

Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit.

ONE WAR OVER AND ANOTHER BEGUN.

A Sermon

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“And when Gideon perceived that he was an angel of the Lord, Gideon said, Alas, O Lord God! for because I have seen an angel of the Lord face to face. And the Lord said unto him, Peace be unto thee; fear not: thou shalt not die. Then Gideon built an altar there unto the Lord, and called it Jehovah-shalom.”—Judges vi. 22—24.

THESE Midianites were wandering Bedouins from Arabia, and from the east country round about the Holy Land. Like those who represent them in the present day, they were masters of the art of plundering, and knew no bowels of compassion. They generally lived a hard life themselves, and when they had an opportunity to feast on the spoils of others, they rioted without stint, and left a famine behind them. Most fitly does the Scripture compare them to grasshoppers, for both in number and in destructive force they were like those terrible devourers. God had brought them upon Israel to scourge that nation because it had been so foolish and so ungrateful as to set up the gods of the heathen, and to forget the one mighty God who was so specially and graciously their patron and defender. They were impoverished and ground down to the very last degree by these plunderers, who left no food either for men or cattle. The poor Israelites, creeping forth from their dens and caves, attempted to carry on the work of husbandry, and sowed the land; but when the time came for reaping, the marauders came forth once more, took away their harvest, and despoiled their pastures again. Then, as usual, Israel cried unto Jehovah, and his ear was open to their groaning. Their afflictions made them weary of their idols, and caused them to say, “We will return unto our first husband, for it was better with us then than now.” God in his great mercy raised up for them a deliverer, Gideon, a mighty man of valour, who distinguished himself in various skirmishes with the foe! His name was already a terror to Midian, for he who dreamed of the barley-cake which smote the tent, and it lay along, said to his fellow—“This is none other than Gideon, the son of Joash.” His character has never been sufficiently admired: Scripture names much less bright than his have been preferred before him by the general ministry; yet he deserves far better treatment. He was a man gentle and yet strong, cautious and yet venturesome; a searching enquirer, and an intense

believer. While he was a sort of foreshadowing of David, he had much of the after-glow of Joshua. He was a truly great man, though his latter days were overshadowed by a grievous religious error, and a sad moral fault. Despite his failings he was one of the greatest of the heroes of faith. This man went to his work with the Bedouin in much the same manner as that which has proved so successful in Egypt during the past week. He was not in a hurry to venture upon a pitched battle, but waited his time, and then by a sudden and unexpected attack he struck the whole host with panic, so that they fled at once, and Midian was smitten as one man. It is very singular how history repeats itself, and how all events go to exhibit the singular truthfulness of the Bible record. These wild Arabs can clearly be overcome by a single blow if it takes them when they feel secure. Formidable as they are as plunderers, and great as they are at boasting, they are not able to stand against a hand to hand onslaught; true valour drives them before it like a rolling thing before the whirlwind, scattering them like chaff before the tempest. The leaders flee: two of the minor ones, Oreb and Zeeb, the raven and the wolf, are first captured, and by-and-by the greater generals, who had fled first of all, are taken by the victorious band. The leaders were ahead of all others in flight then as they have been in the late campaign. In after days the destruction of their mighty ones became a proverbial curse, "Make their nobles like Oreb, and like Zeeb: yea, all their princes as Zebah, and as Zalmunna." There are many points of likeness between the two campaigns, but this is not our theme to-day.

Let us think for a while of Gideon, in order that we may see that we ourselves are or may be somewhat parallels with him. We may not have to smite the Bedouin as he had, but unto a spiritual warfare God has called many of us: and though he intends to use us, and to get unto himself victory by us, yet it may be that at this moment we are in fear. We are now passing through the same mental processes as those which educated Gideon, and we are being prepared thereby for future conflict and conquest.

I. I shall begin by asking you to dwell for a minute upon GIDEON'S SIGH FOR PEACE; for he loved not war, but pined for quiet. He called the name of the altar,—“Jehovah-shalom,” which the margin reads, “The Lord send peace.” You see therefore that deeper down in his spirit than any desire for warlike honour there was a yearning after peace. He wanted not the spoils of princes; he only desired to plough, and sow, and reap in peace.

