

A SERMON FOR THE TIME PRESENT

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A SERMON DELIVERED ON LORD'S-DAY MORNING, OCTOBER 30, 1887,
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 AT THE METROPOLITAN TABERNACLE, NEWINGTON.

*“In that day it shall be said to Jerusalem, Fear not: and to Zion, Let not your hands be slack.
 The Lord your God in the midst of you is mighty. He will save, He will rejoice
 over you with joy. He will rest in His love; He will joy over you with singing.
 I will gather them that are sorrowful over the solemn assembly,
 who are of you, to whom the reproach of it was a burden.”*
Zephaniah 3:16-18.

HOLY Scripture is wonderfully full and abiding in its inner sense. It is a springing well where you may draw and draw again, for as you draw, it springs up forever new and fresh! It is a well of water springing up everlastingly. The fulfillment of a Divine promise is not the exhaustion of it. When a man gives you a promise and he keeps it, there is an end of the promise—but it is not so with God. When He keeps His Word to the fullest, He has but begun—He is prepared to keep it, and keep it, and keep it forever and ever! What would you say of a man who had wheat upon his barn floor and threshed it until he had beaten out the last golden grain, but the next day he went and threshed again and brought back as much as the day before? And what if, on the day after, again taking his flail, he went to the same threshing and again brought back his measure as full as at the first, and so on for all the days of the year? Would it not seem to you as a fairy tale? It would certainly be a surprising miracle! But what should we say if, throughout a long life, this miracle could be prolonged?

Yet we have continued to thresh the promises of God ever since faith was given us—and we have carried away our full portion every day! What shall we say of the glorious fact that the saints in all generations, from the first day until now, have done the same? And of that equal Truth of God, that as long as there is a needy soul upon earth, there will be upon the threshing door of the promises the same abundance of the finest of the wheat as when the first man filled his measure and returned rejoicing? I will not dwell upon the specific application of the text before us. I do not doubt that it was specially fulfilled as it was intended and if there still remains some special piece of history to which this passage alludes, it will again be fulfilled in due time. But this I know, that those who have lived between whiles have found this promise true to them! Children of God have used these promises under all sorts of circumstances and have derived the utmost comfort from them!

And this morning I feel as if the text had been newly written for the present occasion, for it is in every syllable most suitable to the immediate crisis. If the Lord had fixed His eyes upon the condition of His Church just now, and had written this passage only for this year of Grace, 1887, it could scarcely have been more adapted to the occasion! Our business shall be to show this, but I would aim at much more. Let our prayer be that we may enjoy this marvelous portion of the sacred Word of God and take intense delight in it. As God rests in His love, so may we rest in it this morning. And as He joys over us with singing, so may we break forth into joyous Psalms to the God of our salvation!

I am going to begin with the last verse of the text and work my way backwards. The first head is, *a trying day for God's people*. They are sorrowful because a cloud is upon their solemn assembly and the reproach thereof is a burden. Secondly, we will note *a glorious ground of consolation*. We read in the 17th verse, “The Lord your God in the midst of you is mighty. He will save, He will rejoice over you with joy. He will rest in His love; He will joy over you with singing.” And, thirdly, here is *a brave conduct suggested thereby*—“In that day it shall be said to Jerusalem, Fear you not: and to Zion, Let not your hands be slack.”

I. Beginning at the 18th verse, we notice A TRYING DAY FOR GOD'S PEOPLE. *The solemn assembly had fallen under reproach*. The solemn assemblies of Israel were her glory—her great days of festival and sacrifice were the gladness

of the land. To the faithful, their holy days were their holidays. But a reproach had fallen upon the solemn assembly and I believe it is so now at this present moment. It is a sad affliction when in our solemn assemblies *the brilliance of the Gospel Light is dimmed by error*. The clearness of the testimony is spoiled when doubtful voices are scattered among the people and those who ought to preach the Truth, the whole Truth, and nothing but the Truth, are preaching doctrines which are the imaginations of men and the inventions of the age! Instead of the Revelation of God, we have philosophy, falsely so-called! Instead of Divine Infallibility, we have surmises and larger hopes. The Gospel of Jesus Christ, which is the same yesterday, today and forever is taught as the production of progress, a *growth*, a thing to be amended and corrected year by year. It is an ill day, both for the Church and the world, when the trumpet does not give a certain sound—for who shall prepare himself for the battle?

