

Westminster Pulpit- G Campbell Morgan-3

Part

2

Part

4

1. [Sermons on Genesis through Nehemiah](#)
2. [Sermons on Psalms through Song of Solomon](#)
3. [Sermons on Isaiah through Zechariah](#)
4. [Sermons on Matthew](#)
5. [Sermons on Mark through John](#)
6. [Sermons on Acts through Colossians](#)
7. [Sermons on 1 Thessalonians through Revelation - - Series on "Problems"](#)

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SERMONS ON THIS PAGE:

- Isaiah 6:1-9a. Preparation For Service.
- Isaiah 9:6; Matthew 10:34; James 3:17. Peace
- Isaiah 28:20 Short Beds And Narrow Coverings
- Isaiah 33:14. Dwellers In Fire.
- Isaiah 40:3. Preparing The Highway.
- Isaiah 43:7. The Purpose Of Life.
- Isaiah 46:13. Salvation In Zion.
- Isaiah 45:22. Center And Circumference.
- Isaiah 52:11. Clean, For Service.
- Isaiah 55:10-11. The Harvests Of The Word Of God.
- Isaiah 64:4; 1 Corinthians 2:9. Waiting For God.
- Jeremiah 17:12. Sanctuary.
- Jeremiah 18:3. The Potter's Work On The Wheels.
- Jeremiah 31:29-30; Ezekiel 18:2-4 Sour Grapes.
- Ezekiel 18:4. Individuality In Religion.
- Daniel 6:3. Daniel, A Man Of Excellent Spirit.
- Hosea 12:3, 4. The Healing Of Life.
- Amos 8:11-13. Famine For The Word Of God.
- Amos 3:3. How Can A Man Walk With God?
- Habakkuk 3:17, 18. Jubilation In Desolation.
- Haggai 2:4. Be Strong--And Work!
- Zechariah 4:6. The Divine Worker.
- Zechariah 8:5. The Children's Playground In The City Of God.

046 - Isaiah 6:1-9 - Preparation for Service

Preparation for Service

In the year that king Uzziah died I saw the Lord sitting upon a throne, high and lifted up, and His train filled the temple. Above Him stood the seraphim: each one had six wings; with twain he covered his face, and with twain he covered his feet, and with twain he did fly. And one cried unto another, and said, Holy, holy, holy, is the lord of hosts: the whole earth is full of His glory. And the foundations of the thresholds were moved at the voice of him that cried, and the house was filled with smoke. Then said I, Woe is me! for I am undone; because I am a man of unclean lips, and I dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips; for mine eyes have seen the King, the Lord of hosts. Then flew one of the seraphim unto me, having a live coal in his hand, which he had taken with the tongs from off the altar: and he touched my mouth with it, and said, Lo, this hath touched thy lips; and thine iniquity is taken away, and thy sin purged. And I heard the voice of the Lord, saying, Whom shall I send, and who will go for Us? Then I said, Here am I; send me. And He said, Go.

Isaiah 6:1-9

Standing as we do on the threshold of our winter's work, feeling that we are coming to days of harvest and of gracious ingathering,

the question of my own heart has been, Lord, what hast Thou to say to me? I feel that if I can but hear what He has to say to me, I may venture to pass the word on to you.

This passage of Scripture is familiar to us all. In the middle of the ninth verse the revelation of perpetual principles ends. After that we have the commission spoken to Isaiah concerning his own time. He was commissioned to utter a message of devastating judgment. We are not commissioned to utter that message. The local, and the incidental, occupy the last half of this chapter. The essential and the eternal occupy the first part.

The opening words of this passage fix in the history of the Hebrew people the event it recounts. "In the year that king Uzziah died." The reign of Uzziah over Judah, which had lasted for fifty-two years, was over, and his son Jotham was about to succeed to the throne. Israel was suffering under the fearful tyranny of a military despotism. Shallum came to the throne by the murder of his predecessor. Menahem came to the throne by the murder of Shallum. Pekahiah succeeded his father, but was murdered by Pekah. And now Pekah was on the throne, reigning over a people who were soon to be scattered.

The reign of Uzziah had been remarkable in many respects. When he ascended the throne fifty-two years before, as a youth of sixteen, he had set himself to seek God, and the issue had been a period of remarkable prosperity. He had conducted a series of victorious campaigns against the enemies of God, by which he restored much lost territory. Following these, he brought about internal development, the building of towers, the making of cisterns, the planting of the land, its cultivation, and the increasing of husbandry. It was a wonderful reign to a certain point. Then his heart became lifted up, and the man who was victorious over the perils of adversity was overcome by the perils of prosperity. He rebelled against God, and was smitten with leprosy, and for the last period of his life lived in a leper house. At last he died.

It was at this point that there came to Isaiah, the son of Amoz, the vision recounted in this chapter. He had lived in Judah, and had known no occupant of the throne of his own people other than the king who had now passed away. In the economy of God the time had now arrived when he should come forth to his definite and public ministry. In this wonderful passage we have the story of his solemn ordination.

The passage falls into two parts, first, the vision; and second, the voice.

In the first verse these are the outstanding words, "I saw the Lord." In verse five we have the answer to that. "Then said I, Woe is me!" In verse eight we have the outstanding words of the second division. "I heard the voice of the Lord." In the last part of the same verse is the answer, "Then I said, Here am I; send me."

Take the simplest of these sentences that we may have the outline of the study on our minds. "I saw the Lord."... "Then said I." "I heard the voice of the Lord."... "Then I said." A vision and a voice, and in that order. First the vision with all that it meant of revelation to the soul of this man of truth concerning God, and consequently of truth concerning himself, and all that it led on to of cleansing. And then, and not till then, the voice, "Whom shall I send, and who will go for Us?" First the vision, and then the voice. First the personal relationship to essential Light, and Love; and then the relative commission in obedience to which, the man illuminated and cleansed, went out to do the work of God. If I am to do anything for my Master, today, tomorrow, and the next day, I must have this vision, I must hear this voice. My answer to the vision must be Isaiah's answer, and my answer to the voice must be his also.

Let us, then, first examine the vision. What did Isaiah see? The first thing that is impressed upon the mind in the study of the passage is that the prophet saw an occupied throne. "I saw the Lord sitting upon a throne, high and lifted up, and His train filled the temple." That is the first truth that broke upon the soul of the prophet, with such terrific force and power that he spoke as though he had never seen the vision before. As a matter of fact, this man had long seen the Lord high and lifted up, but the empty throne was the occasion which revealed to him the true significance of the filled Throne.

"In the year that King Uzziah died." The news spread from street to street, from town to town, from village to village, that the king was dead. There came to Isaiah the sense of loss in the passing of the king. Chaos was everywhere. Israel was in such a terrible condition that she could not exist any longer nationally. Judah was following hard and fast in the wake of Israel to the same defeat and disaster. The one throne to which Isaiah had looked for support was empty. Men said to the psalmist, "If the foundations be destroyed, what can the righteous do?"

And that, perchance, was the first feeling that came to the heart of the prophet when the throne of Judah was empty. Who now will succeed? Then, "In the year that king Uzziah died I saw the Lord sitting upon a throne." Behind the empty throne, there is a throne that is never empty. Over the chaos that appals the heart there is the God of order and government.

I think if we had cross-examined Isaiah, he would have been unable to describe the personality upon which his eyes rested, but he saw the Lord. A Person was manifested to him. Through this whole book of Isaiah there is presented a Personality vague and undefined, a Personality that startles us with contradictions, a Personality robed in splendor, girded with strength, with government sitting upon his shoulder; a Personality stripped, wounded, bruised, suffering; a King reigning in righteousness, and prosecuting His

propaganda to the end of the ages, and through all the spheres, a bruised and broken Man Who says, "Who hath believed our report? and to whom hath the arm of the Lord been revealed?" Vague shadowy outlines, never quite clear until the New Testament is in your hand, but nevertheless a Person. Isaiah's first vision of this Person was so vague that he could not perfectly describe it, so definite that he said, "I saw the Lord."

He proceeded immediately from the description of the central Person to that of the surrounding facts; seraphim, flaming glory, smoke, reverberating thunder, and the maintenance of a song, but the Person is mentioned and left, "I saw the Lord." The essential truth is that of a Person enthroned.

There is a very beautiful connection between the twelfth chapter of the Gospel of John and the whole prophecy of Isaiah. It is the chapter of Jesus overshadowed by the Cross. The first incident is that of Mary's coming very near to His grief, and breaking the alabaster box of ointment upon His feet. The second incident is that of His entrance to Jerusalem, which we call the triumphal entry, all full of sorrow to Him. The third incident is that of the coming of the Greeks. The Cross is everywhere. It was the shadow of the Cross that drew forth the adoring worship of Mary, that filled His own eyes with tears as He rode into Jerusalem, that made Him reply when Greeks asked to see Him, "Except a grain of wheat fall into the earth and die, it abideth by itself alone."

Now look at verse forty-one in this chapter. "These things said Isaiah, because he saw His glory." What said Isaiah? "Lord, who hath believed our report?" "These things said Isaiah, because he saw His glory." Isaiah's conception in chapter fifty-three of the mystery and the agony of rejection had been made tremendous because he saw His glory. When did he see His glory? When he was commissioned for his work. "I saw the Lord sitting upon a throne, high and lifted up." The first thing the prophet saw ere he went forth to work that was to be hard and perilous and difficult was the vision of the enthroned God. The throne of Judah is empty. There is chaos everywhere. For this man the Throne is filled, and out of the chaos the cosmos is coming.

He next proceeded to speak of the surrounding glory, the seraphim, the flames of fire; the hosts of the Most High God. Six-winged seraphim. In the presence of that Personality, with two wings they veiled their faces, with two they veiled their feet, with two they were perpetually flying. This is of course symbolic, and we can interpret such symbolism only by Eastern thought. The face is the symbol of intellectual apprehension, the feet are the symbols of governmental procedure, the wings are symbolic of activity Divinely inspired. The unveiling of the nature of the enthroned One is seen in the activity of the burning spirits that surround the throne. They veil their faces, unable to come to perfect intellectual apprehension of the mystery of His Being. They veil their feet, for while they are principalities, dominions, rulers, their governmental procedure gains its strength from submission to His Throne. The veiling of the feet is the hiding of personal authority in the presence of supreme Authority. But the wings, the remaining wings, are ever active, inspired by the very Spirit of life; they perpetually serve under the authority of His Throne.

Now listen to the song. It is a twofold song. First, the song of the nature of the enthroned One. "Holy, holy, holy, is the Lord of hosts." Then it is a song about earth. I am always so thankful when I come to this. It is a song about earth in that high presence chamber, with the enthroned Jehovah revealed personally, but so that He cannot be described; surrounded by the flaming spirits that veil their faces of intelligence, and their feet of government, and beat their wings in perpetual service. What is this they sing of the earth? "The whole earth is full of His glory," or notice the marginal reading of the revised version, "the fulness of the whole earth is His glory." These spirits that surround the throne look down to the earth and see God's glory in it. Isaiah has a different vision of it presently, and these spirits saw his vision also, but they are singing in the presence of God of an ultimate triumph of truth, of a final restoration, of a final victory. They are singing by faith and hope, in the presence of God, of the victory that is to be. "The whole earth is full of His glory." The great psalm of the King, which describes His procedure to ultimate victory, ends with the words that the seraphim sang in the presence of God. "The whole earth is full of His glory." So that the psalm of the glory of God, which is part of the inheritance of the saint here and now amid the chaos and the darkness and the strife and the battle, is the perpetual song which angels sing.

Notice for a moment the effect of the song on the earthly temple. The very "thresholds were moved," trembled. "The house was filled with smoke." We shall be perfectly correct if we translate this word "smoke" by "anger." In Psalms 80, verse four, we read;

O Jehovah, God of hosts,

How long wilt Thou be angry against the prayer of Thy people?

The literal translation of this is, "How long wilt Thou smoke against the prayer of Thy people?" The connection shows that smoke is a symbol of anger. In the day of God's activity it is said by the ancient prophet Joel that there shall be "blood, and fire, and pillars of smoke"; and Isaiah, in that high presence chamber, saw the uplifted God upon His throne; saw the burning spirits round the throne veiling their faces and feet, and ceaselessly moving to do His bidding; heard their song, the song of ultimate victory, in the earth itself; and yet there was the trembling of things in the temple of God. There was the filling of the house with smoke, typical of His anger. So this man stood in the midst of the awful vision, conscious of God's holiness, and His enthronement, conscious of the victory that must be final, and yet conscious that anger was abroad, that judgment was out on the highway of the Most High. The house trembled and was filled with smoke.

And now how did he answer the vision? The answer was not a prepared one. The greatest words men speak in the presence of God, either about God, or to God, are words that come surging out of the deepest consciousness, words that must be spoken because no others are fit. And when this man stood in the midst of the glory, when for a moment his eyes were unveiled, what did he say? Oh, the agony of the cry, "Woe is me! for I am undone; because I am a man of unclean lips, and I dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips." All of which means that when the prophet had a clear vision of God, he had the true vision of man. And when the prophet had the clearer vision of the Divine order, he had a more overwhelming sense of human disaster. Notice that the cry concerning himself proceeds backward, from effect to cause. The effect, "Woe is me!" The reason of the woe, "I am undone." The reason of the being undone, "I am a man of unclean lips."

Why unclean lips only? Why did he not say unclean heart, why did he not say unclean spirit? Again, the language is symbolic, and it is most simple symbolism. Let us turn over to the epistle of James (3:6). "The tongue is a fire: the world of iniquity among our members is the tongue, which defileth the whole body, and setteth on fire the wheel of nature, and is set on fire by hell. For every kind of beasts and birds, of creeping things and things in the sea, is tamed, and hath been tamed by mankind: but the tongue can no man tame; it is a restless evil, it is full of deadly poison." As in the Divine, the Word is the expression of the God; so in the human, the speech of man is the expression of man, and the lips and the tongue are the instruments of speech. This man standing in the presence of the glory confesses that his lips are polluted. Let Jesus speak, "The things which proceed out of the mouth come forth out of the heart; and they defile the man." Within is the fountain head of corruption, but it is poured out and expressed through the tongue and lips, and so Isaiah says, "I am undone; because I am a man of unclean lips." The words are unclean, because the fact that they have to express is an unclean fact. What has this to do with his work? Everything. I do not know how you all feel, my brethren, but the most stupendous evidence to my heart, every day growing, of the grace of God is not that He saves me. That is a great evidence of grace, amazing grace! But the most stupendous evidence of God's grace is that when He saves me He consents to use me. And, my brethren, one of the first qualifications for being ready is to have stood in the presence of His glory, and to have found out how unworthy I am to utter His message. God almighty is my witness that I am not speaking to you idly. Every day I am more astonished that God should use me at all.

And what follows? I do not know that it would not be good to sit still and read the rest almost without comment. It is so simple. "Then"—I wish I knew how to emphasize that "then," because it is the dividing line. We have tried to look at the glory of God, at the enthroned Jehovah, at this man smitten in his inner consciousness with a sense of unworthiness. Then what? "Then flew one of the seraphim." Taking in his hand one of the sacred vessels from the altar, the place of blood and fire, and catching one of the burning coals from the altar, he comes to that man.

Now, whereas I want to speak especially of the fact that for the man called to service there is perfect cleansing and energizing provided, what I want you to see first is that out of the midst of the overwhelming and awful glory of God comes the most overwhelming vision of His grace. The enthroned Jehovah surrounded by the burning spirits that worship. Do you hear the thunder of the seraphim as they sing? Can you hear anything else? I do not think I can. God can! What did He hear? The cry of a guilty man! Oh, soul of mine, take heart. One guilty man cries out in the consciousness of his sin, and the faint cry of that human soul, conscious of pollution, rises in the ear of God above the thunder of the seraphim. And a seraph must leave the place of worship to work when a human soul is in need. These are Divine measurements. These are not the measures we sometimes put upon evangelistic effort. That was evangelistic effort. And he brought the live coal and he touched the lips of the man, he touched that which the man had made the symbol of his own uncleanness. The man said, "I am undone; because I am a man of unclean lips," and the seraph touched the lips, and said, "lo, this hath touched thy lips; and thine iniquity is taken away, and thy sin purged." This is one of the cases where I am almost inclined to translate iniquity very literally as to the actual meaning of the word. "Thy crookedness has been taken away." Fire has straightened out three! But something more. "Thy sin is purged." Sin is offense, guilt, the thing in a man that is the outcome of his iniquity in his relation to God. What of that? It is purged, and here you may use the old Hebrew word, "thy sin is expiated." It is the word that the Hebrew made use of when he referred to atonement. It is the word to cover over, not in the sense of covering over a polluted thing, but to atone, to blot out. Thy sin, as against this high excellence and glory of heaven is expiated. Thy personal crookedness is straightened out. Your relative guilt is expiated.

And how was it done? By the coal of fire from the altar, and God Almighty cannot deal with Isaiah in his uncleanness except by the coal of fire that comes from the altar.

What follows? Perhaps a pause. I do not know. There is no pause in the letterpress. I think there must have been a pause, a waiting moment, in which this man rose into the great consciousness that he was undone no longer, that his lips were no longer impure but purified; and it is as he waited in that great consciousness that the voice came. He had seen the vision of God. This was the outcome, and now the voice, and how much it says, "Whom shall I send, and who will go for Us?" Who will go? God is asking for volunteers. God needs someone to be sent, someone who will go. What is the question? Who is ready to be sent? "Whom shall I send?" "Who will go for Us?" and the emphasis in that second question is not on the "Go," but on "for Us." Who will be ready when I send them? Who will be in readiness to be sent, ready to represent Us? And then, thank God, notwithstanding that this man but a

moment ago had expressed his consciousness of pollution, immediately came the answer, "Here am I; send me." "Here am I," that is abandonment; "send me," that is readiness. He could not have said that until his lips had been touched by the coal from the altar. The vision cursed him, but the fire cleansed him; and now when God wants help, this cleansed man says, I am at Thy disposal.

That is the whole law of service. In order to do successful service I need first a vision of God enthroned. Have you this vision of God? If you are not quite sure whether God's throne is tottering or not, you had better retire. You remember God's method of sifting an army. It was a wonderful method. Thirty-two thousand came out and said, We are all ready. And the first test was, Let the men fearful and afraid go home. And twenty-two thousand men turned right about face and marched home. Are you sure that was not a mistake? No, for in the day of battle the man who has fear in his heart is a peril. When the victory was won they all came back to shout. God bless them! But when we are fighting we do not want them.

Can we see God on His throne? That is the question. We can see the chaos. We are very blind if we cannot. National corruption, municipal rottenness, dilettante fooling with the problems of poverty that ought to be the problem of every statesman. But high over all earthly thrones is the Throne that never trembles. If you can see God on His Throne, then that Throne is commissioning you to take the evangel of the crucified Christ to cure all the ills of humanity. That is our message. We must have a vision of His enthronement, of His holiness, and we must have this also, the vision of His ultimate glory in the earth. And then we need the vision of self. If I may have a vision of His glory I need the true vision of self. We need also the cleansing that He provides. We are not fit for all this. But to stay there is to dishonor God. Remember the altar is there, and the fire is there. God help us to get to the altar. He will cleanse us and purge us, and with a baptism of fire make us all He wants us to be, if only we will let Him. Let us look up into His face, solemnly and earnestly saying, By the vision of Thine enthronement, by the matchless mercy of the altar and the fire, here am I; send me.

047 - Isaiah 9:6; Matthew 10:34; James 3:17 – Peace

Peace

His name shall be called... Prince of Peace.

Isaiah 9:6

I came not to send peace,...but a sword.

Matthew 10:34

The wisdom that is from above is first pure, then peaceable.

James 3:17

That is a startling combination of text. The first is part of one of the sublimest of Messianic prophecies. It occurs in that great passage of Isaiah in which out of circumstances of tumult and turmoil, of war and strife and perplexity, the prophet foretells the day when all the things of war shall be destroyed; and he bases his hope upon the great fact that a child is born, a son is given. Whatever local meaning there may have been in the words of the prophet; whatever first application there may have been in his own domestic relationships, it is quite certain that he looked through, and saw emerging, amid the mists somewhere—how far I think he could not have told—the figure of One, a great and wonderful Deliverer, Whom he described by the four titles, Wonderful Counsellor, God-hero, Father of eternity, and finally Prince of peace; which titles constitute a key to the interpretation of Scripture, and of all human history so far as that history has been written, either in what we call sacred or profane literature. The complete title gives us an account of the unveiling of God, of the growing understanding of God on the part of man.

He was known first in Creation as the "Wonderful Counsellor," and then of necessity, in human history as the "Mighty God," the God-hero, the God of battles, the warrior God. Then in revealed religion, He was progressively revealed as the "Everlasting Father," or as the margin has it, the Father of eternity. If we take the Hebrew word here, and translate it quite literally we are grievously disappointed. It would then read, the Father of the terminus. Can anything be more disappointing than that? Yet that is that! As another Hebrew word—"everlasting"—means vanishing point; this Hebrew word, not from the same root, and not having exactly the same meaning signifies the terminus; that is, that which is beyond the vanishing point. God is the Father of that. So if the first uttering disappoint, we find that the suggestiveness is vast. The Father of the banishing point, and of that which is beyond, the terminus. Therefore He is the abiding One both as to time and space. And finally, the "Prince of peace."

If we accept the suggestion, which this morning it is not my purpose to argue, that here a progressive unveiling of God is indicated; then you will notice that there is first the thought of the "Wonderful Counsellor," the One of perfect thought and perfect will, from Whom must come a perfect law. And immediately following it, the "Mighty God," the God-hero, the God of battles, the God of war. And out of that, and following it, the further revelation of the "Father of eternity." And at last, that of the "Prince of peace."

So that if we take the whole of this description, there is here also a recognition of conflict. "I came not to cast peace"— and I adopt

that marginal reading very definitely, not "I came not to send it," but I came not to cast it promiscuously, carelessly. There must be the God of battles before there can be the Prince of peace. There must be the coming of the sword ere there can be peace. And yet why? And the answer is postponed for a moment.

The second of these texts is the word of the Prince Himself. The centuries have run their course. Others have also climbed the heights of vision, and have gazed in hope and longing; and men have again, and yet again, been encouraged as the dreamers have told of lights upon the eastern sky, and have sung to them some refrain caught in high moments of meditation; and all the songs have been those of a coming One. At last we stand by the side of the One long looked for; and what this prophet said of Him long before is true; "when we see Him there is no beauty that we should desire Him." The Prince of peace is now speaking to His messengers as He prepares them for their work; and as He is sending them forth to proclaim the Kingdom He is warning them of the fact that they will have to do their work in the presence of, and in spite of persecution. "Think not that I came to cast peace on the earth: I came not to cast peace, but a sword!" That text is meaningless and valueless, and may be misinterpreted immediately unless we keep it in relation to its context. Where does the subject really begin? In the previous chapter, with Matthew's declaration that when Jesus went through all the cities and villages He saw the multitudes, and He was moved with compassion, because He saw them as sheep scattered, harried by wolves, without a shepherd. Out of that compassion comes the rule of the sword; and if you will take time to look at the context you will see that from that declaration of the moving of His heart with compassion in the presence of what He saw, the story moves right on to my text. It is continuous! The text belongs to that. He saw the multitudes, He was moved with compassion. He said to His disciples, Go ye, and then He began to instruct them as they went. He said, You will go as sheep in the midst of wolves. It is not going to be easy work, this work I bring to you. What is the work? To bring peace. The multitudes are harried by wolves, scattered, spoiled, harmed; therefore, I must fight! What for? To bring peace to the multitudes. The passion for peace creates the necessity for the sword.

The third text is the word of the most practical of the New Testament writers, and if you will take all the context here in this letter of James you will see that he is protesting against conflict amongst the brethren of the Prince. Brother of the Prince Himself, according to the flesh, he writes to those scattered by the dispersion, and speaks to them again and again as "My brethren," "My brethren," "My brethren." I am constrained to wait a moment here, because there is light upon that thought which is of value to us. There was a day when Jesus was in the midst of His work, and His mother and His brethren—this man amongst them in all probability—took a long journey as far as from Nazareth to Capernaum, to find Him, and to persuade Him to give up His work, because He was over-wearying Himself. Jesus was in the house, with a handful of disciples, and He then inquired "Who is My mother? and who are My brethren... For whosoever shall do the will of My Father which is in heaven, he is My brother, and sister, and mother." A great deal has happened since then. His brother has become His brother in a new sense, because he is doing the will of His Father. And it is very significant to me, that when he writes, this brother of the Lord after the flesh, he says to those to whom he writes, "My brethren." He is protesting against conflict amongst them, faction and strife among the brethren of the Lord. How will it be cured? In these circumstances, which are very local, and for the correction of conditions which do not universally obtain among the saints of God, there flames out a principle of interpretation, which helps me in an understanding of all the things of difficulty which have oppressed me as I have read the prophecies of the coming of the Prince of peace, and then heard this self-same Prince of peace say, "I came not to cast peace, but a sword."

Think of the history of the centuries, the nineteen centuries of the Christian era or dispensation. Look back for a moment to the Person with Whom we are so familiar now, the Person of this Lord Jesus Christ of ours. Remember that He is the One to Whom all the prophets give witness; the Prince of peace for Whom men had been waiting, and for Whose coming they had been longing. Remember this also, even though it but increase the perplexity of the situation, that before He went away He said to a little group of His disciples, "Peace I leave with you; My peace I give unto you: not as the world giveth, give I unto you." Remembering all these things, then look at Him, and if there is one matter that impresses the mind more than another as you watch this man Jesus, from the moment when His public ministry began, to the close of that ministry, it is that of the restlessness of the life of this Lord of peace. I know you are in revolt against that statement because you are in sympathy with the underlying riches of His quietness. All that is true. I am speaking now of the external things. No home! Oh my masters, did you ever think of it? Oh, the tragedy of it! We recite it carelessly, or with merely sentimental sympathy, but listen to it, and at this Christmastide try to understand it: "Foxes have holes, and the birds of the heaven have nests; but the Son of man hath not where to lay His head." Homeless! Friendless! Do you challenge me? Well, then I shall ask your definition of a friend, and I will give you one from inspiration, and this is it. "A friend loveth at all times, And a brother is born for adversity."

Test the friends of Jesus by that, and He had not one. When the darkness gathered, and the tempest swept, He was left alone. There are some passages in this New Testament that to my own heart are passages which flame with fire. "They all"—they, that little group of disciples, whom He in grace called friends only by virtue of what He would make them presently, "they all forsook Him and fled." No, I am not angry with them. I admire them for staying so long. I am such a coward myself that I should have gone long before they did. But the fact, consider it, wherever He went, unrest; no place to lay His head; no friend. He tried to tell them of His Cross, but they never understood it until after His resurrection. All about Him were the men of light and leading, planning and

plotting to catch Him in His talk, to entrap Him, He was a storm-center from the beginning of his ministry to its close. No peace.

Then look at the story of His first disciples, and the appalling thing is that when you begin now to look at the inner circle, strife is discovered amongst them. Oh, that dreadful picture of the New Testament of those last days, in which there was strife amongst them, as to which of them should be the greatest, repeated as you read the story, until you are weary of it. Conflict!

And then we come outside, and look generally through the centuries; and we look abroad today; where is peace? In the Church? Would God it were, but it is not. Brethren are divided, fighting; wasting the energies of their spiritual life which ought to be devoted to the warfare against the devil; hindering one another. Do you admire the divisions of Christendom? Then so do not I. Do you care to argue that all these things are willed by Him Who prayed that we all might be one? The divided condition of the Christian Church is a shame and a disgrace. Where is peace?

And my brethren, if I lift my eyes and look outside, if I look at the world, where is peace? If I look at that section of the world over which, sooner or later during these centuries, the messengers of the Cross have passed, that section of the world which is spoken of as Christian, or Christianized, where is peace? Well, I need say very little. I do not know, and I do not ask, and I care absolutely nothing for your particular convictions as to national politics, but I ask you to look from the height of your Christian experience at the world. We talk about peace. We thank God in speeches from the throne and elsewhere that there is peace, but is there peace?

To take that first text, "His name shall be called... Prince of peace" is to be faced by apparent contradiction. Nineteen centuries, well nigh two millenniums have run their course, and where is peace?

But to take the second text, "I came not to cast peace, but a sword" is to find a description of all that we have seen, but it seems to contradict the idea that He is the Prince of peace.

To take the third is to find the explanation, and to deny both the apparent contradictions.

Mark then I pray you, how these three texts are a revelation, and in order that we may profit by the revelation let us understand its method.

The first text is the announcement of ultimate purpose. He is the Prince of peace. This one Book of Isaiah, is the Book of the Servant of God, Whose mission is one. What is that mission? To establish peace. How does He do it? By the way of judgment; and the first division of the prophecy describes the peace resulting from judgment. In that second division; first, the purpose is declared; secondly, the Prince is presented; and finally, the program is announced. If I were to write one word across the prophecy of Isaiah, a word that catches the underlying motive, what would it be? Peace, God's great purpose of peace. He is the Prince of peace.

When the Prince came, He described the process toward the peace as being the way of the sword. Jesus did not come to sing a lullaby to humanity, and to tell it that its sin does not matter, and its wickedness is nothing, that presently it will all be forgotten. He came in the name of God and eternity to declare war upon all the things that prevent peace. The sword is necessary in the interests of peace.

The third of these texts reveals for us the underlying principle. "First pure, then peaceable."

In the few moments that remain to us, let us make some applications of the teaching; first, in individual life; secondly, in social life; thirdly, in national life; finally, in international matters.

