

PRAYER FOR THE CHURCH NO. 2788

A SERMON
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DELIVERED BY C. H. SPURGEON
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*“Cause thy face to shine upon thy sanctuary.”
Daniel 9:17*

A TRUE-HEARTED believer does not live for himself. Where there is abundance of grace and great strength of mind in the service of God, there is sure to be a spirit of unselfishness. It was so with Daniel, who was a model man in the matter of decision of character and a holy, believing walk before the Lord. That “man greatly beloved” was, in all respects, faithful to his convictions. No lion’s den could silence his courageous prayer. No presence of mighty monarch or of his festive guests could turn him aside from delivering his fateful message.

Yet Daniel was not satisfied. Whatever might be his own condition, he remembered what Jerusalem was, and what the people to whom he belonged were, and in the depths of his soul he sorrowed, notwithstanding all that God’s grace had worked within him. I firmly believe that the better a man’s own character becomes, and the more joy in the Lord he has in his own heart, the more capable is he of sympathetic sorrow and probably, the more of it he will have. If you have room in your soul for sacred joy, you have equal room for holy grief and depend upon it, you will have both of these emotions if the Lord has perfectly consecrated you and purposes to use you for His glory.

Daniel was also a man of many visions. With the exception of John, whom Daniel greatly resembles, it has scarcely fallen to the lot of any man, unless it is Ezekiel, to have so many wondrous visions of God. Yet his visions did not make him visionary. There are many persons who could not be trusted to see the tip of an angel’s wing, for they would become so proud, ever afterwards, that there would be no holding them. But he who is fully consecrated to God may see vision after vision and he will make a practical use of what he sees and try to find out something to be done, something to be repented of, something to be prayed for, something that shall be for the good of the church of God.

Daniel had also been studying the prophecies, and he knew, by what he had discovered, when certain predictions would be fulfilled. But he was not, like some students of prophecy in our day, utterly unpractical. They seem to be so taken up with the future that they do nothing in the present. They are so fully occupied in looking up to the sky, with their mouths wide open, waiting for the coming of the Lord, that they forget that the very best way to wait for the coming of the Master is to be found doing His will. “Blessed is that servant whom his Lord, when He comes, shall find so doing.”

What Daniel learned from the study of the Sacred Books, he turned to practical account and finding that a certain time was near, of which good things were foretold, he set his face toward the Lord and began to pray—not for himself, but for his people, many of whom were at Jerusalem, hundreds of miles away from him, or scattered in various places all over the face of the earth.

For them, he used those bright and sparkling eyes which had looked up into the fires supernal. For them, he used that thoughtful and enlightened mind which had studied the oracles of God. For them, he used those knees which were so familiar with the attitude of prayer and getting alone by himself, he wrestled mightily as Jacob had done of old—only Daniel’s pleading was for a far greater number of people, who were in a still direr trouble—and he, too, wrestled until he came off more than a conqueror.

I am anxious, dear friends, that Daniel's prayer should, by the blessing of God's Spirit, inspire us with the spirit of prayer and that his example, in forgetting himself and remembering his people, would help us to be unselfish and lead us to care for our people—even God's people—to whom we have the honor and privilege to belong. Patriotism is an instinct which is found, I think, in every true Englishman. And most of the other nations of the earth can also boast of their patriots. Let it never be said that the church of God has no feeling of patriotism for the Holy City, for the heavenly land, and for her glorious King enthroned above. To us, Christian patriotism means love to the church of God, for—

*“There our best friends, our kindred dwell,
There God our Savior reigns.”*

Let us have loyalty, by all means, but chiefly, loyalty to Christ. Let us have true patriotism, but especially that patriotism which consists in love to “the land of the living” of which Christ is the one King and Ruler.

In meditating upon Daniel's prayer, “Cause thy face to shine upon your sanctuary,” I shall, first of all, speak upon *the holy place*, “Thy sanctuary.” Then, secondly, we will consider *the earnest prayer itself*. And lastly, we will think of *the conduct consistent with such a prayer as this*.