If added to this, we should see *creeping over the solemn assembly of the Church a lifelessness, an indifference and a lack of spiritual power*—it is painful to a high degree. When the vitality of religion is despised and gatherings for prayer are neglected, what are we coming to? The present period of Church history is well portrayed by the Church of Laodicea, which was neither cold nor hot and, therefore, to be spewed out of Christ's mouth. That Church gloried that she was rich and increased in goods, and had need of nothing, while all the while her Lord was outside, knocking at the door, a door closed against Him! That passage is constantly applied to the unconverted, with whom it has nothing to do—it has to do with a lukewarm *Church*, with a Church that thought itself to be in an eminently prosperous condition—while her living Lord, in the doctrine of His atoning Sacrifice, was denied an entrance! Oh, if He had found admission—and He was eager to find it—she would soon have flung away her imaginary wealth and He would have given her gold tried in the furnace and white raiment with which she might be clothed! Alas, she is content without her Lord, for she has education, oratory, science and a thousand other baubles! Zion's solemn assembly is under a cloud, indeed, when the teaching of Jesus and His Apostles is of small account with her.

If in addition to this, *worldly conformity spreads in the Church* so that the vain amusements of the world are shared in by the saints! Then is there reason enough for lamentation, even as Jeremiah cried—“How is the gold become dim!” Her Nazarites, who were purer than snow and whiter than milk, have become blacker than coal. “All our enemies have opened their mouths against us.” If there is no longer a clear distinction between the Church and the world, but professed followers of Jesus have joined hands with unbelievers, then may we mourn, indeed! Woe worth the day! An ill time has happened to the Church and also to the world. We may expect great judgments, for the Lord will surely be avenged on such a people as this! Know you not of old that when the sons of God saw the daughters of men, that they were fair, and they were joined unto them, then the flood came and swept them all away? I need not pursue this subject further, lest our *burdens* take from us the time which is demanded for *consolation*.

It appears from the text that *there were some to whom the reproach was a burden*. They could not make sport of sin. True, there were many who said that the evil did not exist at all! And others who declared that it was not present in any great degree. Yes, and more hardened spirits declared that what was considered to be a reproach was really a thing to be boasted of, the very glory of the century! Thus they huffed the matter and made the mourning of the conscientious to be a theme for jest. But there was a remnant to whom the reproach of it was a burden—these could not bear to see such a calamity. To these the Lord God will have respect, as He said by the Prophet—“Go through the midst of the city, through the midst of Jerusalem, and set a mark upon the foreheads of the men that sigh and that cry for all the abominations that are done in the midst thereof.”

The majority drank wine in bowls and anointed themselves with their chief ointments, but they were not grieved for the affliction of Joseph (Amos 6:6). But some were pressed in spirit and bore the Cross, counting the reproach of Christ greater riches than all the treasures of Egypt. God's people cannot bear that Christ's atoning Sacrifice should be dishonored! They cannot endure that this Truth of God should be trod under as mire in the streets. To true Believers, prosperity means the Holy Spirit blessing the Word to the conversion of sinners and the building up of saints. And if they do not see this, they hang their harps on the willows. True lovers of Jesus fast when the Bridegroom is not with His Church—their glory is in His Glory and in nothing else! The wife of Phinehas, the son of Eli, cried out in her aging agony, “The glory has departed,” and the reason that she gave was once because of the death of her husband and his father, but, twice, because, “the Ark of God is taken.” For this she named her new-born child, Ichabod—“The glory is departed from Is-

rael, for the Ark of God is taken.” The most bitter pain of this godly woman was for the *Church* and for the honor of our God! So it is with God’s true people—they lay it much to heart that the Truth of God is rejected.

