

THE ROCKY FORTRESS AND ITS INHABITANT

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**A SERMON
PREACHED ON LORD'S-DAY MORNING, FEBRUARY 3, 1884,
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AT THE METROPOLITAN TABERNACLE, NEWINGTON.**

*“He that walks righteously, and speaks uprightly; he that despises the gain of oppressions, that shakes his hands from holding of bribes, that stops his ears from hearing of blood, and shuts his eyes from seeing evil; he shall dwell on high: his place of defense shall be the munitions of rocks: bread shall be given him; his waters shall be sure.”
Isaiah 33:15, 16.*

THERE were terrible times in Jerusalem in the days of Hezekiah. The Assyrian power was exceedingly formidable, and it was ferocious to the last degree. Woe to the unhappy land which fell under the power of this spoiler. Assyria knew not the meaning of “mercy.” It came down “like a wolf on the fold,” tearing and devouring without pity. The armies of Sennacherib were ravaging the kingdom of Judah, and they had brought it into such a state that the prophet cried, “The earth mourns and languishes: Lebanon is ashamed and hewn down: Sharon is like a wilderness and Bashan and Carmel shake off their fruits.” Before the invaders the land was a garden, and behind them it was a desolate wilderness. Yet the Lord had given a promise to His people in Jerusalem on this wise, “therefore thus says the Lord concerning the king of Assyria, he shall not come into this city, nor shoot an arrow there, nor come before it with shields, nor cast a bank against it. By the way that he came by the same shall he return and shall not come into this city, says the Lord.” Notwithstanding Rabshakeh’s blasphemous letter, and all his foul reviling, those who trusted in Jehovah were not dismayed, for the Lord had promised to defend the city for His own name’s sake.

There were godly men in the city, I fear they were not many, who rested content with the sure promise of God, and went about their daily business feeling perfectly safe. They would have felt secure if the whole land had swarmed with Assyrians as the fields with locusts, for they believed the word of the Lord. Their trust was in the living God, and therefore they feared not the multitude of the enemy. But the whole of the inhabitants of Jerusalem were not of this brave order, the unholy were afraid, and fearfulness surprised the hypocrites. Their sin and their deceit made cowards of them. They would all be destroyed; they would all perish by the Assyrians! Who was to save them? What power could resist the conqueror of nations? Where were the gods of Hamath and Arphad? The people of those cities had trusted in their gods, and yet none of them had been delivered out of the hands of the invader. How could Jehovah turn back the fierce tyrant, now that he had come upon the land like a flood?

The sinners and the hypocrites in the time of trial were discovered, the sinners showed their fear, and the hypocrites manifested their unbelief. They began to flee before they were pursued. They trembled though no enemy could be seen from the walls. God in vengeance was near to the city, the land smoked with all-consuming fire, the flame of the Lord’s indignation burned perpetually—how could these men hope to live in such times? As well hope to live amid devouring fires and everlasting burnings. Alas, there are many who dwell among God’s people at this day, and have a name and a place among them who are sinners and not saints, hypocrites and not believers, and these will before long be discovered and dismayed. While all goes well with the church of God, you cannot separate the vile from the precious, nor pluck up the tares from among the wheat, nor cast out the bad fish from among the good, which are enclosed in the same net. But trying times come, and days of adversity, and then the false brethren are discerned. When persecution arises the hypocrites are offended, when affliction rushes like a torrent, the sand-founded houses fall, and especially shall it be so when amid the terrors of the last tremendous day every secret thing shall be revealed, and hypocrites and sinners shall appear in their true colors. Fearfulness will leap unexpectedly upon the hypocrites to their intense surprise, for they will see how impossible it is for them to dwell with God and to abide in His holy presence. Oh, dear brethren, let us not be satisfied with being in Zion, or in the church. Let us not rest till we are quite sure that we are

not sinners in it, that we are not hypocrites in it, for, mark you, if our religion is not sanctifying and true, it will fail us in the hour of trial. If our confidence in God does not make us calm and hopeful in the time of temptation and sorrow, what is the use of it? Yet it is certain that no man shall find his profession to be of use to him in testing times but he that is true in it, he that is thorough in it, he that is neither a sinner nor a hypocrite in the sense in which those words are here used. Safety in Zion belongs to those born in her by regeneration, reared in her by sanctification, enfranchised in her by faith in the Son of God, settled in her by fixed principles, confirmed in her by obedience to her laws, and bound to her by intense love of her king and her citizens. Such “shall dwell on high” secure from danger, and only such, the aliens and foreigners within her gates shall before long be driven forth with shame.