I. First, then, Daniel speaks of THE HOLY PLACE. “Thy sanctuary.”

Of course, he refers to the temple at Jerusalem, which was then in utter ruin. It had been broken down and burned by the Chaldeans, and Daniel therefore rightly calls it desolate, but fervently prays that God would cause His face to shine even upon its ruins.

My first remark is, that *the temple at Jerusalem was typical of the church of God*. We are never to regard any building now upon earth as a sanctuary, a *holy place*. We do, very incorrectly, speak of places as being consecrated to divine worship, but it is utterly impossible that there should be any more holiness in any one building than in another. Holiness is not an attribute of material substances. It does not appertain to iron, stone, mortar, brick, or timbers. It is something which belongs to the mind and to the spirit of man, and from the time of our Lord, there has been no building which was even typically holy.

Sitting on the well at Sychar, he said to the woman of Samaria, “The hour cometh when ye shall neither in this mountain, nor yet at Jerusalem, worship the Father...The hour cometh, and now is, when the true worshippers shall worship the Father in spirit and in truth: for the Father seeketh such to worship him.” Stephen declared to the Jewish Sanhedrin, “The most high dwelleth not in temples made with hands,” and proved the truth of his statement by quoting the Lord's own declaration by the mouth of the prophet Isaiah, “Heaven is my throne, and earth is my footstool: what house will ye build me? saith the Lord.”

Talk of holy buildings, can anything that man has made be as holy as yon bright blue sky, which the Lord has spread out like a curtain, and as a tent to dwell in? Talk of holy water, can any water be holier than that which drops in blessed showers straight from heaven?

“But” says someone, “if the temple was typical, of what was it a type? Why, of the church of God. There is still a temple upon the earth, but it is a temple not made with hands—a temple reared not by human masons, and hewers of stone, and carpenters, and other artificers, but built by God Himself. This temple is the church of God. “Which church?” asks someone. There never was more than one that is, the church which Christ has redeemed with His own blood. The living stones, which compose this living temple, were all chosen by God from before the foundation of the world. They are, one by one, being quarried by effectual grace and built up by the power of the divine Spirit, so as to grow unto a holy temple in the Lord.

So we learn that as the temple was typical, so also was it *unique*. There were never two temples at one time. True, there was a second, which was built upon the foundations of the first. Still, there was only one at a time, the second was the continuation of the former one with less of splendor. All through

the land of Canaan there was only one spot where sacrifice might be lawfully—offered only one shrine where, on high occasions, the multitudes met together for worship. And in like manner, there is only one church of our Lord Jesus Christ. “Which church is that?” someone again asks. None of them all, but there are some people, in all the visible churches, who belong to the one sanctuary of God.

We may hope that even in those churches which have most departed from primitive simplicity, there is a remnant according to the election of grace. And that there is a still larger proportion among those who keep more closely to the Word of God and to the truth as it is in Jesus. You cannot say of any part, or of the whole of what is called the visible church, that it is the sanctuary of God. It is a sort of shell in which the real church of God is encased and which it helps, perhaps, to preserve but which it also certainly disfigures.

There is an elect people to be found on earth. Do you ask, “Who are they?” I answer, “The LORD knows them that are his.” They are a people redeemed from among men by a special and peculiar purchase of our Lord—a people quickened with one life, in whom there is but one living and incorruptible seed, which lives and abides forever—a people in mystical, real, spiritual, indissoluble union with their great covenant Head, the Lord Jesus Christ—a people who are, some of them, very poor and quite unknown. Some of them, however, are in the high places of the earth, a few may be found even there. They are scattered up and down in the world and some of them do not know one another, but the Lord knows them all. And whether they know it or not, there is a communion between them all.

