

THE SINNER'S ONLY ALTERNATIVE

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A SERMON
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“Now therefore come, let us fall unto the host of the Syrians: if they save us alive, we shall live; and if they kill us, we shall but die.”
2 Kings 7:4.

OUTSIDE the gates of Samaria, at the time mentioned in our text, you might have seen four miserable beings, gaunt and thin, with that sharpness of eye and visage which is ever the effect of protracted hunger. They were lepers, suffering from a loathsome disease, and emaciated by starvation. They held, as it were, a miniature council of war, and the result of their deliberations was that they said to one another, “Why stay we here to die? If we go into the city, even should we be permitted to remain there, famine is so rife that we would soon die there; while, if we continue to sit here, it is quite certain that we must pine away, and perish. Let us go to the camp of the Syrians; here is a little hope in that direction, though it may be a very slender one. The Syrians may put us to death, and so end our miseries. Perhaps death by the sword is preferable to death by famine; at any rate, we can but die in any case. Let us choose the desperate alternative; let us take that course which, although it requires the greatest boldness, holds out some slight hope of success.”

You know the result of their decision; they went to the Syrian camp, found that the host had fled, feasted themselves to the full, and, possibly, began to appropriate some of the plunder that abounded all around them. Then, suddenly, the thought struck them, “Here we have bread and corn in abundance, yet the people in Samaria are starving. This is a time of common distress; so, though they did throw us out of the city, it would be a deed unworthy even of lepers if we left our fellow creatures without news of our discovery; so, let us go back, and tell the good news to the people in the city, that their suffering may be relieved, as our own has been.” They did so, and soon the famished crowds poured out of Samaria, and fed to the full. You are familiar with the narrative, so I will base upon it an argument which may prove useful to any inquiring ones who may be here. There are, probably, with us some who have before them an alternative somewhat similar to the one mentioned in our text. If so, I hope they will imitate these poor lepers in their actions; and, afterwards, count it their joyful privilege to deliver to others a message as cheering as the one which these lepers carried to the famine-stricken people of Samaria.

I. First, then, THERE ARE SOME OF YOU WHO HAVE AN ALTERNATIVE PRESENTED TO YOUR CONSCIENCES.

There was a time when you were careless about eternal things, but that time has passed. You can look back, possibly, only a few weeks, to the time when the Sabbath was to you a day of revelry, when the house of God was entirely neglected by you, when the Bible was a Book which you would not have read unless you had been flogged to it, and when prayer was a duty and privilege that you utterly despised. But now, your conscience has been somewhat awakened, and though not thoroughly as yet, still partially you have begun to perceive that what is written in Scripture is true, that we have gone astray like lost sheep, that our iniquities have prevailed against us, and that our very righteousnesses are as filthy rags. You have heard the gospel preached; it matters not where—whether in the cathedral, or in the theater, or anywhere else. But, now that you have listened to the Word, Satan has interposed, and has said to you, “Christ will not receive such sinners as you are. The grace of God was never intended for men who have degraded themselves as you have. There may be hope for other men, but there is none for you; the gate of mercy is fast closed against you, and it has been said of you, ‘He that is filthy, let him be filthy still; he has disobeyed his God, let him receive the penalty for that disobedience.’”

Now you perceive that there are just two courses open to you; you can sit still, but then you know that you must perish; or you can go to Christ, and your fear is that you will perish then. Yet you can but die if you go to Him, and He rejects you; whereas, if you do not go to Him, you will surely perish. Even should you believe in Him, you fear that you may be lost; but if you do not believe in Him, there is no hope at all for you. Should you go to Him in prayer, your fears tell you that He may repel you, and say to you, "Get you gone; what right have you, who once cursed Me, to expect any favor from Me? You, who have scorned My grace a hundred times, and defied My law, what do you mean by falling upon your knees, and entreating My mercy? Begone, ungrateful wretch, and perish in your sins!" Yet still this truth is present to your mind—that if you do perish there, you do but perish, and it is quite certain that you will perish if you remain where you are. Let me try and work out this question for you, sitting down by your side, as one of the leprous men may have sat down by his fellow. You know, my friend and brother, that, should you die as you now are, it is absolutely certain that you must perish. Do not listen to Satan's lie: "You shall not surely perish." You all know that the Bible is the Book of God. I can hardly believe any man who tells me that he doubts whether the Bible is the Word of God. The truth of Scripture is being so perpetually confirmed by all the discoveries of those who travel in the land where it was written that I can scarcely credit the doubts concerning its authenticity as being honest.

