

THE LORD'S CARE OF HIS PEOPLE

NO. 452

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 BY REV. C. H. SPURGEON
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“He that toucheth you toucheth the apple of his eye.”
Zechariah 2:8

GOD'S love to His ancient people is the theme of many a psalm, and deserves to be rehearsed in the ears of every generation. Abraham was by nature as a rough unhewn stone, but the Lord who chose him in the quarry, having hewn him from the rock, made him a polished pillar, a monument of divine faithfulness. The Lord set His love upon him while he was a Syrian ready to perish, He brought him out of the land of his nativity, and called him from his father's house. Having made a covenant with the solitary man, He multiplied his seed until they became like the stars of heaven for number.

The kindness which God showed towards Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, He retained towards His chosen people, who sprang of their loins. Even when to all appearance He had deserted them, His face was towards them for good. If He sent a famine, and broke the staff of life, He provided seven years of plenty in Egypt, that the storehouses of Pharaoh might be full for their sakes, if the Egyptians heavily oppressed them, then all the powers of nature were put out of their accustomed pathway to emancipate them from the house of bondage.

When He had brought them out into the howling wilderness, His path dropped fatness, the heavens rained forth bread, and the rocks flowed with rivers, He made men to eat angels' food, He carried them as on eagles' wings, He could truly say, “I shod thee with badgers' skin, and I girded thee about with fine linen,” He made His Jeshurun to ride upon the high places of the earth, and fed His Israel with royal dainties, “butter of kine, and milk of sheep, with fat of lambs, and rams of the breed of Bashan, and goats, with the fat of kidneys of wheat.”

Wherever they went, their foes fled before them—Amalek was put to confusion before the people of the Lord, Sihon, king of the Amorites, and Og, king of Bashan, felt the terror of their arm. Even the false prophet, as he looked from the mountain's brow upon them, could only say, “Happy art thou, O Israel: who is like unto thee, O people saved by the LORD, the shield of thy help, and who is the sword of thy excellency! Thine enemies shall be found liars unto thee; and thou shalt tread upon their high places.”

In due time He brought this people into the best spot of land which the earth knew—a country which indolence and tyranny have rendered barren, but which anciently overflowed with superabundant fertility. He brought them to a land of hills and valleys, of springs and rivers—a land out of whose bowels they might take iron and copper, and treasures in abundance. He established them in a land which flowed with milk and honey, so fertile that even its spontaneous productions, as exemplified in the grapes of Eshcol, rivaled the products of the choicest husbandry.

Having brought them into this goodly heritage, He drove out the former inhabitants that He might plant His people, and make them dwell in safety alone. How gracious He was to them in the days of Joshua, and in the years which followed! When He mapped out their lots according to their tribes, He rejoiced to dwell in the midst of them, He had His tabernacle in Shiloh, and His dwelling place in Zion. He showed not Himself unto other people, but only unto this nation upon which His heart was set. He chastened them, but He raised up judges for their deliverance.

At last He gave them a king in His anger, and took him away in His wrath, but He sent unto them David—a man after His own heart, before whom their enemies were rooted out, and the nobles among their persecutors were made like Zebah and Zalmunna who fell by the hand of Gideon. Greatly He

blessed the nation under David and his immediate successors! Everything in the neighboring countries was ordered only to bring peace and prosperity to the chosen land—Thy land, O God, which Thou hast overshadowed with Thy wings.

Ofttimes they provoked Him, but His anger waxed not hot against them. When He lifted up His rod, His strokes were few, and He repented of the evil which He did unto them. At last, when they became incorrigible in their sins, and made their brows like flint, and their hearts like adamant, for a season He gave them up to captivity.

They were taken to Assyria, they were carried away to the rivers of Babylon. The days of their banishment were many, and they wept in the bitterness of their soul. Still, even in their captivity He loved them. When they had forgotten *Him*, He had not forgotten *them*, and in due time He brought them up again out of the house of their bondage, once more to set them in their land.