Some friends talk about exclusive communion, but it is impossible to practice such a thing, for all true communion is with Christ the Head, and also with all the rest of the members, just as, in the body, every member communicates with every other member and unless it should cut itself off, and kill itself, it must commune with all the rest. It may tie little pieces of red tape around itself and try to stop the circulation of the blood, but as long as there is life, the heart beats through the whole body. Every pulse has its effect upon the whole, from the crown of the head to the sole of the foot and so is it with the communion of saints. We are all one body. One life pulsates through all the living church of the living God. There was but one temple and there is but one church.

People try to get a visible form of that one church, but I believe that is utterly impossible. The Church of Rome claims to be that one church and we know what sort of a church it is. And on the other hand, there are certain brethren who profess to be the one assembly of God. Well, I will not say what kind of church they have made, but I believe that all schemes for comprehending all the saints in one visible church must fail.

Adam never saw Eve until God had perfectly fashioned her and you will never see the church, the Bride of Christ, till she is perfect and complete. And when she is, you will clap your hands with joy at the sight of the exquisite beauty which God shall have given to her before she is presented to her heavenly Bridegroom. The process of perfecting her is going on now and Christ’s Bride is being “curiously wrought” out of material taken from Christ’s own side. And she will be able to say to Him, “Your eyes did see my substance, yet being unperfect.” Yes, He sees and He knows it all.

There was but one temple, then, and there is but one church, the sanctuary of God, and for that church we ought to pray. This should correct the idea of some who, when they pray for God to bless His sanctuary, mean, “Lord, bless little Bethel! or “Lord, bless the parish church!” or “Lord, bless the extremely orthodox community to which I belong!” or “Lord, bless the select few that gather to hear our dear minister!”

I say, “The Lord bless all who love our Lord Jesus Christ in sincerity and wherever there lives upon the face of the earth a man who has anything of the grace of God in him, the Lord lift up His countenance upon him. May He deliver him from all errors and mistakes into which even God’s children fall in a measure, and may He bring them all to the one Lord, the one faith, and the one baptism!” If there is good evidence that anyone is indeed a living one in God’s one true, spiritual temple, shall we not all wish every blessing to such a one in the name of the Most High!

The temple at Jerusalem was, further, the fabric of wisdom. It could only have been built by a Solomon. And Solomon found a band of men, whom God had prepared to carry out the extraordinary work of the temple, for from its marvelous foundations, which have been lately uncovered, even to its topmost pinnacle, it excelled all the architecture which the world had ever seen.

But the church which God is erecting is a far more wonderful work of wisdom infinitely superior to that of Solomon. Wisdom planned it in election. Wisdom has worked marvelously and continues still to work in the calling out of the saints. Wisdom fits each living stone for its proper place and puts each one into its right position. When it shall be all finished, it will be the marvel of all intelligence—they shall see what a matchless sanctuary God, and not man, has reared, and note how, in every single detail, His infinite wisdom is manifest.

The temple that Solomon built was also *the result of great cost*. Immense wealth was lavished upon it and you do not need that I should try to tell you at what cost the Lord is building up His true sanctuary here among men. The cost of any one of us, if we are indeed living stones, no arithmetic can ever calculate. Nowhere but in the heart of Christ could our ransom price be found and even that heart had to be pierced to find it. Well does Peter say, “You were not redeemed with corruptible things, as silver and gold...but with the precious blood of Christ, as of a lamb without blemish and without spot.” How marvelous, then, is that temple which is erected at such a cost! Everything about it is according to God’s riches in glory by Christ Jesus. Solomon’s temple, glorious though it was, had not about the whole edifice so much of splendor as God displays in even the least of the living stones which He builds upon the one foundation, Jesus Christ our Lord.

Again, the temple of old *was the shrine of God’s indwelling*. It was the one place under the old dispensation of types, now done away with, where God dwelt in visible manifestation among His ancient people. We are told that a peculiar light shone between the wings of the cherubim over the ark of the covenant and that pillar, which looked like a cloud by day and flamed like a mighty beacon by night. It was there that men must go, or at least, to that spot that they must look, if they sought the Lord. And therefore it was that Daniel worshipped and prayed with his windows open toward Jerusalem.