This burdened spirit is a token of true love to God—those who love the Lord Jesus are wounded in His wounding and vexed with the vexing of His Spirit. When Christ is dishonored, His disciples are dishonored. Those who have a tender heart towards the Church can say with Paul, “Who is offended and I burn not?” The sins of the Church of God are the sorrows of all living members of it. This also marks a healthy sensibility, a vital spirituality. Those who are unspiritual care *nothing* for Truth or Grace—they look to finances, numbers and respectability! Utterly carnal men care for nothing spiritual and, so long as the political aims of Dissenters are progressing and there is an advance in social position, it is enough for them. But men whose spirits are of God would sooner see the faithful *persecuted* than see them desert the Truth! They would sooner see Churches in the depths of poverty, full of holy zeal, than rich churches dead in worldliness! Spiritual men care for the Church even when she is in an evil case and cast down by her adversaries—“Your servants take pleasure in her stones and favor the dust thereof.” The House of the Lord is, to many of us, our own house. His family is our family! Unless the Lord Jesus is extolled and His Gospel conquers, we feel that our own personal interests are blighted and we, ourselves, are in disgrace. It is no small thing to us—it is in our life!

Thus have I dwelt upon the fact that it is an ill day for God’s people when the solemn assembly is defiled—the reproach thereof is a burden to those who are truly citizens of the New Jerusalem—and because of this, *they are seen to be sorrowful*. The Lord here says, “I will gather them that are sorrowful over the solemn assembly.” They may well be sorrowful when such a burden is laid on their hearts. Moreover, they see in a hundred ways the ill effect of the evil which they deplore. Many are lame and halting—this is hinted at in the promise of the 19th verse—“I will save the lame.” Pilgrims on the road to Zion were made to limp on the road because the Prophets were “light and treacherous persons.” When the pure Gospel is not preached, God’s people are robbed of the strength which they need in their life journey. If you take away the bread, the children hunger. If you give the flock poisonous pastures, or fields which are barren as the desert, they pine and they become lame in their daily following of the Shepherd. The doctrinal soon affects the practical.

I know many of the people of God living in different parts of this country to whom the Sabbath is very little of a day of rest, for they hear no Truths of God in which rest is to be found—they are worried and wearied with novelties which neither glorify God nor benefit the souls of men! In many a place, the sheep look up and are not fed. This causes much disquietude and breeds doubts and questions—and thus strength is turned to weakness and the work of faith, the labor of love and the patience of hope are all kept in a lame state. This is a grievous evil and it is all around us. Then, alas, many are “driven out,” of whom the 19th verse says, “I will gather those who are driven out.” By false doctrine many are made to wander from the fold. Hopeful ones are made to stray from the path of life and sinners are left in their natural distance from God. The Truth of God which would convince men of sin is not preached, while other Truths which would lead seekers into peace are beclouded and souls are left in needless sorrow. When the Doctrines of Grace and the glorious atoning Sacrifice are not set clearly before men’s minds, so that they may feel their power, all sorts of evils follow! It is terrible to me that this dreadful blight should come upon our Churches, for the hesitating are driven to destruction, the weak are staggered and even the strong are perplexed! The false teachers of these days would, if it were possible, deceive the very elect! This makes our hearts very sorrowful. How can we help it?

Yet, Beloved, all the time that the people of God are in this evil case, *they are not without hope*, for close upon all this comes the promise of the Lord to restore His wandering ones. We have the sense twice over—“I will get them praise and fame in every land where they have been put to shame.” “I will make you a name and a praise among all people of the earth, when I turn back your captivity before your eyes, says the Lord.” The adversaries cannot silence the eternal testimony! They hung our Lord, Himself, on a tree. They took down His body and buried it in a tomb in the rock. And they set their seal upon the stone which they rolled at the mouth of the sepulcher. Surely, now, there was an end of the Christ and His cause! Boast not, you priests and Pharisees! Vain the watch, the stone, the seal! When the appointed time had come, the living Christ came forth! He could not be held by the cords of Death. How idle their dreams! “He that sits in the heavens shall laugh: the Lord does have them in derision.” Beloved, the reproach will yet be rolled away from the solemn assembly—the Truth of God will yet again be proclaimed as with trumpet tongue! The Spirit of God will revive His Church and converts as many as the sheaves of the harvest shall yet be gathered in! How will the faithful rejoice! Those who were burdened and sorrowful shall then put on their garments of joy and beauty! Then shall the ransomed of