It was about this time when He would give to His people a fresh deliverance, as memorable as the coming out of Egypt, that Zechariah testified “he that toucheth you toucheth the apple of mine eye,” as much as to say, “I smite you, but I hate the nation that oppresses you, I take the axe to cut down your stubborn pride, but lo, I will break the axe to shivers, I send against you the executioners of My anger, but I will surely punish them also for the evil which they have done. He that toucheth you—even though *I* be the great first cause of the terrible onslaught upon you—‘he that toucheth you toucheth the apple of mine eye,’ and I will be avenged on him in the day of my wrath.”

Thus introduced, the text seems to teach us three lessons, upon which we shall speak briefly, and God grant it may be to your edification. It tells us, first of all, *God's esteem of His people*, secondly, *the danger which surrounds persecutors*, and thirdly, *the safety of the church of God*, for it may be well to remind you that the Jewish nation was a type of the church of Christ.

I. First then, our text teaches us GOD'S ESTEEM OF HIS PEOPLE.

He esteems them as much as men value their eyesight, and is as careful to protect them from injury, as men are to protect the apple of their eye. The pupil of the eye is the tenderest part of the tenderest organ, and very fitly sets forth the inexpressible tenderness of God's love.

As Calvin remarks, “There is nothing more delicate or more tender than the eye in the body of a man, for were one to bite my finger or prick my arm or my legs, or even severely to wound me, I should feel no such pain as by having the pupil of my eye injured.” Behold then, beloved, a mystery of lovingkindness and affection. The Lord sits upon the circle of the earth, and the inhabitants there are as grasshoppers, the nations are as a drop of a bucket, and are counted as the small dust of the balance, how marvelous that He has thoughts of everlasting love towards such worthless things!

As we said this morning [See sermon #447—GOD'S ESTIMATE OF TIME], it is a wonder that God should even notice such insignificant creatures as men, that He, in His infiniteness should be able even to discover such infusoria in this drop of matter which we call the world. But that wonder is totally eclipsed by another, namely, that God should *love* such utterly worthless, as well as insignificant creatures.

Oh! Great One, when You did give Your heart, were there not some creatures worthy of it? Nay! there could be none, for even Gabriel himself was not fit to match the eternal God. The cherubim and seraphim, the presence angels that stand before God as His holy servitors forever, what were they? they were not pure in His sight, and He charged His angels with folly. The noblest created intelligences are so far inferior to our God, that only by wondrous condescension could He *love* them.

O God, how is it that You could have chosen the debased, depraved, rebellious, hard-hearted creature called man? Why did You look upon such a one and bring him into Your favor? What is man, that Thou art mindful of him, or the son of man that Thou visitest him? This inquiry we cannot answer, and therefore, no more curious to solve this mystery, we will weave it into our everlasting song, and we will sing of Thy sovereign grace before Thy throne for ever. 'Twas of Thy grace, of Thy own will and good pleasure, that Thou hast lifted us up from the dunghill and made us to sit among princes.

It is not for us to know wherefore the Lord has His people so highly in estimation, for we cannot search to the bottom of this divine mystery, but brethren, God's love, which at first came to us freely, has so ennobled us in Christ, that God's present esteem of us in Jesus is not without reason and justification. Love without cause has now imparted and imputed such loveliness to its objects, that in Christ they are fitting subjects for love's embrace.

Know ye not that the saints are the *masterpieces of His workmanship*? God has shown His wisdom in balancing the clouds, and guiding the stars in their orbits, infinite wisdom is discoverable in every flower and in every living thing, but the wisdom and the skill of God are far more clearly to be seen in the believer, than in any other work of the divine hand. Man, born the first time, was fearfully and wonderfully made, but newly-created, and regenerated, he is far more full of marvels than he was before. Well therefore, because of the divine skill which has been shown in our re-creation, may we be the objects of divine care.

When Bernard Palissy had, after long struggles, invented that valuable ware which still remains unmatched, we can suppose that, if a person had entered his room and broken those invaluable dishes, which were worth their weight in gold, he would have said, "I had sooner that you had burnt my house, or that you had maimed my person, than break these things which have cost me so much thought, so many trials in the furnace, and so much daily watching, and nightly care."