At the present time, the one place in all the world, where God dwells, is His church. You can find Him anywhere upon the earth as the Creator, but the glory of the Godhead comes out most brilliantly in redemption, for it is of His redeemed people that it is written, “I will dwell in them, and walk in them; and I will be their God, and they shall be my people.” God has not said, of any one country, “England America, Russia, Spain, shall be Mine.” But Moses truly said, “The LORD’S portion is his people; Jacob is the lot of his inheritance.”

It is in His church that God dwells. Sometimes men take us into some gorgeous building with ornamental roof and wondrous architecture, and as we are led up to a brass railing, we are told that, inside that barrier, it is peculiarly holy. And then we are pointed to some steps and we are told that at the top of those step, it is much holier than it is anywhere else. To my mind, it is an amazing thing that men should entertain such absurd notions, for which there is not the slightest shadow of a foundation. But you get where there is a true child of God and there the place is holy.

I declare that I have often stood on holy ground, but it has been by the bedside of some poor expiring saint with whom the Lord has been dwelling and through whom He has manifested the wonders of His grace. That is where God dwells, in that godly woman dying in the workhouse. That is where He dwells, in that humble-minded man plodding at the plough tail to earn his bread by the sweat of his brow. That is where He dwells, in that saintly woman who endures a daily martyrdom for Christ’s sake and in that man whose holy life adorns the doctrine of God, his Savior in all things. These are the true holy places—the sacred shrines of God wherein the Holy Spirit delights to dwell.

The temple at Jerusalem was also *the place of God’s peculiar worship* and where is God worshipped now, beloved, but in His living church? A number of us may meet together and call ourselves Christians, and think that we are worshipping God, but unless we are really regenerate and the Spirit of God is in us, there is no true worship. You cannot offer acceptable worship to God by forms, or ceremonies, or the

sweetest music, or even in the simplest style of worship in the most plain meeting house, or by sitting still, and saying nothing, as the members of the Society of Friends do, unless you worship God, who is a Spirit, in spirit and in truth. It is heart-work, soul-work, the work of the Spirit of God drawing us near to God which alone is acceptable to Him. I dare say it yet again, there is no worship under heaven that can be pleasing to God except the worship of the one true church, the sanctuary of God and that church is composed of believers in Jesus, whose hearts are knit together into one in Christ.

The temple at Jerusalem was also *the throne of JEHOVAH's power*. It was out of Zion that He sent forth His rod and from that sacred shrine that He spoke, by His ancient prophets, the Word that was full of power. Who could stand against Him when He was angry and spoke in His fury out of His holy place? And Christ's power, through the Holy Ghost, still goes forth from His church. The man who is to preach with power, must be one of those who are quickened by the Holy Spirit and through whom the Spirit speaks with energy divine. Mere human eloquence is nothing in this matter. Nor is learning, by itself, of any account. Though you may have gone to twenty universities and received from them all the degrees with which men delight to bedizen them, all is in vain without the Spirit of God. It is the life of Christ in a man, the Holy Ghost being with him, that enables him to speak with power.

It is the work of the church of God to evangelize the world. It cannot be evangelized from any other source. God will not send angels to do that which He has committed unto men and certainly, He will not employ the wicked to declare His statutes, so His church must do it. The living waters flowed forth from Jerusalem. Light and instruction and the oracles of God went forth from Jerusalem of old. And they must go forth from the church of God, which is among men to this day. Let us, each one, take care that we have our share in this blessed employment.