the Lord return with songs and everlasting joy upon their heads! The conflict is not doubtful. The end of the battle is sure and certain. I think I even now hear the shout, “The Lord God Omnipotent reigns!”

II. Secondly, let us think of something which shines like a star amid the darkness. The second verse of the text presents A GLORIOUS GROUND OF CONSOLATION. Here is a rich text, indeed! This passage is like a great sea, while I am as a little child making pools in the sand which skirts its boundless flood. A series of discourses might well be founded on this one verse—I mean the seventeenth.

Our great consolation in the worst times lies in our God. The very name of our Covenant God—“The Lord Your God”—is full of good cheer! That word, “The Lord,” is really JEHOVAH, the Self-Existent One, the Unchangeable One, the Ever-Living God who cannot change or be moved from His everlasting purpose! Children of God, whatever you have not got, you have a God in whom you may greatly glory! Having God, you have more than all things, for all things come of Him. And if all things were blotted out, He could restore all things simply by His will. He speaks and it is done! He commands and it stands fast! Blessed is the man that has the God of Jacob for his trust and whose hope is Jehovah! In the Lord Jehovah we have righteousness and strength. Let us trust in Him forever! Let the times roll on—they cannot affect our God. Let troubles rush upon us like a tempest, but they shall not come near unto us now that He is our defense. Jehovah, the God of His Church, is also the God of each individual member of it—and each one may, therefore, rejoice in Him. Jehovah is as much your God, my Brothers and Sisters, as if no other person in the universe could use that Covenant expression!

O Believer, the Lord God is altogether and wholly *your* God! All His wisdom, all His foresight, all His power, all His immutability—all Himself is yours! As for the Church of God, when she is in her lowest estate, she is still established and endowed in the best possible sense—established by the Divine decree and endowed by the possession of God All-Sufficient! The gates of Hell shall not prevail against her. Let us exult in our possession! Poor as we are, we are infinitely rich in having God! Weak as we are, there is no limit to our strength, since the Almighty Jehovah is ours! “If God is for us, who can be against us?” If God is ours, what more can we need? Lift up your heart, you sorrowful one, and be of good cheer! If God is your God, you have all you can desire. Wrapped up within His glorious name we find all things for time and eternity, for earth and Heaven. Therefore in the name of Jehovah we will set up our banners and march onward to the battle! He is our God by His own purpose, Covenant and oath—and this day He is our God by our own choice of Him, by our union with Christ Jesus, by our experience of His goodness and by that spirit of adoption whereby we cry, “Abba, Father.”

To strengthen this consolation, we notice, next, that *this God is in the midst of us*. He is not a long way off, to be sought with difficulty, if haply we may find Him. The Lord is a God near at hand and ready to deliver His people. Is it not delightful to think that we cry not to God across the ocean, for He is *here*? We look not up to Him from afar, as though He dwelt beyond the stars, neither do we think of Him as hidden in the fathomless abyss—but the Lord is very near. Our God is “Jehovah in the midst of you.” Since that bright night in which a Babe was born at Bethlehem and unto us a Son was given, we know God as, “Emmanuel, God With Us.” God is in our Nature and, therefore, very near to us. “The Word was made flesh and dwelt among us.” Though His bodily Presence is gone, yet we have His spiritual Presence with us always, for He says, “Lo, I am with you always.” He walks among the golden candlesticks. We also have the immediate Presence of God the Holy Spirit. He is in the midst of the Church to enlighten, convince, quicken, endow, comfort and clothe with spiritual power. The Lord still works in the minds of men for the accomplishment of His purposes of Grace.