When the poor man had pulled up the very floor of his room, to heat the furnace for the last time, before he saw the precious stuff come from the crucible, his work must have been dear to him, and when we think that God, our God, has made His people the objects of His eternal thoughts, the trophies of His noblest skill, vessels of honor fit even for the Master's use, it is but little wonder that He should guard them with a jealous care, even as men do the apple of their eye.

Moreover, all the people of God are the object of *the dearest purchase* that was ever known, since they were redeemed not with corruptible things, as with silver and gold, but with the precious blood of Christ. Stand ye at the foot of Calvary, and let the groans of Christ pierce your heart, behold His head crowned with thorns, see ye His hands and His feet streaming like fountains of blood, think for a moment of the awful anguish which His spirit suffered, of the unknown pangs He bore, when He redeemed our souls unto God, and you will readily conclude that love so amazing, which could pay a price so stupendous, would not easily loose its hold of that which it has thus purchased unto itself.

We think little of ourselves, when we value ourselves at anything less than the price which Jesus paid, we dishonor the Lord which bought us, if we think ourselves only fit to live unto the flesh, and to this poor temporary world, when indeed, we are fitted for a heavenly world, and for divinest purposes, seeing that Christ the Son of the Highest shed His very heart's blood to redeem us from our sins. Well, I say, may He value highly, those whom He has so dearly bought!

Furthermore, let us remember that to God the Father, the saints are Christ's *most tender memorial*, monuments of Christ's passion and conflict, the engraven tablets of His death. What is there in heaven which is the record of the Redeemer's achievement? Yonder spirits before the throne are the monuments of the battle and the victory. What is there to bear witness on earth to what the Lord has accomplished? We who have by faith believed, are now the living triumphals of His conquest.

If you and I had erected a lasting and valuable memorial to some beloved child, we should think it a grievous insult and a serious injury, if an adversary should wantonly and wickedly defile it, but so the Lord looks upon His own people as standing mementoes, and He counts it no small sin, no mean offense, for any of His adversaries, be they ever so great, to touch His anointed, and do harm to His chosen.

As obelisks, arches, columns, and pillars are raised in commemoration of heroes and their glories, even so are the saints the sublime memorials of Jesus. Precious are they for this cause, to the heart of Him who delighteth in the honors of His only begotten Son. The hosts of heaven shall jealously guard these living stones of memorial.

Yet more, remember that Christ's people are *God's own children*, and you know how even *we*, although we are evil, could not stand still to see our children ill-treated. I have heard a man say sometimes, "You may strike me and I will not return the blow, you may even spit in my face and I will put up with the insult, but if you touch my children, my blood is in my face, I cannot endure it." Ask a woman what it is that brings her mettle up the most, is it not if she sees her little ones ill-treated, or hears a word of false accusation spoken concerning them?

The God of heaven and earth will not have the princes of the blood royal ill-used, they who are descended from His loins, and are thus the nobles and the peers of the court of heaven, are not to be trodden under the foot of man. God will avenge their quarrel at last. Surely as the world shall look on Christ whom they have pierced, and mourn, so shall they look on the injured and persecuted church, and mourn because they despised the excellent of the earth, and threw God's jewels into the mire. They are His children, I say, and therefore He loves them.

Look around even to the brute creatures. When we would describe the creature most terrible, we speak of the bear robbed of her whelps, if you would describe the strong lion when he lashes his sides with fury, is it not when his cubs have been taken away? Then he rushes to the attack, fearless of the spear, and of the hunter, meditating terribly how he may destroy the murderer of the young lion, so shall it be with the Lord God Omnipotent, His fury shall be kindled against the enemy, and He shall tear him in pieces if he touch any of the house of Judah, or of the seed of the Son of David. The King who is in the midst of them is mighty, and He is strong who is their deliverer.

Yet again, no doubt there is a special reason why God is thus jealous over His people, since he who touches them, does to a certain degree, touch *the person of Christ*—the Father's firstborn. Are they not members of His body, of His flesh, and of His bones? The cry of Christ from heaven, "Saul, Saul, why persecutest thou me?" clearly shows that Christ looks upon the persecution of humble men and women as an insult to Himself.