But even if you reject the Word of God, you must believe that God is just. If there is a God, He must punish men for sinning against Him. How can any moral government exist if sin goes unpunished, if virtue and vice lead to the same end? Conscience, fallen though it is, and no longer like God's candle in the soul, still has sufficient light left to assure men that God must punish sin. Supposing that you do accept the Word of God as true, you know that the unregenerate can never see the face of God with acceptance, that those who have not been cleansed from sin can never stand before the thrice-holy Jehovah, for there can by no means enter heaven anything that defiles. As to your ultimate fate, if you continue as you now are, there can be no question; the fire of hell must be your everlasting portion. Now turn to the other alternative; there is for you at least some hope. Even your poor trembling heart admits that there is at least some hope that, if you seek mercy, you shall find it. I can assure you that there is not only hope, but that there is certainty that you will obtain it. Jesus casts out none that come to Him, and He freely receives the vilest of the vile. But I put the matter now as your unbelief puts it; it is not to you an absolute certainty that Christ will reject you, is it? You are not quite sure that, if you pray to Him, He will reject your petition; or that, if the tear of penitence shall steal down your cheek, God will refuse to pardon you. I am only stating the question as you yourself state it; if I were speaking according to my own convictions, I should, on the authority of God's Word, affirm again and again that if you come to Him through Jesus Christ, His Son, He will certainly receive you. But even putting it in your way, is it not the wisest course for you to say—

***"If I perish, I will pray,
And perish only there"?***

Let us look at the matter in another light. It is certain that if you perish as you now are, you will perish without pity and without mercy. The law, by which you are condemned already, knows nothing about forgiveness, and the law provides no sacrifice for sin. If you perish without seeking mercy at the hands of Christ, there can be no mercy for you; but rigorous, unabated, undiluted justice must be your portion. But now, do you not feel that even if you could perish after coming to God through Christ, yet you would not perish without having some ray of pity thrown upon you? Would there not be at least this consolation for you—"I did what God commanded me to do; I did come to Him, and seek forgiveness; I did plead the precious blood of Christ, yet He rejected me"? Do you not think that this would be balm to your spirit? But if you perish as you now are, you will have this thought ringing in your ears forever—"You heard of Christ, but you believed not on Him; you lived where the light of the gospel was clearly shining, yet you shut your eyes to it; Christ was preached close to you, yet you refused to trust Him; you would have none of His warnings, but you put your fingers in your ears, and ran on to destruction." But should you perish after having sought mercy through Christ, you would be able to say, "I did seek it; I did knock, I did pray, I did trust, I did yield my heart to God, yet I perished." If such perishing were possible—though we know that it is not—it would be far preferable to perishing without having sought the Savior in His own appointed way. For your own sake, then, I urge you to choose this alternative, and I ask you to let me take

you by the hand, and lead you to Him who, with arms outstretched, waits to welcome you, that He may give pardon to the guilty, life to the dead, and salvation to the lost.

Yet further, you ought to remember that all those who have continued in a state of nature have, without exception, perished. Not one, however high in station, however excellent in morality, however profound in learning, however lofty in fame, has ever been able to pass the threshold of heaven except through the blood and merit of the Lord Jesus Christ. In the black list of the unregenerate, there is no exception to their condemnation. But take the other side, and at least we can assure you, from our own case, that even supposing that some perish, though they trust in Christ—which is not true—yet there are some who do not. Certainly, there are some who, in this life, receive the pardon of their sins, and know that they have received it, and who, in death, are cheered with the prospect of a glorious immortality. Saul of Tarsus was led to repent of sin, though he said that he was the chief of sinners. Others in his day, who had no more right to mercy than you have, sought and found it; and there are hundreds, yes, I might say thousands, in this Tabernacle now, who could rise, if this were the proper season to do so, and each one say, “This poor man cried, and the Lord heard him, and delivered him out of all his troubles.” Well, then, if God has, to your knowledge, saved some who have come to Him—I say that He saves all who come to Him through Christ, but I am dealing with the question from your standpoint—then it would be wise and right for you also to say—