And do you wonder at it, when *the ills of war were all around?* He had for a long time seen in the cases of his friends and neighbours the desolating effects of war: their property was taken from them, their bread was stolen out of their mouths, their children were slain, and themselves made to hide away upon the tops of mountains or in caverns among the hills. Life became intolerable amid such privations and dangers. Gideon must have felt his heart swell with grief and indignation as he looked upon the remnant of Israel hunted like partridges upon the mountains, though once they had dwelt safely, every man under his vine and under his fig-tree. The Bedouin styled the valley of Jezreel “the meadows of God”: how grievous to see those fat pastures trodden down by the feet of the invaders! Ah, little can you and I imagine of the

horrors of war. We read of it, and our sympathies are touched, but we know not the multiplied murders, the painful wounds, the desolating rapine, and the fierce crimes which attend the track of armies. If we saw battle with our own eyes, we should with burning fervour cry, "Send us peace in our days, good Lord."

Moreover, he had not only seen war, but he sighed for peace, because *he was himself feeling the mischief of it*. The dread of the conflict had come to his own mountain farm at Abiezer. There he was himself, threshing wheat by the wine press, in an unusual place, in an inconvenient place, that he might hide a little grain, for winter's food, from the Midianites who were eager to devour it. Ay, and when carnage smokes at your own door, and rapine is at your own gate, when you yourself are straitened and are hiding for fear, then comes from the deep recesses of the spirit the cry, "Oh, that God would send us peace, for this is a weary oppression; these ravens and wolves devour us utterly." Let us bow our heads and thank God that he has long blessed this favoured isle with unbroken peace; and as an act of thankfulness to God let us set our faces against the war-spirit which so readily inflames our fellow-countrymen.

The way of peace was sufficiently well known to Gideon: the prophet of the Lord had indicated to the people that the only way of peace was for Israel to return unto Jehovah, her God. The great sin of departure from the glorious living God was set before them, and they could readily draw the inference that they would never have peace from their enemies till first of all they had made their peace with God. They must surrender to their sovereign, and renew their loyalty, and then he would drive out the foe from their land. They must confess their transgressions and renew their covenant, and then they would obtain deliverance. Then would the ancient promise be fulfilled, "One should chase a thousand, and two put ten thousand to flight." Gideon probably knew this before the prophet came; it was deeply imprinted on his thoughtful spirit, and as he was a man of faith in God, he did not doubt but that if Israel returned unto Jehovah then peace would follow. Much is gained when we know this, if our knowledge leads to practical action.

While Gideon was meditating and working, an angel appears to him and *gives him the assurance that with him at least God was at peace*. The covenant angel said to him, "Jehovah is with thee, thou mighty man of valour." Methinks his spirit ought greatly to have rejoiced at that assurance, and perhaps it did; for what better thing can happen unto any man than to receive such a token for good? If God be for us, who can be against us? We know how sweet is the assurance that being justified by faith we have peace with God. It is well with us when we are assured that the Lord is with us, our helper, our shield, our portion for ever and ever.

But there arose in his mind a grave anxiety. His was a very careful, thoughtful soul, for he was a man of prudence, large-hearted, far-seeing, and given to look at things coolly and steadily; and there arose in his heart a question serious and vital, "Is this the voice of God to me, or am I deluded? Is God at peace with me, or am I like the rest, plunged in a horrible warfare against the living God?" Therefore he puts a question, and he asks a sign that he might make sure of what he was about.