Should any wound your hand and then say, "I have not injured *you*," you would reply, "But it is *my* hand and it is so much a part of myself that I cannot separate myself from the injury." So is it with Christ, the poorest, meanest, most illiterate Christian, is in the closest union with the glorious head of the body, and it will be at the foeman's eternal hazard if he touch him since he is part of Christ's mystical body. If you hurt His people willfully, the Son of man will say, "Inasmuch as ye did it unto one of the least of these my brethren, ye have done it unto me," and the recompense shall follow.

Do you not know that the children of God have a relation towards God the Father, in respect of their being *partakers of His character and dignity*? The saints are God's ambassadors. Amongst all nations an insult offered to an ambassador is an offense which cannot be readily wiped out, God's ambassadors to the sons of men are His chosen people, they are Christ's representatives on earth, so far as they live up to their profession. They who are the people of God are the Christs of this generation, anointed of the Lord, and sent forth to tell of His love. Their life, if it be as it should be, is the picture of virtue, and an example to mankind.

Now, the world's hatred to these men is but a part of their hatred to the Most High. They see His image in His servants, and wantonly insult it, or contemptuously disregard it. When men oppose the people of God, it is because of their holiness. If it could be clearly proven that the world's opposition to the church was on account of the church's inconsistency, then it might be pardonable, or even virtuous, but we believe the real reason of the world's enmity is the church's holiness. Were she not Godlike and divine, she would not be attacked, if she were not clear as the sun, fair as the moon, she would not be terrible as an army with banners, nor would the foe go forth in battle to meet her.

Well then, because holiness is insulted in a persecuted saint, because righteousness is itself debased and defamed when the righteous man is slandered and dishonored, therefore the battle is not ours but the Lord's, and He will surely deliver His chosen. Because God espouses the quarrel of the virtuous, and takes up the gauntlet for the weak who desire to serve Him, therefore see to it, ye sons of Ham, ye

children of the persecutor, see to it, for when He fits His arrows to the bow, and draweth His sword out of the scabbard, it shall go ill with you, for He remembers His people, and He will avenge His own elect.

II. The second point is THE DANGER OF PERSECUTORS, “He that toucheth you, toucheth the apple of mine eye.”

If a man should seek to thrust his finger into our eye with the purpose of destroying our sight, I think we should not deliberate long as to the way in which to treat him, we should take good care that at all risks to our antagonist we defended a thing so precious.

Now, when any molest the people of God, they may be certain of this, that God will surely visit them, therefore let persecutors take heed how they meddle with God's eyes.

According to the learned Blayney, our text may be read, “Whosoever touches you, touches the apple of his own eye.” In this sense we understand the passage as declaring that God shall cause the enemies of His church to work their own ruin, they shall pull out their eyes by their own fingers. The visitation of God will surely blast and wither those persecutors who go on in sin. At times it curses in the form of temporal death, more often however, in the form of spiritual hardness of heart.

I am not one of those who looks upon everything that happens in this world as being a judgment from God. If a boat goes down to the bottom of the sea on a Sunday, I do not look upon that as judgment on those who are in it, any more than if it had gone to the bottom on a Monday, and though many good people get frightened when they hear one affirm this belief, yet I cannot help their frights, but like my Master I must tell them that they who perish so are not sinners above all the sinners that be in Jerusalem.

I looked the other day at “Fox's Book of Martyrs,” and I saw there an illustration of that deeply-rooted mistake of Christian people, concerning God's always punishing men's sins in this life. Fox draws a picture of a Popish priest who is insulting the faith, speaking lightly of the blood of Jesus, and exalting the Virgin Mary, and he drops down dead in the pulpit, and Fox holds him up as a picture of a great sinner who dropped down dead for speaking lightly of Jesus, and the good man affirms the wicked priest's death to be a judgment from heaven.

Well, perhaps Fox is correct, but still I do not see the connection between his dropping down dead and the language he employed, for many a preacher who has been exalting Christ has fallen down dead in the pulpit, and happy was it for such a man that he was engaged in minding his charge at the time. The fact is, providence smites good men and bad men too, and when the storm rages and the hurricane howls through the forest, not only are the brambles and briars shaken and uprooted, but goodly oaks crack and break too. We are not to look for God's judgments, except in special cases, in this life. This judgment is in the world to come.