*“I’ll to the gracious King approach,
Whose scepter pardon gives;
Perhaps He may command my touch,
And then the suppliant lives.
Perhaps He will admit my plea,
Perhaps will hear my prayer;
But if I perish, I will pray,
And perish only there.
I can but perish if I go;
I am resolved to try;
For if stay away, I know
I must forever die.”*

But you can go on to say, in the words of the same gracious writer,—

*“But if I die with mercy sought,
When I the King have tried,
This were to die (delightful thought)!
As sinner never died.”*

No; not one ever died thus. You would be the first who thus perished, so take this alternative; and, as the Holy Spirit has quickened you to make you feel your need of a Savior, I pray that the same Holy Spirit may lead you, this very hour, to plunge into the stream—sink or swim—that whether you perish or are saved, you may say, “Your wounds, O Jesus, shall be my hiding place; Your blood shall cleanse me from all sin; Your righteousness shall be my clothing; You, and You alone, shall be my All-in-all.”

II. Now I pass on to observe that THE DISCUSSIONS OF THESE LEPERS ENDED IN ACTION.

I wish this could be said of all of you. How many holy resolutions have been strangled in this house of prayer! How many good thoughts have been murdered in those pews! See if you cannot find their blood upon your own clothes. Many a time, the tear, which betokened the first rising emotion, has been wiped away, and the emotion has gone with it. May it not be so now, but may God grant that, like the lepers, we may put into action what we think over, and what, by the aid of the Holy Spirit, we resolve to do!

And, first, let me remind you that *the action of these lepers was bold*. Cowardice would have sat still, and said, “It is true that we shall perish if we remain here, but we will not go just yet to the Syrian camp; we are very hungry, but we may be able to go without food for another hour;” and thus, only the extreme pinch of privation would have driven them out. The fear of a sword-thrust might have kept them still, but it did not. They said, “We will risk it; we know that it is a desperate experiment; but, for better or for worse, for life or for death, we will go to the camp of the Syrians.” So they said, and so they did, and you will be wise if you act in the same fashion. It may seem a very bold thing for you, my unknown but trembling hearer, to think of going to Christ by faith. “Why!” you say, “I have not the presumption to do so after what I have been.” Perhaps some of you could tell of immoral conduct, others could speak of the

gospel despised, and of privileges neglected, which make your guilt even more heinous, and you say, "No, we cannot have the face to go to Christ. We are too black, too guilty, too diseased. We cannot cover our sores, we cannot hide the leprosy which gleams in deadly whiteness from our brow. We cannot go, we dare not go." But do you not recollect those lines of Hart's that we so often sing—

*"Venture on Him, venture wholly,
Let no other trust intrude;
None but Jesus
Can do helpless sinners good"?*

Oh, yes, do venture on Him! Though it seems impossible that God would receive you, He can do what would be impossible to all others. O you blackest of the black, and vilest of the vile, trust Him to pardon you, for He can do it! It surpasses your faith, does it? But it is God who has promised to pardon, so judge Him not by yourself, measure not His ability by your rule, fathom not the depths of His grace with your short-lined plummet. Honor Him by believing that even such a sinner as you are may find grace and pardon, and find them now. I recollect that John Bunyan, in his "Grace Abounding to the Chief of Sinners," says that there were times when he felt that his sins were so great, and his horror at them was so terrible, that he must go to Christ at all costs. He said, "Though I used sometimes to think of Christ as of one who stood with a pike in His hand to push me back, yet my dire necessities came upon me with such force that I would gladly have run upon the very pike sooner than continue to endure my sin." Sinner, venture to run upon the pike, and you will find that there is no sword or pike in Christ's hand; but when you think that you are about to run upon the spear, He will clasp you in His arms, press you to His bosom, and say to you, "I have blotted out, as a thick cloud, your transgressions, and, as a cloud, your sins: return unto Me, for I have redeemed you."