Brethren, in spiritual matters you and I had need be sure. If we have peace within our spirit let us make certain that it is the peace of God; for still are there voices that cry, "Peace, peace," where there is no peace. Still do siren songs charm men to ruin with their dulcet notes; still does the fatal river flow most smoothly as it approaches the dreadful cataract. Beware of that word of the Lord, "When they shall say, Peace and safety; then sudden destruction cometh upon them, as travail upon a woman with child; and they shall not escape." None are more quiet than the ungodly when they are given up to a strong delusion. The Psalmist says of them, "There are no bands in their death: but their strength is firm. They are not in trouble as other men; neither are they plagued like other men." Like liquor which has settled on its lees, the ungodly man's carnal confidence seems clear and bright: the settling of conscious sin and consequent doubt in their case lies at the bottom undisturbed. It was not so with Gideon: his anxiety made itself visible. He was not the man to leap at a shadow: he sought for substance. If he was to have peace, he must have it from God: if he was to be delivered, he longed to have victory plain and permanent. The favour which he asked was requested because anxiety troubled him, and he wished to make assurance doubly sure. He desired to know from God himself that his mission was authentic and his success certain. "Fast bind, fast find," says the proverb, and this valiant man would have it so.

I believe that many of us have been, and perhaps are, in Gideon's position. Of course we have not his errand, but we have one of our own, and we are troubled because we are not personally sure of our peace. We are grieved by our past sins and their consequences. This is the lot of many men. The fowls which they have reared have come home to roost: they have been guilty in the past, and their sins have returned upon them, so that they are sore vexed. They have cried unto the Lord in their trouble, beseeching him to deliver them out of their distresses, and now a consciousness of sin is upon them, and they fear lest their prayers should be rejected. Under the strokes of God's rod they smart, they feel their guilt more and more, they are sore afraid. "Conscience doth make cowards of us all," and when the mighty Spirit of God convinces us of sin then sin becomes a second sorrow; nay, worse than that, for if sorrow do chasten us with whips, sin doth scourge us with scorpions. We are consumed by God's anger, and by his wrath we are troubled. His breaking waves go over us, and his billows swallow us up. Still the heart keeps on crying after God if it is being operated upon by the Spirit of God. The mind is tossed to and fro and is confounded, but even in its confusion it seeks the true rest, and longs to gain peace in God. Like the needle in the compass, it is agitated and disturbed, yet still it knows its pole, and trembles towards it. It will never be still till it reaches the point of its rest. Have you ever been in that condition? I know you have if the Lord has loved you and ordained you to his work. Has God at such a time sent you a message of mercy? Have you searched the Scriptures and found a precious promise? Have you heard a faithful servant of God preach under his Master's anointing, and have you been comforted? Even then I should not wonder if the darkening thought has arisen like a cloud, "Is this the right comfort for me? May I really enjoy it? Will it be presumption

or assurance?" There is often a fine line, thin as a razor's edge, between the two, and woe unto him who makes a mistake about it. O God, save us from carnal security. Prevent our crying "Peace, peace, where there is no peace." Better that we write bitter things against ourselves, if they be true, than that we say smooth things and flatter ourselves to destruction. Therefore, I should not wonder if you are asking the Lord to give you a token for good. You are praying to him and saying, "I will not be comforted except thou comfort me: thy dove shall find no rest for the sole of her foot except it be in the ark with the true Noah, in whom is rest." As for me, I will take no cup of consolation except that which Jesus proffers when he gives it me with his own pierced hands. If washed, it shall be in Jesus' blood: if clothed, it shall be in his righteousness. I will be hungry till I die sooner than eat anything but the bread of heaven. I will thirst till I faint and expire, but none shall give me to drink except of the water of the well of Bethlehem. Brethren, we must make sure work for eternity: we cannot afford to have a question on that matter. A note of interrogation here will be a note of alarm. It will be a thorn in our side.

I am sure that in the case of Gideon, if it be thus spiritually interpreted and set in gospel light, we may see ourselves. As though we looked into a glass we may say, "That portrait is my own."

II. From Gideon's longing, panting desire to obtain peace with God and then peace for his country we turn to look a little further into GIDEON'S FEAR WHICH HE MET WITH IN THE WAY OF PEACE. "An angel" appeared to him,—so saith the text in the Authorised Version; but in truth it was *the* angel of Jehovah, and this should have comforted him, even as it has comforted us. Do we not sing,

"But if Immanuel's face appear,
My hope, my joy begins;
His name forbids my slavish fear,
His grace removes my sins"?