He is the Prince of peace. Think of individual life today. Was it ever more restless than it is now? What are the causes of unrest in individual life? Now I pray you, shut out of view, if it be possible to you for the moment, all other people than yourself. Think of the individual, think of the restlessness of individual life. What are the causes of unrest? Sin. And if the word is not understood outside, I think it is understood here, even if it is a word you are not inclined to make use of. Sir Oliver Lodge says the intelligent man does not speak of sin today. I deny it absolutely. The intelligent man speaks of every fact, it is ignorance that declines to look facts in the face. We may differ as to the interpretation of what is the underlying cause of the unrest; but the Bible teaches that it is lack of God. I take any individual life you please, and where there is no recognition of God, no practical, everyday, actual, positive traffic with God or commerce with eternity, then you have a life hot, restless, feverish. And by way of contrast, find me the life of the man, or the woman, or the little child, who knows God; and I will find you a life of quietness and peace, in spite of all the circumstances of stress and strain and conflict. Oh, do we not know them! How they help us, the quiet saints of the most high God, many of them devoid of all the things that minister to man's supposed well-being, but whose hearts are firm and steady and quiet, until it may be said of them, "He that believeth shall not make haste." All the restlessness of individual life today is due to man's lack of God.

What is the way of peace? First pure. And what is purity of heart? It is the heart undivided in its allegiance to God. So this Prince of peace comes. He will come this morning. He is coming this morning. He comes into the pulpit, for this Prince of peace does not divide between the pulpit and the pew. He comes to say, I have brought a sword, and I have come to war against the things in your life that shut God out. This Prince of peace is first the warrior with flaming sword and flashing eyes, and the tremendous word of the

ancient prophecy upon His lips, "There is no peace, saith my God, to the wicked." Jesus Christ does not come first with a song and a lullaby and a narcotic. He comes with a sword and a flame and a fire; and there are men and women feeling this, here and now. You know that He will not make peace with the evil thing within you. "First pure." And there are men and women who will yield to Him, and hand over to Him their sword of rebellion, and let Him destroy as with burning the habiliments of their warfare; and to such men and to such women He will bring the peace of God which passeth all understanding.

And He is the Prince of peace socially. What are the causes of unrest in the social world? Take the word of the inquiry in its most general sense; there is social unrest, and we all know it, we are all talking about it and arguing about it; and all that may be perfectly proper; but what are the causes of it? Caste, and injustice, the failure of men to recognize the absolute oneness of human nature. And so class is set against class, and the dividing lines are being emphasized. Oh the peril of it. And there is injustice in many ways, not only the injustice on the part of those who hold power, but the injustice of misrepresentation on the part of those who lack power; and the injustice as between two men in conflict is that neither of the two will see the standpoint of the other. There are caste differences and injustices.

Or, if you look at the business world, self-seeking is the inspiration of commercial activity, and a vast amount of dishonesty, which has been rechristened business sharpness.

Or, if you look at the Church of God, love of power, and lack of love are the causes of unrest.

What is the way of peace? The Prince comes, first pure; He brings a sword. He is against everything that emphasizes class. He will not enlist as under His banner, even the man who names His name if he bring into the spirit of his conflict that which is against the Spirit of the Lord Himself. He demands that there shall be recognition on the part of all men of the first fundamental necessity of manhood's relationship to God; and then consequently, the great issues and results, of man's true relationship to his brother man. He still comes, and it is not a song merely, it is thunder, saying to men, "Thou shalt love the Lord thy God... thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself." On these two commandments hang all the law and the prophets; and He is at war with everything in social life that contradicts the individual right of every man to a relationship with God; and the individual responsibility of every man concerning his brother. He is at war with all the forces of unrest.

Or, if you make a further application, what are the causes of national unrest? And I am not lifting my eyes to gaze any further than the shores of my own land. What are the causes of our own national unrest? Are they two, or is it but one? I leave you to decide. Perhaps one, but it must be stated in two ways. Forgetfulness of God and that which is the result—the enthronement of Mammon. Forgetfulness of God! I wonder if we shall soon hear again in our Houses of Parliament, a man who dare quote his Bible, and do it accurately; and do it, not at the bidding of a party, but at the bidding of God Almighty. I wonder! We have forgotten God. We must not say—as we were told recently—too much about the Congo, lest we disturb the balance of power somewhere. Away with the base thing! Where is God? We have forgotten Him, we are putting Him out of count. If a man says these things, somebody will say he is political. I avow in the presence of God, Whose I am, and Whom I serve, I have nothing to do with the mere paltry tricks of party politicians. I have everything to do with the land I love, with its lack of peace and its restlessness, and I affirm it is because we have forgotten God. Our empty churches, our broken-down family altars, our neglected Bibles, these are the things that matter. And my brethren, the Christ of God is at war with all these disturbing forces. It is the sword that He brings. He has not come this Christmas time to sing a national lullaby. He has come again anew, to declare war against the men who forget God, and against the men who enthrone Mammon in His place. Mammon! Oh what eyes had this Man of Nazareth, what far-seeing vision, what clear and accurate understanding of the constructive and destructive forces of the ages. Listen, You cannot serve God and the devil? Oh no, He did not say that. That is what I should have said. I must have my antithesis perfectly balanced. This is what He said, "Ye cannot serve God and Mammon," for He knew the devil also, and knew that the devil hides himself behind Mammon, behind its gaudiness and its glitter and its ministry to sensuality. The devil keeps out of sight today, he hides behind Mammon. I have said before on one occasion, I fear the thing was printed, but I will say it again, I have stood in amazement in the presence of Watts' great picture of Mammon. You look at it some day; and yet—my apology to his memory—had I to paint Mammon, I should have painted it otherwise, not bloated, satiated, and sensual, but as gaunt and hungry and never satisfied. That is Mammon. Why is wrong forever on the throne? Ask that question when next righteousness is defeated in any locality, or in the nation, why? And the answer will be, Mammon. When a nation forgets God, it always enthrones Mammon.

And so this Prince of peace is against the forces that cause unrest, and that in the interests of peace.

One other word, for even if so far I have only looked at one's own land, if a man be a Christian man, he cannot forget that he belongs to the world. If a man be a Christian man, he has come to a recognition of the unity of the race. And so one other glance, the international unrest, what are the causes of it? I had almost said, and I am perfectly sure you would have been in revolt against if I had said it so bluntly, that the cause of unrest is patriotism. I will qualify my word,—false patriotism, the patriotism that consents, out of a narrow attitude of mind, to use the word foreigner. Is there a more terrible word in existence than the word foreigner? I do not think there is to a Christian man. Foreigner! The patriotism that says, so long as this land, and this country is maintained in peace

and prosperity, then it matters nothing what others go down in the struggle; is false, it is of hell!

And the consequent unfairness that grows from it, and the avarice of which it becomes the expression. Would you have an illustration? I will give you one. The fact that at this hour, a paper, standing supposedly for Conservatism—a great word—is consenting to employ the prophet of godless socialism to create strife between this country and Germany. That is what I mean. I will not be silent in the presence of this kind of thing. Silence here would be wicked and evil. Mark well, I pray you the unholy association. A man, brilliant and clever, who has taken stance definitely against revealed religion and the religion of Jesus Christ; and by his own paper is advocating a socialism that is godless in its thinking and godless in its outlook; and yet, this man is to write to show how we are to defeat Germany! And think you, the Christ is in favour of it? I make my solemn protest against it in the name of Christ. What does it mean? It is the outcome of a false patriotism; it is the determined attempt to say that this nation is the only one that really matters. My brethren, here are the causes of unrest. What has Christ to say? He brings the sword, and He is against it. He is against everything that denies the absolute right of all men and all nations, and castes, and rulers, to God, and to the fellowship of their brother man. And there will be long conflict ere peace can be established. A peace based upon unfairness and injustice in thinking and attitude towards other nations is no peace, and cannot live or last.

The supreme passion of the Church of God must be for peace. We must mourn over all war. War in itself is contrary to the ultimate purpose of God. But, we must also remember the refrain of Isaiah, and the declaration of Jesus. "There is no peace... to the wicked." "I came not to send peace, but a sword." We must remember that the principle of peace is purity. To make peace with wrong, or to consent to be silent in the presence of the things that are wrong, is to destroy peace.

And yet, let the final word this morning be the personal word. What is the Prince of peace saying to thee, to thee, Oh heart of mine, Oh soul of mine? I feel as though it were almost impossible, and as though it would be almost an impertinence to ask in the case of any other man, and yet let every man ask it. What says the Prince of peace to thee, Oh heart of mine, Oh soul of mine? Does He draw the sword? Then He draws it against some evil thing in thy heart, in thy thinking, in thy outlook, in thy habits; and He will make no peace with it for the sake of ultimate peace. Then do not be at war with Him, but end the war by letting Him win, even though it mean the breaking down of the idol, and the wounding of the spirit; for out of that wounding there will come peace, God's great peace, which is first pure.

048 - Isaiah 28:20 - Short Beds and Narrow Coverings

Short Beds and Narrow Coverings

For the bed is shorter than that a man can stretch himself on it; and the covering narrower than that he can wrap himself in it.
Isaiah 28:20

This is the language of a fine satire. At this point the prophet, burning in anger, indulged in sarcasm. It was caustic and severe, but behind it throbbed the great heart of the man who was carrying the burden of his people's sin and attempting to lead them from the folly of their unbelief and rebellion back again to allegiance to God.

To understand this text in its final application and in its perpetual meaning, we must consider the context. The prophet was addressing a people who had been created as a people by God, a people who had been familiar from childhood with the law and with the testimony. He was addressing a people, moreover, who owed all their material prosperity to Him. Yet, he was speaking to a people whose life in its underlying impulses and its perpetual mode was the life of godlessness. The greatest difficulty confronting the prophet as he delivered his message was not the mere fact of the godlessness of the people, but that of the form this godlessness had taken. It was that of self-satisfied contempt for all that he had to say concerning the claim of God and God's methods in judgment. Intellectually, these men had not abandoned belief in God, but, practically, they had abandoned the truth concerning God. They still believed in Him, but they did not believe in His immediate government.

The whole story of the prophet Isaiah, as it is revealed to us in this one book, is that of a man who spoke to an inattentive age or to an age which, if attentive, mocked him and refused to obey his message, until, as the prophetic period drew to a close, he inquired in anguish, "Who hath believed our report? and to whom hath the arm of the Lord been revealed?"

In this twenty-eighth chapter we have a tremendous and terrific utterance concerning the judgment of God; and as we read it carefully, we discover the interruptions of the mocking rulers. We hear the contemptuous speech of the men who listened to him but declined to believe the things he said. The prophetic message is always that of the government of God. Occasionally this man—who was a man of heart and a man of tears, a man who understood the suffering of the Divine heart, and foretold more perfectly than any other prophet of the old economy how, in the fulness of time, the suffering of the Divine heart would have its expression in the suffering Servant of God—occasionally this man broke out into denunciation, fierce and terrible; announced that God is not only the God of mercy, but also a God of judgment, in the sense of vengeance and punishment of sin. Every now and then, this man of tears became a man of thunder; this man—whose heartbeat seems as though it reverberated through the centuries until it found its

perfect harmony with the heartbeat and the heartbreak of the Son of God—declared another side of the Divine nature; told men of God's "strange act" of judgment. Judgment as punishment is contrary to the Divine wish, but nevertheless part of the Divine will, that which God would never do, if man did not compel Him to the doing.

The answer of the men of that time is clearly brought out in the particular chapter in which our text occurs. These men taunted the prophet. A careful reading of the chapter shows that he repeated what they said. These are the words of the men who had heard his message, words uttered in regard to him, Isaiah; words that reveal their contempt for him: "Whom will he teach knowledge? and whom will he make to understand the message? them that are weaned from the milk, and drawn from the breasts?"

Then follows a revelation of what they objected to in his message, and the voice of their scorn is heard. They said, "For it is precept upon precept, precept upon precept; line upon line, line upon line; here a little, there a little."

If I may interpret the attitude of these men by the language of our own days, they said, "This kind of preaching is out of date! Whom is he trying to teach knowledge? Let him talk to children! This halting method, of precept upon precept, of line upon line, of here a little and there a little, is of no use."

"Whom will he teach knowledge?" says the advanced age! "Whom does he imagine he can convince?" says the intellectual giant, who may be a moral leper. So the men of his day contemned the prophet. Then he told them of judgment. He thundered of the Divine government. They said, "We are not afraid! We have made a covenant with death! We have entered into a covenant with hell." Then the passion of the prophet blazed, and he said to them, "...Behold, I lay in Zion for a foundation a stone, a tried stone, a precious corner stone, a sure foundation: he that believeth shall not make haste." There shall be no fever, no fret, no fear, for that man! But beyond that, what? The scourge is also coming; the hail shall beat, the whirling flood shall sweep across, and "your covenant with death shall be disannulled, and your agreement with hell shall not stand;..."

Then it was that he said: "For the bed is shorter than that a man can stretch himself on it; and the covering narrower than that he can wrap himself in it." In other words, I have told you of Divine government, I have announced the Divine judgment. You try to find rest by declaring that you have made an agreement with death, a covenant with hell. The bed is too short for you. You have never rested on it yet. The cold and biting windstorm will sweep upon you, and the covering will not keep you warm. You cannot rest on the beds you are making. You cannot hide in the covers in which you are attempting to wrap yourselves.

We are thus brought face to face with the principle that underlies the text. This age is very much like that age, but I am not proposing to make any wide application of this great message. I bring it down to its individual application, and I want to say two things, the first with all brevity, the second at greater length, and close with a return to the first.

The first thing I want to say is this: "Behold," said God through Isaiah, and says God to us today, "Behold, I lay in Zion for a foundation a stone, a tried stone, a precious corner stone, a sure foundation: he that believeth shall not make haste." That is the first thing. I say it briefly now. I will return to it in conclusion. The prophecy has become history. The prophetic foretelling has had its gracious and glorious fulfilment. Whereas the prophet spoke in the abstract of principles, at last in the fulness of time the abstract message was wrought out into concrete history, and there came to men God's Stone, a tried Stone, an elect, a precious; Stone. We know the connection between the New Testament and this message. We know how in the New Testament we read of that Stone, as He Himself spoke to men, "He that falleth on this stone shall be broken to pieces; but on whomsoever it shall fall, it will scatter him as dust." The message of the prophet has become the fact of history, and there is rest for the heart of man in Him Whom God set forth to be a Propitiation for our sin, and not for our sins only, but for the sins of the whole world. Wherever a man is weary of sin, weary of sorrow, weary of self; wherever a man is feeling the pressure of life, and attempting to realize his manhood and failing, thank God for the Stone laid in Zion, elect and precious. You need not wait for an after-meeting. Believe as I preach. Before I get to the end of my sermon, if some tired broken man or woman will but fall on that stone, it will break him, but break to remake, and he will find God's rest, God's covering; presently, when the storms break and judgment begins,

Bold shall he stand in that great day,
For who aught to his charge shall lay?
While by His blood absolved he is
From sin's tremendous curse and shame.

But now, if we are not resting there, where are we resting? Of all other rests than that I say, "The bed is shorter than that a man can stretch himself on it; and the covering narrower than that he can wrap himself in it." Unless we have found rest for our souls in Jesus, we have found no rest. Unless we have taken refuge in Him, we have no covering that hides us. The first half of the figure refers to a present experience. The second half of the figure refers to an experience that must come to every soul of us—the final day, the day of assize, the day of inquisition, the day of wrath. The rest is that which men are seeking now. The refuge is that which they will need when the hailstorm sweeps, and the Divine judgments are abroad. In Jesus we may have rest today, and refuge forever. Out of Him there is no rest today, and there will be no refuge in the great and awful day of God.

Let us take the first of these matters. There is no rest for any man save on that cornerstone built in Zion, and yet men seem to be resting. What do we mean by rest? In the underlying deeps of our consciousness we know that this life is not all. I am not now going to argue with the man who doubts that assertion. I pray for him, for probably no argument of mine can convince him. I speak now to the rank and file, to the great mass of human souls. We know that this life is not all. We are also profoundly conscious that whatever else we may do, we cannot stay the moving wheels of time. You may smile at my folly when I tell you that once as a boy I remember wanting an hour longer for recreation. Seeking to obtain it, I stopped the clock! God help you to see that you smile at the folly of every man who imagines he can pat back or delay the turning wheels of time. They bear us onward to a consummation. If we have fear in thinking of the end, then there is something wrong in our life. If, when a man speaks of death, you object, shall I tell you why? It is because sin is unforgiven. Christian men and women in the frailty of the flesh sometimes at the end shrink from death because of its mystery. Yet they look into the face of the rider on the pale horse, and with the dignity of an assured victory they say, "O death, where is thy victory? O death, where is thy sting?"

"The sting of death is sin." If we do not like the preacher to speak of death, it is because sin is not dealt with in our experience. We ought to look on toward the last day. Let us honestly face it. Presently these turning wheels will bring us to the end, to the margin of life, where burdens are laid down; will bring us to the confines, crossing over which, we go out into what has been spoken of as "that bourne from which no traveler returns." In view of that day, and in view of the fact of the spiritual nature of man, how are we resting? On what have we attempted to lay down our humanity, our soul, our personality, so that we are not affrighted when we think of the close?

I talk to men individually, and I find their answers to these questions are very different. One man says, I have no fear of God, or of the end, or the future, because my life has always been a moral life. That man is making a bed for himself of his own morality.

Another man says, I have no fear of the future, because I am a Christian by all the rites and ceremonies of Christianity, by all religious observances on the part of my parents, and on my own part. That man is making a bed of external religious observance.

I find another man who says, Well, ten years ago, fifteen years ago, twenty years ago, I yielded myself to Jesus Christ, and it is all right. That man is making a bed of worn-out experience.

I come to yet another man, and he says, I have no fear; God is a God of love, and God will never punish me, or let me suffer for my sin. That man is making a bed of a false doctrine of God, utterly unwarranted by the revelation which He has made of Himself to men.

Another man puts me aside when I attempt to speak to him, saying, Oh, don't talk to me. I know these things are important, but I have no time for them yet. That man is resting his soul on the unspoken conviction that there is time yet to be, when business will not press, and pleasure will not allure, and he will have inclination to deal with the things spiritual and eternal, and with God.

These are but samples. I say to you in the presence of every one of them, and of all similar ones, first, "The bed is shorter than that a man can stretch himself on it"; and, second, "The covering is narrower than that he can wrap himself in it." In other words, none of these things brings perfect rest to the soul of man; none of these things will be sufficient to enwrap and hide him in that awful day of wrath which must break forth against all wilful disobedience and rebellion and sin.

I say, in the first place, these things do not constitute beds on which men can rest. Take the man who says that he has no fear of God and of the future, because he has been a moral man. What is morality? Morality demands a standard. What is your standard? It would be ludicrous, if it were not tragic, to hear the answers that human beings will give to that inquiry. One man says, I have always paid my way; I have never defrauded anyone, or harmed anyone. These things are advanced as though they were of the essence of morality. We see at once what is the standard of that man's morality. It is the policeman. Here is a man in the image of God, with the very stamp and likeness of Divinity on his brow; and yet he talks as though everything that the universe can ask of him, and God Almighty demand of him, is that he escape the clutch of a human policeman, and that is supposed to be morality. Morality must have a standard, and the standard of true morality must come as a revelation from Him Who is God. He has given us a standard of morality. I do not choose for the moment to find it in the words of Jesus, simple and sublime and all inclusive as they are; I go back rather to the ten words written by the finger of God long ago for the government of human life, and I ask, Does our morality bear the test of that high standard? When men consent to measure their morality by that standard, they too often begin among the things of secondary importance. What is the first word, the fundamental word of morality. "Thou shalt have no other gods before Me." "Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind." That is morality. The man who is simply moral enough to escape imprisonment, moral enough to maintain the respect of the crowd of people that live around him, because he never harmed them, is immoral—unless his life is crowned with worship, unless he realizes the highest thing in his being as his soul goes out in love and adoration to the God of all.

And we know it. There are moments when the consciousness surges upon us. There are moments when the whispering of the other world rings through our souls, when an infinite light such as never was on land or sea flashes on our consciousness; somewhere in

the silence of the night, in the loneliness of the mountain; somewhere amid the more tragic loneliness of the crowded city, God breaks in upon our souls, and we think of the infinite distances, and spaces, and eternities, and tremble! Yes, the bed is too short for us to stretch on, and our souls find no rest on any morality in which we have made our boast.

Some there are who trust in religious observances. I find persons who say, I was baptized in my infancy; I was confirmed when I came to a certain age; I have regularly attended the sacrament; therefore I am a Christian. By no means therefore. To begin with, spiritual life is never generated by material action; the life of God is not communicated by the sprinkling of water, nor could be. It is a lie, of all lies the most dastardly, that tells a child that in baptism it was made the child of God and inheritor of the kingdom of heaven. We dare not, even at the risk of uttering things that sound controversial, consent to say nothing about that lie; for thousands of souls are being deluded by it; they are led to think of themselves as Christians, and yet the Christ-life has never touched them, and they are devoid of the love of God. The warrant of my assertion is not any formulated creed, but the Scriptures of truth, the revelation of God, in which it is said to men, not, Ye must be baptized into life by water, either more or less; but, "Ye must be born again." Any man who puts his trust in any ceremony such as this finds a bed on which he cannot stretch all his manhood, and finds, therefore, no perfect and positive rest.

I have known men and women who most surely on the day of confirmation were born again. Let us consider this. What did you promise on the day of confirmation? You took upon yourself vows that others, alas in their folly, had taken upon themselves for you long ago, and never fulfilled. You say that is a drastic statement. I challenge you to find me any godparent who ever fulfilled his vows. It cannot be done. I cannot do it for my own children, let alone the children of other people. But there came a day when you took these vows. What did you promise? You promised three things, in what you believed to be the presence of God's minister: you promised to renounce the world, the flesh, and the devil. Did you mean it? Did you do it? If so, that was repentance; and if in the doing of it, you yielded to Christ, then and there you were born again. But did you do it? Did you renounce the world? Did you renounce the flesh? Did you renounce the devil? If not, your bed is too short to stretch on. You cannot rest on a broken vow, can you? Instead of renouncing the flesh you have pampered and ministered to its constant, clamant cry. Instead of renouncing the devil, you have allowed the devil to lead you and drive you at his will. And yet you are a Christian, forsooth! No, a thousand times no! "For the bed is shorter than that a man can stretch himself on it." In the honest integrity of conviction, you know that on such a bed there is no rest; on such a false assumption there is no place for the soul's security.

But someone else will say, Ten years ago—fifteen, twenty—I gave myself to Christ, and I am all right. By no means necessarily so. The fact that Jesus saved me yesterday is in itself no use now. Unless I am able to link on to my past tense a present tense, then woe is me, for I am undone. The great apostle, writing his own biography in rapid sentences in the Philippian epistle, said, "...I count all things but loss..." That is what happened on the way to Damascus. Suppose that, having counted all things but dross, he had gone back and picked them up again and said they were precious; suppose sin had triumphed because he had gone back to the world and forsaken the things of Christ; suppose he had turned his back on the Christ and crucified Him afresh, and had counted the blood of the covenant an unholy thing, and done despite unto the spirit of grace, what then? Then, I tell you, his cleansing long years before would have been of no avail. But in that great chapter he said something else. "Yea, verily, and I count all things but loss..." The past is the present also. The attitude taken up long ago is maintained today. Jesus saved me on the Damascus road; Jesus saves me now.

I am afraid the Church of Jesus Christ is full of men and women who are living on a past experience; and they sing at rare or regular intervals, as their choice may be:

Where is the blessedness I had
When first I found the Lord?

Men and women sing that as though it were a sign of saintship. It is a sign that they have lost their saintship. The blessedness I had when first I found the Lord is with me yet; but it is greater, mightier, and flows as a river instead of a rivulet. That should be the language of the soul. The bed is shorter than that a man can stretch himself on it. There is no rest in a past profession that is not merged into a perpetual possession.

Once again. Here is the man who tells me that he is trusting God, that he is casting himself on God, that God is too good to punish him. Oh, man, God is too good to let you go unpunished! There are men who if they passed into heaven as they are would turn it into hell. God writes on the portal of His home, "There shall in no wise enter into it anything unclean, or he that maketh an abomination and a lie." God is so good that He will not let anything that works abomination into His dwelling-place and home. If we will not accept the conditions of His heaven, in love to heaven, in love to truth, in love to the well-being of multitudes, He must shut us out, He must visit on us the vials of His wrath, the punishment we have positively and deliberately chosen.

If you can persuade me that God will allow a man to sin until character becomes sin, and then let him, the impure, into the land of light, then you will persuade me that God is unkind with an unkindness that is tragic and awful. His wrath flames in the passion of His love. The punishment that He visits on the sinner is the necessary outcome of the infinite compassion of His heart. "Be not

deceived; God is not mocked; for whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap."

Let me turn to the last illustration I used. A man tells me that there is time enough yet, that he has no time yet, that he is postponing these things to a more convenient season, that business presses and pleasures allure, but that some day, in a little while, he will attend to his religion. Oh, how often the messengers of the Cross have had to speak of the fatuous folly of this position. Long before the Christian light had fallen on men, the philosopher said to his students, "Gentlemen, the supreme thing is that we be ready to die." One of their number said, "That is true, and I propose to be ready." Asked the teacher, "When do you propose to prepare?" "Just before I die," came the flippant answer. Then the old man said, "And now, sir, have you fixed the date of your dying? Do you know when it will be? Seeing that you may die within a moment, this is the time to prepare for dying."

I grant you that the soul cast on God in the last extremity is mercifully saved for Jesus' sake; but when is the hour of your last extremity? Moreover, how do you know that when the passing comes, all the intellect will not have lost its power to think? God's time is the perpetual Now! Now is the accepted time, now is the day of salvation! There is not a man really at rest who is postponing the decision of infinite and eternal and important things. The bed is shorter than that a man can stretch himself on it.

Let us remember that the thing on which we are trying to rest we shall need as a refuge in the day that is coming. How will our morality hide us from the searching eyes of Him Who judges, not the external action, but the internal character? How will our religious observance cover us if it have not produced in us religious life? Will a profession of the long ago hide us from the eyes of Him if it have not continued, and if our life have not harmonized with it in all its process? How will our affirmation of the love of God stand us as refuge when, in love, to save others from the contamination of our pollution, He hurls us into the darkling void? How will our excuse as to time avail us when He will remind us that the one supreme and first business of life is the adjustment of the soul to Himself?

But thank God for the message of the prophet, who, ere he satirized the men who thought they had made an agreement with death, uttered these words: "Behold, I lay in Zion for a foundation a stone, a tried stone, a precious corner stone of sure foundation: he that believeth shall not make haste." He who rests there shall have no restlessness. He who takes refuge there shall know nothing of the fitful fever of the man who attempts to wrap himself in a narrow covering. That resting place is long enough, and broad enough, and strong enough, to rest the weary soul and give it perfect peace.

Bold shall I stand in that great day

if I am arrayed in the robe that He brings to me, that righteousness of which Paul writes, which has been set forth as at the disposal of men by faith and unto faith.

Turn from your false rest, and come to the true; and you will find in God all that your soul is needing now, and all that it will need in the last unutterable day.

049 - Isaiah 33:14 - Dwellers in Fire

Dwellers in Fire

The sinners in Zion are afraid; trembling hath seized the godless ones: who among us can dwell with the devouring fire? Who among us can dwell with everlasting burnings?

Isaiah 33:14

This chapter is a graphic description of Divine deliverance wrought, and the text reveals the effect produced upon some in the delivered city as they gazed with wonder and astonishment at the judgment of that God who was their King. The hosts of Assyria had melted away, and yet of these hosts they had been afraid. It must have seemed to those within the city as though they would be utterly overcome by the great armies that lay encamped about the walls. It was of this occasion that Byron sang:

The Assyrian came down like a wolf on the fold,
And his cohorts were gleaming in purple and gold;
And the sheen of their spears was like stars on the sea;
When the blue wave rolls nightly on deep Galilee.

And yet, though Judah had struck no blow, but through her King and her prophet had waited upon God only, the vast hosts had been driven back, many of them escaping to Nineveh, many of them being left dead upon the field. As the men of Zion looked out at this wonderful work of God, and became conscious of how God wrought without human instrumentality when it so pleased Him, the sinners in Zion were afraid, and the godless inside the delivered city trembled and cried out in their anguish, "Who among us can dwell with the devouring fire? Who among us can dwell with everlasting burnings?" They had seen the fire at its work. They had seen the age-abiding burnings take hold of the enemies of God, until they became weak and were driven and consumed. Isaiah had

perpetually taught the truth of the presence of God as righteousness and as fire amongst men. That truth was demonstrated in the destruction of the hosts of Sennacherib. When in answer to prayer God delivered them they were impressed, not so much with the deliverance as with the method. As it proceeded in fiery judgment upon the foes outside, and the consciousness of God as fire came home to those within, they cried out in trembling and anguish: "Who among us can dwell with the devouring fire? Who among us can dwell with everlasting burnings?" Are we safe? May not that fire burn us ere the night fall upon us? May not that age-abiding burning scorch us as it has scorched the men outside? The question is a revelation of the dawning upon the consciousness of these men of the truth which Isaiah had attempted to teach them, that of the presence of God as devouring fire and as age-abiding burnings. This consciousness raised in their case, as it must ever raise in the case of men who arrive at it, an inquiry of the utmost importance. How can man live in fire without being burned or scorched?

Turning from the local coloring, coming at once from Jerusalem to London, from the bygone age to the age that now is, I propose to ask you first to consider with me in the light of the inquiry of the men of old the fact of the presence of God in human life as fire; and, secondly, I shall invite you to make the inquiry they made, "Who among us can dwell with the devouring fire?" and then to listen to the answer of the prophet which immediately follows.