We are going to look this morning at these favored people; first, to *note their character*, secondly, to *observe their security*, and to finish, thirdly, by stirring up all present to *seek their felicity*. Oh, for the aid of the Holy Spirit the entire sermon through!

I. First, let us NOTE THEIR CHARACTER.

They are described in part in the words of our text, but I am obliged to go a little further afield for one essential part of their character. The true people of God who in the time of danger will be preserved are a people *who display a humble, patient, present faith in God*. They reveal their character in the second verse of the chapter before us when they pray—“O Lord, be gracious unto us; we have waited for You: be You their arm every morning, our salvation also in the time of trouble.” They humbly cry, “O Lord, be gracious unto us.” They are a praying people, who make their appeal to God under a sense of need; they are not fatalists for they pray, neither are they self-sufficient, for they seek help from God. They beseech the Lord to bless them not according to their own merit, but according to His grace. Though their outward life has been cleansed, and their hearts are renewed, yet they do not imagine that they have any claim upon God, but their appeal is to His free favor, “O Lord, be gracious unto us.” They are not a people who think that God will be gracious necessarily, and that, therefore, they need not pray for mercy, for they are found crying to Him in earnest prayer. They are, you see, a trustful people, who feel that they have need, and that their need can only be fulfilled by the sovereign grace of God, to whom they make supplication. Those who dwell on high with God are always lovers of grace; it is the top and bottom of their hope.

Furthermore, they are a waiting people, “We have waited for You.” If the Lord does not seem to hear their prayer at once, they nevertheless expect that He will do so, and therefore, they wait expectantly. If at once they have not all the comfort and joy they would desire, they tarry God’s pleasure, not rushing into sin to snatch a hasty rescue, nor running away at the first rebuff and saying, “What profit is there if we wait upon Him?” Quite certain that the Lord does hear prayer, and that He waits to be gracious, they hopefully wait His time, for His appointments are always wise.

They are a people who have a present faith, which they exercise every day, saying, “Be You their arm every morning!” They do not imagine that by having trusted in God years ago they have obtained salvation, and therefore may now live without faith, but they believe today as they believed from the beginning of their Christian life, and so prove it true that “the just shall live by his faith.” Every step they are depending, every morning they are looking up to the hills from where their help comes. These are the true people of God, and the only people of God—trusting, hoping, expecting, relying and resting upon the Lord their God. The fear of the Lord is their treasure, and they cry with exultation in the language of the 22nd verse, “The Lord is our judge, the Lord is our lawgiver, the Lord is our king; He will save us.” The description in our actual text is the portrait of their outer life, but a living faith is the secret basis and foundation of it all.

This being understood, our text gives a description of these people, setting out their various features. It first describes *their feet*, or how they walk, “He who walks righteously.” Faith has an effect upon our entire manhood. When a man believes, his faith affects every part of him, it operates upon his actions, thoughts, wishes, and designs, and it affects both his private and public life. One of the first evidences of a true belief in God is that a man walks righteously. He tries to act rightly towards his God and towards his fellow men, and thus he is led to be devout before the Lord, and upright among men. The rule of right is the rule for him, not policy, nor the hope of gain, nor the desire to please, much less the lust of the flesh and the pride of life. By the grace of God he labors above all things to walk in the narrow way of true holiness. I want you to notice this, because the promise I am going to speak about belongs only to