One would have thought that Gideon would have leaped for joy when he beheld his God veiled in angelic form, but instead thereof the shadow of death fell upon him. Here was a man panting for peace, and firmly following the way of peace, and yet afraid with a deadly fear. Peace cannot be had except by our drawing near to God and the Lord's drawing near to us; but as soon as this process commences poor humanity shrinks from the interview, and is melted with fear. "When Gideon perceived that he was an angel of the Lord, Gideon said, Alas, O Lord God! for because I have seen an angel of the Lord face to face." It usually happens that when God is bringing men into peace with himself, while the operation is going on thoroughly and soundly, there is a degree of trembling in the soul. I suspect that conversion which has no trembling in it: note the prodigal's cry, "I am not worthy to be called thy son." Note Peter's bitter weeping, and the three days' darkness of Saul of Tarsus. Even to believers the visitations of God are not without overwhelming awe: Jacob cries, "How dreadful is this place," Job abhors himself, Moses doth exceedingly fear and quake, and Isaiah cries, "Woe is me."

Why was Gideon afraid? *Not because he was a coward*—you will

scarcely meet with a braver man in all Scripture than this son of Joash—but because even brave men are alarmed at the supernatural. He saw something which he had never seen before, an appearance celestial, mysterious, above what is usually seen of mortal men; therefore, as he feared God, Gideon was afraid. When the living God draws very near to a soul, even though it be in the person of Christ Jesus, that soul is struck with awe, and trembles before the Lord. It cannot well be otherwise. Recollect how it was with the beloved John. “When I saw him,” says John—that was, his own dear Master, upon whose breast he had leaned his head—“when I,” the disciple whom Jesus loved, “saw *him*, I fell at *his* feet as dead.” You do not wonder, therefore, if a poor soul full of doubt and anxiety, vexed with a sense of sin, and greatly troubled by affliction, is full of fear when Jesus draws near. Though he comes with no feeling but of love, no thought but of mercy, no sentence but of free forgiveness, yet the heart is awe-struck at the wondrous sight. Alas, some of you know not what it is to have the Lord drawing near to your spirits. If you did you would not think it strange that certain awakened ones have acted in a singular way, and for a while have forgotten to eat bread. Daniel saith, “I was left alone, and saw this great vision, and there remained no strength in me: for my comeliness was turned in me into corruption, and I retained no strength.” That great Lord who ruleth all things, whose voice divideth the flames of fire, maketh the hinds to calve, and discovereth the deep recesses of the forest, is not to be discoursed with as an ordinary person; his presence overwhelms the finite mind. He looketh on the earth and it trembleth, he toucheth the hills and they smoke; the voice of his thunder is in the heavens, his lightnings lighten the world. When this glorious God comes near to the soul it is a solemn visitation, and the mind is bowed under it. Wellsaid Habakkuk, “When I heard, my belly trembled; my lips quivered at the voice: rottenness entered into my bones, and I trembled in myself, that I might rest in the day of trouble.” I marvel not that this mighty man of valour was grievously disturbed. Who among us would have been otherwise?

Moreover, *Gideon had been ill-taught by tradition*. There was a rumour abroad which was derived from truth, and yet was false, namely, that no man could see a heavenly being and live. It is true that the Lord expressly told his servant Moses that he could not see his face and live; but he did not say, “Thou canst not see an angel and live”: nor had he said, “Thou canst not see my veiled presence and live.” The tradition was an accretion to the truth and a corruption of it. We may not see the face of God, but we may see Jesus; in fact, we live because we see him. Beware of the moss which grows upon a truth. Many a heart bleeds because it is wounded by its own imperfect ideas of God; and so when God does draw near, when the great Almighty overshadows it, there is a slavish dread for which there is no need. “I shall die,” saith he, “I shall die.” He sees his sin, and therefore he thinks that God has come in anger to punish him: he feels his weakness, and fainting under it he groans, “I shall die.” No, soul, if God had meant to slay you he would have let you alone. Whom God destroys he first leaves to the madness of his own conceit. He does not take the trouble to show a man his sin, and reveal to him his transgression unless he means to pardon