First, let me speak to you of this vision of God as fire. I have already said that this was the burden of Isaiah's message. Certainly the great burden of his message was the immanence of God, the nearness of God. Isaiah, perhaps the mightiest of all the Hebrew prophets, the man of largest outlook and keenest insight, came to an age characterized by its practical godlessness. We know the history of Israel and Judah, and how terrible had been the forgetfulness of God. To these people Isaiah came, saying in effect, You forget God, but you do not escape God; though you put Him out of your thinking, and make no calculation upon His presence and will, He wraps you round about in every hour of your life. This man of far-seeing vision, as he looked on to consummation and deliverance and salvation, expressed the whole of it by one word—Emmanuel, God with us. He taught constantly the presence of God in human affairs, and that in the processes of the method of God there would be a mysterious moment in human history when God would be present in the form of a child. Whether he saw clearly all the issue of his teaching I am not prepared to say, but this was the underlying truth, the nearness of God and the impossibility of human escape from that nearness. Isaiah taught, moreover, the righteous character of God, and insisted that the uplifted throne was based upon righteousness and holiness and equity. He declared with scorching and biting scorn that their religious observances were of no value in the sight of heaven if in their own life they were not true and upright and righteous. He insisted first upon the immanence of God, and, secondly, upon His righteousness and His righteous requirements. Then he perpetually used fire as a symbol of the Divine presence and method. Go back to the opening of the prophecy, to chapter 6, in which he describes the wonderful way in which he was called to the work, when he saw the Lord high and lifted up, and His train filling the temple, and when there came out of his own anguish the cry that told of his sin and of the people's sin, "Woe is me! for I am undone; because I am a man of unclean lips, and I dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips." How was he prepared for his work? "Then flew one of the seraphim unto me, having a live coal in his hand... from off the altar; and he touched my mouth with it, and said, Lo, this hath touched thy lips; and thine iniquity is taken away and thy sin forgiven." God came to him as fire for purification, according to the figurative language of that chapter. Then coming to the end of the prophecy, in chapter 66, speaking of the coming of God in punishment, he says: "For behold, Jehovah will come with fire, and His chariots shall be like the whirlwind; to render His anger with fierceness, and His rebuke with flames of fire. For by fire will Jehovah execute judgment, and by His sword, upon all flesh." It is not Isaiah only who uses this figure of fire. All Scripture brings us back again and again to this symbolism. From beginning to end you will find that the presence of God is suggested under the figure of fire. When from the Garden of Eden man was excluded from intimate communion with God it was a flaming sword which was the symbol of that exclusion and of God's holiness. When God would reveal Himself to a man for the making of a nation it was in a bush which burned with fire and was not consumed. Then in the New Testament all truth about God is expressed in one remarkable sentence in the Epistle to the Hebrews: "Our God is a consuming fire." Or, if I think of Christ, the last prophecy foretelling His coming declared that "He is like a refiner's fire." Christ Himself used the same figure: "I have come to cast fire upon the earth." In the final book of the Bible, John, describing the glorious vision of this selfsame Christ, said: "His eyes were as a flame of fire." Or, if I come to the Holy Spirit of God, omitting all the incidental words concerning Him in the old economy, and taking up the simple story of His coming to initiate the era in the midst of which we live today, what was the symbol of His coming? Tongues of fire that sat upon the heads of the assembled company. I have but gathered these things together to show that this figure runs through the Word of God, teaching us certain truths concerning God Himself.

What, then, are we intended to learn by its use? What is fire? Fire is the evolution of light and heat by combustion. Those of you who perfectly understand what that means are welcome to the definition. I think I see enough of what it means to understand the use of this marvelous figure in the Word of God. In the New Testament, which is the final revelation, we have three definitions of God, which it is well to put together. "God is love." "God is light." "God is a consuming fire." The greatest of the three is not the first, nor the second, but the last, because it includes the other two. God is love and light, and therefore He is fire. The evolution of light and heat is fire. The combination in one mysterious personality of light and love is fire. Love is heat, passion. Light is illumination, principle. Combine the two and you have fire. "Our God is a consuming fire." Omit if you will the distinguishing word "consuming." It is used there because it is needed in the connection, but the great word stands, "God is fire." Whether He be consuming or not

depends entirely upon the condition of that which comes into contact with Him. Whether He be a devouring fire or an age-abiding burning depends entirely upon the condition of the person who comes into contact with Him. To put the whole thing superlatively, whether when a man is wrapped about with God he be in hell or heaven depends upon what the man is in himself. No man escapes God in hell. I need not say that no man escapes God in heaven. It is the One Presence which makes heaven and hell the presence of the God of fire, who is to certain people a devouring fire and to others an age-abiding burning. It is this combination in a personality of passion and principle acting upon each other, holding each other in true proportion, which blazes out into fire. If there were nothing but principle it would petrify itself into stone. Where there is principle—light, and passion—love, principle is suffused with passion and passion is held in check by principle, and there is fire. Not fire that needs feeding with any earthly fuel or else it die, but the eternal fire, the age-abiding fire, which fire is God Himself.

Take this symbolism of fire a little further. What shall we say of the presence of fire? It is everywhere. Scientists make use of the word "eremacausis," and believing with John Ruskin that it is well to translate such words into simpler words, I find that eremacausis means a slowly burning fire. There is in nature everywhere a slowly burning fire. There is fire in everything, there is no escape from it. We do not always see its flame, but it is always burning, and it is most beneficent. Without it nature could not renew itself, nature would be halted in its procession from season to season, and in its unfolding of new glory and beauty. Sometimes we speak of this in other words as the process of oxidation going forward everywhere. I pick up a piece of metal from the highway. It is rust covered. What is rust? Fire. I stand in autumn looking at the hillside clothed with trees, and I admire the beauty of the tints. But what is this? Fire. This is not poetry. This is not imagination. This is cold, scientific fact. The fires in nature flame out in autumn time. What are they doing? Devouring effete things—age-abiding fires thoroughly purging nature's floor, and making way for springtime and new harvests. These fires are destroying this building while we are in the midst of it, tearing it down, burning up the effete thing, making way for something yet to be. It is not idly that this great figure of fire is utilized all through Scripture as a symbol of God. God is in this and every age, in this and every place. He fills heaven with His presence. He wraps earth about by that selfsame presence. He is everywhere throughout the limitless and marvelous universe of which we know so little. There is no escape from Him. He is present as fire, as devouring, age-abiding fire. At this very moment all the men of this age and all the movements of this age, and all the thinking of this age are wrapped about with this fire, penetrated with this fire. I am not yet dealing with the effect it will produce upon us, but rather facing the fact of the presence of God everywhere, and the impossibility of escape from that presence.

I would like for one moment to change my tone and say that in this text there is the greatest comfort the soul of man can find. I never look at some vested interest rearing its lordly head and blighting with its breath the life of men without saying, Oh, thou foul monster, thou too art wrapped in the fires of God, and as the Assyrian host melted so shalt thou melt presently! It would be interesting to make application of that to all the nation and the outside world, but I am more anxious to make application to this audience. I am in the fire now. I am wrapped about with Deity, unable to lift my material hand save in Divine strength, unable to think a problem out save with heaven's own wisdom. I may prostitute the wisdom and the strength, but it is in God I live and move and have my being, and God is a fire.

One word more as to this symbolism of fire. If this is fire, and the presence of fire, what is its effect? It is penetrative, it is resistless. It is devouring or transmuting into permanence, according to the material that is put in it. There are things that fire makes not to be, so far as there can be an end of anything. There are things that fire makes stronger and mightier. There are certain things which, if flung into a furnace, lose their identity. There are other things which, when put into the furnace, lose dross, alloy, admixture, and flash with new brilliance and luster. The effect of fire is according to the material. To certain things fire is devouring, and the Hebrew word "devouring" is, literally, eating. We talk of rust eating, and it is a perfectly correct figure; it is the figure of this word. Who among us can dwell with fire which eats like rust? Who among us can bear the age-abiding burnings?

From these questions, then, as to the symbolism of fire we make these deductions: God, because He is love and light, is fire. He is everywhere, therefore all things and all men are already in the burning and ever-present fire. In its effect fire is devouring, or transmuting into permanence, and I would not pass from that statement without one word of personal application. God is destroying you or making you. God as a veritable fire is devouring you already, or is devouring that in you which would destroy you, in order that you yourself may not be destroyed. Everything depends upon what we are in ourselves. I am not dealing with how a change in personality may be effected which changes the relationship to fire. That is the Gospel, blessed be God! I am dealing with simple and abiding law. Those souls that have wandered into everlasting darkness, who have of their own deliberate choice turned their back upon the call of infinite mercy and of infinite law, are not without God, they are with Him, and the fire of their age-abiding devouring is the fire of the Divine presence. Draw me what graphic picture you will of the condition of the lost, it may be lurid, it may be medieval, according to the fastidiousness of this age, out of date, but no picture of the Middle Ages is half so dreadful as the fact of the soul abiding in God yet out of harmony with Him—destroyed by the fire that ought to have made it, because of deliberate and final choice on the part of that soul. Hell is begun here as heaven is begun here. I am not foolish enough to tell you that hell ends here any more than I am foolish enough to tell you that heaven ends here. Some men tell me that heaven is beyond but that hell is all here. Hell begins here; some of you are in it. Heaven begins here; some of us are in it. When we have done with this material frame we shall be where we choose here and now. Whether in hell or heaven, we shall have our being in God, and in God as fire. Whether to feel

forevermore the eating and devouring of that fire upon the thing that is unworthy, or to feel forevermore the burning of that fire to high and noble purpose and permanence, depends entirely upon what we are ourselves. How often this text has been preached from as though it refers to hell. So it does, but it also refers to heaven. The deepest thing in it is not a description of hell, but a tremendous announcement that God is fire. It is the cry of a heart conscious of sin, Who can dwell in this? Who can dwell in such burnings as this?

Now we turn to that inquiry. Take the simple word used in both cases. Who can dwell in the fire. Who can dwell in the burnings? You will find that the word "dwell" is used four times in this chapter. Twice in the chapter of my text, in verse 16: "He shall dwell on high," and in verse 24, "The people that dwell therein." The Hebrew word is not the same. There are here three Hebrew words with different shades of meaning. In verse 24 is a word which suggests sitting down in perfect rest in a certain place. In verse 16 the word signifies being at home. In my text it signifies to sojourn as a guest. The word used in the text itself has three distinct significations: to sojourn as a guest, to fly away, and sometimes conflict. I am by no means perfectly sure what these men meant when they used it. I am not sure that the use of this many-sided word is not indicative of the trembling fear in which they asked the question, as though they had said: See that fire outside, how it has destroyed the Assyrians. Who of us dare visit it, dare flee it, dare fight it? There is evidence of a lurking subconsciousness that that fire is where they are also, and a desire to be out of it. Who are the men who ask the question? Sinners, ungodly ones, and they say, Who can be the guest of fire and not be burned or scorched by the flame? What flame is it, O men of Jerusalem? Of what are you speaking? And I think I hear their answer. There has been a scorching fire; behold the Assyrians dead about our city. We are delivered, but, oh, what a blast has burned Assyria! Who of us can live in it? Whether they were consciously in it is not definitely told by the word they used, but they were conscious of its nearness. They felt the hot blast of the fire sweeping toward them and said, Who among us can dwell there? If there had been nothing but the question we should have gone away feeling that the symbolism of the test was that of judgment only. How wonderful is the answer of the prophet: "He that walketh righteously and speaketh uprightly." That is, he whose attitude toward God is what it ought to be. It is as though the prophet had said: I have told you that God is righteous, God is upright, God is fire. But you need not be afraid of the fire if you have God's character: "He that walketh righteously and speaketh uprightly." How shall I know whether that is my condition or not? And the prophet turns from the relationship to God to the relationship to man. "He that despiseth the gain of oppressions, that shaketh his hands from taking a bribe, that stoppeth his ears from hearing of blood, and shutteth his eyes from looking upon evil: he shall dwell on high." Isaiah uses a stronger word than they used. He says, If you are right with God you can be at home in fire. Then follows the most marvelous description of the absolute safety of the soul that is right with God. He gives the position, "he shall dwell on high"; and the defense, "his place of defense shall be munitions of rocks"; his sustenance, "his bread shall be given him; his waters shall be sure"; his hope, "thine eyes shall see the King in his beauty."

May I venture to translate this message of Isaiah into other words? Oh, soul of mine, art thou afraid in the presence of the truth that God is fire? If thou art afraid it is because of what thou art in thyself. God's fires never harm God's children. The man who partakes of God's character can live in God's fire. You may well fear fire if you are a sinner. You may well fear the burnings if your hands are full of bribes and there is blood in your garments. You may well fear the fire if you are unholy, unrighteous, but not if you are right with God. To use the magnificent and daring word of Peter, the man who himself partakes of "the Divine nature" can live in the fire of the Divine nature. Hell and heaven are one in atmosphere, and the atmosphere is a burning, blistering pain, or a shining, beautiful glory, according to what I am in myself. Nothing can live in fire but that which is of the nature of fire. Nothing can live in fire but that which will take hold of the fire and be unweakened thereby. Who is it that can dwell in everlasting burnings and be unafraid? He that walketh righteously and speaketh uprightly. He can dwell in the fire.

This is the great rock upon which faith fastens in the midst of toil. I may be speaking to some tonight who are greatly overburdened in their toil for God. Perhaps there are some worshipping with us who have come from the country, and down there in your village or town it seems as though God was being beaten, it looks as though the Assyrian must triumph over Judah. It is not so. God is in this age burning, burning, burning, and only that can remain which partakes of the fire nature, which answers the call of righteousness and becomes righteous. The mightiest foe cannot abide, God will burn it to destruction. Assyria is very proud. She spoils, though none has spoiled her. She deals treacherously, though none has dealt treacherously with her. For a time evil has a glamour and apparent glory about it. Take heart, and be at rest, oh, warrior of the King! The one thing that evil cannot do is lock its door against God. He wraps it about in the flame of His own being, and there is no evil house in London, no evil man or movement that is not already in this all-embracing fire. I thank God that my heart knows it. Then there is the other side of this great truth, which should give my heart pause tonight. Can I dwell with the fire? Can I dwell with the age-abiding burnings? Let me drop the figurative language of the prophet and ask, Am I right with God? That is the final question. If I am right with God then I can dwell with the fire. If not, I must still dwell in the fire, but the fire will blast me. Hell is an absolute necessity of morality. Deny me the fire of hell which burns the man who deliberately turns his back upon right, and by that denial you deny me the love of God, the love and light, from the commingling of which fire issues. Find me the man, the woman, the child, who is love-governed, and who walks in light, that is a son, a daughter of fire. Such can live in fire. Find me the man, the woman, hate-governed, and who loves darkness, such is stubble for burning. The very fire which purifies to perfection the son of fire consumes with age-abiding force the soul that is against God.

Oh, soul of mine, canst thou dwell in fire? I dare hardly ask you, so does the question press on me. Ask it of your own heart tonight. Having said with these men, Who can dwell in the fire? say, I am in the fire What will it do with me? Will this fire, from which I cannot escape, this fire so slowly burning that in my unutterable folly I think of it as some autumnal tint, when it is blasting devastation—will it finally devour or purify me?

Eternal Light! Eternal Light!
How pure the soul must be,
When, placed within Thy searching sight,
It shrinks not, but, with calm delight,
Can live, and look on Thee!
The spirits that surround Thy throne
May bear the burning bliss;
But that is surely theirs alone,
Since they have never, never known
A fallen world like this.
There is a way for man to rise
To that sublime abode;—
An offering and a sacrifice,
A Holy Spirit's energies,
An Advocate with God.

050 - Isaiah 40:3 - Preparing the Highway

Preparing the Highway

The voice of one that crieth, Prepare ye in the wilderness the way of the Lord, make straight in the desert a high way for our God.
Isaiah 40:3

These words are taken from the prologue to the second part of the prophecy of Isaiah. That prologue consists of the first eleven verses of chapter 40, and this chapter contains the keynote of the twenty-seven chapters here beginning and closing with the end of the book. The burden of this second part of the prophecy is comfort, and the comfort which was to be brought to the people of God in those olden days was to know that Jehovah was acting on behalf of His people. Nevertheless, there was a responsibility which they were called on to fulfil. That responsibility is revealed in the words of my text.

By bringing together the first verse of chapter 35, with which the earlier prophecy closes, and the charge of the text, light will be thrown on its meaning.

The wilderness and the solitary place shall be glad; and the desert shall rejoice, and blossom as the rose.

Prepare ye in the wilderness the way of the Lord, make straight in the desert a high way for our God.

The abiding principles revealed in the text and in all its context are these: first, that God never abandons man to the result of his own folly; second, that He interferes, arresting, changing, restoring; and, finally, that in His interference He always calls on man for cooperation.

In order that we may gain the present value of this Old Testament call let us examine carefully the scriptural applications of it, and apply this scriptural examination to our own circumstances and conditions.

The prophet heard a call, the voice of one that crieth, and this was the cry: "Prepare ye in the wilderness the way of the Lord, make straight in the desert a high way for our God." When we turn to the New Testament we find that each of the evangelists, Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John connected this prophetic utterance of Isaiah with the ministry of John the Baptist as the herald and forerunner of Our Lord Himself. Consequently, we have a double illustration of the real meaning of the text, and so are helped to apply it to ourselves.

In the twenty-seven chapters which constitute the second part of the prophecy there are three great movements. In chapters 40 to 48 the prophet was contrasting Jehovah with idols. We may summarize the contrast thus: that the difference between Jehovah and all other gods is just this: other gods men make and carry; Jehovah makes men and carries them. Having thus contrasted Jehovah and idols, beginning with chapter 49 and ending with chapter 57, there comes into view, first indistinctly, then gradually with a wonderful distinctness, a Person Who is the Servant of Jehovah. We see Him suffering and triumphing, the Person through Whom

Jehovah is to reveal Himself in His superiority to all idols. In chapters 58 to 66 the prophet again leads us along the line of contrast, contrasting faithful souls and hypocrites. The whole movement has to do with peace, the purpose of peace, God's Prince of peace, and the program of peace. Peace is seen ultimately established, not by the abandonment of any principle of truth or honor, but through battle and smoke and turmoil under the leadership of the great Prince of peace. The twofold preparation which the prophet pointed out as necessary for this activity of God through His Servant was, first, that people should turn from idols to Himself, and, second, that they should turn from hypocrisy to perfect confidence in Himself.

Then, as we come to the New Testament to consider the message of that wonderful man, the last of the long line of Hebrew prophets, again we discover three movements in his ministry which may thus be summarized. First, he came denouncing sin; second, he came announcing the near advent of the Messiah; finally, he came to present the Messiah to men in that statement: "Behold the Lamb of God, Which taketh away the sin of the world." When they asked him who he was himself, he answered that he was a voice, and uttered the words of the text.

The twofold preparation on which John the Baptist insisted may thus be described: repentance, a change of mind expressing itself in reformation, a change of conduct; and faith in the coming of One, expressing itself in following Him. He fulfilled his ministry when he indicated Jesus to his own disciples and sent them after Him, and when, at last, he said, "He must increase, I must decrease."

Now, the value of this glance at the old-time illustration and the illustration in the New Testament is that each reveals the fact that those who hear it can obey the call, and prepare a way in the wilderness for God, a high way in the desert along which God can travel. The accomplishment of the divine purpose is wrought out by God Himself, but He always asks for cooperation from men. In the ancient time the little remnant gathered round the prophet of the Theocracy is seen helping God's progress, making a high way, casting up a way in the wilderness and in the desert along which it was possible for God to move in order to accomplish His final purpose. In the case of the herald, the little group of disciples that gathered about him, loyal to his preaching in the midst of the corruption of the age in which he preached, constituted God's vantage ground. Out of their number the Messiah Himself at last selected His own disciples at the first, and so moved forward.

And if we follow through we find the principle obtaining in all subsequent history. The apostles of Jesus, hearing the call, obeyed and prepared a high way for God, and through their loyalty God moved forward to all the victories of the centuries.

In the dark ages in the history of the Church the cry went up again, and the Reformers heard it, and made a high way for God. Later on in the history of our own country, amid lasciviousness and frivolity and corruption, the Puritans in the Established Church, and the Independents outside it, constituted that little group of souls who felt the agony of the wilderness, and made therein a high way for God. A little more than a hundred years ago, when once again darkness had settled on the Church in this country of ours, the Holy Club at Oxford, so-called in uttermost contempt, in which were found the Wesleys, Whitefield, and other kindred spirits, constituted a remnant who in the dark wilderness made God's opportunity, who in the desolate desert cast up a high way for the triumphant march of Jehovah.

Now I come to that which of course is principally on my heart, the immediate application of the call of the text. We lift our eyes in the midst of worship and look out on the world. As we do so we see the world today in the throes of the most terrific and appalling upheaval that it has ever known. The measure in which our eyes have seen the vision of the glory of the divine ideals for humanity is the measure in which we are conscious of the tragedy of the hour in which we live. I go back again to this passage in Isaiah, and see in the 35th chapter a most glorious picture of restoration: "The wilderness and the solitary place shall be glad; and the desert shall rejoice, and blossom as the rose." If we reverse the picture contained in that whole chapter we find a picture of desolation, an exact picture of the circumstances in the midst of which we are living today.

But that is not all the outlook, that is not all the truth. That is not the highest truth or the deepest. So let us look again. What does the man of faith really see today when for a moment he resolutely climbs the mountain, and looks from the standpoint of his living fellowship with God?

First of all, he sees God. Ah! but that is the difficulty today. That is where we halt. Well, if you and I, living in the comparative quiet of this England today do not see God, the men in the trenches see Him, and the men who keep their long and lonely vigil on the high seas see Him. There is nothing more wonderful than the fact that letters are coming pouring in everywhere today from these men, who, in different ways, in different language, are telling the same great truth, that they are seeing big things and know it, that they are finding God as they never found Him before, and are being tremendously impressed with the reality of God.

But all the faithful see Him, and they see Him still in Himself as Love. God is Love. That fact has been forever made sure in human history by the Cross of Christ. That God is love never can be denied by all such souls as have really seen that Cross and have really come into fellowship with it in their own lives, and know its matchless power in the lives of other men. Therefore we know today that we must interpret circumstances by God, and not God by circumstances. The peril of the hour is that men and women of faith may be trying to account for God by the circumstances of affliction. It cannot be done. That is not the true outlook. The true method is

that of interpreting the circumstances by the fact of God. Under the shadow of the Cross of the world's Redeemer, in the presence of all that Cross has wrought in personal life and in history, we are compelled to look again at this dark hour from the standpoint of the abiding, unchanging certainty concerning God, that He is the God of love. When we begin to do that we find that we see God not only in Himself, but in His activity.

In Isaiah 63 the prophecy is of conflict. "Who is this that cometh from Edom with dyed garments from Bozrah?" The answer was given, and another question was asked. Why are thy garments red in their apparel; why is there blood on thy garments as thou swayest forward in the majesty of thy strength? Then came the great answer, "I have trodden the winepress alone." The figure is daring, illuminating, inclusive, final. Look at the treader of the winepress in those Eastern countries and see what he does. He presses the grapes so that their own lifeblood may be poured out, so that their own very nature shall be manifested. That is what God is doing today, pressing out the inwardness of things to manifestation in the sight of angels, in the sight of men, in the midst of human history. Nothing has happened yet in all this strife but that potentially, its inspirations lay within the human heart and the human mind ere the strife began. All the brutishness and godlessness lay like a smoldering fire under the veneered rottenness of a false culture, and all the strength and heroism of the faith that is prepared gladly to die in defense of honor and truth lay unrecognized as the inspiration of life before the war broke out. In this hour God is compelling humanity to express itself, and in all the terrific scenes in the midst of which we live God is treading out the winepress, compelling the inward things of human life to express themselves. He has not inspired the slaughter, He is not responsible for the iniquity of war. All the potentialities that have grown into experience have been generated within the heart of man. God always compels man to be outwardly what he is inwardly. He gave Judas the bag, knowing that he was a thief, which is a graphic, terrific illustration of an abiding principle, that God compels a man, a nation, a race, into circumstances in which they will manifest outwardly the true inwardness of their character. He is treading the winepress.

But the true man of vision climbs higher yet, and sees the issues resulting. Every valley shall be exalted, and every mountain and hill shall be made low; that is the ending of all inequality—valleys exalted, mountains made low. All the unevenness shall be made level and the rough places plain; that is the restoration of the highway that has been lost, over which ravenous beasts have been passing. Finally, is seen the divine Hegemony, the revelation of the divine glory, which all flesh shall see! God Himself is winning His victory, which ultimately is the victory of humanity as it marches out into the larger, grander, nobler life, a life to which it cannot come until the poison is pressed out in the winepress, until the forces of life have been poured out in the winepress. So God is seen, even today, not exiled, not indifferent, but active with the master impulse of infinite love to humanity; the hour of His vengeance is come, and that is the year of His redeemed.

Now we come back to the call of the text: "Prepare ye in the wilderness the way of the Lord, make straight in the desert a high way for our God." Observe that way is to be prepared in the wilderness, in the desert. It is in an hour of desolation that this work is to be done; it is through darkness that this toil must be endured. The results will be seen when presently the desert is blossoming with beauty, and the wilderness has become a cultivated way; but we are to do our work while it is still a wilderness, while it is yet a desert.

That brings us to the very practical question: How are we to prepare a way for God? What can we do? I say the question is practical. It is a large question. Yet sometimes the most practical and the largest questions may best be answered by the simplest forms of statement. Therefore, in two declarations, I want to give the way of preparation as I see it today. First, we have to prepare His way by standing for God with men; and, second, by acting with God for men. This is an hour in which the men of faith must stand for God with men, must stand for the sovereignty of God, for the absolute rights of God. Does that really need saying? Is it not so patent that there should be no need of saying it, certainly no need of argument? Yet, on the other hand, have we not been in grave danger of wandering from it? That old fundamental bedrock of Calvinist theology is the bedrock to which the Church must come back, the sovereignty of God. In this flippant and decadent age of ours, someone has positively written something about "If I were God"! The almost blasphemy of the suggestion! We have to take our stand anew today, for the final sovereignty of God, for the fact that there is no appeal from His decision, for the fact that whether it be a man or a society or a nation or a race, if either or all of these seek in any way to act apart from His law there is nothing for man or society or nation or race but irrevocable and irremediable ruin. That is a bedrock assumption to which we must get back from all those anemic interpretations of Deity which seem to think Him as merely some sentimental Being with Whom men can trifle and then escape. We must get back to the rock conception of God, and know that, whereas on that granite Rock a man or humanity may build eternal dwelling places, if man or humanity trifles with it, it will grind man and humanity to pieces.

I go further. The Church of God today will prepare a high way for God as she insists not merely on this fundamental fact of His Sovereignty, but on the revealed character of God. The Church is to insist on it that God is, as He has revealed Himself to be in the Word. The Church must lift her perpetual protest against any false conception of God. God is not Moloch, God is not Baal, God is not Mammon. God is God as He unveiled His grace and glory in the Person of Christ, terrific in His wrath, overwhelming in His compassion. The God of truth, the God of justice, the God of righteousness, the God of long-suffering and patience, the God Who will make compromise with evil under no circumstances, but the God Who will divest Himself of His dignities to die for a lost and

ruined humanity.

Included in this is the fact that today the Church must stand everywhere for the law of God as that law is laid down, for individual rectitude of life, a rectitude of life the Pattern of which has been given to the world in the humanity of Jesus, in all the interrelationships of humanity for the value of truth, the necessity for justice, the maintenance of honor, and loyalty to obligations.

Forevermore the Church must stand for the infinite mystery of the love of God, so that as she helps men to make their policies, as she sustains men in the hour of their strife, as she prepares men to live or die for righteousness, she must forever more instruct and inspire them with love as the central, final meaning of all life.

The Church is also called on to act for men with God. That means, first of all, that she is to lift holy hands in perpetual prayer. I wonder if we are ceasing to pray as the days go on, or are we praying more? When this war broke out meetings for public intercession were held here and there much more so than today. I have had correspondence recently on whether we are right, or whether something should not be done to bring the Christian people together for public intercession. I am not anxious for this, but I am anxious that the individual soul in holy fellowship with God shall never cease to pray. I am not anxious to assemble a crowd. I am anxious for the mystic fellowship of all the saints in all congregations in unwearied intercession on behalf of humanity. We are to act for men with God. Men will understand our activity presently when we go out and act for them in actual deeds. I am coming to that. But the Church's first business is prayer. So far as I have influence, so far as my message may reach, I would urge, not that men will waste time trying to get up a meeting, but that they get to business in private, that whenever their minds go to the fields of slaughter, to the suffering homes, to the rulers of the nations and their counselors, they give their thoughts wings and lift them Godward. So shall we prepare in the wilderness a high way for God.

Then, of course, there must be much more than that. We must act for men in the actuality of the strife, in all ministry on behalf of those who are sorrowing, in guiding all diplomacy the compass of the divine wisdom and the divine thought. This is an hour when prayer must have its expression in actual service. In proportion as all men and women of faith are realizing these things, and doing them, we shall prepare a high way for God.