the people who answer to this description, therefore see you to it that you do not take the comfort of the promise if you come not under the character to whom that comfort is given. The man who does not walk righteously shall not dwell on high; there shall be no place of defense for him. If we depart from the ways of righteousness, and run in the paths of the wicked, we shall meet with the same fate as they. “Be not deceived; God is not mocked: for whatsoever a man sows that shall he also reap.” Where the grace of God truly dwells, and a living faith is in exercise, the man becomes righteous in his walk and conversation, and his course is more and more conformed to the will of the Lord. I deny that a man is a believer in the Lord Jesus if he remains a dishonest man; I deny that he has real faith in Jesus Christ if he is rotten in heart, unjust in business, and untrue in life. He knows not Christ who delights in iniquity. So you see that the first description of this blessed man who is to dwell on high is very searching, for it does not relate to his profession, but to his walk and conversation from day to day. It is not talk, but action that we have here. Here is no room for the fiction of formality; all is fact, fact of daily life.

The next feature that is described is *his tongue*—“He speaks uprightly.” No description of a man’s character can be perfect which does not include his speech. A man who lies, or who talks obscenely or profanely, is a bad man! A man, whose words are arrogant and boastful, cruel and slanderous, unreliable and deceptive, unchaste and impure, is no child of God. The grace of God very speedily sweetens a man’s tongue, and if his religion does not operate upon his speech, surely it is not the religion of the pure and holy God. “By your words you shall be justified, and by your words you shall be condemned.” If the tongue is set on the fire of hell, the heart is not on fire with grace from heaven. The doctor says, “Stick out your tongue,” and he judges the symptoms of health or disease thereby, assuredly, there is no better test of the inward character than the condition of the tongue. “Out of your own mouth will I judge you” is a fair decision. If, then, our lips do not speak uprightly, that is, speak truthfully and justly, if our tongue is not salted and sanctified by the grace of God, then we cannot claim any of the privileges which are described in our text. God grant that we may prove by our conversation that the Lord has renewed us in our inner man.

The next feature is *the heart*—“He that despises the gain of oppressions.” Not only does he not oppress any man, nor wish to gain anything by extortion or by grinding the faces of the poor, or by any act of unrighteousness, but he thinks such gain as might be made in that fashion to be utterly contemptible—he despises it. He desires gain if it may come cleanly to him, prosperity is as welcome to him as to another man, for he has his own needs and the needs of his household for which he is bound to provide, but if any should say to him that there is gold to be had through pinching the laborer in his wages, or through grasping by law that which is not morally his own, he abhors the thought. He says of such gain, “I would not win it if I could. I would not put such evil money among my honest earnings; it would pollute all the rest of my substance.” A good man is jealous lest he should seem to receive the wages of unrighteousness. He desires to receive his goods as blessings at the hands of God, and not to win them as a spoil from the oppressed. A true Christian would not bring into his house a thing over which he could not seek the blessing of God, he would count it a thing accursed like Achan’s wedge of gold. Many ways of making money which are tolerated nowadays would be loathsome to a right-minded man. Though unrighteous practices should promise to fill his house with silver and gold, he would not follow them. He could not sell his Lord for pieces of silver. He despises the gain of oppression. It is as the mire of the streets to him. He looks down upon it with utter contempt. Dear friends, it little matters what our outward life may be, or even what our speech may be, if our heart is not affected by our religion. If grace only lies skin-deep in you, it has only saved your skin, but not your soul. Until grace touches the mainspring, it has done nothing to purpose, the heart must despise evil, as well as the lips denounce it. Until the wellhead is sweetened, the streams are foul. Not only must I do right, but love right; not only must I avoid wrong, but I must hate wrong; not only must I refuse unrighteous gain, but I must utterly despise it. See, my brethren, how much is necessary before any one of us can claim the choice blessings which are spread before us in the second part of our text.