Let us think of this when we are going forth to Christian service—“The Lord of Hosts is with us.” When you call your class together in the Sunday school, say to your Lord, “If Your Presence go not with me, carry me not up from here.” Ah, Friends, if we have God with us, we can bear to be deserted by men! What a Word of God that is, “Where two or three are gathered together in My name, there am I in the midst of them!” Shall not the army shout when the King, Himself, is in their ranks! Let God arise, let His enemies be scattered! When He is with us they that hate Him must flee before Him! Be it our concern so to live that we may never grieve away the Spirit of God. Beloved, there is such abundant consolation in the fact of the Presence of God with us, that if we could only feel the power of it at this moment, we should enter into rest and our Heaven would begin below!

Let us go a step further and note that our consolation is largely to be found in the fact that *this God in the midst of us is full of power to save*. “The Lord your God in the midst of you is mighty; He will save.” That is to say, “Jehovah, your God, is mighty to save.” His arm is not shortened! He is still “a just God and a Savior.” Nor is He merely able to save, but He will *display* that ability—“He will save.” Come, my Brother, we see around us this and that to discourage us—let us, like David, encourage ourselves in the Lord our God! We may very well forget all difficulties, since the God who is in the midst of us is mighty to save! Let us pray, then, that He will save—that He will save His own Church from lukewarmness and from deadly error—that He will save her from her worldliness and formalism. He will save her from unconverted ministers and ungodly members! Let us lift up our eyes and behold the power which is ready to save and let us go on to pray that the Lord may save the unconverted by thousands and millions! Oh, that we might see a great revival of religion! This is what we need before all things. This would smite the enemy on the cheekbone and break the teeth of the adversary! If tens of thousands of souls were immediately saved by the Sovereign Grace of God, what a rebuke it would be to those who deny the faith! Oh, for times such as our fathers saw when first Whitefield and his helpers began to preach the life-giving Word of God!

When one sweet voice was heard clear and loud, all the birds of paradise began to sing in concert with him, and the morning of a glorious day was heralded. Oh, if that were to happen again, I should feel like Simeon when he embraced the heavenly Babe! Then would the virgin daughter of Zion shake her head at the foe and laugh him to scorn. It may happen—yes, if we are *importunate in prayer* it *must* happen—“God shall bless us, and all the ends of the earth shall fear Him.” Let us not seek power of rhetoric, much less of wealth, but let us look for the power which saves! This is the one thing I crave! Oh, that God would save souls! I say to myself, after being badgered and worried through the week by the men of modern thought—“I will go my way and preach Christ’s Gospel and win souls.” One lifting up of Jesus Christ Crucified is more to me than all the quibbling of the men who are wise above what is written! *Converts* are our unanswerable arguments! “Happy is the man,” says the Psalm, “that has his quiver full of them: they shall speak with the enemies in the gate.” Blessed is the man who has many spiritual children born to God under his ministry, for his converts are his defense. Beholding the man who was healed standing with Peter and John, they could say nothing against them. If souls are saved by the Gospel, the Gospel is proved in the surest manner. Let us care more about *conversions* than about organizations! If souls are brought into union with Christ, we may let other unions go!

We go yet further and we come to great deeps—behold *God’s joy in His people*. “He will rejoice over you with joy.” Think of this! Jehovah, the living God, is described as brooding over His Church with pleasure! He looks upon souls redeemed by the blood of His dear Son quickened by His Holy Spirit and His heart is glad! Even the infinite heart of God is filled with an extraordinary joy at the sight of His chosen. His delight is in His Church, His Hephzibah. I can understand a minister rejoicing over a soul that he has brought to Christ. I can also understand Believers rejoicing to see others saved from sin and Hell. But what shall I say of the infinitely-happy and eternally-blessed *God* finding, as it were, a new joy in souls redeemed? This is another of those great wonders which cluster around the work of Divine Grace! “He will rejoice over you with joy.” Oh, you are trembling for the Ark of the Lord—the *Lord* is not trembling, but rejoicing! Faulty as the Church is, the Lord rejoices in her! While we mourn, as well we may, yet we do not sorrow as those that are without hope, for *God* does not sorrow—His heart is glad and He is said to rejoice with joy—a highly emphatic expression!