In conclusion, let me say some things that are on my heart. Recently an interview with Benedict XV, the Pope of the Roman Church, appeared in our newspapers. He is reported to have declared that he stood for spiritual neutrality at this particular hour. I hasten to say that we have no right to judge any utterance of the Pope by newspaper reports. At the same time, when a man occupies that august and terrible position, any opinion to which he gives utterance demands attention. I notice that the Organ of the Vatican has said that in that report there are "various inexactitudes." I observe that Cardinal Bourne has said that in the report he discovered "much embroidery." I note also that Father Bernard Vaughan said, in his own more vigorous method, that the whole thing is "a wicked fake." Let us hope that it is so. I do not suppose that anything I say will influence the Pope any more than anything he says will influence me. Yet, because people are reading this report, and the mind of men has been moved by it, as the correspondence in the newspapers has revealed, I should like to say that the Pope has the means of definitely correcting the inexactitudes, removing the embroidery, exposing the fake. However, that is beyond the consideration of the present moment. The idea which shocks my soul is the idea of spiritual neutrality. I declare to you today that this is impossible. Because the Church of God is supernatural, she cannot be spiritually neutral. She must distinguish between right and wrong, she must distinguish between truth and a lie; and she must speak. The necessity for her distinguishing, and for her public speech today, is the greater because the rationalization of theology has issued in the destruction of the elementary moral sense in certain theological quarters. Perhaps it is so—I suppose it is so—that organized Christian testimony is impossible. Then let all individual Christians and those prophets who are responsible to God alone utter no uncertain sound today. Let it be declared, and insisted upon, that we stand, not first for our own nation, but first for the Kingship of God and for the Kingdom of God, and for all those things which are involved in the divine government of right and truth. Only as by our praying and by our toiling, and, if necessary, by our sacrifices, our tears, our suffering, we stand for the spiritual ideal are we helping. But as we stand for that ideal, in the wilderness the way of God will be prepared, and in the desert the high way will be flung up.

051 - Isaiah 43:7 - The Purpose of Life

The Purpose of Life

Every one that is called by My name, and whom I have created for My glory; I have formed him; yea, I have made him.

Isaiah 43:7

The first application of this text was to God's ancient people Israel. The whole message of which it forms a part was delivered to the chosen nation. The opening word of the text indicates the fact that the prophet was thinking, not so much of the whole nation as of the individuals who made up the nation. "Every one" is a distributive by use of which the thought passes to individual life, and the great purpose of its being. "Every one that is called by My name, and whom I have created for My glory; I have formed him; yea, I

have made him."

My purpose in taking this verse is not at all to deal with it in its application to the nation of Israel. Neither is it my purpose to deal with it in its application to individual members of that nation only. It is my purpose rather to take it as a revelation of the principle that has application in the case of every individual life; for while there are special ways in which Israel was indeed the chosen nation, and special ways in which the members of that nation were the chosen people of God, yet we must ever remember that all the things said concerning them, in their deepest intention, reveal the thought and intention of God for all men. I have taken this verse out of the ancient prophecy, then, because I conceive it to be a remarkable declaration of the real purpose of human life. "Every one that is called by My name, and whom I have created for My glory; I have formed him; yea, I have made him."

The whole burden of the message of the verse, and consequently the burden of the message I bring you tonight, may thus be expressed in briefest words, Man is created for the glory of God. The Bible makes clear to us that this is true, not only of the elect people, but of all humanity. The charge made by the prophet in the ancient days against the king of Babylon was couched in these remarkable terms, "The God in Whose hand thy breath is, hast thou not glorified." We should have charged neglect of his kingdom; with encouraging vice. He was guilty of all these things, but the spokesman of the eternal purpose and the mouthpiece of the Divine message to the profligate king said nothing of these manifestations. He at once struck at the root of the trouble, "The God in Whose hand thy breath is hast thou not glorified." It is equally evident that the principle has application to all men when we come to study the New Testament argument of salvation. Paul, in his letter to the Romans, having shown that the Gentile failed because he held down the truth in unrighteousness, and the Jew because he failed to be obedient to the revelation of God, sums up the whole situation in these striking words, intimately related to the thought suggested by my text, "All have sinned, and fall short of the glory of God." So whether it be the ancient Babylonish king, or whether it be humanity, both Jew and Gentile, the Bible declares that human failure consists in failure to glorify God. That brings us back to our text, with its simple central declaration, "whom I have created for My glory."

A right understanding for the purpose of human life will give us the true standard by which to measure our lives. That is the supreme difficulty, we so perpetually measure ourselves by wrong standards. When Robert Burns sang,

O wad some power the giftie gie us
To see ourselves as ithers see us,

he did not touch the deepest thing in human life. It would be a great advantage to us sometimes if we could see ourselves as others see us, but it would be a temporal and passing advantage. If we would find the supreme advantage we must see ourselves as God sees us. When Dr. Jowett was Master of Balliol, on one occasion at dinner a lady, desiring to draw from him some smart witticism, asked him, somewhat flippantly, "Tell us, Dr. Jowett, what do you really think of God?" His answer came quick and sharp: "Madam, it matters nothing what I think of God; it matters everything what God thinks of me." When we allow the Scriptures of Truth to do their work in our lives they always compel us to that judgment seat. We come to the standard of eternity, to the balances of the sanctuary, to the measurements of God.

The declaration of the text is supreme, "whom I have created for My glory." I call you then to quiet meditation on that declaration along two lines. First, man a creation of God; and secondly, man a creation of God, for Himself, and for His glory.

First, then, man a creation of God. In this one brief verse three words are employed to describe that creation. Whereas I am not going to detain you at any length, for detailed examination of them, suggestive as such examination would be, I cannot wholly pass them over. "I have created... I have formed... I have made." The Hebrew words living at the back of these three English words are as distinct as are the English, and more so; for we may interchange the English words, but we cannot interchange the Hebrew, each one having a separate emphasis and signification. The first word is the essential one, to which I draw your attention specially, "I have created." It is an all-inclusive word, which indicates actual causing to be, by the God of omnipotent power and wisdom. At your leisure you will read again the first chapter of Genesis, and you will find these words there used with great accuracy. The word translated "created" appears in that chapter three times only. The word translated "made" occurs over and over again. The word "created" is used only when there was evidently an entirely new beginning, a new departure. If you accept the evolutionary theory of creation you will remember that there are gaps that have never been filled; not a missing link, but many missing links. Three principal links are missing. There is the link between man and the highest form of life beneath him. There is the link between the animal life which is sentient and the vegetable life that lies beneath it. There is a missing link at the back of everything as to origination of the first fact in creation. At those points in your book of Genesis the word "created" occurs and nowhere else. "In the beginning God created," the primal activity of Deity. The word appears again between the vegetable and the animal kingdoms. It occurs again when man appears upon the scene. It is the essential word that indicates the original act of causing to be.

The second word in this particular verse, the word "formed," is a word which indicates a process. It is a word which is perpetually used of the potter at his work at the wheel. By manipulation of things already existing, a new thing is made to be.

The third word, "made," is a word which indicates the outlook on the result. I have made. I have accomplished. I have finished.

I cannot think that it is without signification that the prophet gathered up the three great words used to describe the making of anything when he spoke of what God does in the case of man. I have created him; the original essential thought was that of God, and the act by which the thought of God was realized was that of God. I have formed him; all the mysterious and hidden processes so full of interest and yet for ever baffling the ingenuity of man perfectly to discover are the processes of God. I have made him; when at last he stands upon the earth the completed being the finality of the work is of God.

To me in this great declaration of my text there is infinite comfort. Man in all his complex nature is a thought of God, a work of God. I look out upon nature everywhere, and see in the handiwork of man inventions and improvements, but there is no advance in man, save as man is developed; that is, save as that which already lies within him potentially is realized in the process of human history. All the culture of this age and of every age is simply the development into visibility of powers Divinely bestowed in the original creation of man. How wonderful are the thoughts of men. I see them expressed in architecture, in sculpture, in art, in poetry, in philosophy; but all these are broken lights of that essential thought of God which He wrought out when He made man. Some of you will remember how angry John Ruskin was with the railway train, with what vehement passion he denounced the monster that swept over the landscape and spoiled it. I plead guilty, if guilty be the word to use, to being a disciple of John Ruskin. I owe more than I can tell to his writings, but I never could follow him in that vehement denunciation of the railway train. I stand upon an eminence, and looking out over the landscape see the fields of exquisite green, or, as Ruskin says, the ploughed field which sweeps up the hillside in folds of russet velvet; and as I look a railway train comes thundering across the country. Then I am always inclined to worship the man that made the train, because of the ingenuity that is revealed in it, the wonderful and determined mastership of nature that laughs at mileage and acres, and moves swiftly to its destination. I see in the train, not the smoke, that is a process and will be consumed presently, but rather the power of humanity manifesting itself. Everything that has come from the thinking and planning and working of man is the result of the creation of God. Man is God's thought, and God's creation, and in himself is infinitely more than all his work. Humanity is the creation of God, the crowning creation, the last fact in the wonderful process of creative power. Every human being stands upon that final eminence, and the greatness of man is but evidence of the greatness of God. Man is of Divine creation.

Man is not only of Divine creation in that broadest sense. Every man is a Divine creation. There is an old saying which is used about some outstanding man. I have heard it used on this side of the Atlantic of Oliver Cromwell, and on the other side of Abraham Lincoln. God made Oliver Cromwell and broke the mold; God made Abraham Lincoln and broke the mold. I have no quarrel with the statement. I have a perpetual quarrel with the suggestion. What is the suggestion? That God occasionally makes some remarkable man and breaks the mold, that there may be no repetition. He breaks the mold after He has made every man! Every man is a lonely individuality, a special thought of God, incarnate. When Jesus stood before Pilate, and Pilate challenged Him as to Kingship and as to truth, Christ said, "To this end have I been born, and to this end am I come into the world, that I should bear witness unto the truth." It was a great declaration of conscious individuality, potentiality, responsibility. Every man can say the same in some measure. The trouble is we do not all find out for what we were born and for what purpose we came into the world. In the great economy of God, in the wondrous, matchless marvel of His government it is true of every human being, "whom I have created for My glory."

But it is not only that man is Divine creation; according to the teaching of this book He is a Divine expression, made in the image of God. Perfect personality can only be postulated of God Himself, and that personality is limited in man. Whatever you think of personality, you are thinking finally of the infinite, eternal personality in God. Force, mind, heart, will. Are these elements that constitute personality in man? They are all shadows of the things that constitute the personality of Deity. Man is distinct from all lower creation in this, and herein lies his dignity, that in some way, which perhaps he never perfectly understands, he is kin of God; in His image, made with His likeness, an outworking into visibility of the essential facts concerning God Himself.

Because of these things man is the one link between the material and the spiritual. He is the point in which all lower forms of life touch the highest and become familiar with it. He is the point at which all the highest forms of existence touch the lower, and make them flash and flame with beauty. I pass over all this world and I see everywhere life in creation, but it never becomes spiritual until I see it in man. There is never recognition of the infinite and the eternal until I come to man. I think there is profound significance in the discovery of the opening declarations of John's gospel, where the mystic writer says of the incarnation of the Word, "In Him was life; and the life was the light of men." You cannot say that of anything lower in the scale of creation. You can say "In him was life" of every blade of grass, of every daisy that decks the sod, of every bird that poises in air its wing, and sings the song of seraphim; but you cannot say "the life was light" until you come to man. All else was created by God; but when creation reached man man turned round and looked into the face of God and knew Him. Light flamed with the coming of man. In him the lower orders of creation reach light, and finality. In man earth has traffic with heaven. In man heaven stoops down to earth and makes it beautiful. This is true of every man. Created by God. An expression of God. A link between the material and the spiritual worlds.

Now pass to the second of these thoughts. For what is such a being made? I have created him, said Jehovah by the mouth of

Isaiah, for My glory. Here my difficulty begins. I know this is the ancient phraseology of the Church. We are all familiar with it, but how shall we say it so that the declaration may startle us into attention and change the whole order and current of our lives? It ought so to do, and will so do, if we can but hear it as we ought to hear it. Allow me a moment or two with the background of negation. What is the purpose of human life? There is the day of birth, and out there somewhere is the day of death, and these are but human terms, the full meaning of which none of us fully understands. The beginning and the end. What is the real meaning of the interim, of all that which lies between the wail of birth, and the darkness of death? What is the real meaning of human life, its true purpose? I will mention some things to you. The amassing of wealth, the acquisition of knowledge, the pursuit of pleasure. I mention these things only to dismiss them. You have already dismissed them. The deepest in you has said at once, No, it cannot be that a man Divinely created, himself an expression of Deity, a link between the material and the spiritual worlds, has as the purpose of his existence such things as these. Let them be dismissed. I will not stay to argue them for a moment.

Once again. Think of the day of birth. Think of the day of death. Tell me what is the purpose of the life that lies between? Is it the salvation of the soul? Certainly not. That is but the initial activity enabling a man to fulfil the purpose of his being. Is it then sympathy with sorrow? Assuredly not. The day will come—it seems slow in coming but it will come—when God shall wipe away all tears from men's eyes, and sorrow—listen, this is not my imagination, this is inspiration—"sorrow and sighing shall flee away," like black plumaged birds, never to return. Then is the purpose of life the service of humanity? No, that does not touch the deepest. That may be a method by which man today will fulfil the purpose of his being, but there is a profounder answer.

What, then, is the real meaning of this strange, complex, and marvelous life of mine; creation of God, expression of God, in itself a link between dust and Deity, between the material and the spiritual? I go back to the ancient prophecy. "Whom I have created for My glory." Allow me to illuminate that declaration by the revelation of the Bible generally, without referring to any particular passage. Man is created first for the knowledge of God. Man is created secondly for communion with God. Man is created thirdly for action with God. Man is created finally for revelation of God.

Man is created first for knowledge of God. There is given to man a consciousness of God which no other being has. The light of the uncreated beam is focussed in the lens of a human spirit. Zophar, in the olden days, said, "Canst thou by searching find out God?" and the answer intended, and the accurate answer, is, By no means. Yet man can know God, although he cannot know Him absolutely and perfectly, just as a man cannot encompass in his thinking eternity. Although eternity as a thought baffles the proud intellect of man, a man can know it. The moment in which a man knows the limitlessness of space he knows that he cannot know it; but in knowing that he cannot know it if he knows it. The moment a man encompasses in his mind the thought of unending duration he knows he cannot know all the meaning of it; but knowing that he cannot know it is to be sure of it, and so to know it. No dog thinks of eternity. No lower form of life thinks of unending space. No other created being can know God, but man is made to know Him. This is the first way in which man glorifies God, by coming to know Him. To this bear witness the words of Jesus Himself, so full of meaning. "This is age-abiding life, that they should know Thee, the only true God, and Him Whom Thou didst send."

Man is made not merely for the knowledge of God but also for fellowship with God, communion with God. In every man there is a desire, and capacity to listen to the voice of God. In every human being there is the possibility of sympathy in thought and feeling with God. It is sadly lacking in all of us, even in the best; yet there is no man or woman in London but is capable of communion with God; no man or woman but that can desire and cry out after the living God. Where that listening and that crying out and that desire are instructed and directed and obeyed, then God is to be found and known, and communed with. If my assertion is not enough, then in this sanctuary tonight there are hundreds of witnesses who still hear the voice saying amid the city's din and bustle, "This is the way, walk ye in it." For this communion man is made.

All of these are but preliminary and fundamental things. Not merely for knowledge of God and communion with God man is made, but also for co-operation with God. What was it in the beginning? Go, dig this garden and keep it. When the first man began his delving and his digging, his watching and his cultivation, until there came first the blade, then the ear, then the full corn in the ear; first the sapling, then the tree, then the verdure garments, and then the fruit, what was he doing? Working with God. He was partner with God. When the last man delved in your garden, and put in those russet bulbs that had no form or comeliness that you should desire them, and waited and watched until the spring time came and kissed the ground, and out of the russet bulb came the glorious flower, that man worked with God. Cooperation with God is the law of human life, and for that man was created.

I come from Eden and look at the second man, the last Adam.

The whole story of how He glorified God is told in His own words, "My Father worketh hitherto, and I work." Cooperation with God in His case was Redemption and Renewal; gathering the thorns out of the garden and bathing them in His blood that the curse might be removed. It is a metaphor, a figure of speech, but the infinite fact behind is far finer than the figure can ever suggest. The Church in so far as she fulfils the Divine ideal, to use the apostle's words of all its members, is composed of "workers together with God." Today saintly men and women are in co-operation with God, and presently in those dim and purple distances of the ages to come the ransomed will co-operate with God, for through the Church the kindness of God is to be manifest, and to the principalities and

powers in heavenly places is to be made known by them the wisdom of God.

So that man finally fulfils the purpose of his being by such activity with God as results in the revelation of God. Angels desire to look into these things; they bend over, peer into, watch with intense interest the whole process and progress of man. Why? Because, according to that great Pauline teaching, the angels are learning God through His manifestation in humanity as they cannot learn Him anywhere else. Man reveals to man the truth of God, as in the Fatherhood of God he realizes the brotherhood of man. Devils are learning through human history God's righteousness and God's power, and the ultimate doom of evil. For co-operation with God man is made.

Thus man fulfils the purpose of his being. Every man who is living for any lower thing than to glorify God is prostituting God-given powers. It is an ugly word. It is a word that is hardly used in polite society. Yet I pray you remember there is a prostitution as vile as the sin we shudder at; which yet, alas, man seldom trembles at the thought of. It is the prostitution of human life to anything lower than the glory of God. Do I take these hours, these days; these powers, this thought, this mind, this spirit, and use them for any other purpose ultimately than to glorify God? That is prostitution.

Sin is just that, wilful, chosen failure to seek the glory of God. That was the meaning of the word of Jesus when He said concerning Nicodemus, and through him concerning every man, "Ye must be born anew." That was the meaning of Paul when he wrote, "Ye have put off the old man with his doings, and have put on the new man, which is being renewed unto knowledge after the image of Him that created him."

Now I have done; and you will begin. In the light of this consideration, what about our life? God requireth that which is past. Where is it? What of the years that have gone? Yonder the day of birth, I can name it, and date it, and fix it. Somewhere is the day of dissolution. I cannot name it. I cannot date it. I cannot fix it. All these years since then till now have gone. What have I done with them? No such question can be asked, and honestly answered without our having to confess, "We have sinned, and fall short of the glory of God." Yet it is to those who have so sinned, and so come short of the glory of God that He sent His Son. "The Son of man came to seek and to save that which was lost." Here tonight in actual and spiritual presence is that selfsame Saviour. One of the words of my text is the word "formed," the word which I reminded you indicates the activity of the potter. Take that word and let me finish with it. Take that word as I find it in this same Bible. The vessel that the potter formed is marred, spoiled, ruined in the hand of the potter, but He will make it again another vessel.

See how you have failed. See how you have groveled in the dust. See how when the golden crown was held over your head, like the man with the muckrake you sought the satisfaction of the glitter of a straw. Behind you are the years the cankerworm hath eaten. The promise is that "He will restore the years that the cankerworm hath eaten." The promise is that "He will make it again another vessel." All He asks is that you will understand another great declaration of this chapter, "I am Jehovah; and beside Me there is no Saviour." Let us come to Him as a Saviour and we shall find Him full of pity, full of power. The past may be forgiven and we may yet live to His glory.

052 - Isaiah 46:13 - Salvation in Zion

Salvation in Zion

I will place salvation in Zion.

Isaiah 46:13

The forty-sixth and forty-seventh chapters of the prophecy of Isaiah constitute a complete message in themselves. The forty-sixth has to do with God's determination to destroy Babylon; the forty-seventh describes that destruction.

The reading of the forty-sixth chapter brings before the mind a condition of affairs that might almost be described as chaotic.

The city of God was in ruins; the people of God were scattered; the nation, peculiar to God for the fulfilment of His purpose in the world, was represented by the feeblest remnant. The chosen people of God are seen by the prophet, under the dominion of Babylon. Then the mind of Isaiah, illumined by the Spirit, sees a Deliverer—how far or how near perhaps he himself could not have told—and in the wake of that Deliverer Babylon destroyed, and the people of God restored to the fulfilment of the Divine purpose. In delivering this message, the prophet instituted a contrast between Babylon and Zion; between the city of God and the city of men; between all that man is able to do without God, and all that God is able to do in spite of man. It is a contrast between idols and God; a contrast between the gods of Babylon, "Bel boweth down, Nebo stoopeth," and the God of the chosen people, Jehovah. The contrast may be crystallized in two very brief declarations; idols are created and carried; Jehovah creates and carries. That is forevermore the difference between false and true religion, the difference between all idolatry and the worship of God, the difference between Babylon and Zion, between good and evil, between right and wrong. So that the contrast in this chapter, being peculiarly a contrast between religions, the conception of the prophet most evidently is, that what a nation is, depends upon the religion of the

nation. Babylon has worshipped idols. Zion is the center of the worship of Jehovah. Idol worship means that men make idols and then have to carry them. They make them, carry them, and put them down; and they stay where they are placed, they cannot move. Their makers cry to them, but they cannot answer. When they move, it is because they are carried. In contrast, God creates, and whatever He creates He carries. Babylon makes an idol, and puts it down. It never moves. Jehovah makes a man, and carries the man; and if the man have vision and wisdom he worships Jehovah.

Of idolatrous Babylon, Isaiah saw the destruction. It was the vision of faith. Had we been there, with any other than the prophetic outlook, listening to any other voice than the voice of faith perpetually singing its song in the heart, we should have said that idolatry was strong and true religion weak. Behold Babylon, mighty Babylon; wealthy, equal to the conquest of the world; Babylon with its splendour and its pride! Behold Zion in ruins; her sons languishing, all her wealth gone, her power departed! But faith sees neither Babylon nor Zion pre-eminently; but the idols and Jehovah. Faith knows that the conflict is not between Babylon and Zion, but between idols and Jehovah. Faith foretells the downfall of Babylon, and does so in an age when no one will believe the message save those who live by faith, and by faith see Him Who is invisible, and so are able to sing the song of ultimate triumph long ere the crash of battle commence.

The last word in the great movement which declares that Jehovah is determined upon the destruction of Babylon is the word of my text, "I will place salvation in Zion."

There are three lines of thought suggested for our consideration in this text. The great ideal is first suggested; salvation in Zion. Then the fact of failure is recognized; Zion without salvation. Finally, the prophetic word of promise declares that Zion shall be restored to the fulfilment of ideal, "I will place salvation in Zion."

The great ideal; "Salvation in Zion." For the interpretation of this phrase, the fulness and finality of the whole Bible is needed. Two antagonistic principles are discovered in the history of humanity as revealed in the Scriptures of truth. Whereas in our study of the Bible, we discover remarkable differences as between the old economy and the new, there are great underlying, unifying principles running from Genesis to Revelation. I am not going to deal at length with that principle of antagonism to faith which is represented by Babylon, but will state it in a few brief sentences. Babylon is first manifest as a confederacy without God in the history of Babel. From that moment throughout the whole of the Scriptures, whether Babylon be an actual city with an actual king, or whether the actual has passed and the principle of Babylon which is human confederacy without God alone remains, Babylon is against Zion. In the final book of the Bible, among the visions of the Seer of Patmos, we see at last the Lamb enthroned on Zion's hill, and immediately there follows the song of the multitudes "Fallen, fallen is Babylon the great."

Let us now restrict our examination to the other principle, and taking out of our text the two words "Zion" and "Salvation" attempt to see what they suggest.

When we read the Old Testament, the word Zion seems to thrill to the tireless music of a psalm. Zion is the synonym for everything of which the Hebrew thought with pride, with satisfaction, with gladness, and with rejoicing. What does Zion mean? That is a question that has not often been asked. We are so familiar with all that Zion stands for symbolically that we have been slow to inquire into the real meaning of the word. It means desert. That in itself is a suggestive fact. We find the first historic reference to Zion in the Book of Samuel, when after all Israel had made David king at Hebron, he captured Zion from the Jebusites. This Zion was a rocky fastness, devoid of verdure, in the center of verdant and glorious hills, so that presently men will say "As the mountains are round about Jerusalem, so is the Lord round about them that fear Him;" but itself was desert. A city had been built upon it long ere David captured it, and being a rocky fastness it was considered impregnable. When the Hebrews sang of Zion they never thought of the desert. The Hebrews associated with the name great essential values, and principles, and aspirations.

With the degeneration of the instrument through which God intended testimony concerning Himself to be borne to the world, the conception of Zion itself degenerated also, and men thought of it only from the civic standpoint, the national standpoint, the patriotic standpoint. These are all secondary things. A devout Hebrew who knew the secret mystery of his own life, and who lived in true consciousness of his relationship to Jehovah, sang of Zion and thought of Zion, as the place of Divine founding; the place of Divine dwelling; the place of Divine revealing. Zion for the Hebrew was the synonym of the Divine presence, the Divine government, the Divine unveiling; and the thought that came to the heart of the Hebrew when turning from those central verities to consider his own relationship to Zion was always the thought of the other word in my text, salvation.

Let us then inquire the meaning of this great word. The particular word, here translated "salvation," is somewhat rare in the Old Testament. The root significance is that of freedom. The idea here is that of safety based upon freedom. Zion was the home of the free; because it was the dwelling place of God, it was the place where bondage could not continue. Zion, the place of Divine dwelling and Divine revealing and Divine government, was the place of human security, and human realization, and human happiness. The captive exiles sang of Zion, and sighed for Zion, because Zion was the dwelling place of the great King, and consequently the place of the perfect Kingdom. Zion and salvation to the thinking of the Hebrew were always closely associated.

I turn from these Old Testament Scriptures to those of the New. Zion is first mentioned in Matthew, and finally in Revelation. In Matthew, it is mentioned by the citation of Hebrew prophecy, "Tell ye the daughter of Zion, Behold thy King cometh unto thee, Meek, and riding upon an ass, And upon a colt the foal of an ass."

The word occurs again in John's record of the same event; so that in the gospel stories, the thought of Zion is maintained in relation to the King Who came to establish the Divine order and bring in the Kingdom of God. When Paul was writing his great letter to the Romans he also quoted from the ancient prophecy and showed that the spiritual ideal was to be fulfilled in the Christian Church. The writer of the letter to the Hebrews, writing to the Hebrew Christians, tells them "Ye are come unto mount Zion, and unto the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem." When Peter was writing to those of the dispersion in Bithynia and elsewhere, he told them that God had already laid in Zion a chief cornerstone, elect, precious, and that the preciousness of the cornerstone is made over to all such as believe in Him; and so the spiritual house is being built, the spiritual city is being constructed; the principles of the Divine government are being established in the world. We come at last to the Book of Revelation, and in chapter fourteen, we read these words, "I saw, and behold, the Lamb standing on Mount Zion, and with Him a hundred and forty and four thousand, having His name, and the name of His Father, written on their foreheads." That is the ultimate fulfilment of the Hebrew purpose and ideal; and closely associated with it is the declaration "Fallen, fallen is Babylon the great, which hath made all the nations to drink of the wine of the wrath of her fornication."

What then is the ideal suggested by this text? Let the local colouring fade. Let the immediate application of the ancient prophecy be forgotten, and the economy of God concerning Israel be out of sight. The principle revealed as a great ideal is that of the establishment of the Divine order in the world; Zion instead of Babylon. Babylon, the city and the life of godlessness. Zion the city and the life of godliness. All the prophetic writers and all the prophetic singers in the Old and New saw the ultimate victory, the victory of Zion over Babylon, of Jehovah over idols, of that religion which consists in worship of the One Who creates and carries, over that religion which consists in the creating of idols which men have to carry, and carry until overburdened by their weight they stoop to dust and destruction.

The startling recognition of the text is that it infers disassociation between Zion and salvation. It reveals the fact that there may be Zion without salvation. It suggests that the city may remain ostensibly the city of God, and yet not be a city of salvation. Is not that the story of all the trouble with which the prophets had to deal? Was not that the actual, local condition of affairs in the midst of which Isaiah and all those great Hebrew prophets exercised their ministry? Zion without salvation; the city of God, without God; the place of the Divine revelation, but no revelation; the center from which the law is to proceed for the benefit of the world, but no law proceeding from the center, the temple of worship with all its rites and ceremonies, but no worship; or in the words of the New Testament, form without power. That is the tragic side of the picture presented; the purpose of God, thwarted, prevented, hindered, unrealized. Zion, beautiful for situation, the joy of the whole earth, the city of the great King, the place to which captive eyes look with longing, the place to which the remnant of captives did return; but Zion without salvation, Zion, mark it well, under the yoke of Babylon, Zion mastered by forces which were antagonistic to Zion. That is the appalling picture. That is the condition of affairs in the midst of which the prophet exercised his ministry.

That is the perpetual peril of Zion, of the people of God, of those who name His name, bear His sign, profess His doctrines, claim to be His peculiar people; Zion without salvation, Zion under the yoke of Babylon; Zion, that ought to be against Babylon, preventing its victory, breaking its power; under Babylon's yoke, mastered by Babylon. That is the tragedy of the text. How comes it that Zion is mastered by Babylon? By the introduction of idols! How came the introduction of idols to Zion? By forgetfulness of God. Zion has made for herself idols, and Zion has had to carry the idols she has made, and Zion has been bent and bowed beneath the weight of her own idols. That was a subtle form of idolatry when Israel made the golden calf. What was the golden calf? Read the story carefully and you will find it was a representation of God, for when they made the golden calf they did not ostensibly turn away from the worship of Jehovah. They worshipped God as they sang and danced around the calf. They made the calf to represent God. The golden calf was one of the ancient symbols of religion; the cherubim, the ox for service! Had you talked to the leaders who in the absence of Moses made the golden calf, they would have said, We are not turning from God, we are making something that will help us to worship God. That is idolatry on the part of the people of God. So surely as they make a likeness of God, presently they will worship the likeness and forget God. That is why God forbade the making of any likeness of Himself in order that men should worship. We are far away from the wilderness today, far away from the golden calf, far away in this assembly from image worship in any form, and yet idolatry abides in the Church of God today. The idolatry of the Church of God is seen in her mastery by Babylon, and in her weakness in every hour of stress and strain and strife. Her inability to interpret the will of God, the law of God, and to insist upon it in the world, is born of her complicity with Babylon, and that in turn results from the fact that she has put between herself and God rites, or ceremonies, or priests, or preachers. By such creation of false intermediation as between the soul and God, Zion bends to idolatry; and when Zion bends to idolatry, Babylon with her wealth and her pollution and her godless strength places upon the neck of Zion a yoke, and Zion has lost her power and lost her testimony.