and save him. He lets the proud Pharisee remain as comely as he dreams himself to be, and allows him to glory in his own righteousness, and go on in his proud self-conceit: as for the chosen of the Lord, the Spirit of God blows upon their comeliness and withers it right away as the flower of the field. If the Lord has taken to strip you, he will clothe you: if he makes your righteousness to fade like the leaves of autumn, it is because he has a glorious robe with which to array you: therefore be not afraid. Yet it is no marvel if you are cast down: we are such creatures of sight and feeling that before the glory of the Lord we are encompassed with fears, and sickened with affright.

Besides, *Gideon was in a state of mind in which he could be easily cast down.* He was a brave man, but long affliction had cast a tinge of sadness over him. His usual conduct in life is well pictured by the two signs which God gave him. When all the people around him were with excitement, like the threshing floor, heated and dry, he, like the fleece, was cool and composed: and then, again, when all around him like the wet floor, were damped with discouragement, he alone remained in his ordinary condition, with not a drop of cowardice within him. That was the kind of man: calm, quiet, determined, brave. But at the moment recorded in our text he was smarting under a cruel oppression, conscious of God's anger for Israel's sin, and overshadowed by God's own presence, and therefore his mind was ready to rush from one fear to another. Only, see the beauty of it, that he always tells his fear to God, always goes to him for comfort, and therefore always obtains succour. The brave man is not he who sees no fear, but he who, seeing the danger, rises superior to it. Men who are boldest in the actual conflict are usually found among those who look seriously at the coming battle, and do not go to war with a light heart. These men count the cost, and so when they commit themselves to the conflict they know what they are at. Such was this man, tossed to and fro from one fear to another, but never tossed off from his God, and so always sure to right himself. And you, dear heart, if you are seeking after peace with God I should not wonder if fear follows fear, and yet no fear drives you from looking unto the Lord. It is but natural that you should be overawed, but oh, be not despairing, for there is the surest reason for hope. Still look to Jesus, and he will surely in his due time send you a blessed deliverance.

One thing is noteworthy, namely, that *Gideon's greatest fear arose out of a sign which he had himself asked for.* He said, "Show me a sign," and when he had that sign, namely, God's coming to him, then it was that he was afraid. Be very chary how you ask for signs; for they may work your discouragement rather than your comfort. I have known some say, "I shall not believe I am a child of God unless I feel a deep sense of sin," and when they have entered into that feeling they have exclaimed, "I will never again ask for this." I have heard of others who thought they could come to Christ if they were gently drawn; and the Lord has been gently drawing them, and then they have wished that they had been more troubled and distressed. They imagine that they could have believed more readily had their despair been greater—a strange notion certainly. The fact is, we are prone to unbelief: this noxious weed grows without sowing, and only the sweet love of Jesus can teach us how to believe. We are ever busy in manufacturing fresh doubts, and for raw

material we use the very tokens for which we so earnestly besought the Lord. We cry aloud, "Show me a token for good," and when the token is given we are amazed at being heard, and fall to fearing more sadly than before. Therefore pray for such boons with bated breath, and say twice over concerning such things, "Nevertheless, not as I will, but as thou wilt."