The Lord takes pleasure in them that fear Him, imperfect though they are. He sees them as they are to be and so He rejoices over them, even when they cannot rejoice in themselves. When your face is blurred with tears, your eyes red with weeping and your heart is heavy with sorrow for sin, the great Father is rejoicing over you! The prodigal son wept in his father’s bosom, but the father rejoiced over his son. We are questioning, doubting, sorrowing, trembling—and all the while, He who sees the end from the beginning knows what will come out of the present disquietude and, therefore, rejoices! Let us rise in faith to share the joy of God! Let no man’s heart fail him because of the taunts of the enemy. Rather let the chosen of God rouse themselves to courage and participate in that joy of God which never ceases, even though the solemn assembly has become a reproach! Shall we not rejoice in *Him* when He, in His boundless condescension, deigns to rejoice in *us*? Whoever despairs for the cause, He does not—therefore let us be of good courage.

It is added, “*He will rest in His love*.” I do not know any Scripture which is more full of wonderful meaning than this! “He shall rest in His love,” as if our God had, in His people, found satisfaction! He comes to an anchorage—He has reached His desire. As when a Jacob, full of love to Rachel, has, at last, ended the years of his service and is married to his

well-beloved and his heart is at rest. So is it spoken in parable of the Lord, our God—Jesus sees of the travail of His soul when His people are won to Him! He has been baptized with His Baptism for His Church and He is no longer straitened, for His desire is fulfilled. The Lord is content with His eternal choice, content with His loving purposes, satisfied with the love which went forth from everlasting. He is well pleased in Jesus—well pleased with all the glorious purposes which are connected with His dear Son and with those who are in Him. He has a calm content in the people of His choice, as He sees them in Christ. This is also a good ground for our having a deep satisfaction of heart. We are not what we world be, but then, we are not what we *shall* be. We advance slowly, but then, we advance *surely*. The end is secured by Omnipotent Grace. It is right that we should be discontented with ourselves, yet this holy restlessness should not rob us of our perfect peace in Christ Jesus. If the Lord has rest in us, shall we not have rest in Him? If He rests in His love, cannot we rest in it? My heart is comforted as I plainly see in these words, unchanging love, abiding love, eternal love—“He will rest in His love.” Jehovah changes not! Being married to His people, “He hates putting away.” Immutability is written on His heart. The turtledove, when he has once chosen his mate, remains faithful throughout life and if the beloved dies, he will, in many cases, pine away with grief for her, for his life is wrapped up in hers. Even so our Lord has made His choice of His beloved and He will never change it—He died for His Church and so long as He lives, He will remember His own love and what it cost Him—“Who shall separate us from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus our Lord?” “He will rest in His love.”

The love of God to us is undisturbed—“The peace of God, which passes all understanding”—dwells with His love. He is not disquieted about it, but peacefully loves and is never moved. The calm of God is wonderful to contemplate—His Infallible knowledge and Infinite power put Him beyond fear or question. He sees no cause of alarm as to His redeemed, nor as to the cause of Truth and the reign of righteousness! As to His true Church, He knows that she is right, or that He will make her right. She is being transformed into the image of Jesus and He rests in the full assurance that the image will, before long, be complete. He can carry out His own purposes in His own way and time. He can see the harvest as well as the sowing, therefore He does “rest in His love.” You have seen a mother wash her child and as she washes its face the child, perhaps, is crying, for it does not, for the present, enjoy the cleansing operation. Does the mother share the child’s grief? Does she also cry? Oh, no! She rejoices over her baby, and rests in her love, knowing that the light affliction of the little one will work its real good. Often our griefs are no deeper than the cry of a child because of the soap in its eyes. While the Church is being washed with tribulations and persecutions, God is resting in His love! You and I are wearying, but God is resting.