Yet there have been some special cases. Look at Antiochus Epiphanes, one of the greatest persecutors that the Israel nation ever had—his death was so awful that I should disgust you if I described it. Remember too, Herod the Great.

“The disease of which Herod the Great died, and the misery which he suffered under it, plainly showed that the hand of God was then in a signal manner upon him, for not long after the murders at Bethlehem, his distemper,” as Josephus informs us, “daily increased in an unheard-of manner. He had a lingering and wasting fever, and grievous ulcers in his entrails and bowels, a violent colic, and insatiable appetite, a venomous swelling in his feet, convulsions in his nerves, a perpetual asthma, and offensive breath, rottenness in his joints and other members, accompanied with prodigious itching, crawling worms, and intolerable smell, so that he was a perfect hospital of incurable distempers.”

The Roman emperor, Julian, a determined enemy of Christianity, was mortally wounded in a war with the Persians. In this condition, we are told that he filled his hand with blood, and casting it into the air, said, “O Galilean! thou hast conquered.” History affords you many such cases. God has seemed to say to His providence, as David said to Solomon concerning Joab, “Let not his hoar head go down to the grave in peace.”

I read the other day a list, I should think, of a hundred of the mighty persecutors—Roman and Grecian, and so forth—all of whom came to a most shocking and untimely end, and in the face of so

many facts, one did feel it fair to draw the inference that “Bloody and ungodly men shall not live out half their days.”

There is a story told of the days of the Cavaliers, when they used to hunt up the Puritans for meeting in the woods, in the fields, or on secluded banks, to worship God. One old man, who was parish constable, was asked to be an informer and hunt up a certain meeting in his parish in Northamptonshire, but the old man said, “No,” he’d have nothing to do with it—not that he liked those people, for he hated them, “but,” he said, “I should not advise any of you to meddle with any of these people. In the good old days, when Sir Harry was alive, he hunted them, and took eight troopers with him to harry the Puritans all round this region and,” said he, “the old man is dead, six of the soldiers are dead, some of them were hanged, and some of them broke their necks, and I myself fell off my horse and broke my collarbone in the act of persecuting them. For my part I have had warnings enough, and I will never meddle with them again.”

And I have no doubt that history could tell hundreds of tales of that kind, where God has seemed, at last, to leave off His general rule of longsuffering and of patience, and to give to His foes a blow there and then, for their hectoring and intolerable hunting of His children, and harassing them out of the land. Far oftener however, the penalty has come in spiritual things. He has left them to wax worse and worse, till they have become so hardened in sin that they “breathed out threatenings against the saints,” and licked up the blood of God’s children as dogs licked up the blood of Naboth.

No sermon has had power to move them, no truth could awaken them, no warnings of providence could alarm them, no wooing invitations could win their hearts, they have gone down, down, down a steep descent with their feet slipping in gore—in the red crimson mire, crimson with blood of saints—and in hell they have lifted up their eyes being in torment.

“I’d like,” said one old Romanist in the days of Luther, “I’d like to ride up to my horse’s bridle in the blood of Lutherans.” And he had his wish ere long in another way, for in a dreadful bursting of blood vessels in his own body, he laid weltering in his gore, not up to his horse’s bridle, but covered to his very soul with a suffocation of blood.

God has done this, spiritually, to other men. They wanted to slay other men’s souls, and the blood, as it were, of their own souls has drowned them. They would let off the light, and God has left them in darkness, they would throw away the salt, and God has given them up to rot, and to become putrid, they slew God’s ambassadors, and God has proclaimed eternal war against them—a war which rages now, and will rage in the world to come.

I do not know whether I happen to have any person here who might be called a persecutor. We do not have much persecution to suffer now-a-days, at least, it does not come to much. I know that many servants lose their places, many wives are ill-treated by their husbands—now and then some poor husbands by their wives, and I know that children have been made wretched by their parents. Ah! but when you put these things side by side with Smithfield and the old Lollard’s Tower, they come to nothing.