All this while, beloved friends, *Gideon had one truth before him which ought to have prevented all his fears*: for the Lord had spoken to him, and said, "Go in this thy might, and thou shalt save Israel from the hand of the Midianites: have not I sent thee?" See, he goes home fearing that he will die, and yet that could not be. How could he die if he was to deliver Israel? he must be a live man to do that, and yet, you see, he forgets to reason for his own comfort, but takes care to argue for his fears. Have I never seen my hearers doing this? I have often caught myself at it,—refusing to use my logic for the strengthening of my faith, but perverting reason in order to assist my unbelief. Is not this foolish and wicked? We sharpen the knives with which to cut ourselves; we nurture in our bosom the viper which will bite us; we stuff our pillows with thorns, and fill our cups with wormwood, and all to no purpose but the increase of despondency. Too often we are industrious in the fabrication of discomfort, and utterly idle in the search for joy. This is folly, and yet better men than we are have fallen into this fault. The Lord save us from it. In drawing near to God is our peace, and if in that process a sense of the presence of God casts us down and creates a more poignant sorrow than we felt at the first, let us not therefore shrink from the process, but push on with all our might. As our safety lies in coming to God, to him we must approach at all hazards. If he seem to stand before us with a drawn sword in his hand let us run upon the point of it. If even our God be a consuming fire let us still draw near to him, for this is indeed the high privilege of saints. "Our God," that is our God in Christ Jesus, "is a consuming fire." Who, then, shall dwell with the devouring fire? Who shall dwell with everlasting burnings? When this question is quoted it is usually referred to the burning of hell. The error is glaring. For the Scriptural answer to the question shows that it is not so. "He that walketh righteously and speaketh uprightly"—he it is that dwells on high with the Lord God. He is the man that can live in the fire, for he is genuine metal. He hath the pure heart, and shall see God, and live. That sweet singer of the sanctuary, Miss Havergal, beautifully writes:—

They say there is a hollow, safe and still,
A point of coolness and repose
Within the centre of a flame, where life might dwell
Unharm'd and unconsum'd, as in a luminous shell,
Which the bright walls of fire enclose
In breachless splendour, barrier that no foes
Could pass at will.

"There is a point of rest
At the great centre of the cyclone's force,
A silence at its secret source;—
A little child might slumber undistressed,
Without the ruffle of one fairy curl,
In that strange central calm amid the mighty whirl.

“So, in the centre of these thoughts of God,
 Cyclones of power, consuming glory-fire,—
 As we fall o’erawed
 Upon our faces, and are lifted higher
 By his great gentleness, and carried nigher
 Than unredeemèd angels, till we stand
 Even in the hollow of his hand,—
 Nay, more! we lean upon his breast—
 There, there we find a point of perfect rest
 And glorious safety.”

So dwell we in the heart of God, who is a wall of fire round about us, and the glory in our midst. He who shall have had everything burnt up within him that can burn shall find in the presence of God the element of his life. Oh, the splendour of the life of faith! God bring us fully into it. Thus have I spoken of Gideon’s fear while he was in the path of peace.

III. Now let us spend a few minutes in considering GOD’S COMFORT OF HIS SERVANT. “The Lord said unto him, *Shalom*—peace be unto thee; fear not: thou shalt not die.” The Lord would not have his Gideons disturbed in mind. If we are to trouble the enemy we must not be troubled ourselves. “Comfort ye, comfort ye my people, saith your God. Speak ye comfortably to Jerusalem, and cry unto her, that her warfare is accomplished, that her iniquity is pardoned.” This is how God would have his prophets speak, and this is how he speaks himself. He wants his workers to be full of comfort while they labour.

Notice, brethren, *the great power of God in speaking home the truth*. Suppose I salute you with, “Brethren, peace be to you.” That would be a sweet word; but when the Lord says it, you feel the peace itself. Suppose Peter had stood up in that barque which was tossed upon the Galilean lake, and had said to the waves, “Be still”: the waves would not have taken much notice of him, and the whistling blast would have defied him; but when Jesus said, “Peace, be still,” the rampant lions of the sea crouched at his feet, and there was a great calm. Oh, that the great Master’s voice would sound the requiem of trouble in every tempest-driven heart by saying, “Peace be unto you,” so that you may become perfectly restful in your God.