“He shall rest in His love.” The Hebrew of this line is, “He shall be silent in His love.” His happiness in His love is so great that He does not express it, but keeps a happy silence. His is a joy too deep for words! No language can express the joy of God in His love and, therefore, He uses no words. Silence in this case is infinitely expressive. One of the old commentators says, “He is deaf and dumb in His love,” as if He heard no voice of accusation against His chosen and would not speak a word of upbraiding to her. Remember the silence of Jesus and expound this text thereby.

Sometimes, also, the Lord does not speak to His people—we cannot get a cheering word from Him. And then we sigh for a promise and long for a visit of His love. But if He is thus silent, let us know that He is only silent in His love! It is not the silence of wrath, but of love! His love is not changed, even though He does not comfort us—

*“His thoughts are high, His love is wise,
His wounds a cure intend.
And though He does not always smile,
He loves unto the end.”*

When He does not answer our prayers with His hands, He yet hears them with His heart. Denials are only another form of the same love which grants our petitions. He loves us and sometimes shows that love better by not giving us what we ask than He could do if He spoke the sweetest promise which the ears have ever heard. I prize this sentence—“He shall rest in His love.” My God, You are perfectly content with Your Church, after all, because You know what she is to be. You see how fair she will be when she comes forth from the washing, having put on her beautiful garments. Lo, the sun goes down and we mortals dread the endless darkness, but You, great God, see the morning and You know that in the hours of darkness dew will fall which shall refresh Your garden. Ours is the measure of an hour and yours the judgment of eternity! Therefore we will, by Your Grace, correct our short-sighted judgment by Your Infallible knowledge and rest with You.

The last Word is, however, the most wonderful of all—“*He will joy over you with singing.*” Think of the great Jehovah *singing!* Can you imagine it? Is it possible to conceive of the Deity breaking into a song? Father, Son and Holy Spirit together singing over the redeemed? God is so happy in the love which He bears to His people that He breaks the eternal silence—and sun and moon and stars—with astonishment hear God chanting a hymn of joy! Among Orientals a certain song is sung by the Bridegroom when he receives his bride—it is intended to declare his joy in her and in the fact that his marriage has come. Here, by the pen of Inspiration, the God of Love is pictured as married to His Church and so rejoicing in her that He rejoices over her with singing! If God sings, shall we not sing? He did not sing when He made the world. No, He looked upon it and simply said that it was good. The angels sang, the sons of God shouted for joy—creation was very wonderful to them—but it was not much to God who could have made thousands of worlds by His mere will. Creation could not make Him sing and I do not even know that Providence ever brought a note of joy from Him, for He could arrange a thousand kingdoms of Providence with ease!

But when it came to *redemption* that cost Him dearly. Here He spent eternal thought and drew up a Covenant with Infinite wisdom. Here He gave His only-begotten Son and put Him to grief to ransom His beloved ones. When all was done and the Lord saw what became of it in the salvation of His redeemed, then He rejoiced after a Divine manner! What must the joy be which recompenses Gethsemane and Calvary! Here we are among the Atlantic waves. The Lord God receives an accession to the Infinity of His joy in the thought of His redeemed people. “He shall rejoice over you with singing.” I tremble while I speak of such themes, lest I should say a word that should dishonor the matchless mystery, but still, we are glad to note what is written and we are bound to take comfort from it. Let us have sympathy with the joy of the Lord, for this will be our strength.

III. I close with a brief word upon THE BRAVE CONDUCT SUGGESTED THEREBY. Let us not sorrow under the burdens which we bear, but rejoice in God, the great Burden-Bearer upon whom, this day, we roll our load. Here it is—“In that day it shall be said to Jerusalem, Fear you not; and to Zion, Let not your hands be slack.”