There can be nothing more tragic than Zion without salvation, than the Church of God without the dynamic that makes men free,

without the authority that interprets morality in the terms of the eternal, without the voice to which the world is compelled to listen. Zion captured by Babylon is the tragedy of all tragedies. That is the picture of the conditions to which this man delivered his message.

Now finally, hear the word of Jehovah, "I will place salvation in Zion." The ultimate victory of Zion will not be Zion's victory, but Jehovah's victory. Zion will come again to the place of power and testimony and witness through restoration, but the restoration will be wrought by God, "I will bring my righteousness near." Zion had her responsibility and it is clearly indicated. It consists first in a recognition of the difference between the idols and God. Remember that when you make your idol, you must carry your idol, and it becomes your burden. Remember, God made you and still carries you. Break down your idol and cease its worship, and worship the God Who makes and the God Who carries. Refuse to bend the knee to any other than God. Bend the knee to God, make His will supreme, His government the one and only law. Let the Church of God have done with the worship of the golden calf. Let the Church of God have done with her worship of her own rites and ceremonies. Let the Church of God have done admiring her own magnificent organizations. Let the Church embody the principles of Zion, and faith, and return to Jehovah, make His will supreme in all the affairs of her own service, and in all the affairs of the lives of her own people; let her remember and let her return, and then "I will place salvation in Zion." He will make the Church a city of free men, for bondage to God is freedom from all other bondage. The neck bent to His yoke is the most erect in the presence of every other form of tyranny. The man wholly submitted to Jehovah is the man who is master of lust and passion and the alluring forces of the world which only win a man, for his destruction. It is the bondsman of God who is the free man in the world. That is the whole principle of Zion in a sentence.

From this consideration, we gather this application and these lessons. Anything in place of God, or anything that puts God at a distance, is idolatry. When we put something between the soul and God we at once become burden bearers. If our religion is something as between ourselves and God, though our creed be perfectly orthodox as to God, then are we idolaters.

How shall we know? We shall know by our relation to our religion. Let me put a question with all practical force. Are you carrying your religion, or does your religion carry you? That is the test question. There are men and women in this house tonight who are carried by God. They read the great word I read in your hearing, and they understand it, they know it. It is not poetry to them. It is poetry, but it is infinitely more, "I will bear; yea; I will carry." There are men here who, presently, will pass away from the sanctuary, the day's worship done they will take a night's rest, and tomorrow morning will settle back again into the work of the shop, the office, the hospital, and all the way will feel the lift and lilt of their religion. Those are the men who belong to Zion.

There are other men who lay their religion aside when the service is over, they have carried it, it is an observance. They come to the sanctuary because they ought to come once a week at least. It may be that in the morning hour, they will bend the knee in prayer, and also at night; but they are carrying their religion. It is something added on to their life, a department of their life which they lock safe up when they get to business and pleasure. It is a weariness to them, a burden. If they dared they would be rid of it. Then, even though they sing the song in this house, and attend reverently to the preaching, and never take the name of God in vain, they are idolaters, they belong to Babylon and not to Zion. The test of religion is whether you carry it or it carries you; whether it is a weariness and a burden, something that after all if you only dared you would fling overboard; or whether it is the inspiration, the joy, the strength of life. Idolatry is the making of an idol which you can put down in any given place—and you will find it there when you come back. It will not move. There is a good deal of that in the Christian Church. You go away today, you will find your religion here next Sunday; it will not move, but you will be away from it for a week. That is idolatry. True religion is the worship of God, which means that in the busy street, in the midst of perplexing questions in the office and the profession, and amid the thousand and one duties of the home, it carries you, and the song of His praise escapes your lips, and the gladness of His presence is in your heart. That is true religion.

There is Zion. There is Babylon. Oh soul of mine, art thou an idolater, or art thou godly? Dost thou belong to Zion, or dost thou belong to Babylon?

Leaving the thought of the individual, or multiplying it into the corporate whole, is this church Zion without salvation; or is salvation here? Are we a company of God's free men and free women and therefore able to pass the word of freedom to the slave, and able to help to snap his chains; or are we enswathed and hindered by the very chains of our religious observances?

How fine are the distinctions of God, and how searching the figures of Holy Scripture. Just where we thought we were safe from observation, He flashes upon us the light that shows that all the things in which we put our trust are false. Zion; the house is there, the name is there, the songs are there, the sacrifices are there, the priests are there! But is salvation there? A man crosses the threshold, is he likely to be helped? Is he likely to touch the unseen, the eternal? If not—listen to me, my brethren—if not, Zion is a more terrible menace than Babylon. Babylon stands aloof and we know where we are. But if Zion is under the influence of Babylon then what can the world do? Let us see to it, I repeat, that Zion is the hill of God, that her citizens are men and women of faith, and then from her goes forth His law which is life and liberty.

My last word ought to be, and shall be a personal one. Go back to the vision of the Lamb upon Mount Zion with Babylon tottering to

decay. That day has not yet come, but it is good to look at it. Thank God that the victory must be won. Yet go back over it, and shutting thyself up alone with God, brother mine, sister mine, in an act of lonely dealing with God say, art thou an idolater, or art thou worshipping Jehovah? If some man shall say tonight—God grant he may—I am an idolater, I have carried my religion—then fling it overboard now, and trust in Jehovah. He will carry you, and all your life shall flame with light and thrill with power, May He so bring us to Himself.

053 - Isaiah 45:22 - Center and Circumference

Center and Circumference

Face unto Me, and be ye set free, all the ends of the earth: for I am God, and there is none else.

Isaiah 45:22

This is the great divine word to man, the perpetual call of love; it is therefore the Church's all-inclusive message. All the prophets, seers and psalmists of the past in varied tones and with differing emphases have uttered the same message. Upon man's answer to the message—when he has heard it—has depended his condition, his character, his destiny. "Face unto Me, and be ye set free, all the ends of the earth: for I am God." God gave the highest revelation of Himself to humanity in the incarnation, therefore these words of the ancient prophecy are supremely the words of Christ. The context of my text is quoted by the writers of the New Testament in direct application to Him. We are warranted, therefore, in dealing with this passage as finding its most powerful delivery in the Person and ministry of Jesus. It is through the fact of that ministry, not merely the ministry of nineteen centuries ago, which was straitened and limited, but the perpetual ministry of the Christ from Pentecost until now, that the Church is able to deliver this message. I think you will see what is on my own heart and mind this morning. We are facing, so far as our union as ministers and people is concerned, a new year of work. I am very much inclined to forget the things that are behind in order that we may press toward those that are before. As we face the future we are far more conscious this morning than we were three years ago of the problems, perplexities, and difficulties of our work. As we come to know the neighborhood in which we are called to serve we are sometimes almost overwhelmed. We are, moreover, conscious that there are currents of thought which three years ago were undercurrents, but now are more evident and on the surface. It is well for us, therefore, quietly to get back for a morning's meditation to first principles, to remind our hearts, together as ministers and church, of what indeed is the Church's business. I gather up my whole message as we start our new year together and express it thus. We exist for one simple and all-inclusive purpose, to say in this neighborhood, and so far as we may be able to make our voice heard and our influence felt, one thing only, and that, "Look unto Me, and be ye saved, all the ends of the earth." We cannot at Westminster say that as it ought to be said. By that I mean to say the message is too full, too varied, too infinite for one church to deliver it. The Word of God is symbolically referred to in that great book of dreams and visions, signs and symbols: thus, "His voice as the voice of many waters." If here we can express the music of one of the streams which mingle into the many waters, we shall thank God. Yet it is well for us to understand the full music to which our contribution is to be made. We go back, then, to this old text that we all know so well, that everyone here who has ever preached has preached about, not to discover in it something new, but to find in it the old without which the new is always useless, but in the power of which there is perpetually springtime following winter, new beauties blossoming out of the essential root. So I bring you back to first principles this morning as we face another year's work.

Because the One Who here speaks has revealed Himself to us in Christ finally and perfectly I shall ask you to think with me first of the center, "Look unto Me," God as revealed in Christ; then of the circumference as here indicated, "All the ends of the earth"; then of the great claim as here made, "Look unto Me, and be ye saved." If one were seeking for a title for this morning's meditation, it might be described as, Center and Circumference, the Story of a Circle.

First, then, let us turn our thought to the Center. "Look unto Me, and be ye saved, all the ends of the earth: for I am God, and there is none else." The ultimate revelation of God to man was made in the Christ. As I read the story of Christ in the New Testament I discover that the Man of Nazareth was but the revelation of One Who has been—and now the tenses are all at fault and there is no help for it—and must always be the Center, the age-abiding Center of the universe of God. I am not going to tarry there. The ultimate, final words were written long ago by the Apostle-Seer to whom was given to see things for all who should follow him. In those opening verses of the Gospel which bears his name, he has revealed to us the fact that the One Who came into time as Jesus was, in the deepest fact of His actual personality, "the Word." In the beginning with God, Himself God, present at and presiding over creation, sustaining all things by the word of His power, so that nothing has been made save by Him: Himself the Light that lighteth every man that cometh into the world, and so present in some sense to every human consciousness. All these things are mysteries of which there can be no final explanation. I mention them only that our hearts may be reminded of them as we proceed a little further. This Christ Whom we are called to preach is the age-abiding Center of the creation of God, the Word of God Himself.

Leaving that, I ask you to remember that Christ is the center of human history. All that preceded Him led to Him and culminated in Him. Everything since the time of His manifestation in the world has been affected by His presence here. All the highways of the

past led to Him. All the highways from His coming unto this moment have proceeded from Him. He was the consummation of the old hopes and aspirations. We may think of the world on Hebrew or Gentile side, taking those old and convenient divisions with which we were familiar in our childhood, and we shall discover that everything led toward Himself. The Hebrew nation lived by hope in the coming of One: they were looking for Him; they were unable to produce Him; when He came they did not know Him as a nation. Yet as the centuries have passed since His coming we see how in His own Person He perfectly fulfilled all their expectations, and was the incarnate music which had expressed itself in their singing. All that was high and noble and ideal in their aspirations found fulfilment in the Man of Nazareth Who was at once the King with government resting upon His shoulder, and the suffering Servant bruised and broken and battered Who had been described in their ancient writings. All the lines of the strange and wonderful Hebrew history led to Him. When He came ritual was fulfilled, aspiration was realized. There came with Him the dawning of that day the gleaming glory of which the men of the past had caught glimpses of from many a mountain peak. There came the clear articulation of that truth, certain parts and emphases of which the teachers of the Hebrew nation had spoken to the people through the centuries. All that perhaps is readily granted. It is equally true that in the historic Christ there was found the consummation of all that was excellent in the Gentile world, and there had been much. We are greatly mistaken, and upon the basis of that mistake shall misinterpret history, if we imagine that God had abandoned the world outside Hebraism. There had been mighty figures in the Gentile world. Take the testimony of the greatest of them preceding Christ; they themselves claim that they had been able to do no other than to teach men to ask questions. Socrates and Plato both practically declare in so many words that their mission was a mission of instructing men how to inquire. What were the questions they had asked? Questions concerning the immortality of man, concerning the destiny of the soul, concerning the character of the Creator. When one reads some of the writings of those Gentile thinkers one is inclined to think that God was leading them as distinctly and clearly as He was leading the Hebrew prophets in their doings and declarations, leading them to inquire. Yet remember this, they had been unable to give any answer to their questions. In some senses the world reached its greatest intellectual height before Christ came: Greek eloquence, sculpture, philosophy, poetry, we still go back to them for the standards. Yet the Greeks had not been able to answer these supreme questions. He came, a Man of Nazareth, and the very questions they had been asking were all answered. He "brought life and incorruption to light through the gospel." He, not in any long and set discourse, but by the familiar manifestation of His everyday speech, tore away the veil and revealed to men the destiny of the soul, and the nature and character of God, this last supremely. So that the idea of God which is embodied in the best thinking of the century in which we live has come absolutely as the result of His presence in the world and His teaching. He was thus not merely the One Who consummated and completed all that was excellent in the centuries before He came. He became the starting point of a new history. The old history had commenced with the creation of man. The new history commenced with the incarnation of God. By His coming new forces were introduced into human life, new aspirations were felt in the human heart. Men began to see, dimly, and yet as they had never seen before. That theme is a fascinating one. I remit it to your own thinking. I beg you often to think of it in these days. Every look of man outside the Church, I am not speaking merely of men in the Church, every look of man toward better conditions and the realization of brotherhood is the result of the light that flashed by Galilee and over the Judean valleys. Every high and noble conception of human life which we cherish, and which some men cherish who are telling us that the churches have done their work, was born with Jesus. I am not proposing to enumerate any of the things of which I am thinking. You know and are thinking of them. Every conception that is high and noble that is in the mind of man today was born with the Man of Nazareth. So I say that He stands at the center of human history. All before Him leading toward Him: all after Him coming forth from Him.

Again He stands at the center of life today. He still retains His absolute pre-eminence as the ideal man. It is to this Man of Nazareth that men turn even after they have denied some things that we of the evangelical faith teach concerning Him, and they point to Him at least as the ideal man, as the One Who has revealed in human history a type of humanity that had never been dreamed of. If I say that all men recognize that He is the ideal man, I do not mean to say that they are willing to conform to the pattern. They are not. While men stand in the presence of the sublime dignity of the manhood of Jesus they never answer or obey it save as they are brought by the power of the Spirit into the place of submission to Him first as Saviour. There He stands amid the men of His own age, a peasant, garbed in simplicity, girt as a slave, always serving. Hear me when I tell you this, that there is no thinking man in the East or West, whether East or West refer to London or the world, who does not recognize the dignity and beauty of that ideal, even though he do not obey it and is not prepared to follow it. Christ stands at the center of individual life revealing the ideal.

There is another word which is a supreme word and may be dismissed in a sentence. He stands at the center not merely revealing an ideal but communicating the dynamic. That is the burden of the preaching here perpetually, and I need not detain you to argue it this morning. That is the supreme and lonely splendor of this Christ, not that He flashes upon human life that is paralyzed an ideal—that He does; but that He touches the paralyzed life with power until it also becomes the ideal life. That is the loneliness of the Christ. The other is His loneliness also, for we refuse to put into comparison with Him any teacher the world has ever had in revelation of the possibility of human life. Yet this is the final loneliness today, that He stands amid men, with all their advancement and all their progress and all their new philosophies, and wherever a man comes to Him, from the East or West, North or South, paralyzed, helpless, beaten, broken, damned so far as a man can be in this world, this same Imperial One touches him with power to purpose, and he stands upon his feet and lives. That is why I continue to preach Him.

Then He stands at the center today of society, teaching men that there can be no regeneration of society save upon the basis of the regeneration of individuals. We are told that socialism is Christianity. That depends. So far as the men who are uttering their convictions concerning the social ideal have seen the realization of life upon the plane where war of every kind shall cease, that is Christianity: but so far as they are attempting to realize their dream while men are still in themselves evil and sinning, that is not Christianity. Jesus Christ confronts the individual man and says with passion and tenderness, "Ye must be born anew." I will give you life.

He stands at the center of the nations. They are not looking at Him, but He stands there. He has given to the world all truth concerning government. He has revealed to the world the fact that humanity can finally live out its perfect life only under an absolute monarch. He has also revealed to the world that there is only one absolute monarch, and that is God. He is calling men everywhere—mark the emphasis of the familiar word—to "seek—first the Kingdom of God." God is the absolute monarch He came to preach. In one brief sentence He flashed upon the world the whole conception of the true constitution of a nation, "One is your teacher, and all ye are brethren.... One is your Master, even the Christ." I do not know how you feel, but I am startled anew by the comprehensiveness of that word of Christ, by its profound philosophy. I am startled by the fact of how far the world is from understanding it.

What is He saying? "Look unto Me." I quoted the text in other words, attempting to convey the real force of the Hebrew, for this word, "Look," is not the word that is most commonly translated so; it is a word that literally means "face," "Face unto Me," that is the call. Mark if you will in the simplest way what this word is, and what it is in regard to the Christ. If only we were simple enough and I dare have a blackboard in this pulpit! Imagine it for a moment, and that upon it you have a diagram of a circle. You take a point which is the center, mark the sweep of your circle. At the center write the word "Me"; around it write "the ends of the earth." Look for a moment or two at that circle, and let me say some of the simplest things that you have nearly forgotten, though you learned them once. Look at the circle for a moment. You cannot draw a straight line from the center but it touches the circumference. There is no point in any circumference from which you cannot draw a straight line to the center. If you attempt to draw a straight line from the circumference which does not touch the center it touches the circumference again, getting back to its own dead level, and continues on into the distance never touching the center. That you may see it more clearly, with your eye fixed on the diagram, look at the center; we have drawn a circumference. You cannot put your pencil or chalk anywhere outside the center but that you touch a circumference. You can sweep a circumference anywhere outside the superficial area exposed to your view. I like Isaiah's "the ends of the earth." At the center God revealed in Christ, for we may add to Isaiah's vision the revelation of the New Testament. What then? All the straight lines from that center touch the circumference, the myriad circumferences that sweep around the center. I do not think that the psalmist was thinking of circles and circumferences, yet he was in the midst of the same philosophy when he exclaimed, "How precious also are Thy thoughts unto me, O God! How great is the sum of them." All the lines and forces of God are out toward His humanity. You are in a circumference which is related to that center, nor can you escape therefrom. Round the center there sweep myriad circumferences, and there is not one who can escape. We are all in His purpose. We are all in the provision of His infinite grace, in some sense related to Him by purpose. It is possible that I am not experimentally related to Him, that I am not receiving the light He came to give, or the life He came to bestow, that I am not responsive to the love that is in His heart: but I cannot escape Him. If you will let me put that for one minute in another way, not for the sake of the multitude of Christian people, but for the sake of the one man who has drifted in here and does not know Christ as Saviour, there is a straight line from where you are to the heart of God; you have no journey to take, you are in relation to Him already in His economy and purpose: "Look unto Me, and be ye saved, all the ends of the earth: for I am God, and there is none else."

Follow me now as we come to that last great word, the claim: "Face unto Me." What is the thought conveyed in that call? That what is the matter with man, whether you use the term individually or generically, is that his face is not toward God. That is the trouble with human life individually. That is the trouble with human life socially. That is at the root of the agony of international dispute and war and armament. It is but a dream we are allowed to dream, we cannot hurry the processes of God; the consummation is not yet, but it will be. How will it come? All the nations of the earth are to face to God. That is the end. I am at the circumference of which He is the center. Sweeping lines round about that central personality in the universe include me, pass through my life. The cry that comes from the center, transcendent, immanent—I do not care for these words—the cry that comes from the center, from the center of this life and light, is this, "Face unto Me." God has never turned His back upon humanity. With that statement perfectly agrees the language of the apostolic writers. They never asked or suggested that God should become reconciled to man. It is always that man should be reconciled to God. It is the same great figure as Isaiah's. We speak of reconciliation as though God had turned His back on man and that man had turned his back on God. It is not so. Man has turned His back upon God. God has never turned His back upon man. Because He has never turned His back upon men—oh, I know the humanness of it and the incompleteness, and the difficulty of the figure, yet hear it—the face of the Father is still looking toward the far country where the prodigal has gone; the cry of the Father, "Face unto Me, and be ye saved," indicates the only way of salvation for a man, for society, for a nation. For a man, "Face unto Me."

There is life for a look at the Crucified One.

We do not all like that hymn. Some speak of it as being unworthy of the singing of a great congregation, but that is because their understanding of it has been so feeble. There is the profoundest philosophy in it for me.

There is life for a look at the Crucified One,
There is life at this moment for thee,
Then look, sinner, look unto Him and be saved,
Unto Him Who was nailed to the Tree.

You say it was borrowed from the old story of the brazen serpent. Certainly, but what is the story of the brazen serpent? It is the story of people who had broken God's law and turned their backs upon Him, beaten, suffering, turning back to the brazen serpent because that was the symbol of His authority. The great truth is that they turned back to God. That is human salvation. "Look unto Me." Oh, the comfort of it this morning. It is the voice of thunder that comes to us out of the infinite space. It is the voice of Galilee. I hear the voice of Jesus saying, "Come unto Me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest." That voice was so simple and winsome that His mother loved it in babyhood and loved the music of it in manhood. It was so gentle that the men and women who came into contact with Him never trembled at the thunder. Yet behind it there was the infinite majesty and mystery of the calling of God to man, "Face unto Me." Man, you can do it where you are. You can do it without an inquiry room. You can do it without any sacramentarian interference on the part of priest or preacher. "Face to Me." That is His call.

That is His call to society. That is His call in the presence of all the problems that vex us. I am not expressing any opinion now as to the question at issue, but this Christian congregation this morning believes with all its heart that if directors and men would face to Him there would be no railway strike. "Face to Me" is the great cry. Remember that in this same great chapter of Isaiah a little way before our text these words occur, "Declare ye, and bring it forth; yea, let them take counsel together: who hath shewed this from ancient time? Who hath declared it of old? Have not I the Lord? And there is no God beside Me; a just God and a Saviour." If you are going to take away from Christ the fact that He is a Saviour, then you are going to take away that in which when men look they find life. If you take that away you cannot reconstruct society. "Look unto Me." Not merely the ideal, the social reformer, but a Saviour and a just God.

That is His word to the nations. We are looking in other directions. We are still looking to armaments and to policies. Oh that we might be delivered from them and look unto Him. What then?

"Be ye saved." I do not want us to drop that word saved but to understand it. "Be set free." The facing of man, the turning of man to God is the liberation of man from all the things that bind him. It is not license. Man is not let loose upon the universe uncontrolled. That would be but to work ruin and havoc everywhere. He is brought back into true relation to the center of the universe. His life then indeed becomes in tune with the infinite in the deep and true sense of that word. He has found His way back to the path from which he had wandered. He is set free from all the things that spoil by being bound to the central throne of righteousness and judgment. "Be ye set free." Yes, saved, set free. This is what we need in our sociology. You may hold your meetings and discuss plans and pass resolutions, divide up and get angry and quarrel, but it is only as you can set men there that you can bind them together. It is only as men are bound to the throne of God that they are bound to each other. It is only as men are set free from lust and passion and selfishness that they can be bound together in a great society, a great brotherhood. "Saved"! It is not a narrow word. It is not the peculiar property of the Salvation Army. Let no one go away imagining I am saying a critical thing of the Salvation Army. I wish I could have had you all with me at the Albert Hall recently as I sat and rested my soul and thanked God for the Salvation Army. It is not, however, their peculiar word. It is their word, blessed be God that it is. But it is our word also to this district of the West so far as we can touch it, and to the East so far as we are responsible for it. Being saved means being set free from all the things that spoil the soul. There is only one way: "Face unto Me," says God. Let me use my geometrical figure once more and I have done. If my memory serves me right it was in the third book of Euclid that we learned that concentric circles are such as have a common center. If that be true, then the ends of the earth—and what does that mean? The Hebrew word means cessation, the point where it leaves off. What is beyond it? I know not. I am at the ends of the earth. The circles are still sweeping round and round, what? The same throne, the same center, concentric circles having the same center, the same throne, the same God, the same Saviour. I leave you to make your application. Take the lines which in imagination I drew upon that first circle a little while ago. You remember that a line that proceeded from the center to the circumference of your first circle can be carried out and it touches all the rest. The line that commences at the circumference but was not drawn toward the center goes into ever increasing distance from the center. From all these simple things learn this at least, that if I am in right relation to the center here, so am I, so shall I be, through all the ages of which I do not know the mystery. It is when a man finds himself in right relation to the center there that he laughs at death with the laughter of holy victory, and recognizes that passing is but transition from limitation to larger life. Do not let us be at all anxious to prepare for dying, but very anxious to prepare for living. Am I ready for heaven? Yes, if I am ready for London. Am I ready for eternity? Yes, if I am fit for time. If my face is toward the center here,

Then let the unknown morrow bring with it what it may,

It can bring with it nothing but He will bear me through.

That applies not merely to changing seasons and years of quickly passing life, but to the up-heaped ages that baffle my thinking and yet rejoice my heart, the "for ever" more of which I am a part.

054 - Isaiah 52:11 - Clean, For Service

Clean, For Service

Be ye clean, ye that bear the vessels of the Lord.

Isaiah 52:11

These words reveal a philosophy of service for the people of God. They define the responsibility which constantly rests on those who bear His name, that responsibility being indicated in the words, "ye that bear the vessels of the Lord." Moreover, they declare the conditions on which this responsibility may be fulfilled, that, namely, of cleanness in the full sense of that great word.

Bible history reveals the long conflict between two opposing principles, represented by two words, Babylon and Israel; the one standing always for self-centered life, and the other for life which is God-centered.

It is not for us to stay now to trace with any minuteness of examination the conflict between these two principles as it is revealed in the Scriptures of Truth. We may, however, call to mind the landmarks in the case of each. Babel, Babylon, Babylon the great, the mother of harlots. These words serve as indices, and cover the whole movement in the Bible. Over against them we may think of the landmarks on the other side, Abraham, Israel, and Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God for the establishment of the Divine order in the world.

In the first case we trace a movement, based on rebellion against God's government, and issuing at last in uttermost confusion as the great word of the Apocalypse indicates, "Fallen, fallen is Babylon the great." On the other hand, we trace a movement based on loyalty to God's government and issuing at last in eternal steadfastness. The realization of the Divine order among the sons of men is indicated in that word of the Apocalypse, "Behold, the tabernacle of God is with men, and He shall dwell with them, and they shall be his peoples."

Ever and anon in the history of the people of God as recorded in the Scriptures, they are seen yielding to the spirit of Babel, and always as a consequence sharing its confusion. The picture of Jehovah presented, when one takes this outline view, is that of One Who broods over His people, and forevermore attempts to woo them back toward Himself, and He does that because by their complicity with the spirit of Babylon they injure themselves, and, infinitely worse, because by their complicity with the spirit of Babylon they injure the nations round about them.

In this prophecy of Isaiah, and especially in this part from which our text is taken, we find ourselves in the midst of this conflict, where the two principles are clearly evident. As a matter of fact, at this time Israel, as viewed by the prophet, was in actual captivity in Babylon. Yet there was evident among them a Divine movement toward return to loyalty to God, and consequently toward establishment in their own land. It is impossible to understand this text without recognizing that it forms part of a greater whole. At the fifty-first chapter we have the commencement of the prophet's appeal, "Hearken to me, ye that follow after righteousness, ye that seek the Lord." There were among the people of God those who were following righteousness, who passionately desired it, and were seeking the Lord. As we read on we find that the people were aroused as the result of the prophet's appeal, and they lifted a cry to God in these words, "Awake, awake, put on Thy strength, O arm of the Lord." Then we come to the answer of God to the cry of the people. It is found in the opening words of the chapter I read to you, "Awake, awake, put on thy strength, O Zion."

The people of God were captive in Babylon. I pray you notice carefully the suggestiveness of it. The people who stood for loyalty to God, and ought to have borne that testimony to the world, were slaves in Babylon, which represented antagonism to the government of God. Yet amongst them in slavery were those in whom was the consciousness of all they were failing to do, and the sigh after something nobler expressed itself in that prayer to God, "Awake, awake, put on Thy strength, O arm of the Lord." To them the answer of God, if I may reverently put it into other words, was this, Why do you cry to me to awake? I am awake. I am not asleep. It is for you to awake and put on strength, and put on your beautiful garments.

Then follows the strange movement which chapter fifty-two describes. The prophet's vision is a remarkable one. He sees the people in their captivity, and he sees messengers crossing the mountains between Jerusalem and Babylon, and the burden of the cry of the messengers to the people in captivity is this, "Thy God reigneth."

It had seemed to these captive people as though God had resigned the throne of government, and they had said, "Put on Thy strength." His answer is, It is for you to put on strength, and the watchman on the heights, and the messengers that traversed the

roads between Jerusalem and Babylon cried to the captives, "Thy God reigneth." That cry was answered by a great song of hope, and the people are seen preparing to leave Babylon and return to Jerusalem.

At last the call came, "Depart ye, depart ye, go ye out from thence." The captives were called to leave the place of captivity and to take their way again to the city of their established government. As they were about to obey, this solemn word was uttered, "Be ye clean, ye that bear the vessels of the Lord."

They had suffered through the Babel spirit, under the influence of which they had passed. They had passed into captivity to Babylon, because they themselves had bent the neck to the spiritual conception of Babylon. Now revival was beginning in the sigh after God and the proclamation of His continued reign; and they were turning back again to the place of blessing. On the eve of departure the solemn warning was uttered, "Be ye clean, ye that bear the vessels of the Lord."

Such is the background. In the foreground is this clear enunciation of abiding principle. Those who bear the vessels of the Lord must be clean. Let us then quietly and solemnly consider the two thoughts already indicated; first, the responsibility of the people of God; and second, the condition on which they are able to fulfil that responsibility. That responsibility is suggested in the words, "Ye that bear the vessels of the Lord." The condition on which it is possible to fulfil that responsibility is indicated in the command, "Be ye clean."

This principle of responsibility is enforced from the beginning of Bible history, and has been enforced over and over again by the prophets and interpreters of the ages, and yet, as Christian men and women and as a Christian Church, it is a principle we are always in danger of forgetting. The principle is that the people of God exist, not for their own sakes, but for the sake of the peoples who are not the people of God.