The portrait does not omit *the hands*, those important members of the body—those prominent actors both for good and for evil. In Isaiah’s day bribery was connected with every government office high and low, but the good man “shakes his hands from holding of bribes.” If money was slipped into his hand before he was aware of it, he shook it off with indignation. He would not take what was offered or keep what was given. There is still much bribery abroad, in indirect ways men are offered advantages if they

will wink at evil, or frown on good. Satan tempts young and old with the old insinuation, “All these things will I give you if you will fall down and worship me.” The Destroyer still makes merchandise of souls. Oh, for grace to shake off every sort of bribe from our hands as men shake off dust from their feet with utter abhorrence when their indignation is awakened. Clean hands are as necessary as renewed hearts. If your hands clutch the reward of a sinful trade, or a dishonest transaction, or if you hold a profit by countenancing wrong, or forbearing from right, you are not among the people whom the Lord has sworn to guard with His own right hand.

Thus we have described the feet, the tongue, the heart, and the hand. Now comes *the ear*—“that stops his ears from hearing of blood.” Men, who delighted in war, in olden times, were apt to regale one another with their cruel deeds—whom they slew and how they slew them. They rolled the dainty morsels of cruelty under their tongues. In Hezekiah’s time, I guarantee, tales were told with blood-red horror that would have made our ears tingle, and these were greedily listened to by those of a coarse spirit. But the good man in Jerusalem would not hear them. When a man boasted of having slain such an enemy, the godly man said, “Go tell your tale somewhere else, lest I bring you before the judge. I will not hear of your wicked doings. I cannot endure your brutal talk.” He shut his ears, he drew back from the discourse; it was sickening to him. Now it is not the hearing of blood alone that you and I must avoid, but the hearing of anything that is tainted, prurient, skeptical, depraving. This has much to do with the health of a genuine Christian’s soul—that he puts an embargo upon unclean conversation, counts it contraband, and will not allow it to enter his soul by the gate of the ear. He wisely shuts the gate, lets down an iron gate and pulls up the drawbridge, so that no filthy communication may come in by Ear-gate. The same sacred prudence prevents our reading books which are corrupt, or false. As soon as we reach a page which has an ill savor about it, we drop the volume and return it to its owner, or if it is our own, we cast it into the fire that it may do no harm to others. The righteous man “stops his ears.” He will not be interested in that which cannot subserve his highest interest. He is not willing to be like the king in the story, poisoned through the ear. He knows that an ill tale cannot injure him if he never hears it, and therefore he denies his curiosity that he may preserve his memory undefiled. He is deaf to news about which a good man would be mute. He has the blood upon his ear, to signify that his Lord has bought him with a price in that member, as well as in every other. Yes, his ear is bored to the doorpost of truth, that he may hear it and it only, with full intent of heart.

The picture is complete when *the eyes* are mentioned—“and shuts his eyes from seeing evil.” He cannot help seeing it as he goes along his pilgrimage through life, but he seeks not such a sight, and as much as he can he avoids it. He takes no pleasure in the most brilliant displays of folly. Vain pomps and glories charm him not. He does not seek his amusement in gazing upon gaudy wickedness. If there is turmoil in the street he is not the man that will be called as a witness to it, for he discreetly walks the other way, leaving off strife before it is meddled with. He is one that does not leap into the ditch in the hope that he may come out of it without being covered with mire, but he chooses the clean path and keeps out of harm’s way. When others crave to see life, he judges such life to be death, and pursues a nobler path. He wishes to see only that which is good, and true, and helpful to his progress to heaven. Opened eyes and ears are good, but sometimes closed eyes and stopped ears are better. You know the old classic story of how Ulysses caused his sailors to pass the rocks of the Sirens in safety. The sweet enchanting song of the fatal sisters would have fascinated the mariners, and drawn them upon the rocks, and so the crafty Ulysses sealed the ears of all his mariners with wax, lest the sweet deluders should destroy them—

*“Then every ear I barr’d against the strain,
And from access of frenzy lock’d the brain.”*

To be blind and deaf and dumb in some places would be far better than to hear and see and speak to our own condemnation, it is infinitely better to enter into life halt or blind or deaf, than, having all our powers, to use them for sinful purposes, and fall into the fires of hell at the last.