Yet I know that there are many men who only want power and they would be as violent against God’s people as ever the tyrants were in the olden times. Very well then, as you cannot do what you would do, since you do what you can, God shall visit that also upon your head, and you shall find that the jest, and the sneer, and the jibe, and the slander, and the cruel mocking, shall by no means lack their reward.

But I will not dwell upon a point which we care so little to mention, but turn rather to the last point, upon which I speak with brevity.

III. THE SAFETY OF THE CHURCH.

“The church is in danger! The church is in danger!” Do you believe that, dear friends? No, it depends upon whose church it is, but if it is God’s church, all the croakers in the world cannot alarm us, for we believe that God’s church is safe enough, despite everything that may be said. “Oh but the church is in danger from Romanism!” Nonsense, God can keep that in bounds. The dragon would have drowned

the woman with the floods of his mouth centuries ago, if the Lord had not secured her from harm forever. The gates of hell shall not prevail against the church, much less then shall the gates of Rome prevail.

It is not the church of our Lord Jesus Christ that is in danger. Perhaps the fat benefices may be, I will not say anything about that, I do not know of any particular promise upon which unscriptural officers and worldly dignitaries can rely, but the church of God has special security guaranteed by covenant, by promise, and by oath. God is her pledged preserver, for there is a promise—"I the LORD do keep her; I will water her every moment: lest any hurt her, I will keep her night and day."

The church is not in danger, and why? Well, first, the very frame of nature was made to protect her. We take up a chestnut or other seed, and we find outside a prickly envelope, then there comes a hard shell, then inside a soft one, and then a film, and then another film, and at last, somewhere in the center, you get the life-germ, and all the rest was made to exist for a time, and to rot, and to decay, in order to preserve the life-germ from hurt, and to furnish food for it when it began to spring up.

Now, I look upon this great vaulted roof of heaven, and the whole earth as being but the surrounding envelope in which God has wrapped up the living seed of His church. You will have to break the whole constitution of earth before you will be able to surprise with destruction those whom God has surrounded by munitions of such stupendous strength. Speaking after a mystical sort, the mountains are round about Jerusalem, the solid rocks of the earth are like arms beneath her, the very stars are her watchers, and the firmament and the heaven of heavens are the gates that shut out her raging foes.

When the Lord made the heavens and the earth, what was the drift of the whole thing? For what was the earth preparing in the old geological past? Preparing, you tell me, for man. But why and wherefore was man made? God made the whole race of man, but in respect of that chosen life within the race, those elect men and women who are as the substance which is in the oak when it loses its leaves, the holy seed which is the substance of the race and of all time.

And when man came into the earth and did multiply, and God divided the nations, and scattered them to the north and to the south, to the east and to the west. He divided the whole, looking to His people, seeing at one glance how it would be best for this empire to stand, or that monarchy to fall—how it would be more advantageous for that dynasty to exist through a whole stream of kings, or for that monarch to be cut off in his prime, ere his son should be born who should take the scepter from the dying hand—I say that the whole machinery of nature, the whole work of God which He has made, is intended to be the shell in which the Lord preserves His people, and there must come indeed—"The wreck of matter and the crash of worlds," and a total unloosening of the pillars of earth and heaven, ere ye can perish, O ye children of God!

But again, not only does nature, but providence, works for the protection of God's people. "All things work together for good to them that love God." Stupendous agencies are abroad. The wheels are so high that they are dreadful, but the wheels are full of eyes, and they only turn in such a way as shall preserve the church of the living God.

When we shall see the end from the beginning, we shall be in amazement as to how it was that everything turned upon the axle of the church—how the greatest wheel turned on its pole to bring out the elect, to fetch up out of their spiritual darkness the generation who were afterwards to be enlightened, how the biggest wave that followed the keel of the church's ship was ordained to wash it onward, and how the very wave which seemed to roll the other way, did but in some mystic manner still waft her onward to her desired haven, how storms and tempests, plagues and conflagrations, wars and bloodsheds, all co-worked to bring out the people of God, that the Lord's name might be glorified in them.

Like some huge steam vessel, providence bears on the church, and you must reverse those wheels which lash the sea of events to foam, before you can detain the church from her haven.