See, then, what the sanctuary of God is. Our Lord Jesus Christ, speaking of the temple of His body, said to the unbelieving Jews, "Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up." But now He is gone from us and we know Him no more after the flesh, but we still have God among us. That God is the sacred third person of the ever-blessed Trinity in Unity, the Holy Ghost and though we may not say that He is incarnate among men, yet we can truly say that He dwells among men. There is still a divine indwelling, the Holy Ghost is here on earth right now, dwelling in His people, as Paul wrote to the Corinthians, "Know ye not that your body is the temple of the Holy Ghost which is in you?" The whole body of believers put together makes up the one great spiritual temple, which is the sanctuary of the living God.

II. Now, secondly, I must speak more briefly upon THE EARNEST PRAYER, "Cause thy face to shine upon thy sanctuary."

And first, I note that it is a prayer *quite free from selfishness*. Daniel does not even say to the Lord, "Cause your face to shine upon me." Have you not, beloved, sometimes felt that you could almost forego the light of God's countenance yourself, if He would but bless His church? O souls, if God will but save some of you, if God will but make you into pillars in His eternal temple, some of His saints will be well-pleased even if they themselves have to go mourning on their own account!

Further, Daniel's prayer was *the child of thought*. He had thought over the condition of the temple at Jerusalem and thinking it over, he had become troubled in his mind. It was lying desolate, but he knew that there was a promise that it should be rebuilt. He thought over these two timings, he let his soul lie-a-soak in the truth about God's sanctuary, and then he prayed. It often happens that there is very little power in those prayers that leap out of our lips without premeditation—born in a minute, like gnats, and dying just as soon. But the prayer that lies in the soul, like eggs in a nest, and that has to be sat upon, as it were, and hatched, and brought forth—there is life in such supplication as that and that is the kind of prayer which prevails with God. Such was the prayer of Daniel.

It was also *a prayer which cast itself entirely upon God*, "Cause thy face to shine upon thy sanctuary." He does not say, "Lord, send more prophets." Or "Raise up new kings." Or "Do this or that," but only, "Cause thy face to shine upon thy sanctuary." Oh, that we might learn how to pray so that God should be the subject as well as the object of our supplications!

O God, Your church needs You above everything else! A poor little, sick, neglected child needs fifty things, but you can put all those needs into one if you say that the child needs its mother. So, the church of God needs a thousand things, but you can put them all into one if you say, “The church of God needs her God.”

There was also *great faith in this prayer*, “Cause thy face to shine upon thy sanctuary.” Daniel seems to say, “Lord, it scarcely needs Your command, it only wants You to smile upon your sanctuary, and all shall be well.” But Daniel, the temple is all in ruins. There was scarcely a column standing upon its proper pedestal and hardly one stone left upon another. “Ah!” says he, “that is true, but Lord, cause your face to shine upon your sanctuary.” The face of God is as the sun when it shines in its strength. The favor of God is not merely something to His church, but it is everything. The revelation of His love to His people is not simply a blessing, but it is all the blessings of the covenant in one. Cause thy face, O infinitely glorious JEHOVAH, to shine upon your church here below! Will you not, beloved, all join in that prayer?

It was, however, *a very comprehensive prayer*, because wherever God’s face shines upon His church, note what happens. First, her walls are rebuilt. Desolations, when God shines upon them, glow into perfection. We shall soon see our church members multiplied and all things in proper order, if the Lord will but shine upon us. Then shall you see each one of the Lord’s servants in his right place, ministering before the Lord. I hope we all pray for ministers, but I am afraid we do not pray for them as often and as earnestly as we ought. But Lord, if You will Cause your face to shine upon your sanctuary, we shall have ministers enough and of the best sort, too. If Your face is but turned Zionward, You will find the man who will tell out the love of Jesus.

When the Lord shines upon a church, then its worship will be acceptable to Him, even the most humble form of it will be acceptable in His sight. We know, beloved, what it is to have God’s face shining upon us, do we not? How sweet the service is then! How intense the prayers! How fervent the praise! How you feel fed! How glad your souls are! In this land of weeping skies and gathering clouds, we know what it is to have a long time of dullness, but how different is the prospect when the sun shines forth in its glory, and how different is our worship when the Lord lifts upon us the light of His reconciled countenance!