“Peace!” the word is *shalom*, the word which Gideon borrowed and applied to the altar which he raised in obedience to the Lord’s bidding. It signifies not only quiet, but prosperity, success, “good fortune,” as the multitude say. When God spoke that word home to his dear servant’s heart a great joy was born within him to prepare him for his great warfare. The Lord also cheered him with, “Fear not.” Oh, that charming word; as full as it is short—“Fear not.” It is the death-knell of fear, the life of hope. If we once hear it as God’s fiat in our soul it makes us leap over a wall or break through a troop. Doubts and fears flee away like spectres of the night when the sun arises. “Fear not.” What is there to fear? If God is with you, of whom can you be afraid? Gideon feared himself, feared his own unfitness and unworthiness, feared in the awful presence of God; but the Lord said, “Fear not,” and Gideon’s heart grew calm.

Then the Lord added, “Thou shalt not die,” thus meeting the special

form of his dread. This is what the Lord says to every poor trembler who is holding to him by the desperate grip of faith,—“Thou shalt not die. Thou shalt not die the second death: thou hast no sin to die for, for I have laid thy transgressions on my only-begotten Son; Thou shalt not die, for Jesus died. Thy spiritual life cannot expire, for thy ‘life is hid with Christ in God,’ and because Jesus lives thou shalt live also.” When Jehovah speaks to comfort his people they are comforted indeed, and I pray him this morning so to speak to any of you who wish to enjoy perfect peace. May the peace of God which passeth all understanding keep your hearts and minds by Christ Jesus. May you walk down those aisles saying, “Yes, I have peace with God: I have no fear now: I shall never die, for Jesus says, ‘He that liveth and believeth in me shall never die.’” What a morning without clouds will this be to your souls.

IV. Let us now look at GIDEON’S MEMORIAL. His fears being banished, and being at perfect peace, *Gideon now goes to work.* Are any of you questioning whether you are saved or not? Do not go out preaching yet, for you may, perhaps, put others into bondage. Are any of you half afraid that you are not at peace with God? Be careful what you do! Strive after peace, lest you weaken your testimony. I recollect the lesson which I learned from my Sunday-school class: I was taught, if the other boys were not. Though yet a youth, I was teaching the gospel to boys, and I said, “He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved.” One of them asked somewhat earnestly, “Teacher, are you saved?” I answered, “I hope so.” The boy replied, “Teacher, don’t you know?” As if he had been sent to push the matter home to me, he further enquired, “Teacher, have you believed?” I said, “Yes.” “Have you been baptized?” I said, “Yes.” “Well, then,” he argued, “you are saved.” I was happy to answer, “Yes, I am”; but I had hardly dared to say that before. I found that if I had to teach other people the truth I must know and believe its sweet result upon myself. I believe, dear friends, that you will seldom comfort others except it be by the comfort with which you yourself are comforted of God. Look at certain of our brethren who preach and have no conversions. What is the reason in some cases? Is it not that they fish all the week for frogs to feed the people with, and people do not care to receive such food? I mean this. If some new doubt is hatched; if some philosopher thinks he has found out a flaw in the gospel, next Sunday these worthies discourse upon it, for they think every new query must be answered. As for me, I do not care a fig what all the philosophers find out, for they cannot disprove the facts of my experience. When I come across a fresh piece of infidelity I do not hurry to proclaim it to you, and so do the devil’s advertising for nothing. Let others follow their business, if it be their business; as for me, my business is to preach the truth of God which I have learned from his infallible word by the teaching of his Spirit. God would have his people be at peace with him, and know that they are so, for if they are fretted within, and worried in reference to their God, how can they fight the battles of life?