God's people are ever intended to be channels of communication, through whom He may reach others in blessing. Bible history does not exhaust the possible illustrations, but I am content to confine myself within this limitation. The keyword of God's communication to Abraham was this, I will bless you, and you shall be made a blessing. "I will make of thee a great nation... and in thee shall all the families of the earth be blessed." As we watch the building up of that peculiar people—who are today scattered and peeled, but retain with singular and remarkable persistence their national loneliness, even though they no longer have a national constitution—as we watch the growth of that nation we see God's method for reaching other nations. Israel today is a people scattered and peeled over the face of the whole earth, because they forgot the meaning of their making, and failed to understand that they were created, not in order that God might have a people on whom He might lavish His love in forgetfulness of other peoples, but in order that they might become the instrument through which He would reach other peoples. An illustration of the principle outside that of the covenant people is found in this prophecy of Isaiah in the words of Jehovah concerning Cyrus, "I will gird thee, though thou hast not known Me." Trace the history of all national life through the ages and the same principle is discoverable. God makes a nation for a purpose. The moment that nation becomes self-centered, there comes disaster; He destroys the nation He has made. As the nation He makes realizes its responsibility for all the rest He maintains its strength.

The principle is most remarkably manifest in the life of the Church of God. The Church is the depository of the treasure of God for the race. The Church of God is not an institution which holds within itself treasures for its own enrichment. Said the great apostle, whose peculiar phrase, "my Gospel," referred to the Church, "I am debtor." I am in debt to men. In what did his debt consist? In that he had received the great evangel, in that he had perfect understanding of the provision of the grace of God for men, wrought out into his own experience. Not for his saving only was he saved, but in order that he might be the instrument through which God might reach other men for their saving.

To the Church is committed a threefold responsibility. She stands for the manifestation of God to the world. She exists for the reconciliation of the world to God. She has within her fellowship the living means of grace. Some of you may say that is very high-church doctrine. It is the highest of the high, because it is the New Testament doctrine of the Church. She stands first for the manifestation of God. Hear this great word of the New Testament, "Ye are an elect race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for God's own possession, that ye may show forth the excellencies of Him Who called you." In other words, the Church exists to manifest God. Not through the Word alone will the world find the Father, but through the Word incarnate in the lives of people who have been obedient to it. Only through those who share His nature can His name ever be known.

We bear the vessels of the Lord. The world can find its way to the Saviour only through the Church. Do not misunderstand me, I mean through the Church's proclamation of this Evangel. If you take the widest outlook you see at once what I mean. He cannot reach the heathen people save through the contact with them of His own people. I am neither attempting to discuss the economy of God or to account for it. I declare it as a fact revealed and demonstrated by experience. The world is not waiting for salvation because God is unready to save, but because the Church is not wholly at His disposal to carry the message of salvation. Knowledge of God can come to men finally, fully, completely, only through the Church. He has committed to us the responsibility of revelation. We bear the vessels of the Lord.

The ministry of reconciliation is ours. We fulfil it by the revelation of His love, the revelation of the meaning of His atoning work, and the revelation of the power by which He remakes humanity. All these things are committed to the Church, and men can know them only through the Church.

The means of grace are committed to the Church, the inspired Word for its interpretation, the sacred activities of worship for explanation, and, infinitely more, and without the more these things are of no avail, that service of pity and of power which brings life to the dead, love to those who are lonely, and light to such as sit in darkness. All the treasures of God are deposited with the Church. I do not mean any organized ecclesiastical system, but the whole Catholic Church, made up of men and women who share the life of Christ and walk in the light He brings. We bear the vessels of the Lord.

The one message of God is that of love. God's love message is, that because He seeks the highest good of man He is the implacable foe of sin. All the vessels of the Lord under the old economy symbolized this truth, and called for the perfection of humanity. The ministry of the Church in the world is with this end in view, that the works of the devil should be destroyed, and the ideals of God realized.

To go back again to the simplest statement of the truth. The world can find God only through His people. Or let me make that statement in quite another form. The only use God has for His people in this world is that the world may find Him through them. The Church of God exists today for the bearing of the vessels of the Lord, for the revelation of the truth concerning Him, the opening to men of doors to fellowship with Him. The great deposit of the Church creates the great responsibility of the Church.

Let us hear what this text suggests to us concerning the conditions on which the Church may fulfil her responsibility. We need to hear them because a statement such as this must bring to us consciousness of our own failure. You speak to me of the indifferent city. I tell you the reason for it is the faulty Church in the indifferent city. We cannot realize our responsibility without knowing our failure. With that thought in mind let us listen to what the prophet said concerning the conditions on which the responsibility may be fulfilled. "Be ye clean." It is a very, very simple word. It is a very searching word. The word itself of which the prophet made use is suggestive. Its first intention is that of clarifying through and through. It is a word which suggests the idea, not of water, but of fire; not of something which deals with the external, but of something that searches through and through. I have been very interested in tracing through the whole of the Old Testament the use of the word here translated clean. The result of that survey is this: I find that it is never used of merely ceremonial cleansing. There are other words used in that sense, but this one never. It always has reference to moral cleanness. When the psalmist says, "The Lord rewarded me according to my righteousness; according to the cleanness of my hands hath He recompensed me"; "Therefore hath the Lord recompensed me according to my righteousness, according to the cleanness of my hands in His eyesight"; "With the pure Thou wilt show Thyself pure; and with the perverse Thou wilt show Thyself froward," he in each case uses the same word. Perhaps the verse that helps us most to see the force of this word is that mystical and symbolic word in the Canticles,

Who is she that looketh forth as in the morning,
Fair as the moon,
Clear as the sun,
Terrible as an army with banners?

Clear as the sun, that is pure as the sun, clean as the sun if you so will, and the figure of that verse explains the real thought of the word "clean"; it means clarified as with burning heat. "Be ye clean, ye that bear the vessels of the Lord." Be ye of that fire nature in which no imperfect or impure thing can live. Be ye of that nature which consumes the unworthy, and purifies ye of that nature which consumes the unworthy, and purifies that which is worthy. Be ye of the very nature of God Himself, of Whom it is written, "Our God is a consuming fire." The great picture of the testing of the Church's work in the Corinthian letter comes to mind in this connection: He shall try our work as with fire. If you will allow your imagination to help you, look at the great picture of the Christ which is given in the Apocalypse by the seer of Patmos, "His eyes are a flame of fire." With eyes of flame he glances over the work of the Church. With what result? Watch the work. Some of it is burnt, destroyed; it shrivels and becomes dust, and is gone; all that is hay, wood, stubble. Some of it loses only its dross and flashes in beauty as the fire of His glance rests on it; all that is gold, silver and precious stones. These are the things that live in fire. These are the things of the fire nature, even though when you touch them they seem to be cold. They are fire nature, for fire cannot destroy them. In the ancient prophecy is this remarkable word, spoken to the king of Tyre, "Thou hast walked up and down in the midst of the stones of fire," stones that live in the midst of fire.

If we read the word, "Be ye clean," as though it referred only to some ceremonial cleansing, and inculcated certain ceremonial ablutions, we have not caught the force of the prophet's meaning. You bear the vessels of the Lord. You are to be responsible for His revelation to men. You are the people among whom He has deposited the truth for which the world is waiting. "Be clean," be clarified as by fire, be such men and women as that there is nothing in you that fire can destroy. Be such men and women that all the things fire can destroy are destroyed in your own life. "Be ye clean." Our word "clean" may mean so little when it ought to mean so much. That great Hebrew word of which the prophet made use, which is used with such marked carefulness in all the language of the

seers and psalmists of long ago, is a word which suggests cleansing in its profoundest sense: cleanness from complicity with Babylon. You have been in captivity to Babylon. You are sighing after the higher and nobler. "Thy God reigneth." God is calling you back to the place and position of power. Leave Babylon behind you when you turn your back on Babylon. Do not carry with you as you come again to the place you have lost any of the spirit that destroyed you before. The emblems of the holiness of the Divine government must be borne by holy men. "Be ye clean."

055 - Isaiah 55:10-11 - The Harvests of the Word of God

The Harvests of the Word of God

For as the rain cometh down and the snow from heaven, and returneth not thither, but watereth the earth, and maketh it bring forth and bud, that it may give seed to the sower and bread to the eater; so shall my word be that goeth forth out of my mouth: it shall not return unto me void, but it shall accomplish that which I please, and it shall prosper in the thing whereto I sent it.

Isaiah 55:10-11

The fitness of the symbolism of this text is apparent even to the most casual observer.

Snow and rain are characterized by gentleness which merges into force. One drop of rain falls upon my hand, and I brush it away, and it is not; but when the drop is multiplied and the great storm sweeps along the valley, it is almost resistless in its onrush. One feathery flake of snow falls through the atmosphere. I touch it and it passes and is lost, its crystal beauty destroyed forever by the rudeness of my human hand; but let that flake be multiplied and the falling snow will take hold of the thundering locomotive, clog its wheels, check its progress, bury it beneath its soft and noiseless whiteness.

Rain and snow are characterized by helplessness which grows into beneficence. We ask: "What can this drop of rain do for man? What can this flake of snow do for humanity?" And yet we know that when we pass from the individual drop to the great rain, that this in falling makes the earth laugh back in harvest and crowns the labor of the hands of men. There is no more exquisite word in all Scripture about nature than that simple and sublime passage: "He giveth His snow like wool." Like a warm mantle, it wraps the earth in winter time and keeps it from the penetration of intenser cold. And so we find that rain and snow, helpless as they seem, are the very messengers of beneficence to men.

Again, rain and snow come to us characterized by unfruitfulness, yet generating fruitfulness wherever they fall. Life cannot be sustained by the one or the other. Neither is there in either any element of reproductiveness. Yet in their cooperation with the forces of "old mother earth" and with the ministries of light and air, all that is needed for life's sustenance is produced.

This is but a surface application of the truth. As we watch the rain and the snow and think upon it more carefully, we find a most suggestive symbol of the Word of God. By the Word of God at this moment I mean all that phrase can possibly mean; the written Which reveals the Living, the Living Which seals the written; the written Which is still ours, the Living Which lies behind it and speaks through it in power to the sons of men.

This Word of God in the history of the race, what has it been? Symbols becoming substance, letters advancing to life, that which has seemed to kill becoming, presently, that which has bestowed life everywhere. In order that we may understand the value of this Word of God and learn the true method of appreciation of such value, let us take this symbolism of the prophet and consider it exactly as he has stated it; first, as to the similarities suggested; second, as to the principles revealed; and finally, as to the responsibility entailed.

Let me first tabulate the phrases which we are to consider in this verse: "Cometh from heaven; returneth not thither; watereth the earth; maketh it bring forth, and bud; that it may give seed to the sower; and bread to the eater."

The rain and the snow come from heaven. Man has nothing to do with the coming of the rain and the snow. You will remember how in that great theophany of the Book of Job when, after the human eloquence of his friends has providentially been silenced, God Himself begins to speak to the suffering man. He speaks to him in the midst of his sorrow and his suffering by making all His glory in creation pass before him. In the midst of that wonderful questioning of Job by God occur these two inquiries; "Hast thou entered into the treasuries of the snow...?" which, being translated from poetry into prose means, do you understand the snow? Do you know from whence it comes? Can you analyze the mystery of its crystallization and deposit? Then, "Hath the rain a father?..." which, by some process of translation means, are you able to generate it, to produce it? With those questions in mind, let me read again this statement of the prophet. "For as the rain cometh down and the snow from heaven,..." The Word of God is a message from God to man which no man was able to find out for himself. It is never a philosophy formulated by human wisdom; it is always a revelation made, a something declared that man could not by searching find out. The supreme quality of the Word of God is that however men may occupy their time in discussing the methods by which we have come into possession of these documents, there is stamped upon every page of them the sign manual of Jehovah. They are great unveilings of His nature, great revelations of the deepest

secrets of human life, great illumination of the problems that confront men by Divine revelation. The Word of God is the gift of God and not the contrivance of man.

But it "... returneth not thither..." The snow and the rain pour themselves out on the face of the earth, they melt and pass, and within a very few hours of the great rainfall, which has sweetened everything in its coming, the roads are dusty again and we say, "How soon the rain has passed." So also, soon after the snow has once come under the influence of the sun, it is gone. It has seemed to pour itself out in magnificent waste. Judged by first appearances, it seems as though this gift of heaven had been poured upon earth to be spoiled, contaminated, soiled, wasted.

So also with the Word of God. The Word of God has been given to men in figure and symbol, in prophecy and song, and at last in the Person of Jesus, and since He came, in exposition and explanation, for centuries; and, ah, me! how perpetually it seems to us as we watch the openings and processes of the decades and even of the centuries, as though this great outpouring of Divine revelation was lost, falling upon man only to be spoiled. How often have we thought of it as wasted? Nay, have we not thought so of it sometimes when we have been preaching it? Have we not looked out with almost passionate desire upon audiences that have listened and passed away apparently to frivolity and forgetfulness and have said, Yea, verily, "as the snow and the rain from heaven... but it returneth not thither"? That is the first effect upon us after observing what happens as God gives His Word.

But there is another statement needed to complete and explain this; it "... watereth the earth..." Take this dust as it lies upon the highway and over the furrowed field, and know that within the dust is the making of everything that is beautiful and fruitful. But the dust does not of itself laugh in flowers; it is capable and incapable. Lying within it are all the forces of life. All the mysterious magnificence of your personality on the physical side lies within the dust at your feet, and all flowers that bloom lie there in potentiality. As the rain and snow water the earth, which is at once characterized by capacity and yet unable to fulfil the possibilities that lie sleeping within its own being, it makes all nature laugh with new beauty.

So also the Word of God comes to men in whose nature are the potentialities but not the realizations. The Word of God falls upon the centuries, upon society, upon individuals, and we thought it touched them but to be spoiled and soiled and pass, but we watched and we found that by its falling the soil became productive. There is in every human being the capacity for Deity. There is in every human life the potentialities of the highest and the noblest and the best. I am not discussing the question of man's ruin. I know the ruin; I know it in my own life. But that which is ruined is not destroyed. Without some beneficent ministry external to itself it will be destroyed. Given that ministry it is still capable of realization. The very ministry it needs is that of the Word of God. As is the rain, as is the snow to the dust, so is the Word of God to humanity in its ruin. God has not been wasting His Word. As He has given it by prophets, seers, and psalmists, by His Son, in many a symbol and by many a sign, in many a dispensation; given it to the mocking, laughing, scoffing crowds; He knows that in all the dust that lies about Him there are potentialities; and as He gives His rain and snow to smite the dust into laughter, so He has given His Word that the Word coming to men may touch the unrealized capacity into realization.

The prophet now adds a further truth concerning these elements in the statement, "... maketh it bring forth,..." After the rain and the snow the dull russet ground becomes beautiful with emerald and opal and ruby and diamond, and thus we know that when God's rain and snow touch the dust it makes the dust bring forth.

So with the Word of God. The Word of God makes the dormant forces in man move to fulfilment. All men that have ever realized the possibilities of their own life have done so in response to some part of the Word of God, to the Word spoken, to the Word written, to the Word lived, to the revelation granted; and as the snow and rain coming upon the earth make the earth answer by bringing forth, so the Word of God in the centuries, as they come and go, has provoked into realization the dormant capacities of life.

Yet another word that I have taken separately, because I think it really is separate. It is a stronger word than the former—"... maketh it bring forth, and bud,..." I feel inclined to use here the literal Hebrew word, "and sprout." That is to say, the rain and the snow not merely touch the dust into generation but actually come again in the grass, the flowers, the fruitage. You saw that rainstorm as it swept the field yonder. You watched it come; you smiled at the helplessness of the first few drops as they fell. You were appalled at the rush of the storm as the clouds broke and swept that field. Then you watched it as the clouds passed and the sun shone. As you watched the field it seemed as though all was lost and of no avail, and you went to sleep—and God gives unto His beloved in sleep—and you came back again and looked at your field, and there was the sheen of the emerald all over it. First the blade and then the ear, and then the full corn in the ear, and so on and on, until russet had become green and green had become golden harvest. And in that waving harvest of gold what do I find? The rain that I thought lost, the snow that I thought perished. It touched the dust with the alchemy of God, and it brought back the glorious, gracious harvest.

It is equally true that the Word of God that He has been giving for centuries has never been lost. It has come from Him to touch the failure of human life, and it has been returning to Him laughing with the harvest of ransomed souls. The Word was incarnate in the Christ supremely, and in a less and different degree but nevertheless as truly, God's Word has been re-incarnate in human lives in all the passing centuries. Do not let us be afraid of the word. I make no comparison finally between the incarnation of our blessed

Lord and the incarnation of truth in the life of the believer. Nevertheless, in degree every Christian soul is a re-incarnation of the Word Who became incarnate in Jesus of Nazareth. Is it not so? That which is true and beautiful and of good report in you, in others, what is it but God's great Word which has touched the fibre of your being and reconstructed your broken lives to the realization of His purpose and so to the glory of His Name. The transmuted rain makes the earth not only generate by the touch of beneficence; it makes it sprout and bud and answer back in harvest. So also, the Word re-incarnate in believing souls is the harvest of the earth which supremely satisfies the heart of God.

Yet that is not all. "... that it may give seed to the sower,..." What is this harvest for? You say for the sustenance of human life. That is not the first thing. What is the harvest for? "That it may give seed to the sower" comes before "bread to the eater." Bread to the eater is a secondary thing. Bread to the eater is provision for the toiler that he may continue his sowing and reap his harvests. But the first thing is that, in the new form in which the rain and snow return to God, there is always found the potentiality of propagation waiting for new showers and new transmutations and new harvests. This is the perpetual story of the harvests as they come and go. Always first, seed to the sower.

So with the Word of God. The Word of God taking hold of human life, changing it, becoming incarnate in it, communicates propagative power; it makes a new wealth of seed which may be scattered still further afield. From every life remade and sanctified by the Word of God, there must go forth the seed that will affect yet other fields and stretch out toward the consummating glory of the final harvest.

Finally we come to the last phase of the symbolism, "... and bread to the eater." The issue then is also sustenance to the toiler. The man that plowed and sowed and reaped, feeds. So surely also is it with this Word of God. It comes, as we have seen for the larger purpose, the creation of new seed that may be scattered still for the uplifting of man, but the Word of God is also the bread of life to the toiler. By it his own life is sustained, both in health and strength, and so he is enabled for the service for which he is created and to which he is called.

Let me pass now from these similarities to take the broader outlook and consider the great principles that are revealed.

The symbolism of this great prophetic Word teaches me, first of all, that the Word of God is purposeful. Rain and snow come certainly not for nothing and not for the display of their own wonders but for purpose. The symbolism teaches me, second, that the Word of God is powerful. The rain and snow come to victory always; they are never defeated. And the symbolism of my text teaches me, finally, that the Word of God is prosperous. It accomplishes, it prospers, as do also rain and snow.

The Word of God is purposeful. All this is seen by the various similarities which we have rapidly surveyed. The Word of God is not given to be possessed; it is given that it may possess. The truth of God is not given that men may hold it. Oh, I am tired of the men that want to know if I "hold the truth." Of course I don't "hold the truth"; no man can "hold the truth." It is too big for any man to hold, and God has never given His Word to men that they may "hold the truth." The facts are truly stated in quite another way. The truth must hold the man, wrap him around, change the very fibre of his being, permeate his complete life, and unless the Word of God is doing that for me it is failing in the first intention that God has for it. Not for our good only does it come. It is seed as well as bread. Unless we come to receive the Word as the earth takes the sun and the rain, then I am not sure that we had better not absent ourselves from every occasion when the Word is opened. If I come with my notebook to write down all I can learn about the Word of God in order that I may know it, then I am absolutely failing. But if I come to strip from my soul all the things that hide me that the Word of God may search me, if I have come to lay my life out in the light of the Word that the Word may correct it, then I shall find the Word in me is fruitful as is the snow, as is the rain upon the earth. It is a purposeful thing.

Then, thank God, it is powerful. He says it shall not return to Him void. And why not? May I not reverently say as in the presence of the inspired declaration, God's Word never returned to Him void because it never comes void from Him. Do you remember the word of the angel to the blessed Virgin?—"... no word of God is void...." Every word of God thrills with fruitfulness. If we but know how to receive it and how to respond to it, then it shall return to Him not void but fruitful, in lives changed, remolded, re-fashioned, sanctified.

And finally, then the Word of God is prosperous. It is so because it is His Word. "It shall not return unto me void, but it shall..."—and mark the two words—"... accomplish... prosper...." The word "accomplish" means it does something, it makes something, it realizes something; and the Hebrew word "prosper" literally means it "pushes forward." It is a great dynamic force. It is prosperous, moreover, by selection. "... that which I please,... the thing whereto I sent it."

These are the principles which we must bear in mind as we take up our Bibles and come to listen to the teachings of the Word of God. It is given for a purpose; it is full of power; it accomplishes the purpose by reason of the power.

In conclusion, it is important that we inquire as to the responsibilities that are entailed? Rain and snow might fall upon the earth a long time, and there be no harvest unless the earth is prepared. The rain and snow may fall in all their prodigal munificence and magnificence upon the earth, and there will be no harvest unless the seed is sown. And rain and snow may fall and make the earth

laugh with harvest if the earth be ready and the seed be sown, and yet men get no benefit unless the harvest be reaped, the seed be sown again, and through the process the bread be eaten.

Here, then, are three things at least that I would say: the earth must be prepared; take heed how ye hear. The seed must be sown; preach the Word. The bread must be eaten; let the Word of Christ dwell in you richly.

Take heed how ye hear. In all tenderness and yet with great earnestness and great conviction, I would sound that word in the hearing of all. Take heed how ye hear. How shall we hear? Prayerfully, obediently, and in faith. The spirit of criticism never produces the result of power. Let us pray that in our lives God will plow up the fallow ground, give us the receptive heart, the child heart, willingness to hear and learn, deliver us from preconceived notions and prejudice, make us ready when He speaks to obey, make us simple-hearted at His feet, for as the rain and snow demand an earth plowed, broken, prepared, so does the Word of God demand a condition in those who hear, if it is to bring forth a harvest.

The true seed must be sown, and it must be by the preaching of the Word if the work is to be done. We are not to criticize the Word of God, not to account for the Word of God, not to defend the Word of God. We are to preach it and hear it. And there is a yet fuller application of that truth. The final preaching of the Word is not that of the lips but that of the life. Fundamentally the Word is the seed in the hearts of men, but functionally for the sake of the world, the seed is the sons of the Kingdom, the men in whom the Word has had its true effect.

Finally, the Word, the bread that comes, must be eaten or the toiler will grow weak. We are to let this Word of Christ dwell in us, take it into our life. The Word must come into the intellect, the emotion, the will; and when we take the Word of God into our whole life and answer its every claim, then in that moment God's purpose will be fulfilled in us.

One of the greatest instruments of God in the world today is the British and Foreign Bible Society. It sends out no preachers, but it accompanies the preacher with his message in the tongue of the people to whom he goes. It cannot issue statistics of conversion, but it pours forth the great stream of living water over all the earth and by such action quenches the thirsts of humanity as with the river of God. Alone, however, it would soon fail. As the Word circulates it becomes the sustenance of human lives, and so over earth's wilderness wastes the green appears which merges at last into the golden glory of the harvests of the Word of God.

056 - Isaiah 64:4; 1 Corinthians 2:9 - Waiting for God

Waiting for God

For from of old men have not heard, nor perceived by the ear, neither hath the eye seen a God beside Thee, Which worketh for him that waiteth for him.

Isaiah 64:4

Things which eye saw not, and ear heard not, And which entered not into the heart of man, whatsoever things God prepared for them that love Him.

1 Corinthians 2:9

The similarity between these two passages is patent. There is, however, an equally definite disparity. In the letter of Paul the words constitute a quotation. He introduced them by the formula, "As it is written...."

Now, there has been much discussion as to where the apostle found these words. Jerome affirmed them to be found in the Apocalyptic literature, with which Paul would certainly be familiar, but did not suggest that he quoted them from that literature. If they were quoted from the Hebrew Bible, this passage in Isaiah is the only one in the Old Testament which could in any way be looked upon as that from which Paul quoted. But there is a difference between the thing that Paul quoted and the passage which we are bound to notice. It is possible that he quoted from some other manuscript than that from which our translation was made. It is interesting to Bible students to observe in passing that both in Isaiah and Corinthians the revisers in the margin have not referred to these passages as being direct quotations but have indicated the relation by the use of the word "compare." By that method they suggest that it was not necessarily a direct quotation, but that it moves in the same realm of ideas.

Let us observe, then, the disparity between the two passages. In that in the prophecy of Isaiah, the emphasis is on the marvelous God Who works for those that wait for Him. "... from of old men have not heard, nor perceived by the ear, neither hath the eye seen a God beside Thee, Which worketh for him that waiteth for him."

In the Corinthians the emphasis is not upon God at all; it is upon the marvelous things which God does for them that love Him. "Things which eye saw not, and ear heard not, and which entered not into the heart of man, whatsoever things God prepared for them that love Him." Isaiah says that no other such God has been heard of or seen. Paul says that such wonderful things as those which God prepares have not been seen, or heard, or apprehended by the human heart; so wonderful are they that they can only be

made known by the Holy Spirit. In Isaiah the cause of wonder is that God works for them that wait for Him. In Corinthians the marvel is caused by the things that God does for those that love Him.

This recognition of disparity moves toward a recognition of the true spiritual relationship between the two passages which makes it more than probable that Paul was indeed quoting this very passage, only he did as New Testament writers perpetually did—changed the literal wording of the Old, caught a higher spiritual harmony, went further than the suggestion of the Old, modified it while not contradicting it in order to bring out a fuller and richer phase of truth. In each of them it is evident that the thought is moving in the same realm of ideas. In one it is occupied with the marvelous God Who works for them that wait for Him; in the other it is occupied with the marvelous things that God prepares for those that love Him. And so it seems to me that we may weave these two things into one statement: Our God is marvelous in that He does marvelous things for those who wait for Him because they love Him.

Now let us observe the similarity between the two declarations, in the light of the circumstances under which they were uttered or penned.

Historically the passage in Isaiah is not easy to place, but the nature of the circumstances is most clear. It was a day of darkness and of difficulty, when it seemed as though God had abandoned His own people and had ceased to act. Glancing back at chapter sixty-three, in the fifteenth verse, we find these words: "Look down from heaven, and behold from the habitation of Thy holiness and of Thy glory: where are Thy zeal and Thy mighty acts? The yearning of Thy bowels and Thy compassions are restrained toward me."

Or again in the close of verse eighteen and in verse nineteen:

"... our adversaries have trodden down Thy sanctuary. We are become as they over whom Thou never barest rule; as they that were not called by Thy name."

It was a day, moreover, when there were those among the people who with passionate desire were making appeal to God:

"Oh that Thou wouldest rend the heavens, that Thou wouldest come down, that the mountains might flow down at Thy presence; as when fire kindleth the brushwood, and the fire causeth the waters to boil: to make Thy name known to Thine adversaries, that the nations may tremble at Thy presence."

Then suddenly the prophet seems to have taken a backward look which was born of his intense desire that God should thus appear, and the backward look was one which brought to mind God's past appearances:

"When Thou didst terrible things which we looked not for, Thou camest down, the mountains flowed down at Thy presence."

It is as though the prophet had said: "I am not asking for things that have never been; I am asking Thee to return to Thine ancient attitude towards us, and to the activities of the past." In that very note of memory an idea was born. "... Thou didst terrible things which we looked not for..." Then he enunciated a central philosophy of life, as he declared: "For from old men have not heard, nor perceived by the ear, neither hath the eye seen a God beside Thee, Which worketh for him that waiteth for him." Thus we discover the value of the declaration. God's words for a waiting people, and they only fail when they try to manage without Him. Now let us turn to the New Testament and look at the circumstances that were in the mind of the apostle when he wrote. In this Letter to the Corinthians he was dealing with the difficulties that were confronting the Christian church, and in his mind was the fact of the darkest day in all human history. He was thinking of the day in which the cleverness of the world had crucified the Lord of glory. That was the day, that very day of unutterable and unfathomable darkness, in which God was preparing things for those that loved Him, too wonderful for human understanding, apart from the interpretation of the Spirit. This, then, is the second phase of the truth. God prepares in darkness and in mystery things for those that love Him that are so wonderful that they can only be understood by the interpretation of the Spirit.

From the wealth of ideas suggested by these two kindred passages I propose to make two simple deductions and to apply them.

The deductions are these. In the hour of darkness and difficulty the true attitude of those who believe in God is that of waiting for Him. The only strength sufficient to enable men to wait for God is that of love to Him, for love is the capacity for receiving the interpretation of the things which He is doing.

Waiting for God is not laziness. Waiting for God is not going to sleep. Waiting for God is not the abandonment of effort. Waiting for God means, first, activity under command; second, readiness for any new command that may come; third, the ability to do nothing until the command is given.

The Hebrew word translated "waiting" here has a pictorial affinity which is peculiarly suggestive today. It has affinity with a word that means "to entrench." We do no violence to the real thought of the text if we read it in that way. God worketh for him that entrenches himself in Him. The idea of waiting for God here is that of digging ourselves in to God.

Waiting for God, then, is the adjustment of our lives to the truth concerning Him which we know. When circumstances are chaotic, when it is impossible to understand their movements and to know what will be the outcome of this or that combination of circumstances, that is the hour in which we are to wait for God. God is certain; the one and only certainty of which we have any knowledge; far more certain than the fact of our own being. There is a sense in which we are sure of ourselves, we are sure of our existence, but there are infinite mysteries behind us as to the how of our being and far more unfathomable mysteries lying ahead of us as to the issue of our being; and as to its present continuity, there is no certainty. God is the one unchanging fact from everlasting to everlasting. Waiting for God means putting this life, of which I am so uncertain in a thousand varied ways, into right relationship with Him of Whom I am absolutely and everlastingly certain. Waiting for God means that I adjust my life to Him rather than to circumstances, and that I set my hope on Him rather than on the wit and the cleverness of men. Waiting for God means that definite personal activity which is busily occupied in adjusting the whole fact and circumstances of life to the unchangeable and unalterable fact of God.