Then, too, truth will be proclaimed in all its clearness. We shall not have to complain of the cloudy preaching of which we hear so much nowadays, or of the men whose cleverness consists in confusing the minds of their hearers, or to speak in plain language, in inventing lies to contradict the blessed Word of God and to seek to undermine everything for which we have ever had respect and regard. They have tried to quench hell, and to pull down heaven. There is nothing that their unholy fingers have not sought to pollute. But if God shall cause His face to shine upon us, we shall have the old truth declared once again in all its clearness.

Then, too, we shall see the beauty of holiness in all the members of God’s spiritual church. We may well pray for that, for there are many professors, in the present day, who are the enemies of the cross of Christ—enemies because they manage to get into the church and then dishonor it by their ungodly conduct. O Lord, cause your face to shine upon your church, that all Your people may walk in the beauty of holiness!

Then also there will be delightful fellowship. In the sunlight of God’s presence, we have fellowship with one another, and with the Lord Jesus Christ, and our hearts are exceedingly glad.

And then there will be power in the testimony. With God’s face shining upon His sanctuary, His Word goes forth from His servants with energy and force which none can resist. Join, then, beloved, in this prayer of Daniel, “Cause thy face to shine upon thy sanctuary.” Do it for the church’s own sake. What a sad thing it is when the church is like Samson after the Lord had departed from him, when she shakes herself, as at other times, but can perform none of her former feats!

What wretched Sabbaths some of our brethren have to spend when they go and listen to a profitless ministry and mingle with brethren as dull, and cold, and dissatisfied as themselves! Join in this prayer

also for the world's sake. If the church has not the Lord to shine upon her, what is the poor world to do? What hope, what light, what knowledge of the truth, what salvation can come to a perishing world of sinners except through a living church? What are your own children to do without this shining of God's countenance? If you take them to a place where the worship is dull and lifeless, if they are compelled to listen to something that never interests them at all, and to go where there is no one to care about their souls, you may live to see them grow up to break your hearts. Therefore pray God to bless His church for your dear children's sake.

And then, for God's sake, for Christ's sake, for the Holy Spirit's sake, for a lifeless church is a dishonor to God and the better a church has been, the more of a nuisance does it become when the presence of God is gone from it. May the Lord grant that we may never know what this means in our own case and for all these reasons, let us pray to God to cause His face to shine upon His sanctuary.

III. Now I am to conclude by briefly reminding you of THE CONDUCT THAT IS CONSISTENT WITH THIS PRAYER.

If you and I have been praying this prayer—and I hope we have—what kind of conduct will be consistent with it?

Well, first, we shall consider the state of the church. Some professing Christians do not seem to me as if they ever thought of the church at all. Some do not think much about the church with which they are connected. Do all of you, who are members of this church, know whether the Sunday school is getting on well or not? Now, speak the truth, do you? Did you ever make any inquiry about it? Then there are various societies for the spread of the Gospel connected with this church, do all of you know that there are such societies and do you help them all you can?

Come, now, put the matter to your own consciences. Then there are numbers of people who are members of various little churches, but who never care anything about other churches. They are like the mouse that lived in a box and when the lid was opened, one day, it came out into the cupboard and said that it had no idea that the world was so big. Yet it was only then looking at the inside of a cupboard. And there are many professing Christians who have not a much wider range of vision than that mouse had in the cupboard. They have no idea of the size of the church of Christ or of its various interests. That should not be the case with any of us who are members of the church of the living God. Let us look over all that is in our Master's house. Let us count His flocks and His herds, and see how everything that is His flourishes and increases.