There are three things for God’s people to do. The first is, to *be happy*. Read verse fourteen—“Sing, O daughter of Zion; shout, O Israel; be glad and rejoice with all your heart, O daughter of Jerusalem.” Any man can sing when his cup is full of delights. The Believer, alone, has songs when waters of a bitter cup are wrung out to him! Any sparrow can chirp in the daylight—it is only the nightingale that can sing in the dark. Children of God, whenever the enemies seem to prevail over you, whenever the serried ranks of the foe appear sure of victory, then begin to sing! Your victory will come with your song!

It is a very puzzling thing to the devil to hear saints sing when he sets his foot on them. He cannot make it out—the more he oppresses them, the more they rejoice! Let us resolve to be all the merrier when the enemy dreams that we are utterly routed. The more opposition, the more we will rejoice in the Lord! The more discouragement, the more confidence! Splendid was the courage of Alexander when they told him that there were hundreds of thousands of Persians. “Yet,” he said, “one butcher fears not myriads of sheep.” “Ah!” said another, “when the Persians draw their bows, their arrows are so numerous that they darken the sun.” “It will be fine to fight in the shade,” cried the hero! O Friends, we know whom we have believed and we are sure of triumph! Let us not think, for a single second, if the odds against us are 10,000 to one, that this is a hardship! Rather let us wish that they were a million to one, that the Glory of the Lord might be all the greater in the conquest which is sure!

When Athanasius was told that everybody was denying the Deity of Christ, he then said, “I Athanasius, against the world”—*Athanasius contra mundum* became a proverbial expression! Brothers, it is a splendid thing to be quite alone in the warfare of the Lord. Suppose we had half-a-dozen with us. Six men are not much increase to strength and, possibly, they may be a cause of weakness, by needing to be looked after. If you are quite alone, so much the better—there is the more room for God! When desertions have cleaned the place out and left you no friends, now every corner can be filled with Deity. As long as there is so much that is visible to rely upon and so much to hope in, there is so much the less room for simple trust in God—but now our song is of the Lord, alone—“For great is the Holy One of Israel in the midst of you.”

The next duty is *fearlessness*—“Fear you not.” What? Not even a little? No, “Fear you not.” But surely I may show some measure of trembling? No, “Fear you not.” Tie that knot tight about the throat of unbelief! “Fear you not”—neither this day, nor any day of your life. When fear comes in, drive it away, give it no space! If God rests in His love and

if God sings, what can you have to do with fear? Have you never known passengers on board ship, when the weather was rough, comforted by the calm behavior of the captain? One simple-minded soul said to his friend, "I am sure there is no cause for fear, for I heard the captain whistling." Surely, if the captain is at ease, and with him is all the responsibility, the passenger may be still more at peace! If the Lord Jesus at the helm is singing, let us not be fearing! Let us have done with every timorous accent. O rest in the Lord and wait patiently for Him. "Your God will come with vengeance, even God with a recompense; He will come and save you."

Lastly, let us *be zealous*—"Let not your hands be slack." Now is the time when every Christian should do more for God than ever. Let us plan great things *for* God and let us expect great things *from* God. "Let not your hands be slack." Now is the hour for redoubled prayers and labors! Since the adversaries are busy, let us also be busy. If they think they shall make a full end of us, let us resolve to make a full end of their lies and delusions. I think every Christian should answer the challenge of the adversaries of Christ by working double tides, by giving more of his substance to the cause of God, by living more for the glory of God, by being more exact in his obedience, more earnest in his efforts and more importunate in his prayers. "Let not your hands be slack" in any one part of holy service! Fear is a dreadful breeder of idleness, but courage teaches us indomitable perseverance. Let us go on in God's name. I would stir up the members of this Church and all my Brothers to intense zeal for God and the souls of men. "Therefore, my beloved brethren, be you steadfast, unmovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, for as much as you know that your labor is not in vain in the Lord."

Would God that all were on Christ's side out of this great assembly! Oh, that you would come to Jesus and trust Him and then live for Him in the midst of this crooked and perverse generation! The Lord be with us. Amen.

PORTION OF SCRIPTURE READ BEFORE SERMON—Zephaniah 3.
HYMNS FROM "OUR OWN HYMN BOOK"—46, 731, 18.

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