Shortly, the text means just this, that a true believer is a man who has himself well in hand, having mastery over his whole manhood. He has a bit in the mouth of all the steeds which draw the chariot of life, and he holds them under due control. He will not let his ear or his eyes delude his fancy, or his feet or hands deface his conduct, nor his heart or tongue betray his spirit. He will have nothing to do with evil, he has no fellowship with it, and his spirit is redeemed, regenerated, renewed. He will not be flat-

tered into pride, nor bribed into deceit, nor allured into unholiness. The Holy Spirit has worked in him a holy spirit, and integrity and uprightness preserve him.

The true Christian is a man who keeps himself clear of the common sins of the age, the popular vices which flourish uncondemned. The sins mentioned in the text were those current in Jerusalem. There they oppressed the poor, they ground them down in their rents, in their wages, in the price of food, in the usury demanded for loans, there they took bribes, and sold justice. But the good man did not because of the fear of the Lord. In Jerusalem men-at-arms gained wealth by deeds of blood and violence, they devoured widows' houses and ate up the inheritances of the fatherless, but the child of God did not. He was out of the fashion. Gainful sins were to him most accursed. He would rather suffer wrong than inflict it. David sketched this man in his 24th Psalm, and with this I give a finishing stroke to the portrait—"Who shall ascend into the hill of the Lord? Or who shall stand in His holy place? He that has clean hands, and a pure heart; who has not lifted up his soul unto vanity, nor sworn deceitfully. He shall receive the blessing from the Lord, and righteousness from the God of his salvation."

II. We have reached our second head. I ask you to follow me while, concerning these godly men, WE OBSERVE THEIR SECURITY.

Observe it, first, *as it is pictorially described* in the text. The times are those of war. The battle rages in the plain, but, "he shall dwell on high," aloft upon the craggy rocks shall be his citadel. In times of invasion men resorted to the highest mountains and rocks, that there they might be sheltered among the lofty fastnesses. While others flee, this man shall dwell—dwell at ease, in permanent peace, and that dwelling shall be on the heights, far beyond the reach of the invader. Is not this glorious? The bands of robbers ravage all around, but they cannot plunder *him*; he looks down upon them and defies their power. There upon the inaccessible rock stands the city of peace, its quiet walls gleaming in the sunlight, and flashing back a calm defiance to the foe. "Mark you well her bulwarks." A believer dwells on the heights, his life is hid with Christ in God; he cannot be reached by the darts of the adversary.

"Yet," says one, "though he dwells on high the enemy may reach him by scaling-ladders, or by some other means of assault." By no means shall they smite him, for he shall have a "place of defense." Is it not written, "In the fear of the Lord is strong confidence: and His children shall have a place of refuge"? "Salvation will God appoint; for walls and bulwarks." As a castle prepared for war, as "the tower of David built for an armory," so shall the Lord be unto His people. The adversary shall rage in vain, dashing himself against ramparts which he cannot shake. He shall go round the city like a dog, but find no entrance, for the Lord is there.

"Yet," says one, "these walls may be dashed down, or may fall into decay." Not so, for "His place of defense shall be the munitions of rocks." Stupendous rocks, firm, massive, enormous, shall furnish him a hiding place. Immutable strength shall gird him around both by day and by night forever and ever. "His place of defense shall be the munitions of rocks." Not one fortification, but many shall make up his stronghold. Mountains shall be round about him, the solid foundations of the earth shall stand between him and the enemy, and nothing shall by any means hurt him—

*"Mountains of stupendous rock
His dwelling place shall be,
There might his soul without a shock
The wreck of nature see."*

"Yet," says one, "the enemy may starve a man out of his citadel; rock cities have been captured at last, because the inhabitants have been pinched with hunger. There has been nothing for the men-at-arms to eat, and therefore they have sold their castle for bread." But this is also provided for, "His bread shall be given him." God will take care that the godly shall not want. As the Lord's chosen cannot be driven out, so they shall not be starved out. The believer shall hold the fort till Christ shall come, for the bread of angels shall be rained upon him sooner than he shall lack.