The next thing for us to do is *to lay to heart the evil or the good of Zion*. Consider it well and then be grieved if you see sin triumphant, or error rampant, and do not perceive that the cause of God is advancing in the world. I am afraid there are many nominally Christian people who look, every morning, to check the price of consoles, who have not examined the last Missionary Society's Report, nor have they any clear idea as to the increase or diminution of the work of the Lord. This ought not to be true of any professed follower of Christ. How can we expect the Lord to cause His face to shine upon His sanctuary when His people have little or no care about that sanctuary?

Then, if we begin to think, and begin to care, *we shall try to do what we can for God's church*. It is all very well for a man to pray, but the value of his prayer very much depends upon its sincerity, and that sincerity will be proven by his doing something that will help to answer his own prayer. What are you doing, my brother? What are you doing, my sister, to promote the glory of God in His sanctuary? All the living members of the body of Christ contribute something to the general welfare of the whole body. The little finger would be missed if it were cut off and there is not a tiny valve near the heart, nor a minute vessel anywhere in the human system, which could be taken away without inflicting an injury upon the whole body.

Just so is it in the church of Christ. We cannot afford to spare any part of the mystical body of Christ. But what use are you, brother, in that body? What are you doing, sister, for the well-being of your fellow-members? There is something which you should be doing, or else you would not have any portion in the Lord's spiritual sanctuary.

But when we have done all that we can, *let us pray much more than we ever have done*. Oh, for a praying church! I rejoice that ever since I have been with you, the spirit of prayer has never died out amongst us and I earnestly entreat you never to let it do so. May our prayer meetings be sustained in fervor and increased in number! Praying is, after all, the chief matter. Praying is the end of preaching. Preaching has its right use, and must never be neglected, but real heart devotion is worth more than anything else. Prayer is the power which brings God's blessing down upon all our work.

I beg you, day by day, as you walk the streets, to have this petition in your hearts and in your mouths, "'Cause thy face to shine upon thy sanctuary.' O God, bless Your church all over the world—in Europe, in America, in Asia, in Africa, in Australia! Everywhere prosper Your work among the heathen, and in our own highly-favored land too, cause your face to shine upon your sanctuary.'" And do not cease to present that prayer until, to the fullest possible extent, it shall be answered. And when will that be? When He comes, for whose coming we look with joyful expectation. The Lord blesses you for Christ's sake! Amen.

EXPOSITION BY C. H. SPURGEON

PSALMS 114 and 48

Psalm 114. *When Israel went out of Egypt, the house of Jacob from a people of strange language; Judah was his sanctuary, and Israel his dominion. The sea saw it, and fled: Jordan was driven back. The mountains skipped like rams, and the little hills like lambs. What ailed thee, O thou sea, that thou fleddest? thou Jordan, that thou wast driven back? Ye mountains, that ye skipped like rams; and ye little hills, like lambs? Tremble, thou earth, at the presence of the Lord, at the presence of the God of Jacob; which turned the rock into a standing water, the flint into a fountain of waters.*

I did not interrupt the reading of the Psalm by any exposition. It is a perfect whole and could not well be divided without spoiling it. We may admire the poetry as well as the inspiration of this Psalm. It begins with rugged abruptness, "When Israel went out of Egypt." It only gives just a hint of the discomfort of the Israelites while in Egypt, arising from the fact that they did not understand the Egyptians, "strange language." No doubt they were often beaten by their taskmasters for not obeying orders, when they really did not understand what must have seemed to them the barbarous speech of their Egyptian oppressors. But God led them up out of the house of bondage, the tribe of Judah leading the van, and all the people following in due order.

How beautifully the Psalmist describes the dividing of the Red Sea. He represents the waters as perceiving the presence of God and fleeing away, not because Israel came to the bank, but because God was in the midst of His people, "The sea saw it and fled," as if abashed at the presence of its Maker, alarmed at the terror of JEHOVAH's might.