O sinner, if you think that my Master is a hard master, if you think it would be too bold an action on your part to come to Him, you do not really know Him! I once thought Him to be such a one as myself. For five long years, I thus slandered Him, till my heart was driven almost to despair, and I was ready to choose strangling rather than life. I said it could not be that Christ could ever forgive such a sinner as I was; I wrote bitter things against Him, as well as against myself, till at last, when I could stand it no longer, I came into His presence with the rope around my neck, prepared to hear my sentence; but I ventured to give one look at Him, and oh, what a change that look brought to me! My soul, at this hour, renews its transports at the remembrance of the change that came over my spirit the moment I learned to believe in Jesus. The burden of my sin was gone in an instant. My five years of agony were soon forgotten in the joy of being able to say, "I'm forgiven! I'm forgiven!" Then could I have shouted for joy because the love of God was shed abroad in my heart. Oh, that I could be the means of bringing even one of you to trust my Master as I then trusted Him! I am sure, if you would do so, that you would find Him so good and gracious that you would say, "The half has never been told." I have never been able to tell the thousandth part of His love. I have tried to tell of His mercy, but how little of it have I been able to set forth! I have made but a poor daub where there ought to have been a fine picture of a Prince, with every virtue shining in His face, and love streaming from His eyes of compassion. Poor troubled soul, come and trust Him, even though it may seem to you to be a bold thing to do. Like the woman who stole a cure, so do you come behind Him, and touch the hem of His garment. As the dog under the table, without leave or license, eats the crumbs that fall, so do you. Though you think it is against law, and against reason, still dare to believe in Jesus. He will be better to you than all your fears, better even than your faith, and you shall find that you did not trust Him without a certainty.

But while these lepers did a bold thing, I note that *they did it unanimously*. It is not said that three of them went to the Syrian camp, but that the fourth said, "No, I will not go yet." It is not recorded that two of them said, "When we have a more convenient season, we will go." It was a mercy for them that they were all hungry; for, if they had not been, they would not have gone where food was so abundant. It was also a mercy for them that they were all lepers, or else they might not have dared to go. What a mercy it is for you, sinner, if you know that you are a sinner! What a blessing it is that you have not yet reached that state of mortification which is the prelude of eternal death! You feel as if you were shut out, as these lepers were. I thank God for it, because, now that you seem to be shut out of Israel, it may be that you will begin to go to Israel's God, and find mercy, and help, and hope in Him. You will not all go to Him tonight; oh, that you would! There will come under our notice—our faith is in God that it shall be so—perhaps a

dozen, or a score, each of whom will say, "I will venture to trust Christ." "But what are they among so many?" While we bless God that we have so many seals to our ministry, what a sorrowful reflection it is that so many thousands come into this place, and go away unsaved! There are many of you who can say, "The harvest is past, the summer is ended, and we are not saved." Is it because the gospel is not preached here? No, that cannot be the reason, for we know that the truth is preached here fully and faithfully; yet we sow much, and reap little, compared with what our hearts desire. Is there anyone here who resolves to sit down, and die? If you do so resolve, do it deliberately; but I pray the Lord to cause you to make the right decision. You will not decide aright unless He chooses for you; but if you will make the wrong choice, do it deliberately, and do it solemnly. I wish you would say it if you really mean it, for then I hope you would soon reverse it—"I intend to choose the pleasures of this world, and, from this time forward, to live without God, and without Christ." If you talk like that, you may as well add, "and I mean to die, and be damned," for that must follow if you continue in your present course. In that pew where you are, let your damnation warrant be signed and sealed. "No," you say, "not so." But, sirs, you had better make that league with death, and that covenant with hell, rather than remain as some of you are, indifferent and careless. This is the great fault of our church-goers and chapel-goers. When we once get worldlings in to hear a sermon, they listen with attention; and if they are impressed by what they hear, it often happens that the impression is a saving one. But with you who are used to sermon hearing, it is often merely going from one place to another, to listen to this preacher or that, as though the preaching of the gospel was only intended to amuse you. How often you come to hear us, just as you go to see a popular actor, that you may spend an evening, and be able, when you are asked, "Have you heard So-and-So?" to say, "Oh, yes! I heard him on such-and-such a night." Sirs, do you think we preach merely for this? If you do think so, it proves that you do not know us. Is it such a fine thing to make a display of ourselves before you? Is it such a grand thing to have all your eyes fixed upon us? God knows that I would sooner break stones on the road than be a minister if it were not for the hope of winning souls. I know of no life that has more trouble in it; I know of no occupation that brings more awful despondency of spirit upon a man's mind than my ministry brings upon me; so, if God does not enable me to win souls by it, I pray Him to deliver me from it. I would renounce my charge for all it ever brings me in, or all the honor it ever gives me, if it were not that sinners were saved, backsliders reclaimed, and God glorified. I do pray you, sirs, to shake off your indifference. Be honest even with the devil. If you mean to serve him, be prepared to take his pay; if you enjoy the pleasures of sin, be honest enough to let Satan have a reversionary interest in your soul, and look forward to making your bed in hell, be prepared to lie down in everlasting torments; or else, I conjure you, by the love of God, before whom I stand, embrace that other alternative, and fly to Him who will in no wise cast you out.