Yet further, not to detain you longer, the church is constantly preserved we know, by the ministry of angels. Unseen by us, the angels of God keep watch and ward around us. They bear up the church's foot

lest she dash it against a stone. They cover her head in the day of battle lest the fiery shafts should penetrate her helmet. By night and by day the watchers of God keep constant guard over the blood royal of heaven.

Let us not be deceived in this matter, thinking that we have to deal here with a fancy or a myth. Angels have more to do with this world than we dream. They are more potent influences for the saints' good than ever we have known, for they are the ten thousand chariots of God, the ten thousand times ten thousand saints of the Most High who stand in their battle array this day.

If your eyes be opened, you will be able to say with the prophet—"More are they that are with us than they that be with them." Reckon the angels as your friends, put them not down as though they were weak and feeble, but believe them to be strong, and then ye shall not doubt but that the church shall be preserved as the apple of God's eye.

Then last of all, God preserves His church by the overruling of His grace. By a sort of holy alchemy He fetches gold out of dross, medicine out of poison, success out of disaster. From seeming evil still producing good, and better still, and better still, in infinite progression. So that the evil doings of the church's enemies turn out for her good in the end, and their worst projects are in the wisdom of God but designs for her advancement.

Let us rest in this then, quite confident that by all means and by any means the church shall always be safe. She rocks today, a big wave seems to strain her timbers, but He who built her is on board, the eternal hand grasps the helm, and the Mighty One with unruffled brow looks at the storm and bids the ship cut through the foam.

She has not turned as yet, though rocks and quicksand threatened to be in her path. Straight as a line, "as an arrow from a bow drawn by an archer strong," she sped on her splendid flight, and on she shall go though a thousand hells boiled over to stay her heaven-ordained mission.

Yonder mighty billow, that seems ready to swallow her up and give her an eternal grave, shall break before her prow, and if she be for a moment buried in the spray, she shall either come up white from the washing, or she shall leap it, ascending up to heaven upon its crest, and if she goes down again, as though she would descend into the depths of the sea—the depths of defeat and dismay—it shall be but to bring up some sinner from the depth, and save a soul that otherwise might have been lost. Oh, blessed be God, the church is never insecure, nay, nor yet one of her children.

*"Once in Christ, in Christ for ever,
Nothing from His love can sever."*

*"I know that safe with Him remains,
Protected by His power,
What I've committed to His hand,
Till the decisive hour."*

The apple of God's eye shall not be touched yet. We shall never see a blinded deity, and until then we shall never hear that the people of God have perished, and that the church of Christ has been destroyed by her enemies. Courage then, soldiers of Christ, courage! Turn not back through shame or fear. Another rush, another advance upon the foe, for you cannot be wounded, you are invulnerable, you cannot be defeated, you are invincible. God is in you, and you must be almighty. He that toucheth you, toucheth the apple of his eye. Therefore dare, run risks, and venture for God, for you are always safe when you are venturing for Him.

Our final question is, "Am I thus dear to God?" I would like you, now that I send you away, to ask yourselves that question. You, dear friends up yonder, and you in this mighty tier, and you below, ask yourselves, "Am I thus dear to God?" Let each man and woman ask that question.

How can I answer it? Is Christ dear to me? Then I am dear to God. Is Christ dear to me tonight, do I rest on Him? If I do, I am saved, and if I do not, why should I not now? If I never have believed on Him, why should I not now? If I trust Him, He will save me.

Lord, I trust You. Can you say that from your heart? Then the Spirit of God has helped you to say it, and if tonight, poor soul, whoever you may be, you will repose simply and wholly upon the merit of Jesus' blood, and the power of His intercession in heaven, you are saved. Go your way, your sins are forgiven, you are accepted in the Beloved, if you have trusted Christ. God help you to rely on Jesus now, and to His name be praise forever and ever! Amen.

Taken from The Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit C. H. Spurgeon Collection. Only necessary changes have been made, such as correcting spelling errors, some punctuation usage, capitalization of deity pronouns, and minimal updating of a few archaic words. The content is unabridged. Additional Bible-based resources are available at www.spurgeongems.org.