So was it with the Jordan, that swiftly-flowing river was "driven back" by a very special miracle. The dividing of the Red Sea was a marvelous act of God's power, but the driving back of that rushing river has some extraordinary points about it peculiar to itself. And all this happened because God was there. The sea flees before Him, the river is driven back by Him. In like manner, my brethren, if God is in the midst of our church, nothing can withstand its onward march. If the Lord is in any man, that man need not even think or talk of difficulties, for with God nothing is impossible.

So mighty was the influence of God's presence that the mountains themselves began to move and even to skip like rams, and to leap like lambs. There was some fear there, for they trembled in their solid sockets, "at the presence of the God of Jacob." There was joy, too. We speak of "the everlasting hills," yet the Psalmist depicts them as moving as easily as the lambs frisk in the meadows in the springtime, "The mountains skipped like rams, and the little hills like lambs." How grand is the poetic utterance. "What ailed thee, O thou sea, that thou fleddest? thou Jordan, that thou wast driven back?" "You could no longer rush in your accustomed channel, but must needs return to the source from where you came.

What ailed thee, O thou mountains, that thou trembled as if a palsy had seized upon you? ‘What ailed thou, O you little hills?’”

Now comes the answer, which yet is not given in the form of an answer. The inspired poet, in order to heighten the grandeur of his language, kept the name of God out of the Psalm until he came to the end, when he thus answered his own riddle, “Tremble, thou earth, at the presence of the Lord, at the presence of the God of Jacob; which turned the rock into a standing water, the flint into a fountain of waters”—another miracle, for God multiplied His marvels.

Having brought His people out of Egypt and led them through the wilderness, and made the hills to move at His majestic presence, now He performs a converting work changing the rock into a lake, so plenteous was the effusion of water and making the flint to gush into a veritable river, which followed the children of Israel through the wilderness, for as Paul says, “They drank of that spiritual Rock that followed them, (the margin is, “that went with them,”) and that Rock was Christ.”

Psalm 48:1-3. *Great is the LORD, and greatly to be praised in the city of our God, in the mountain of his holiness. Beautiful for situation, the joy of the whole earth, is mount Zion, on the sides of the north, the city of the great King. God is known in her palaces for a refuge.*

It was so with the literal Jerusalem and it is so now with the church of Christ, of which, “the city of the great King” was a type. God still dwells among men. His Spirit abides with His people and His church stands securely upon the rock of His eternal purposes, evermore the same.

4. *For lo, the kings were assembled.*

The adversaries who boasted that they would destroy Jerusalem, “the kings were assembled,”

4-7. *They passed by together. They saw it, and so they marveled; they were troubled, and hasted away. Fear took hold upon them there, and pain, as of a woman in travail. Thou breakest the ships of Tarshish with an east wind.*

The adversaries of Zion looked up at the city set on that high hill and they despaired of being able to capture it. And in like manner, those who attack the truth as it is in Jesus if they did but know how well it is garrisoned by the omnipotence of JEHOVAH, they also would faint with fear and give up the assault. If they do not, the Lord can break them in pieces as He broke the ships of Tarshish with His strong east wind.

8-14. *As we have heard, so have we seen in the city of the LORD of hosts, in the city of our God: God will establish it for ever. Selah. We have thought of thy lovingkindness, O God, in the midst of thy temple. According to thy name, O God, so is thy praise unto the ends of the earth: thy right hand is full of righteousness. Let mount Zion rejoice, let the daughters of Judah be glad, because of thy judgments. Walk about Zion, and go round about her: tell the towers thereof. Mark ye well her bulwarks, consider her palaces; that ye may tell it to the generation following. For this God is our God for ever and ever: he will be our guide even unto death.*

According to Alexander and Bonar, this last clause should be read, “He will be our guide at death and over death.” He will lead us across the Jordan, and be our God and our guide in the land that flows with milk and honey, whither we are bound. So, glory be unto the God of Abraham, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, forever and ever! Amen.

Taken from The C. H. Spurgeon Collection, Version 1.0, Ages Software. 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.