Bear with me while I again remind you that *the action of the lepers was also instantaneous*. They said, "We will go to the camp of the Syrians," and at once they went. Too many are like that son who said, "I go, sir," and went not. All of us, who are now believers, can recollect times, before our conversion, when we were impressed under solemn sermons, yet the impression soon passed off. Some of you can also remember how you made haste home from the service, and hurried upstairs, for quiet meditation and prayer; but the idle conversation of the afternoon dissipated the impression that had been made. Many there are, who have felt serious searching of heart under a sermon, and who have said, "Please God spare us another day, and we will think over these things;" but what do they say concerning them now? There is a grey-headed man over yonder; let him go back in thought to his early days. When he was a little boy, his mother had bright hopes concerning him; and when he was a lad, everybody looked upon him as a young Timothy; but, now, he is more like Demas, and his silvery hair is a reminder of the silver and gold which he obtained by forsaking God, and loving this present evil world; and, all the while, the root of the matter was not in him. Grey-headed man, recall that early vow of yours, which was registered in heaven, but which you have broken. There are men here, in the high tide of business, who, when they were much younger, resolved and re-resolved that they would serve the Lord, yet they are still as far from doing so as they ever were. If you wrote down your resolves in your pocketbook, I wish you would read them over again, and read them with repentance as you say, "These vows were made in the power of the flesh; and, therefore, they were broken, but the sin of breaking them remains upon my soul. The lepers went instantly to the Syrian camp, and so were saved from starvation; and we should go to Christ, not by long-protracted resolving, but by instantaneous submission. As justification by faith is an instantaneous gift, so the faith

that saves is, doubtless, an instantaneous act. Believe in Christ, trust Christ, and do it now; for, as soon as you have done that, you are saved.

We will leave this part of the subject when I have just remarked that *these lepers were all well rewarded for what they did*. Not one of them perished of famine; they were all saved. Not one came back empty-handed, but all were greatly enriched. And not one of you, seeking mercy through Christ, shall be refused; but all, who are led by the Spirit to trust Christ, shall be blessed, and saved, and adopted into the family of God.

III. I have no time for the last point except just briefly to refer to the fact that THE LEPERS NO SOONER FOUND WHAT WAS GOOD FOR THEMSELVES THAN THEY WENT TO TELL IT TO OTHERS. And if you have found Christ, after you have rejoiced in Him, and fed upon Him, and enriched yourself with Him as your choicest treasure, then go and tell others all you can about Him.

“Oh, but I cannot preach!” says one. Try, brother! “But I cannot preach,” you say again, “for I have tried to do so, but failed.” Then write a letter, brother; or speak a word for Jesus anyhow—

*“Tell it unto sinners, tell,
That you are saved from death and hell.”*

I cannot make out how some people keep this secret. I cannot keep any secrets, and I am sure that I could not keep this one. No sooner does this secret get into the soul of a man than it tries to burn its way out. You recollect that when John Bunyan was converted, he said that he wanted to tell the very crows on the plowed land all about it; and I think it will be the same with you when you find the Lord. If you have learned this great secret, you will want to tell it to your fellow workmen. Perhaps you are employed behind the counter, so when the shop is shut in the evening, you will be telling this secret to those who are with you in the common room. If you are a husband, you will never be content until you have told it to your wife; or if you are a mother, I am sure you will want to be a preacher to your children. It is a great and holy fire, which will burn, and not smolder.