"Ah, well," says one, "but even if bread could be conveyed into the fortress, yet you know these elevated positions cannot be readily supplied with water, and by thirst they may be forced to yield." The promise has thought of that also, for it is written, "his waters shall be sure." The well within the gate shall never fail, the hidden springs shall never be dried up, and the people of the city shall drink and drink as much as they will, and yet the supply shall never be exhausted. O you enemy, let your hopeless warfare end! Give up the conflict, for vainly do you beleaguer the city of God! The chosen of the Lord

shall never be conquered by the foe, for his God has taken measures to garrison him against all assaults and to deliver him in all straits.

Do you remind me that all this is poetry? I answer, "It is a poetical description, but it is true in every jot and tittle," and so I ask you to accompany me while we consider this thing *as it may be actually experienced*.

It is a matter of fact that the man who believes in the Lord Jesus Christ, and lives as a Christian should live, dwells on the heights. His mind is lifted up above the common cares, and worries, and vexations of life. The Holy Spirit has begotten him again unto a lively hope by the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, and therefore his conversation is in heaven, from where he looks for his Savior, the Lord Jesus. I am sure that many of you know what it is to ride on the high places of the earth, and to look down upon the world as a poor, paltry thing. You have walked with God in light, even as He is in the light, and then you have been filled with a joy which no man takes from you, and you have trod the world beneath your feet, and all that earth calls good or great. Thus has it been true of you, "he shall dwell on high."

You have also found that you have had a place of defense in time of trouble. Though often assailed, you have never been really injured. Unto this day the rage of man has caused you no real loss. You can understand today the meaning of that word, "Who are you that you should be afraid of a man that shall die, and of the son of man which shall be made as grass?" Even Satan himself has not been able to overthrow you. You have trod upon the lion and the dragon. In the name of the Lord you have resisted the devil, and he has fled from you. Tell it out this day to all the sons of men, that the Lord your God has been a wall of fire round about you. I also will join you in this glorying. "O my soul, you have trod down strength!" All things have worked together for good to us up till now and we know it, we have had a place of defense, and in this we will rejoice and be glad.

And do you not know today how secure, how immutable is your defense? Even as the eagle on the rock cannot be reached by the fowler, so are you secure. Look! You have God's promise—"I will never leave you nor forsake you!" "No good thing will He withhold from them that walk uprightly." These promises are the munitions of rocks behind which you are sheltered; the sure words of an unchanging God are your bulwarks. You also have the oath of God as your high tower, for He has sworn by Himself because He could swear by no greater. There stands His covenant made up of promises, secured by oath, and ratified by blood. Who shall break within that line of defense? What munitions of rock can be compared with these things in which it is "impossible for God to lie"—these pledges which God can never dishonor, these guarantees of everlasting faithfulness that can never be questioned. Oh, the blessed security of a child of God!

At this present moment, O child of God, you are dwelling where you must be safe, for, first, you were chosen before the foundation of the world, and God will not lose His choice, nor shall His decree be frustrated. Next, you have been bought with the precious blood of the Son of God Himself, and He will never lose what He has dearly bought. You have been quickened by the Holy Spirit, and such a life can never die. You know who has said, "I give unto My sheep eternal life, and they shall never perish, neither shall any pluck them out of My hand." You have been taken into the family of God, and made His child, and will your Father now disown you, or remove your name out of the family register? You are also joined unto Christ in one spirit, you are a "member of His body, of His flesh, and of His bones," and shall Christ be dismembered and the Son of God be torn in two? Believing in my Lord this morning I stand where the devils of hell cannot reach me, and where the angels of God might envy me, for I can exclaim in your name and in my own, "Who shall separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord?" We challenge earth and hell, time and eternity, to dissolve the blessed union between Christ and His people. Who is he that can harm you if you are followers of that which is good? If your confidence is in the living God, who, shall put you to shame?

