it is the hardest thing of all to be tempted as you are. There seems to you to be by the path, the open road to plenty, and in some degree to delight. But you have said, “No, no,” and you have loathed the temptation, and by God’s grace you have stood—and I have known how, year after year, some of you have fought with temptation, and struggled on when sometimes you were well-near starved. But you would not do this great wickedness against God.

My sister, I pray you take the encouragement of this text to strengthen you for the future battles. You have been going through the fires, but you are not consumed yet, and I bless God, upon your garments the smell of fire has not passed. Hold on, my sister, hold on! Through all the sorrow you have, and all the bitterness which is heavy enough to crush your spirit, hold on—for your Master sees you! He will

encourage and strengthen you, and bring you more than conqueror through it all in the end! I address, too, this morning, some youthful minds. Young men who love Christ, and as soon as they get home after attending the house of prayer, the taunting inquiry made by their fellow-workmen is—“You have been to some meeting house, I dare say.” How cruel sometimes worldly young men are to Christian young men! Cruel, for when there are a dozen worldlings, and only one Christian, they consider it to be honorable for the dozen to set upon one! Twelve big tall fellows will sometimes think it a fine game to pass from hand to hand some little lad of fifteen, and make sport and mockery of him. There is honor, it is said, among thieves—but there seems to be no honor at all among worldlings when they get a young Christian in this way. Well, young man, you have borne with it. You have said, “I will hold my tongue, and won’t say a word,” though your heart was hot within you, and while you were musing, the fire burned. Remember what I have often said to you—the anvil does not get broken even if you keep on striking it—but it breaks all the hammers. Do the same! Only hold on, and these fires shall not consume you. If the fires should burn up your piety, it would only prove that your piety was not worth having; if you cannot stand a few jokes and jeers, why, you are not built together in that habitation of God which He has made fireproof! Bear up, and in the end you will find that this hard lot of yours—this severe discipline—did you a deal of good, and made you a better man than you ever would have been if you had been rocked on the lap of piety, and kept from the battle. In later years, your high and eminent post of usefulness may be, perhaps, owing to the severe and harsh discipline to which you were put in your younger days. “It is good for a man that he bears the yoke in his youth.”

Or, maybe, I am speaking to someone who has met with opposition from his own ungodly relations. Remember how Jesus said, “I am come to send fire on the earth, and what will I, if it is already kindled? From henceforth there shall be five in one house divided, two against three, and three against two.” Perhaps your father has threatened you, or what is still bitterer, your husband has threatened to discard you. Now, indeed, you are walking through the fires. He rails at your godliness, makes a mockery of everything you love—and does his best by cruelty to break your heart! My dear sister in Christ, you shall not be burned by the fire. If grace is in your heart, the *devil* can’t drive it out, much less your husband. If the Lord has called you by His grace, all the men on earth, and all the fiends in hell cannot reverse the calling—and you shall find in the end that you have not suffered any loss—the flame has not kindled upon you! You shall go through the fire and bless God for it! From a dying bed, or at least through the gates of Paradise, you shall look back upon the dark path of the way, and say it was well—it was well for me that I had to carry that cross, and that now I am permitted to wear this crown. Who of this congregation is on the Lord’s side this morning? While Jehovah speaks on high in the thunder, let us speak on earth in tones of earnestness. Who is on the Lord’s side among you? You who are not, be warned—“Tophet is ordained of old. He has made it deep and large. The pile thereof is fire and much wood; the breath of the Lord, like a stream of brimstone, does kindle it.” You who are on His side, set up your banners! He says, “Fear not, I am with you. When you walk through the fire, you shall not be burned, neither shall the flame kindle upon you.”

May the Lord bless the words we have spoken; though hastily suggested to our mind, and weakly delivered to you, the Lord bless them for Christ’s sake. Amen.

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