There was a spark once got into the stubble, and the Angel of Discretion said to it, “Lie still, spark, lie still; if you begin to burn, the next stalk will catch fire, and then the next, and the next, until the whole field will be ablaze, and then the homestead, and then the village itself will be burned down.” But preach as he might, the fire would burn, and the Angel of Discretion well-near had his wings burned before he turned to flee. There are, in some of our churches, certain friends who are very angels of prudence. They say, “Young men, do not try to speak for Christ too soon; do not attempt to do it before you are fully qualified for the task.” My dear sirs, if God has told any man this secret, he cannot help telling it to others. If the Lord has touched a man's lips with the live coal from the heavenly altar, his lips will burn as well as the coal. If the New Life has been given to him, it must find a way out, so as to convey the blessing to others.

What a mass of men there is constantly attending this place! I suppose that two-thirds of my usual congregation consists of men. What a noble band of men we would have if all were converted to Christ, and then went forth as messengers for Christ to the Church and to the world! Sirs, do you really know Christ, and yet you have not witnessed for Him to others? Take care that before the great tribunal of God, you are not held responsible, through your neglect, for the ruin of your fellow men. You young men of ability, educated in our grammar schools, and trained in our colleges, it is a lamentable fact that all too often, if you join the church, you feel as if you had only to give it your name, and not your whole self. If a man joins a rifle corps, he attends drill, and throws himself into the whole affair with heart and soul, endeavoring to promote the interests of the corps in every way that he can; but if he joins a church, it is as much as you can do to get him to drill once a year, and he seems to have nothing to do but to “stand at ease.” O sirs, when you join the church, I hope you will give up your whole selves to it! If not, I pray you to withhold your names. Up, up, in the name of God, and tell to starving London what the lepers told starving Samaria—that there is bread to be had. Do you say, “I am myself a sinner”? Your once leprous lips will not spoil the message if you have been to Christ, and have trusted in Him as your Savior. Do you say, “I am unworthy”? Ah! But He, who took away your unworthiness, took away the disability which that unworthiness gives. You are not worthy to be called God's son by nature, but by grace you may be worthy to be His ambassador.

My poor friend over there, you often weep because you cannot do more for Christ. Be of good courage, and do all that you can for Him. If you cannot speak to thousands, be content to speak to one; and if you

cannot bring hundreds to the Savior, be glad if, now and then, you can bring one mourning soul to Him to be comforted. My dear hearers, and especially you who are the members of this church, if you have obtained mercy, I beseech you, in the bowels of Christ, by the compassionate heart of your dying Redeemer, by that hope you have that He will shortly come again, be instant in season and out of season, preach and teach the truth, knowing that your labor shall not be in vain in the Lord. Oh, that, in the day of Christ's appearing, it may be seen that many sheaves have been brought into the heavenly garner through your being stirred up to labor by the ministry in this house of prayer!

To you, unpardoned soul, I have spoken at length, and God knows how truly from my heart. Let me speak just this word more before you go home. I am told that just under the dome of St. Paul's Cathedral, there is the mark of a workman's hammer, where it is said that a man, who was at work on the roof, fell down, and there met with his death. I do not know where it is, but there may be the spot, in this house of prayer, where a soul will be lost forever. This may be the moment when the wax upon that soul's death-warrant shall grow cold, because its owner deliberately says, "I will have none of these things;" and when God shall say, "You shall have none of them. I will leave you alone; your conscience shall never be troubled again, but you shall go through life in peace, you shall go to your death without any care, and only in hell shall you open your eyes to your true condition." God grant that it may not be so with any of you! Yet I feel as if it would be so with you unless sovereign and irresistible grace shall prevent it; and, in that case, there will be a spot, in this house of prayer, where a soul will be born to God. What man will give his heart to Christ? Are there none of you who will do so? Must I go back to my Master with no joyful tidings? Is there no one here who will say—

*"I'll go to Jesus, though my sin
Has like a mountain rose;
I know His courts, I'll enter in
Whatever may oppose"?*

Are there none who will do so? Great God, are all hearts hard? O Spirit of God, come now, in this solemn moment, and break the hearts of stone with the mighty hammer of the Word; cut and wound with Your two-edged sword, and then heal with Your wondrous ointment even now! I say no more, but leave it with Him; may it be so, for Jesus' sake! Amen.