Waiting for God means, therefore, readiness for any command; that state of perpetual suspense which listens for the word in order that it may be immediately obeyed. Those who wait for God are pilgrim souls that have no tie that will hold them when the definite command is issued; no prejudices that will paralyze their effort when in some strange coming of the light they are commanded to take a pathway entirely different to that which was theirs before; having no interests either temporal or eternal, either material or mental or spiritual, that will conflict with the will of God when that will is made known. Souls who wait for God are such as have their loins girt about, their lamps burning; they are alert, awake, ready.

Waiting for God, then, means power to do nothing save under command. This is not lack of power to do anything. Waiting for God needs strength rather than weakness. It is the power to do nothing. It is the strength that holds strength in check. It is the strength that prevents the blundering activity which is entirely false and will make the true activity impossible when the definite command comes.

For those who thus wait, God works; and as surely as men wait thus for Him while He works for them, there will come to them, presently, the clarion call to arise and cooperate. When it comes, the plan is almost invariably a different one from that which had been expected. "In ways we looked not for," said the prophet, "Thou hast wrought for us in the past."

Is not that the history of every forward movement in the economy of God? A period of darkness, a period of desolation, a period of difficulty in which His people were brought to the point of knowing that they did not know and understanding that they could not understand. A period of being clever enough to be done with their own cleverness, and then, while they waited, a period of adjusting their lives to God, severing all ties that held them, abandoning all prejudices that paralyzed, putting an end to every effort that was likely to conflict with the practical definite command and program and plan.

When the call comes, it is almost invariably to something new and surprising and startling, in the doing of which we seem to have to go back upon things that we have said and done in the past. The peril of the people of God is always that they shall be so wedded to yesterday that they are not ready for God's tomorrow; or that they shall be so busy today making their programs that when God brings His program, their own arrangements interfere with the carrying out of His will.

This is no easy conception of life. Waiting is far more difficult than working. It would be a much easier thing for the church of God at this very hour of her darkness to call conferences and councils and make plans for tomorrow than to wait. Waiting requires strength. It demands the absolute surrender of the life to God, the confession that we are at the end of our own understanding of things, the confession that we really do not see our way and do not know the way. The waiting that says: "Until God shall speak we dare not move and will not move, we will not be seduced from our resolution to wait"; requires strength. There is only one motive that is sufficiently strong to bring us to the place of true waiting and that motive is love. Isaiah in effect said, "God works for men that wait for Him"; Paul in effect said, "Marvelous things does God prepare for men that love Him." Love is confident in the authority; love is eager for the command; love rests in the wisdom of God; love is the alertness that waits and moves immediately. No fear of God will produce this waiting in the soul. There may be a waiting which is the result of fear, but that will be the waiting of inertia, the waiting of incapacity, and the waiting that, presently, when a call shall come, shall have no preparation for advance. The waiting that is to have the alertness and eagerness and strength enough not to do must be the outcome of love. This is an hour and power of darkness. The supreme hour and power of darkness came two millenniums ago when the world in its cleverness crucified the Lord of glory. That was a darker hour than this. The situation was more hopeless and helpless than anything the world had known before or since when the rulers of this world, knowing not the wisdom of God, crucified the Lord of glory. So far as our lifetime is concerned, this is the hour and power of darkness. The similarity of our condition and those of the days in which Isaiah's word was spoken is perfectly patent. This is a day in which it seems as though God had abandoned men and ceased to act. This is a day in which the cry is going up from many hearts, "Oh that Thou wouldest rend the heavens, that Thou wouldest come down." This, then, is a day in which God is surely acting in ways that we cannot see. Gleams of light there have been. Great principles have been discovered, and in the light of them we have lived through all these weary months. Yet I do not believe there is any man in the Christian church who is prepared to tell us exactly what God means and what God is doing. But faith affirms its conviction that God has a meaning and that God is at

work. There is a similarity between this hour and that condition of darkness to which Paul referred. Today the rulers of this world are crucifying the Son of God afresh and putting Him to open shame. Then, by the sign and token of Golgotha and the unutterable darkness of the Crucifixion, we affirm our faith that this is a day in which God is preparing for those that love Him, things that eye has not seen and ear has not heard, things that have never entered into the heart of man and which can only be interpreted by the Holy Spirit.

What, then, is our duty today? Our duty is to wait for Him. Every activity which brings us into more perfect adjustment with Him is to be the eager occupation of our busy life and that combined with the resolute refusal to take any action which may prejudice His purpose.

During recent days the Congregational ministers of London have been gathering together to pray and to wait on God in the very sense which we have considered, that of seeking the adjustment of their own lives to the will of God. They are not creating machinery but seeking to be ready for God. That is the true attitude.

It is impossible for us to have lived through these months, critical as they have been and still are with new and sinister evils in our midst assaulting our souls with fear, without wondering.

That day of new conditions in this England of ours! That day of the new problems! Are we ready for it? Letters lie upon my table from men in the war and most of them speak of the new sense of life that has come to them. They are coming back presently. Shall we be equal to the call?

One peril that confronts us is that of making our plans and setting up our organizations. As surely as we do, we shall make ourselves unready for the day of God. What, then, shall we do? Wait for God. Our activity must be that of setting our own lives in right relationship to Him, of placing all our organizations at His disposal. Waiting for God means being free and alert so that when the breath of God moves over us and the voice of God sounds, we shall be ready for departure along the new highway which He will mark out for us. While God works and we wait, He is preparing for a working in which we must cooperate. The new working of God will be revolutionary, the breaking up of our ideals, the scrapping of our mechanisms. Today we must get ready for this. If we are thus to wait for God, we must love Him as we have never loved Him. The question that comes to us as we look honestly within our own souls is the question, "How are we to increase our love to God?" The central need of the moment is a new and passionate love for God, burning and flaming in His holy church. In proportion as that love comes, the church will be able to wait with the waiting that means alertness and readiness for service. Our love to God will be deepened by two things: a new and earnest cultivation of our fellowship with Him and a new and simple and definite obedience to Him.

How are we to cultivate our fellowship with God? By the contemplation of Christ. No man hath seen God at any time. The Son Who is in the bosom of the Father hath declared Him.

Would we see God's brightest glory?

We must look in Jesus' Face.

There must be a new contemplation of the Christ. There must also be a new consideration of human history from the standpoint of the Divine over-ruling; an attempt to focus upon the present situation the light of past situations. Do you not think that when Israel of old came down to the river which prevented her crossing into the land and the command was given to her that she should go across that river and take possession, that she was greatly helped in the interpretation of the problem by the history of the divided sea at the exodus? We are altogether in danger today of looking out with the men of the world, with the men of affairs, with the men whose only look is horizontal and never perpendicular. We are in danger of looking at things on the level, and there is no light anywhere. It is for us to be cultivating our fellowship with God by climbing to the heights and looking back and seeing how God has acted in the past, not in Bible history only, but in all history, for all history is divine. God has abandoned no nation utterly in all time. The man of faith who knows God, especially through Jesus Christ, will look out on the history of the past and the whole history of humanity and see it as a history of the denial of human cleverness and the proving of the folly of the wit and wisdom of the world even when it seemed at the point of victory. He will see everywhere an over-ruling providence, or, better, he will see the over-ruling God.

Let us cultivate our fellowship with God by considering the past and interpret the present hour of stress and strain and darkness, not by the things that are at our disposal in the material or the mental world, but by the activities of God in human history through the running centuries and the cycles of the years. Let us cultivate our fellowship with Him by practicing that which we hear referred to in every Christian service at its close: the communion of the Holy Ghost.

The final responsibility is not a communal responsibility. It is an individual responsibility. It is a responsibility that rests upon me. The cultivation of God must be personal, it must be lonely, and it must be intense. It demands time, it demands effort, it demands endeavor. The waiting for God of the whole church depends finally upon the waiting upon God of the individual members of the church. Through the busy rush of these terrible days, when every hour must sweat its sixty minutes to the death, we are failing

unutterably if we do not find the hour of retirement, of separation, of quietness, that we may find God and cultivate our fellowship with Him. Waiting upon God, we shall learn to love Him more, and by loving Him more, we shall be more perfectly prepared to wait for Him.

That which must accompany that individual fellowship is quick, simple, ready obedience to every shining of the light at whatever cost and to every inspiration of the love at whatever cost.

In proportion as we thus love Him and wait for Him, we shall be ready for whatever may be the plan of God in the days to come.

057 - Jeremiah 17:12 – Sanctuary

Sanctuary

A glorious throne, set on high from the beginning, is the place of our sanctuary.

Jeremiah 17:12

Jeremiah's prophecies were uttered when the religious and moral conditions of the ancient people of God had become idolatrous and profligate. They are full of the sorrow of his heart, and yet thrill with vehement denunciation of sin. Notwithstanding these facts, it is quite evident as one reads this book that in common with all the messengers of God Jeremiah lived and spoke with strength born of a perpetual consciousness that however chaotic the circumstances of the hour may appear, the foundation is secure. In our text we have a radiant revelation of the prophet's conception of the character of that foundation. At the center of all he saw an established throne. As I have indicated, he shared this conviction with all the great messengers of God, whose words have been recorded for us in the Scriptures of truth. There was a day when they said to David, "Flee as a bird to your mountain, for, lo, the wicked bend the bow, they make ready their arrow upon the string, that they may shoot in darkness at the upright in heart. If the foundations be destroyed, what can the righteous do?" He replied, "How say ye to my soul, Flee as a bird to your mountain?... The Lord is in His holy temple, the Lord, His throne is in heaven; his eyes behold, His eyelids try the children of men."

There was a day when Isaiah was passing from the first phase of his ministry into a larger and more trying one, a day when the throne of his people became vacant, and he said, "In the year that King Uzziah died I saw the Lord sitting upon a throne, high and lifted up, and His train filled the temple." So here Jeremiah is facing a ministry full of difficulty; his heart is failing, his flesh is trembling, he is afraid; yet the word of God, as he says, burns within his bones and he is driven forth. He goes in spite of fear and trembling, with a courage and heroism that almost startle us as we read the story. Why was he courageous in spite of fear? The answer is to be found in his declaration, "A glorious throne, on high from the beginning, is the place of our sanctuary."

The conception of my text is that right relation to the throne of God is the place of sanctuary. Notice carefully that he does not say that the sanctuary is a throne, but that the throne is a sanctuary. If Jeremiah had declared the sanctuary to be a throne it would have been true; but it would have opened before our minds an entirely different aspect of truth. It then would have said to us that the sanctuary, using the word in the Hebrew sense, the place of worship and approach, was also the place of government. That is true, but that is not the message of the text. That is not the vision which made Jeremiah and all the messengers of God strong to face opposition and declare the truth. It was the conviction that the throne of God is a sanctuary, that if a man would find sanctuary he must find the throne; if a man would find the place of refuge, of quietness, of peace in the midst of trouble and turmoil and distress, he is not to seek it by the way of asking for a solution, but by putting his life into right relationship with the established throne of the abiding government of God.

Since the days of Jeremiah all the externals have changed. Human ideals, the habits and manners of men, and the customs of the age are all different; but the essential stream of human life flows on, and the laws of its progress are also unchanged.

We take this text out of the midst of the prophecies, turning from the man who uttered it, and all the strange and appalling circumstances in the midst of which he found himself, and we take the words and declare them to be a statement of truth for us. "A glorious throne, on high from the beginning, is the place of our sanctuary." I shall ask you to notice, first, the meaning of sanctuary, and second, to consider the final declaration of the text, that the place of our sanctuary is the throne.

The idea of sanctuary is a very old one. Indeed, it is as old as human history. Wherever you read human history you will find this idea obtaining. In the architecture of ancient Egypt there are found what are called sanctuary temples. They were temples which consisted of one simple chamber, so simple that a person finding his way into it was hidden, and yet no enemy could be hidden from him therein. They were the sanctuaries into which men in hours of great stress and danger came for safety. In the history of the ancient people of God you read of how men came and took hold upon the horns of the altar, which means they sought and claimed sanctuary. Not only in the ancient history and the history of the Bible, but in the history of our own country we find the same story. In olden times every church and churchyard offered what was called sanctuary. We are close to an illustrious instance of what I am now referring to. Dean Stanley says of Westminster Abbey, "The precincts of Westminster Abbey were a vast cave of Adullam for all

the distressed and discontented in the metropolis who desired, in the phrase of the time, 'to take Westminster.' "That is to say, men in debt and danger, and discontented—I am quoting the words concerning Adullam—found their way in the olden days into the church or churchyard, and there were considered safe, and their confidence was respected.

What, then, does the idea suggest? There is a twofold note in this thought of sanctuary. Man's consciousness of his own danger and his desire for escape therefrom; his consciousness of unrest and his longing for a place of rest; his consciousness of peril and his desire after protection. The cry of man after sanctuary in all ages has been the cry of man in the midst of stress and strain and danger, of peril and conflict, and unrest; his cry for protection, for some place in which to hide himself, for some sphere in which the forces which have been buffeting, beating and bruising him will be unable to reach him. The idea of sanctuary is the idea of a place of quietness, of peace, of privacy, of protection. The deep meaning of the word is indicated in the fact that in all the instances I have quoted, and many others which I might have named, the thought of sanctuary is intimately related to religion—false or true matters nothing for the moment—whether the ancient religion of Egypt, or the revealed religion of Israel, or the religion of our own Christian times, the fact remains the same. When a man sought sanctuary he sought the things of religion. In that seeking is evidenced the fact that man associated with sanctuary the idea, first, of purity or holiness; second, of privacy, or perfect silence; and, finally, therefore, as a corollary to these two, the idea of protection, of being guarded from the things which were against him.

The idea of purity, of separation by holiness, sanctuary, in all these illustrations, was in the thinking of the men who sought it, a place in which there was no lie, no deceit. The holy of holies in the sanctuary of the Hebrews was a perfect cube, suggestive of regularity, of exactness, of integrity. Sanctuary, therefore, was a place which had no complicity with the evil things which made sanctuary a necessity to man. Man, in the midst of evil—whether in the sense of wilful sin, or in the sense of the limitations and calamities which follow thereupon—evil, hampering, hindering, bruising, battering him, wants sanctuary, a place where evil is not. He is seeking some place of purity that he there may find refuge from the forces of impurity which have disturbed his life and harmed him.

Sanctuary suggests not only purity, and perhaps this is the subconsciousness of desire—it suggests privacy, a place guarded by the forces of its own holiness from intrusion which is either inquisitive or revolutionary. It is a place of silence, a place of quiet—witness the great shrines of all religions, false and true. At the heart of every one is a place which few are permitted to enter, of which the chief characteristic is peace because there is privacy. In following me you will understand that I am not defending any form of religion. I am illustrating a truth. At the heart of many a religion in the place of silence, quietness, there is enthroned as deity that which is degrading. I simply ask you to notice the desire of the heart of man first of all for a religion untouched by evil, because evil has harmed him, and, second, for a place of quietness.

Men will take sanctuary in the most actual way even yet. You cannot walk through Westminster Abbey or St. Paul's Cathedral without seeing some poor, bruised, battered soul getting quiet. I never see such in the great cathedrals but I experience a twofold emotion—prayer for them, that they may find the secret place of hiding, and the desire that all our churches might always be open for such to pass inside, and sit and seek that quietness and find rest.

Then as a necessary corollary to this desire after purity and privacy, and now perhaps I have reached the first sentiment of the man who seeks it, seeking sanctuary is seeking protection, seeking to be guarded against the things which have troubled and harmed. Overcome in the conflict, bruised and broken in the battle, the spirit of man flings itself toward some religion of purity, privacy and protection, and in so doing at least indicates the fact that by submission to its law of holiness and peace he will be protected from the forces which have been against him.

Such are some of the suggestions of the great word sanctuary. Today the strenuousness of life is more terrible than it ever was. In the age in which we live perchance there are fewer cataclysms, catastrophes, than in olden days; but if the hours red and horrible with tragedy are fewer than they were, the sum total of unrest is greater than it ever was. The strain and stress of life have invaded places which were characterized by immunity therefrom. We still sing,

Thou hast Thy young men at the war,
Thy little ones at home,

but even our homes today are invaded, and the little ones are touched by the competitive fever of the age in which we live. Never perhaps have men more keenly felt the need of sanctuary.

Never has the subconsciousness of common humanity more cried out after some place of rest, some relationship which will make the heart firm and steady, some attitude of life which will correct all the feverishness arising from the complexity and strain of life. Where shall we find our sanctuary? This is background that I may bring you to the text.

"A glorious throne, on high from the beginning, is the place of our sanctuary." A glorious throne. That is the sum total of the revelation of Scripture to men. There are many things included in that of which I am not going to speak. I am not going to attempt to dissect, or analyze, or find out all the component parts of the great truth. From Genesis to Revelation the one truth the Bible declares is that the throne of God is man's resting-place, the throne of God is the place where man will find the answer to his desire for

quietness, to his passion for peace, to his search after sanctuary.

In a rapid survey go over the Bible with me. In the early Bible history the throne is unnamed, but it is always there. In the early movements chronicled for us I find men in relation to the throne, submissive, at peace; in rebellion against the throne, disturbed. The throne of God is everywhere. I come at last to the point where the chosen people make their great mistake, and I hear God's explanation of it, "They have rejected me, that I should not be King over them." I come further on until I find this selfsame chosen people in the midst of circumstances full of terror, Ahab and Jehoshaphat are the reigning kings. In the first book of Kings, for the first time in the Bible, the phrase, "the throne of God," appears. When the thrones of men which had been set up in folly were proven disloyal to the principles for which they stood, and suffering and darkness had settled over the people, the messenger of God reminded them of the one throne of God. The devotional and prophetic books are full of references to the throne of God. In the Gospel story Jesus speaks of the throne of God, and the burden of His message is always that of the Kingdom of God. In the Acts I see Him, the Son of man, having passed to the throne as the final place of His power. When I come to the Revelation, that last book of the canon, declaring the final movements that usher in the eternal state, the throne is mentioned more than in any other part of the Bible. It is the book of the throne of God and the government of God. It is the book of the Kingdom of God. Its one message to men is, if you would find sanctuary, find the throne; if you would find peace, kiss the scepter; if you would be safe, get into right relationship with the one abiding and eternal throne. "A glorious throne... is the place of our sanctuary."

Mark the suggestiveness of the idea. What is a throne? It is the symbol of authority. It is the basis of law. It is the place from which the laws which govern are uttered. It is more, it is the symbol of administration, and not merely the symbol of law. It speaks of rewards and punishments. It speaks of the fact that the laws which are for the governance of all submitted to it are enforced by its majesty. It is the throne of arbitration and the settlement of disputes. This is sanctuary. The Bible idea of sanctuary is not that men shall find peace by escape to the pity of God, but to the judgment of God. The Bible idea of sanctuary is not that man shall find peace because God as a Father takes him and lulls him to sleep while in his heart man is still in rebellion. The Bible idea of sanctuary is that man shall find peace when he returns to the will and government of God in submission. This is not to contradict the meaning and message of Jesus. Jesus came not to persuade God to have pity on men who to the end of their career would remain in rebellion; but to establish the law and make it honorable, to preach the Kingdom and, blessed be His name, to make it possible for any bruised and broken man, returning toward the throne, to be healed and made strong. The ultimate in the purpose of Jesus was to bring men to sanctuary by bringing them to the throne. "Seek ye first His Kingdom, and His righteousness; and all these things shall be added unto you."

Not only did Jeremiah speak of the throne, he used a phrase which runs all through Hebrew figurative speech. "A glorious throne, on high." Even in the Revised Version we have the rendering "set on high," the word "set" being introduced, as is shown by the italics, in order to indicate a thought. I venture to think that here, as so often, there is more grandeur, more rugged splendor if we translate literally, "A glorious throne, on high from the beginning, is the place of our sanctuary." Mark that Hebrew figure of height. It is but a figure, but it is a suggestive one. The figure of height runs through all Hebrew imagery, and is always indicative of safety. In Psalms 46, one of the great psalms which has become the common property of trusting souls, we read "The Lord of Hosts is with us; the God of Jacob is our refuge." You have noticed the marginal reading of the word "refuge," "high tower." Again in Proverbs it is written "The name of the Lord is a strong tower: the righteous runneth into it and is safe"—set on high. It is a peculiar Hebrew figure of safety. How is this safety produced? By setting man on high above the things which are against him.

Go back to the threefold fact of sanctuary. Man coming to the throne of God comes to a throne on high and is lifted above the evil, therefore, into a place of purity. He is lifted above disturbance, therefore, into a place of privacy. He is lifted above enmity, and therefore, into a place of protection. This is sanctuary. It is this thought of height symbolizing safety that emerges in the wonderful words of Jesus with which we are very familiar, "Now is the judgment of this world: now shall the prince of this world be cast out. And I, if I be lifted up from the earth, will draw all men unto Myself. But this He said, signifying by what manner of death He should die." He did not mean merely, "If I be lifted up a few yards from the ground on the rough Roman gibbet."

He meant, "If by that pathway of suffering and sorrow, I am lifted high above evil, high above distraction and enmity, I will draw men to Myself." As He was lifted to the place of the throne by way of the cross He was lifted to a throne on high from the beginning, and as men find their way to Him on the throne through the mystery of His cross, they find their way to purity which is above evil, to privacy which is above disturbance, to protection which is above enmity.

Yet there is another phrase, for the prophet has not said the final thing. "A glorious throne, on high from the beginning, is the place of our sanctuary," "From the beginning." Again you are familiar with the phrase. It is one of those commonplaces of Scripture running from the first book to the last, from the first chapter to the final one, the simple phrase "the beginning." Take the highways of the phrase, "In the beginning God created." Come on into the sweet song of Solomon concerning wisdom, sung while the seeds of the decay of earthly kingship were already scattered, the song in which he sings, "The Lord possessed me in the beginning of His way, before His works of old. I was set up from everlasting, from the beginning, or ever the earth was. When there were no depths, I was brought forth." In Isaiah's prophecy in the midst of the failure of earthly kingship, speaking of the one King, he declares that He sees

"the end from the beginning." It is used by John in introducing the Gospel which reveals the inner life of Christ, "In the beginning was the Word." The Master Himself when correcting the casuistry of men who were asking Him questions about social order and quoting something Moses had said, swept behind Moses and said, "From the beginning," so indicating the permanence of the moral order. It is used by John again in the epistle, which has as its key words, life, light, love, showing from what source these things have sprung, "That which was from the beginning." Found again at the commencement and close of the Revelation of Jesus Christ which He sent and signified to His servant John, "The beginning." Some of you remember the words of Dr. Parker about that wonderful phrase. No words of mine can as beautifully and forcefully convey their profound significance. He said, "The beginning, the remotest date that has yet been suggested. Science has its slow rising and slow falling centuries. Yet 'the beginning'—the dateless date—includes them all, and drowns them in a deeper sea. On that ocean millenniums are but tufts of foam."

"A glorious throne, on high from the beginning, is the place of our sanctuary." That is to say, the government of God is based upon the reasons of things and finds its expression not in the rules of a passing hour, but in the principles of eternity. So that if God shall order my life for the next half-hour the reason of His ordering lies back in the ages that I cannot measure. That is Calvinism at its deepest and best and truest. That is the great fact which we still believe, that every flower that blooms on the sod under the Divine government has its roots of life and thought and suggestion far back in the ages we do not know.

Jeremiah had to preach to rebellious people, footmen to weary him, horsemen to tire him, in a land of peace, and amid the swellings of Jordan. How can he do this work in the midst of the opposition? How can he continue? "A glorious throne, on high from the beginning, is the place of our sanctuary." If this tiny, short life of mine is conditioned by the law of the throne on high from eternity, there is no room for panic in my heart. There is no room for fear and trembling. Let me but learn that law, let me but find the place of true relationship to that fact, and I have found sanctuary.

The fixed point in the universe is the unchangeable throne of God. The laws which emanate from it, the supreme will that enforces those laws, the infinite and unchanging wisdom which arbitrates amid all the conflicts, the certain wisdom and eternal youth which preside over the strife and battle, these, when my life is in harmony, create the only perfect sanctuary for human life. Our loyalty to the throne is the law of our liberty.

In the present life on every hand are mysteries that baffle and perplex. Oh, the perplexities and the problems about us. Let me not speak in generalities. Let me speak to one man or woman here. Buffeted man, tempest-tossed soul, the circumstances of the hour are circumstances of chaos. You cannot see how there is to be deliverance. It may be in matters material, mental, or spiritual. Here you are, an atom of humanity, and the surging sea of the multitude does but add to your unrest. You are seeking sanctuary, a place of peace, of privacy, of purity. Oh, to be high lifted above the things which seem to break and scar. Listen, this is the Gospel of hope, "A glorious throne, on high from the beginning, is the place of our sanctuary." Oh, the inexpressible comfort of knowing that unseen by the vision that is physical, but surely apprehended by faith, "the throne of God is for ever and ever: the scepter of His Kingdom is a right scepter." And, oh, my soul, the deeper comfort when individual life is immediately related to that throne by submission to its authority. Then indeed is man able to sing:

Father, I know that all my life
Is portioned out for me,
The changes that are sure to come
I do not fear to see;
I ask Thee for a present mind
Intent on pleasing Thee.

How may I find that throne? It is not far to seek, for the King Himself, in grace and tenderness and compassion, is at hand, and without material sign you may find the King, and finding Him thou shalt find the abiding throne, the glorious throne lifted high from the beginning. If thy life and mine may be surrendered to Him, we shall have found sanctuary.

058 - Jeremiah 18:3 - The Potter's Work on the Wheels

The Potter's Work on the Wheels

Then I went down to the potter's house, and, behold, he wrought his work on the wheels.

Jeremiah 18:3

The figure of the potter and the clay is perennially attractive. Perhaps it has not been so popular in recent years as formerly. There is a note of severity about it, of which our softer age has been afraid. In every age characterized by strength the figure of the potter has been one of those most often used by the prophets and messengers of God. It is interesting to notice that in the Bible it is used by the men mightiest in their personal thinking and in the influence they exerted on their age. Four Bible writers use it, perhaps borrowing it from each other. Whether that be so or not, they are men of peculiar strength: Isaiah, a man of clear vision of God's

uplifted throne; Jeremiah, a man of deep understanding of God's heart of love; Zechariah, a man who saw further than any Old Testament prophet, and whose book is a veritable apocalypse not yet fulfilled; and Paul, the man of massive thinking and keen penetration to the heart of the philosophy of the Christian religion.

This figure contains a deeper note than that of its severity, which, when discovered, explains and justifies that severity of which some of us have been afraid, and in the presence of which we still tremble. To refer again to the men to whom I have made reference, it will be seen that while they were men of a severe note, yet to speak of severity as their final note would be to misinterpret them altogether. The thunder of Isaiah perpetually merged into the plaintive wail of his tender love as he expressed the thought of God concerning the sinning people; Jeremiah's deepest and profoundest note was reached when he cried: "Oh that my head were waters"; Zechariah looks on to great consummations, to the outworking of the infinite love and pity; and although Paul, with pitiless scorn and sarcasm, tracks sin until we see it in its deepest and inner meaning, he is also the man who says: "I call God to witness I could be accursed from Christ for my brethren's sake." Wherever you find a man of strong outlook and severe note you find him using the figure of the potter sooner or later, but you also find him melting into tears, a man moved with compassion.

I want tonight, as God shall help me, to bring you back to this old and familiar figure, that we may consider its application to personal life. In the passage which I read to you from Jeremiah the figure is used in relation to national affairs. It is almost invariably so used in the Old Testament. We are perfectly justified in arguing from the nation, which is composed of individuals, to the individual lives, which constitute the nation. There are national applications even today of this great message, upon which I do not propose to touch. I desire to take the principle here revealed and apply it to our individual and personal life.

In the passage from which my text is taken the picture of the potter is given in all simplicity and clearness of outline. Jeremiah is seen going down to the house of the potter, and in imagination we accompany him. If we have ever been to the house of the potter we have been in very close comradeship with Jeremiah, for among all the changes that have taken place in manufacture the house of the potter is almost exactly today as it was in the olden days. There have been some small changes in the matter of the wheel, but practically no change in essential things, the potter and the clay. So we may imagine we are standing with Jeremiah in that actual house, and seeing exactly what he saw.

Let us look at these things in all their simplicity, without any reference for the moment to the teaching suggested. What did Jeremiah see? He saw the potter, the wheel, and the clay. In the potter he saw an intelligent and capable worker; in the wheel an instrument by which the worker accomplished a definite purpose in the clay; and in the clay a capable material, something with which it was possible for the potter to accomplish his purpose. These facts constitute the essential revelations of the potter's house for all time concerning the relationship which exists between God and man.

The potter speaks first of God's authority, and we are afraid of the figure because we stay there. That is not all, the potter speaks also of God's interest and God's perpetual attention, and finally of God's absolute power. Looking at the potter as he sits at the wheel and places his hand upon the clay, I am conscious of his right and authority over the clay, but if I watch him more closely, I also see his keen interest as the clay changes its form under his fingers. If I watch yet more carefully I see his close and unvarying attention to his work; his eye is never lifted from the clay while the wheel revolves and his hand is molding. Having started with his authority and observed his interest and unvarying attention, I also recognize his power. Those hands which press so gently, or so heavily, are hands of power, infinite so far as that clay is concerned.

Turning from the potter, I look at the wheels upon which the clay is turned, and they speak to me of all the circumstances in the midst of which I find myself. I think that perhaps the truth concerning these wheels can be told most expressively in the words of Browning:

... this dance,
Of plastic circumstance,
This Present, thou, forsooth, wouldst fain arrest:
Machinery just meant
To give thy soul its ben',
Try thee and turn thee forth, sufficiently impressed.