I must not fail to notice that the poetic utterance, "Your bread shall be given you," is also literally true. It has been true to you, my brethren, concerning your daily bread. That word is true, "Trust in The Lord, and do good; so shall you dwell in the land, and verily you shall be fed." At times there has been little on the table, but all-sufficiency has still filled the storehouse. When God multiplied the oil and the meal of the poor women at Sarepta, I do not believe that at any one moment she ever had more than sufficed for a single meal. Every day that Elijah lived with her, she had to scrape the bottom of the barrel,

for she had never more than a handful of meal and a little oil. We are not told that either the barrel or the cruse was filled up, but we read—"the barrel of meal shall not waste, neither shall the cruse of oil fail." You may frequently reach the end of your provision, but you can never exhaust your Provider. The meal may come by handfuls, and the oil may only drip out drop by drop, but what does that matter? Was not the manna from heaven a small round thing, and did it not fall morning by morning? If you have earthly provision as you need it, should it not suffice you? If you get as much as you need at this meal, and as much as you need for the next meal, is it not well? Are not the loaves of heavenly bread all the better for being fresh and fresh? The manna would not keep, but bred worms; who wants such unsavory food? There is nothing like living from hand to mouth when it is from God's hand to faith's mouth. Daily bread promotes daily gratitude, and from God's hand hourly providence brings multiplied tokens of love, and is a surer sign of remembrance than if we could have life's mercies all in a lump. "His bread shall be given him" refers also to heavenly bread, which we have even more cause to think about, than about the bread which perishes; this also shall be given us. If we are driven away from a faithful ministry, if we move to the utmost ends of the earth where we miss the means of grace, yet the Lord will feed our souls. If His ministers do not feed us, He will Himself minister to us. The word of the Lord shall not cease to nourish us. "The Lord is my shepherd, I shall not want."

As for the waters, the living waters of grace and of the Holy Spirit, these shall always flow; in summer and winter shall the still waters be found at your side. Yes, they shall be within you "a well of water springing up unto everlasting life." Words cannot tell the privilege of the man who lives in God, and lives with God! He need not shiver in the damps of earth—he lives on high; he need not fear the fury of the enemy, for he has a place of defense; he need not dread the lapse of time, his munitions are of rock; he need not tremble at famine and drought, his needs shall all be met by the care of heaven. The man who knows His sins are forgiven, who is covered with the righteousness of Christ, who is in vital union with the Lord Jesus, who is indwelt by the Holy Spirit, that man, I say, need not desire to be any other than he is, but may give himself up to blessing and praising and magnifying the Most High every moment of his life till he is caught up to the highest heaven, to dwell where enemies cannot threaten nor necessities arise.

III. So this brings me to close by urging you, dear friends, to SEEK THEIR FELICITY.

First, shall I need to say, "Do not try to obtain it by hypocrisy"? Since they are so happy, whom God favors, do not think that by getting your name into their church book you will necessarily be favored too. Oh, brethren, be true believers and not make-believers. Do not pretend to be what you are not. Sinners in Zion are still sinners, and they will one day be afraid. Hypocrites, though joined with the people of God, are still hypocrites, and will before long be surprised with fearfulness. Do not hope by a mere empty profession to win the blessedness of God's people, for by such means you will win a curse rather than a blessing.

Secondly, do not hope to win the bliss of the righteous by self-righteousness, for although we have been describing righteous men this morning, yet we have not been describing self-righteous men. The self-righteous is not righteous; the two things are wide apart as the poles asunder. These very people whom God favored had sinned, for we read in the twenty-fourth verse of the chapter, "The people that dwell therein shall be forgiven their iniquity." The blessing is not to the man who glories in his innocence, but "Blessed is he whose transgression is forgiven, whose sin is covered." These favored people cried, "O Lord, be gracious unto us." They knew their need of grace. Do not hope that God will favor you when you neither confess your sin nor seek His grace. Self-righteousness damns; it is only the righteousness of God that saves. Seek the character and the privilege of the saints as a gift of divine grace. Gladly would I drop into your hearts and mouths that prayer of the second verse, "O Lord, be gracious unto us." I commend it to you. Go to your homes and in your silent chamber pour out your hearts with cries and tears, saying, "O Lord, be gracious unto us. We cannot walk in Your ways, and keep our tongue and eyes and ears as we desire to do unless we are renewed and preserved by Your grace. Be gracious in forgiving the past and in helping us for the future to live in Your fear and service. Do this through Christ Jesus our Lord, we implore You."