When Gideon is fully at peace, what does he begin to do for God? If God loves you he will use you either for suffering or service; and if he has given you peace you must now prepare for war. Will you think

me odd if I say that our Lord came to give us peace that he might send us out to war? Gideon's first work was to go and *cut down his father's sacred grove*, which stood on the top of the hill, and enclosed an altar to Baal. He could not effect this business by day, because the foolish worshippers would have rallied to the defence of their dumb idol, and have overpowered the reformer; therefore with his ten men he performed the work by night. I think I see him and his people in the dim darkness, with their axes and saws, doing the work as quietly as they can, felling all those trees. A splendid clearance was made that night. "Now," cries he, "over with that detestable altar to Baal." Some people would have said, "Spare it as a fine piece of antiquity." Yes, and leave it to be used again! I say, down with it, for the older it is the more sin it has caused, and the more likely is it that it will be venerated again. I often wish the reformers had been more thorough in their destruction of idolatrous images and Popish trumpery. In many a parish church of this land everything is ready for the restoration of the Roman idolatry. The nests were not half pulled down, and the rooks are likely to be back again. Many a window, full of saints the Bible never knew, only waits for the martyr-burners to be back again. Gideon cast down every stone, and it was bravely done.

But see, by the Lord's bidding *he piles a new altar of earth*, or unhewn stone; and when that is done, he fetches his father's bullock and slays it for a sacrifice. How steadily they went about this re-establishment of the pure faith! See, they use the wood of the grove for burning the sacrifice, and the heavens are red with the blaze. I think I hear the gallant leader say, "Let them wake now; they cannot prevent our worshipping the Most High, nor can they cause the grove to grow again. By yon beacon-fire Israel shall gather together to fight against Midian, and victory shall be ours." Beloved, if God has given you peace, go home and begin your reform. I would preach up the overthrow of every sin. Down with every idol. Have you one left? Over with it, and present a sacrifice to God. Every true Christian should pass a reform bill at home, and carry it out.

"The dearest idol I have known,
Whate'er that idol be,
Help me to tear it from its throne,
And worship only thee."

But to pull down is not enough. Plenty of people can do that. Gideon, as we have seen, builds an altar to Jehovah. When you are at perfect peace with God, think what you can do for him: think of a new plan of work, or consider how to do the old work better: advance any part of divine truth that has been forgotten, any ordinance that has been neglected, any virtue that has been despised. Especially make prominent Christ Jesus, the altar and sacrifice so dear to God. Now that you have begun the fight by cutting down Baal's grove, complete it by building an altar for the Lord. Instead of a fortress and high tower, declare the atoning sacrifice of the Lord Jesus, and hold that fort till he shall come.

When he had built his altar *he called it "Jehovah-shalom,"* which was done by way of thanksgiving for peace received. The inscription

declares that "Jehovah is our peace." Blessed be his name this day. We have entered on the battles of peace, for the Lord God is with us, and with his people we will go forth to win the peace which he has promised. It was a psalm in two words; it was a song of one verse, infinitely sweet. "Jehovah-shalom": the Lord our peace.

Moreover, it was a prayer, as the margin puts it,—“Jehovah, send peace.” If you have peace with God, let your next prayer be, “Lord, give peace to all thy people.” “Pray for the peace of Jerusalem.” Work it, O holy Spirit of peace! Then ask for peace by the conquest of an ungodly world for Jesus till the first Christmas carol shall be sung again, “Glory to God in the highest, peace on earth, goodwill toward men.”

Sec, brethren, and with that I finish, there may sit here this morning a young man who does not know what God is going to make of him. The capacities of service that God can infuse into a single individual are marvellous. At present you are disturbed in mind, afflicted in heart, ill at ease; you need perfect peace, but you have not found it yet. Rest not till you have it. At God's own altar, where Jesus died, you will find it, and only there. Where Jesus' blood makes peace with God there is your peace. Rest not till you are assuredly at peace with the Lord of all, so that your soul lies down in green pastures, and is led by the still waters. I desire that down in the deepest caverns of your nature there may reign a profound calm which nothing can disturb. Then may the Spirit of God come upon you, and may you sound the trumpet for the battles of the Lord. Oh for the valour which will smite everything that is sinful, and will root out everything that is erroneous. “The sword of the Lord, and of Gideon” be our watchword. As our Master was sent to destroy the works of the devil, even so do we bear the same commission, using only his weapons—love, truth, and self-sacrifice.

PORTION OF SCRIPTURE READ BEFORE SERMON—Judges vi. 1—27.

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