EXPOSITION BY C. H. SPURGEON: *PSALM 84.*

May the Spirit of God bless to us every syllable of this familiar Psalm as we read it!

Verses 1, 2. *How amiable are Your tabernacles, O LORD of hosts! My soul longs, yes, even faints for the courts of the LORD: my heart and my flesh cries out for the living God.*

Perhaps the psalmist would never have said, "How amiable are Your tabernacles, O Lord of hosts!" if he had not been detained from them so long that he could truly say, "My soul longs, yes, even faints for the courts of the Lord." It is very sad, yet it is all too true, that we often need to be deprived of a mercy in order to be made to value it aright. Would it not be wiser, on our part, if we prized our privileges while they were yet spared to us?

Still it is a good thing to have our love to the assemblies of God's house increased by temporary absence from them. See how fervent was the psalmist's desire. His longing turned even to fainting at the very thought that, perhaps, he would never go there again: "My soul longs, yes, even faints for the courts of the Lord." And his very "flesh" also joined in the intense longing of his soul. You cannot often get your flesh to do anything that is good, or to desire anything that is right; yet, sometimes, even our very body seems to be so swayed by the Holy Spirit that it is compelled to go in the right way.

3. *Yes, the sparrow has found a house, and the swallow a nest for herself, where she may lay her young, even Your altars, O LORD of hosts, my King, and my God.*

The psalmist envies even the birds that twitter around the sanctuary, and wishes that he, too, had wings that he might fly to God's altar with them, and there take up his permanent abode.

4. *Blessed are they that dwell in Your house:*

The psalmist meant those priests who lived in the temple; and, in a spiritual sense, his words apply to those who dwell in God wherever they are, and who can truly sing—

*“Wherever we dwell, we dwell in Thee,
On the land or on the sea.”*

“Blessed are they that dwell in Your house;”

4. *They will still be praising You. Selah.*

Constant communion leads to constant adoration.

5. *Blessed is the man whose strength is in You;—*

Who throws his whole soul into the worship; not such as come up to the house of God, and leave their hearts at home: “Blessed is the man whose strength is in You;”—

5, 6. *In whose heart are the ways of them. (Or, better, “are Your ways”). Who passing through the valley of Baca (or, “Weeping”) make it a well;*

Finding solace in their suffering, sanctification and in their affliction.

6, 7. *The rain also fills the pools. They go from strength to strength, every one of them in Zion appears before God.*

Blessed are the pilgrims who are journeying to the upper Zion, the Jerusalem which is above, the mother of all the saints. The margin renders it, “They go from company to company;” or it may mean, “They go from strength of faith to greater strength,” and so they pass on—

“Till each appears in heaven at length.”

8. *O LORD God of hosts, hear my prayer: give ear, O God of Jacob. Selah.*

“You are a prayer-hearing God. Did You not hear Jacob at the brook Jabbok? Then, O God of Jacob, give ear also to me! If I have not yet come to be like prevailing Israel, I am like wrestling Jacob; so, give ear to me as You did to Jacob.”

9. *Behold, O God our shield, and look upon the face of Your anointed.*

We hold up Christ before His Father, and say to Him—

*“Him, and then the sinner see;
Look through Jesu’s wounds on me.”*

10. *For a day in Your courts is better than a thousand.*

He means, of course, better than a thousand spent anywhere else.

10. *I had rather be a doorkeeper in the house of my God, than to dwell in the tents of wickedness.*

“I had rather dust the mats in Your house than sit on Satan’s throne; I had rather wash the feet of Your saints, or perform any menial duties for them, than rule over all the hosts in the realms of darkness.”

11, 12. *For the LORD God is a sun and shield: the LORD will give grace and glory: no good thing will He withhold from them that walk uprightly. O LORD of hosts, blessed is the man that trusts in You.*

He will never walk uprightly unless he does trust in the Lord, neither will he receive the fullness of the blessing except as he learns to trust to the full, for the Master still says, “According to your faith, be it unto you.”

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

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