Your prayer shall be heard, and these blessings shall be yours, but see to it that you seek unto the Lord by a sincere faith. Again, use the second verse as your guide, and cry, "Be You our arm every morning, our salvation also in the time of trouble." Commit yourself to the guardian care of the Lord

each day and especially fly to Him in the hour of trouble, and then will He create righteousness in you and cause you in every good word to do His will. Go, I say, and seek unto the Strong for strength, and to the Righteous One for righteousness, and the blessings of the dweller upon the heights shall be yours.

As for you, my dear brothers and sisters, who are really walking before the Lord aright, straining with your utmost endeavors to do only that which is just and true, at the same time trusting alone in Jesus for your salvation, I would charge you to rejoice exceedingly. If this text is true, that we dwell on high and that our place of defense is the munitions of rocks and that our bread shall be given us and our waters shall be sure, let us be glad! What a happy people we ought to be! We ought, every one of us, to have a beaming face, flashing eyes, an elastic step, a singing life, a courageous heart. All men should be made to feel that the chosen of the Lord are a happy people. It is our privilege beyond that of all other men to go through the world with heaven about our steps. It is not ours to be clad in the weeds of sorrow, for the Bridegroom is with us. We are not commanded to complain, but to rejoice. I leave to others the task of showing the beauty of groaning, or the delightfulness of murmuring; it is mine to urge you to shake yourselves from the dust, and put on your beautiful garments. Why are you so cast down? Dear people of God, you go out in the streets in rags, and yet you have royal robes provided for you; why do you not put them on? “Oh,” you say, “but I have great sorrow.” Yes, but it is written, “As sorrowful, yet always rejoicing.” Why tell everybody of your grief? Is there any good to be done by that? What does our Lord say? “But you, when you fast, anoint your head and wash your face that you appear not unto men to fast.” It is a Christian’s duty to be happy. What a blessed religion is that in which joy is a matter of precept—“Rejoice in the Lord always, and again I say, Rejoice.”

I have been so long away from England that I do not know where our Queen is residing just now, but if I had the wings of a dove, and could mount into the upper air, I would soon find out. I should look for the Royal Standard. I should see it floating over Windsor or Osborne, and by this token I should spy the royal abode. Fling out the banner to the breeze when the king is within. Is the king at home with you, dear brothers and sisters? Do not forget to display the standard of holy joy. Hoist it up and keep it flying. When the Bridegroom is not with us, we will mourn. But so long as we see His face, no man can make us fast. Rejoice, and yet again rejoice, and thus let the Royal Standard fly at the top of the tower. The King is within us! The Prince of Peace is enthroned in our hearts! The Lord is exalted, for He dwells on high, and we dwell on high with Him. Glory be unto His name. Ring the joy-bells! With clamor of united joy let us shout unto our God who makes us to ride upon the high places of the earth! Let it be known abroad that there is no God like our God and no people like His people. Under heaven there are none so joyous as the Lord’s afflicted saints, none so rich as the Lord’s poor, none so honored in heaven as those that are despised of men for Christ’s sake, none so worthy to be envied as those who today are ridiculed for their faith in God. The Lord be with you, and bless every one of you with the full enjoyment of this majestic text, for Christ’s sake. Amen.

**PORTION OF SCRIPTURE READ BEFORE SERMON—ISAIAH 33.
HYMNS FROM “OUR OWN HYMN BOOK”—103, VERSION 2; 18, VERSION 2.**

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