The wheel is incidental, necessary but transitory, to be flung aside when the potter remains and the clay has found its final form and shape. The things of supreme moment are the potter and the clay.

The clay speaks of man's capacity and relation to God. It is of plastic nature; it can be molded. There are other forms of matter which you never find upon the wheel of the potter. There is never any attempt on the part of the potter to mold steel filings into form for beauty or for use. Clay is material which will take the impress of the potter's fingers.

These are the simplest lessons of the potter's house. There I see God and myself and all the circumstances of my life: the intelligent

Master Workman, with the thought in His mind which no one has ever seen; myself of such a nature as to be able to express that thought for others to see it; and all the circumstances of my life, turning wheels, so swiftly turning oftentimes as to make me afraid, presently to be set aside when the vessel is fashioned. So in the potter's house, the simplest of all manufacturing centers and yet the sublimest, for here art and artifice meet, I learn the profoundest lessons of what man's relationships to God really are.

I shall ask you, then, to follow me as I attempt to lead you, first, to the discovery of the principle taught; secondly, to the recognition of purpose suggested; and, finally, to the knowledge of the Person who chooses to stand revealed in this ancient figure as the Potter. Unless these three things are recognized we shall surely rebel against the whole conception. If we simply discover the principle of this figure we shall be afraid. We must also find the Person of the Potter. It is this last quantity which we have too often missed in our consideration of this wonderful figure. We have too often preached the principle of submission to God's absolute sovereignty without reference to the character of God. I shall never submit myself to the principle, so frail and weak and afraid am I, until I see the Potter. If I can but see Him, and know Him, then as plastic clay I shall yield myself to His hand, knowing that in this figure, severe and strenuous, there is the music of infinite tenderness, and patience, and love.

On the other hand, if a man know the Person, and refuse to obey the principle, or accept the purpose, he will fail. The principle taught is that of the absolute sovereignty of God and the necessity for the submission of man thereto. The potter has a right which is absolute over the clay. It cannot resist his hand finally. It has no right to suggest to him what form or fashion it shall take. We hear much today of the rights of man. The first truth which the potter's house teaches is that of the rights of God. Our fathers expressed the truth in a way which we would never care to use, and yet it is sometimes well to go back and listen to the tremendous and overwhelming emphasis which they laid upon it. It is told of a pastor of one of the New England churches in the olden days that he almost invariably asked candidates for membership, "Are you perfectly willing to submit yourself to God whatever His will concerning you may be? Are you willing, if you knew it would be for His glory, to be eternally shut out from His presence?" That question is entirely out of place, since God has said that He willeth not the death of any sinner; and yet at the back of it there is a tremendous truth, of which we are in danger of losing sight—the truth that no man would have any right to complain, whatever God decided to do with him. We know what God would do, He willeth that all should come to Him and live. That is the purpose of God for all, but, knowing that, we must not minimize this other tremendous truth of God's sovereignty. Shall man challenge God? God has a right to take this whole world and annihilate it and sweep out the race that has condemned His law and turned its back on all His infinite love.

Therefore, man's right in the presence of God is that he should have no wish, no claim, no desire of his own, save only to discover the wish, the claim, the desire, the right of God.

But I can quite imagine that someone is stating a difficulty. The clay has no will, and I have will. The clay has no power to choose, and I have power to choose. I was created by this selfsame God with will and the power to choose. Therein lies disparity, and the figure is spoiled by the disparity. Not at all. The distance between God and man is greater than the distance between the potter and the clay. The distance between the infinite will and the finite will is far greater than the distance between the finite will and the thing that lacks will. When you are working out your ratios of comparison you must be very careful to remember that when you compare the infinite with the finite in any form you have a greater distance to bridge than between the finite and finite in any form. What is will? The power to choose within limitation. Will answers a governing principle. It never acts, save with something at the back of it that drives it. Consequently, the highest exercise of will is the choice of the governing principle, the choice of that which shall be master. When God gave man will, He did so that man might choose his master, that he might either submit himself to the one eternal throne of God, which, in turn, is dominated by righteousness and love, or submit himself only to himself, to his own ruin. So far, man has will. Every man and woman, youth and maiden, and child will choose for himself his master, his ruling principle, and so his destiny. God allows man to make his choice, but when he chooses he is still acting under the government of God, and he cannot finally escape therefrom. He will choose truly if he does so by the principle revealed in the house of the potter, saying as he chooses: "Our wills are ours... to make them Thine." Any other exercise of the will is prostitution of the power bestowed, and must issue in the ruin of the one who makes such use of it. So that while there is a difference between the potter and the clay, on the one hand, and God and man on the other, the distance between potter and clay and the distance between God and man are not equal. If the finite man has a right to complete authority over clay, which is finite matter, much more have the infinite and eternal mind and will of God the right to claim absolute authority over the finite mind and will of man. Thus, the teaching of this picture as to principle is the sovereignty of God, and the fact that man's wisdom lies in unconditional and uncompromising surrender to that will of God, of which man's will is but the spark and offspring.

But there is purpose manifest as well as principle. "Behold, he wrought his work on the wheels." The potter has a thought in his mind for the clay, and he alone can transfer that thought to the clay. The clay is necessarily ignorant of the thought in the potter's mind, but can find that thought, and realize and manifest it by quiet submission to the hand of the potter. My brethren, when I pass from this great principle, which I confess taken alone fills me with fear, to notice that there is a purpose, my heart begins to find comfort. The potter, as the wheel revolves, is not dealing capriciously with the clay; his fingers are not working aimlessly. As I watch him in the beginning of the work I cannot see what he means, but he knows what he means, and as his hands rest upon the clay he is

translating into the outward and manifest the thought of beauty and use which is in his own mind and heart. The clay gains in the potter; the potter gains in the clay. The clay is shapeless as clay, but the clay plus the potter becomes a thing of beauty and of use. The potter has in his mind a thought of beauty, which none but himself can see apart from the clay, but the potter plus the clay can express his thought so that others may see it. Here I think we touch one of the deepest mysteries of human life. Man is created that God may have a medium through which He can manifest the things in His own mind. Man is fashioned in His likeness, in His image, that those who cannot see the essential and eternal Spirit may yet see the things of the essential and eternal Spirit in man. How man has missed his mark, and yet by the redemption of Jesus Christ this great purpose is fulfilled. Paul declared: "We are His workmanship." What Paul really writes is, "We are His poetry," not that the Apostle meant we are His poetry, but His work of art, that through which He gives others to see the things of beauty resident in His own infinite mind. This same truth is expressed in Peter's words: "Ye are an elect race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for God's own possession, that ye may shew forth the excellencies of Him who called you out of darkness into His marvellous light." God gains in men that through which He can reveal Himself as the potter gains in the clay the medium through which he can express his thought. But the other side is also true. See what the clay has gained. It was but a shapeless thing, lacking beauty, lacking expression of anything that has refinement in it, lacking utility; but it gains from the hand of the potter form and shape and usefulness. Man alone is as the clay, lacking beauty, lacking true utility, making shipwreck of his own personality; but let man find God's throne and yield to it, submit his whole life to the hands of the great Master Potter, and he finds the poor clay of his life made into something fair and beautiful and full of use to God and to man. You came into this house tonight saying, My life is purposeless. Give it to God, and it will be purposeful. You said, These years have gone from me, twenty, thirty, forty, and I have done nothing. Yield to God and the Potter's hand will be upon you to mold and to make. It may be that the molding and making will not yet be recognized by your fellow men. That matters nothing. It may be that the molding and making will be that of a thing of use rather than of beauty. It may be that He will mold you to some service that men count menial. There is no menial service which the King appoints. There must be yielding to the Potter, but then, oh, soul of mine, when thou art so yielded purpose is the story of thy life.

We go yet one step further in this study. The thought of sovereignty is terrible, and the principle is enough to affright the heart of man. So also is the purpose unless I know the Person. Tyranny may have purpose, but I am afraid of purpose if you only speak of it. Tyranny may demand submission, but I am afraid of submission if you only speak of it. If you bring me to the potter's house and say to me, See the potter and his authority, and yield; see the potter and his purpose, and yield, I will not speak for anyone else, but I am afraid. I know there must be some authority, but I am afraid when I am asked to yield to this infinite authority, although I know there ought to be some purpose. But what is the purpose?

The figure of the potter's house is never perfect until you have passed beyond the principle and the purpose to the Person. Who is the potter? That is the final question before I can yield. There need be no argument, for the answer has been given by revelation in a Person. God is the Potter. Who is God? There is only one answer: "God is love." I might have given a hundred answers. I might have said God is righteousness, is holiness, is beneficence, but I want to gather up all the possessions and express them at once; and when I want to gather up all the characteristics and write them as character there is only one answer: "God is love."

I can submit to love. Now I am not afraid of the purpose. This is the quantity we have too often lost sight of when we have preached about the potter's house. Suffering one, how those hands of God have pressed some days upon the clay, and this clay is feeling, thinking, suffering clay. Oh, how these hands have pressed, but they are the hands of God, and God is love. That great truth is established. I am not going to insult God by arguing it. We know it. The thought of the Potter is love as He molds the clay upon the wheels, and remember He governs the wheels as well as the clay. There ought to be comfort in that for someone. He comes, not only with a thought of love, but with such a nature of love that all the process is a process of love, and if He break by the pressure of His hands it is but to make; if He crush, it is but to create.

I bring you to the principle taught in the potter's house and tell you that until you have learned it, until you submit to it, your life is failure. I bring you to the fact of purpose taught in the potter's house, and tell you, here is infinite comfort if you will but have it so; your life may be purposeful. If I leave you there I leave you afraid, so I bring you finally to the Person. Would we know what the heart of the Potter is we must see it transfixed with wounds upon the brutal cross. Would we know the real meaning of the Potter's hands we must see them with wound prints in them. Would we know the deep truth both as to principle and purpose we must lay our weary heads upon the bosom of God, and feel the beating of the infinite Heart. When I feel that, then I can trust, then I can submit to the principle, then I can consent to the purpose.

My last word to every man and woman, Christian or not, is this: to revel is to take the clay out of the Potter's hands and to render it purposeless and useless—waste—in the economy of the universe. Oh, the wrecks in the potter's field! Vessels half formed, and marred and flung away. The potter's field is full of wreckage, lives that might have been fashioned to forms of beauty, but that they would not yield to the hands of the Potter.

I cannot leave my story with that solemn word of warning. I am perfectly willing that you should charge me with fanciful interpretation, but the potter's field is last mentioned in Scripture in strange company. They bought the potter's field with the price of Him Whom

they priced, and they called it, little thinking how deep the significance of their calling might be, the field of blood. Are there some wrecks in the potter's field in this house tonight, men and women who are saying, I have been spoiled and flung away. I am waste in God's universe. The potter's field has been purchased with blood. I come back to Jeremiah, and I read that when the vessel was marred in the hands of the potter he made it again another vessel. Blessed be God, He came to the potter's field, and He gathered up the wrecks to make them again. There is another chance for you, my brother. By the mystery of His betrayal, by the mystery of His denial, by the mystery of His being sold for the price of a slave, the potter's field is bought, and though you have missed your purpose by disobeying your principle, the Person, the Potter Himself, has come down to the midst of the wreckage, and by the price of His own mysterious life has bought it, and the wreck can be remade. But you must begin with the Person and submit to the principle, and find the purpose. May God help us all to do so.

068 - Zechariah 8:5 - The Children's Playground in the City of God. [[@bible:zeck 8:5]]

The Children's Playground in the City of God

And the streets of the city shall be full of boys and girls playing in the streets thereof.

Zechariah 8:5

One almost expects to hear someone say, "How Extremely shocking!" Some people would probably be surprised to know that the Bible says anything about children playing. This verse not only speaks of them playing, but surprises our prejudices by declaring that boys and girls are to play together, and even startles us further by saying that boys and girls are to play together in the streets! If not inclined to say, "How shocking this is!" I can quite believe that many would say, "Well, it certainly is marvelous." The prophet, inspired of the Spirit of God, knew perfectly well that people would say it was a marvelous thing, so he immediately continued, "Thus saith the Lord of hosts: If it be marvelous in the eyes of the remnant of this people in those days, should it also be marvelous in Mine eyes? saith the Lord of hosts"—which being put into other words simply means, The thing which surprises you, that you look upon as marvelous, that almost shocks you, is the very thing upon which the heart of God is set. God believes in children playing, He believes in boys and girls playing together, and He believes in them playing in the streets.

This is a picture of the coming age. I do not mind at all what you call it. Call it, if you will, "the golden age." Call it, if you so please, "the millennial age," or if you prefer to drop back into the language of your childhood, speak of it as "the good time coming." It is a picture of the ultimate victory toward which men perpetually looked in the midst of the battle, of the final triumph which was a constant inspiration of earnest and consecrated service. Ever and anon these ancient Hebrew seers saw glimpses of the coming glory, heard notes of the coming harmonies. These men were not near-sighted. They were far-sighted in a far finer sense of that word than that in which we mostly use it today. They saw so far ahead that the things they saw have not yet come to pass. They saw a Kingdom established over which a King should rule in righteousness and in equity. They saw a Kingdom established in which a King should rule, and—mark well the language—not by the sight of His eyes or by the hearing of His ears: these are the bases of all judgment at the present moment. They very often lead us into error. This coming King is to rule in righteousness and equity, as one who knows perfectly and absolutely all the facts of the case. As these men looked on they saw nature at peace, and in the midst of it a little child at play. Let us notice the picture which my text suggests. Zechariah speaks of Jerusalem, Zion, the Mountain of the Lord of hosts. This is not a picture of heaven. It is a picture of earth. This is not the picture of a land and conditions beyond the clouds to which men will escape from peril and strife. It is the picture of conditions which are to obtain here in the world where today sinning and sighing and sorrow abound. This is the picture of conditions which will obtain when the prayer which Jesus taught us to pray, and which, alas, we too often pray carelessly, is realized. "Our Father Who art in heaven. Hallowed be Thy name. Thy Kingdom come. Thy will be done, as in heaven, so on earth." Therefore I say to you that for a glimpse of the Kingdom that is to come, I do not come to a Sunday service, but to a Saturday afternoon in a park. When I want to form some true conception of what God's Kingdom will be like, I do not go to a prayer meeting but to a playground. I think I have exercised my ministry here long enough for no one to charge me with undervaluing either the prayer meeting or the Sunday service. They are but means to the end, however, which end is the playground for the children. The establishment of the Kingdom of God, the building of His city, the healing of all wounds, the realization of all the forces that lie in human life, at their most perfect condition; all that, and more, is by suggestion within my text. I know there are discrepancies in both, but in the park and the playground you are nearer the Divine ideal for child life, and I come there, not because that exhausts the meaning of the coming Kingdom, but because it is the only thing like it today. If I come into commercial life, I find there very little like the Kingdom of God. In the commercial world "in that day shall there be upon the bells of the horses, HOLY UNTO THE LORD." That is a poetic figure of a great philosophy. If I come into the law courts today I find very little like the Kingdom of God. They are doing their best, but it is a very poor best. If I come into the political arena I think I see there men striving after the ideals of the Kingdom, yet we are in prison still, and hampered by the god of mammon. If I want a glimpse of the Kingdom upon which I can base all my interpretation, I haste me to the playground. Be patient with me if I make that personal. If I want my own heart to understand God's coming Kingdom I turn my back upon my study and get to that other room,

which is as far from the study as I can put it, where all the noise is, and get amongst my bairns. There I am nearer to the Kingdom than ever I am in my study. Zechariah was a stern prophet, who had no soft things to say in the presence of iniquities; Zechariah was a poet who saw the coming glories. Reading his writings up to this point, you can hardly think of him as having time for a child, and yet suddenly, out of his deep heart, illumined by the glory of the coming days, there sings into the ear of all the centuries the most poetic description of the Kingdom that I find in the whole of the Old Testament. "The streets of the city shall be full of boys and girls playing in the streets thereof." I draw your attention, first of all, to what this text reveals as the thought of God for the children. Let us imagine for a moment that we are not in London. We will transport ourselves to that Kingdom which is to be, and to that city which the prophet saw. In that city we see, first, that God's ideal for the child is that the child shall play. It is a very significant fact that all the millennial references to the child are references to the child at play. "The sucking child shall play on the hole of the asp, and the weaned child shall put his hand on the basilisk's den." That wonderful day when "the lion shall eat straw like the ox," and the wolf and the lamb shall lie down together in perfect peace, will be the child's playtime. Have you ever taken a child to the zoological gardens, and have you ever been strangely perturbed by the child's deep anxiety to climb over the rails and get in amongst the polar bears? It is a Divine instinct. The child wants to be where God intended it should be, and where God means it to be presently, at play with all the lower animals. "A little child shall lead them." It is the child at play, the child in the midst of nature, set there to play. I charge you that you do not whittle down this word "play" until you have spoiled it. Ruskin says, "Play is an exertion of body or mind made to please ourselves." I think that is a perfectly accurate definition, but I do not think it takes in all the facts of the case. May I suggest that play is work. If you do not believe me and you have a boy four years old, stay at home from business one day, and from morning till night do everything that boy does. I very distinctly remember about a year ago, when one of my boys was four years old, he requested me to play horses with him. I agreed to do so on condition that he be the horse and I the driver. My garden at Norwood runs down in terraces, and I let him go wherever he liked; it is good to let young horses do that. He went to the bottom by one path, turned round and came up again. I had already had enough, but I let him go on. He went down and up that garden six times, and then I said I must go into the house for a few minutes—and I was there an hour. What is play? Play is work which is not a task set. Play is work, not for profit, but out of pure delight in the exercise of strength. I wish all the young manhood would remember that. Whenever you put gain or profit at the end of play you demoralize the play. The child has no thought of profit in play. It is work, not as a task and not for profit. God's ideal for the child is that it shall play, and the characteristics of a little child at play are merriment, earnestness, pity, defense of the weak. Watch natural and healthy children at play and you will find that all these things are manifest in the midst of the play.

If I may carry this a little further I would say that God's ideal for the child is that it should play itself into its work. We talk about the kindergarten system as though it were something we had recently discovered, as though we owed it wholly to Froebel. Here it is in Zechariah. He was a long way ahead. We are getting there perhaps sooner than he thought, but there it is—the children at play. If you watch children by careful, loving, tender watching, they will play themselves into the work for which God made them. In this age of collectivist thinking it is good sometimes to reassert the law of the individual, and every individual ought to be able to say concerning his or her life work, "To this end have I been born, and to this end am I come into the world." That is true, not merely of the poets, dreamers and statesmen, but also of the men and women whom we sometimes insult by saying they do mean things. There are no mean things if they come out of the capacity of the man who is doing them. If a little child learns its work through its play, all through the strenuous years you will find the man playing at his work. I do not mean playing with his work or doing it indifferently, but that it will be a delight to him. When work is what it ought to be in human life it is not a task set, not something done for profit merely, but something done for the sake of the thing done. I have been in a carpenter's shop and seen a man at the bench making some plain piece of furniture, and looking at it and touching it with love as he saw it developing under his hand. That is the real carpenter, brother to Jesus of Nazareth. If you find a man who loves his work he will have as secondary motive under it all the two things for which Paul says we are to work, the support of himself and his family, and to have something to give to him that is in need. Beyond that, work is done for the sake of the work, but children never come to that unless you give them their chance to play. You must begin with playtime for the children. That is God's ideal.

Then notice, further, that there is in the text a revelation of the fact that it is God's purpose that boys and girls shall play together. I can quite imagine that some very good people out of this age, if they could be preserved until that day dawns, and came to this city and saw boys and girls playing together, would think everything had gone wrong, that some catastrophe had happened. I walk round among our schools today and I see over one door "Boys," a little further on I find another door marked "Girls." Presently I come to the "Young Men's Christian Association," and a little farther on I see the "Young Women's Christian Association." We have been doing all we can to keep them apart. We are all wrong. God said boys and girls are to play together. Wherever you find that they do so, naturally, purely, perfectly, you will find that the strength of manhood strengthens womanhood, and the refinement of womanhood refines manhood. That is the perfect family in which brothers and sisters grow up and play together. That is God's ideal. The streets of God's city shall be full of boys and girls playing in the streets thereof.

If that be so, we may go yet a step further, and upon this foundation truth of God's purpose for the child and God's ideal for the child build the conditions of public life. This text is an index to the conditions of public life in the coming Kingdom. If in God's city boys and girls are to play in the streets of the city, then the streets of the city will be fit for the boys and girls to play in. Think what that means

in the very simplest way. As Christ makes the child the type of character in His Kingdom, so the child comes to be the test of public life in the city of God. Everything in the life of the coming city will depend upon the little child. Everything will be carried forward in the interests of the little child. Among other things, the streets will be fit for children to play in. Said Isaiah, another of these prophets, "They shall not hurt nor destroy in all My holy mountain." What a city that will be where there will be nothing in the streets to harm little children, physically, mentally, or spiritually! When you have a city with streets fit for children you have a city with streets fit for adults. If the child is safe everyone is safe. Let us walk in imagination through some of the streets of the city of the King. I shall find nothing that can harm the child physically. In that city the drainage will be perfect, and the traffic and everything else will be watched by vigilant eyes for the sake of the children. You can dream your dreams around that. You tell me this is not the Gospel. Then what in the name of God is it? These children whom God loves and speaks of in the terms of playtime in His coming city are to be safe, and the measure in which children are safe in our streets today is the measure in which we have seen this ideal, and are working toward it.

As we walk through the streets of the city of the King, I notice in the next place that in no single shop window can I find any impure literature. On no placard station can I see a bill announcing an amusement, the very bill suggestive of evil and calculated to inflame the passion of a child or youth. No unholy picture can be found. The love of the child will be greater than love of gain. That is the truth about the city of God.

As I go through these streets of the city I find no man ready to pollute young life, no man standing in the shadow of the sanctuary or of the public house watching for his chance to lead a boy who is hardly a youth into the ways of betting and gambling. By no means. In the city of the King the dictum of Jesus will be in operation and the man who is found causing a little child to offend will have a millstone hung about his neck, and be drowned in the depth of the sea, while angels rejoice. There will be nothing anemic and sickly in the city of the King. Righteous wrath will be manifested if anything is done to offend, or cause to stumble, one little child. The streets of the city are to be fit for the children.

Let us go one step further. It seems to me that my text not only reveals to me the purpose and thought of God for children, not only reveals to me what the conditions of public life are to be in the city, but it casts its light upon the home life in the coming Kingdom. It is not only true that the streets are to be fit for the children, but equally true that the children are to be fit for the streets. There are children who come from very respectable houses who pollute the streets by their presence. There are children, proud, despotic, selfish, and, alas, too often impure, to turn whom out to play in the streets would be to defile the other children. I am not blaming the children, for wherever you find such children the blame must be put back on the home from which they come. A child always reflects the home from which it has come. That legend which you hang up in your homes, "Christ is the Head of this house, the unseen Guest at every meal, the silent Listener to every conversation," will be a living reality in that Kingdom. In homes where these things are believed and acted upon from break of day until the sun has gone westering you will have children that you may turn out into the streets who will not harm the streets or pollute them. In the city of the King the home life will be what it ought to be, and out of the homes will come children whose obedience has been won, whose trust has been inspired, to whom high ideals have been presented, not so much by precept as by the practice of those who have had charge of them, children who know God because they have seen Him in the fatherhood and motherhood which has been round about them. Coming out into the streets they will live and walk in the power of all that home has meant to them—children fit for the streets.

If there is one thing tragic in this city it is the picture of the children who have no playtime. What you call their playtime is for some of them opportunity for deeper debasement. Why? Because our streets are not fit for the children, because we have never yet put a little child in the midst of us in our civic affairs and set everything else round the necessity of the little child. I am perfectly well aware that we are struggling toward it, but it is so slow because we have never seen it clearly. Sometimes one's heart is gladdened spiritually, religiously, by things that seem to be very far away, and yet are near to the heart of God. I remember seeing a while ago what came to me as a vision of God's coming glory. I was at the very end of Cheapside, close to the Bank and the Exchange, and suddenly I saw a policeman, a great, strong, muscular representative of the force of the law, raise his hand and hold up all the beating, surging traffic to take a wee bit bairnie by the hand and lead it safely across the street. By so much as we have learned to do that we are coming nearer to the Kingdom. But, oh, my masters, how much there is still to harm the life of the child in our streets. You who listen to me tonight dare not turn your children into the streets to play, but there are children playing in the streets who have no other place to play in, and in the hearts of all children there is capacity for good and the love of the beautiful just as much as in the hearts of your children, if you will find it.

I will tell you a story at second hand. A month or two ago the first Minister of Works of the present Government was walking in St. James's Park. Two or three children were playing there, one of them a girl with tousled hair, dirty and unkempt. The minister of works looked down at this child and said, "Why do you stay here? Why don't you go over there into the Green Park, where you can play on the grass?" The bright eyes looked up into his, and she said, "There are no flowers there." Oh, if we could hear these things! I am not arguing for flowers over there, or if I do argue for them it is that they may gladden the children.

Let us see deeply into this thing. You and I have a responsibility about our streets for the sake of the children. You care nothing for

political parties? So much the better. You care nothing about Moderates or Progressives or Municipal Reform? So much the better; but do you care for the bairns? I have figures and statistics which we have been gathering, for we are trying to find out what we ought to do. Do you know such things as this? Right here under the shadow of this church—I begin there for this is our responsibility—there are at least 132 houses in which, on an average, three or four families are crowded together. These bairns must come out into the streets to play, and the streets are not fit for them, and the homes from which they come are not homes that make it likely that their coming will be a blessing to the streets. Are you content to say you have nothing to do with all these things? Say at once you have nothing to do with the Kingdom of God. Say at once you have no interest in the bringing in of that great and glad golden age toward which seers have been looking, and of which psalmists have been singing. You like to look on to that great day and to sing of it, but I think that the men and women who have not shared the travail that makes His Kingdom come are very likely to be shut out of the Kingdom when it does come. I want to lay upon you the burden of this great and terrible responsibility.

I am told there is nothing we can do, or that what we can do is so little. You are not responsible for all that has to be done. You are responsible for the thing that lies next to your hand. You are responsible, first of all, to see to it that whatever you have of influence, whatever you may have of influence, whatever lies at your disposal by way of influence, you ought to take hold of and use in the interest of, I will not say the Kingdom of God as a far distant thing, but of the little child in the streets. What about the children who are not orphans but are worse than orphans? What about the children who are in sorrow and sore need round about us in our own parish? In our parish there are thirty-four public houses, every last one of them a center of death, an instrument for spoiling childhood. There are portions of these streets of Westminster close to us which are nameless as to their condition. You put the blame upon the police. I put the blame finally upon the Church of Jesus Christ.

These men of old, these prophets, how they toiled and strove, how they entered into every department of human life with their messages and their fire, and inspiration, and daring and suffering and blood. What matters it that they never saw the city, if they saw it from afar? They set their faces toward it and died in faith, not having received the promises, and yet the promises would be much longer postponed if they had not so suffered and toiled, and had not so striven. So I say we are working, not merely for the present hour, but for all the future. We are working with the little child before our eyes, determined as the moments come and go to strive and toil and suffer to make the streets fit for the children, to see to it that they have homes out of which it is possible for them to come with some suspicion at least of what morality, cleanness, and uprightness really mean. There is no bairn in all this crowded district that is not as near to the heart of God as the little child you laid to rest in its cot at home. There is no boy who is not protected from the rain and hardly dare go home, and who will become a sharper on the street, robbing you on every hand—there is not one such who is not referred to by Jesus when He said, "It is not the will of your Father who is in heaven, that one of these little ones should perish."

I say to you tonight that our responsibility as a church and as Christian people for this district must begin there. I am not saying all that is in my heart. I am not saying all I know, but I am making an appeal to you for your interest in prayer, and presently in very definite work. Under the shadow of this church close at hand stands a man day after day, a bookmaker. He has been fined again and again, and he pays a fine as I pay a license to keep a dog, and comes back and carries on his nefarious practices. I am told that we must let these things alone. My answer is that the devil said to Jesus, "Let us alone." Christ's answer is our answer to all these things. We will not let it alone. It is our business not to let it alone. A way must be found by which these men shall be removed, and it be made impossible for them to stand around luring our children to destruction. It is very little we can do. In a few years at least the majority of us will have gone out to the great Beyond, but let us do something. Let us, at any rate, come to close grips with the devil. Let us leave the impress of our fingers somewhere on him, or else let us be ashamed to look into the face of Jesus Christ when the day breaks and the shadows flee away.

Our city is not the city Zechariah saw. The streets of our city are not ready for the boys and girls to play in. It is our business as we take our way through this life of probation and toil and discipline to see the ultimate, and to consecrate ourselves to that great and holy conflict which at last is to issue in victory. I pray that we may make what application of the study of this verse is necessary for our own new inspiration to new consecration to the thing that lies very near at hand.

"Where shall I begin?" says some man. In your own home. "How shall I begin?" Set the millennium up in your own home. "How can I do it?" Crown Christ there. I do not mean theoretically, sentimentally. I do not mean by singing about Him or praying to Him, or reading the things He said; but by the realization of His ideal there for your own children, and by realization of His ideal in your home as Master and Lord and King. Every home so consecrated, and so realizing His ideal, is a contribution toward the building of God's city. We may begin there, and yet to begin and end there is not to fulfill our responsibility. We must go beyond and what we cannot do singly we must do together. As the host of God we must say to the civic authorities and to all the powers that rule the city's life, "These rulings and governings of yours must be in the interest of the child." If that can be established then I have no further care about the youth and maiden, man and woman, about the aged and infirm. We will begin with the child. God help us to hear His call to us about this district through the plaintive need of the child as it expresses itself to all who have eyes to see, and ears to hear, and hearts to feel.