

Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit.

MOURNING AT THE CROSS.

A Sermon

PUBLISHED ON THURSDAY, SEPTEMBER 15TH, 1904,

DELIVERED BY

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AT THE METROPOLITAN TABERNACLE, NEWINGTON,

On Lord's-day Evening, July 23rd, 1876.

“And I will pour upon the house of David, and upon the inhabitants of Jerusalem the spirit of grace and of supplications: and they shall look upon me whom they have pierced, and they shall mourn for him, as one mourneth for his only son, and shall be in bitterness for him, as one that is in bitterness for his firstborn.”—Zechariah xii. 10.

NOTICE, in this verse, the very remarkable change of persons which you find in it; for you have, first, the first person, and then, the third: “They shall look upon *me* whom they have pierced, and they shall mourn for *him*.” It is the same Person who speaks in each case, and he is speaking concerning himself in both instances, so it is very remarkable that he should first say “*me*” and then say “*him*.” What is this but another illustration of the Unity of the Godhead, and yet the Trinity of the adorable Persons in it. Notice that the One who, in this chapter, speaks of himself as “*me*” and “*him*”, is none other than Jehovah, who made the heavens and the earth. Read the first verse: “The burden of the word of the Lord for Israel, saith the Lord, which stretcheth forth the heavens, and layeth the foundation of the earth, and formeth the spirit of man within him.” The Creator of the heavens and the Creator of our spirit is the same Person who was pierced, and who says, “They shall look upon me.” Yet there is a distinction, for we next read, “They shall mourn for *him*.” Jesus Christ is God, and therefore so speaks of himself; yet is he also man, and therefore he is spoken of in the third person. There are other instances in which the divine and human in Christ Jesus are spoken of in a very remarkable manner. Turn, for instance, to the 50th chapter of the prophecy of Isaiah, and the 3rd verse: “I clothe the heavens with blackness, and I make sackcloth their covering.” No one but God could truly say that. Now turn to the 6th verse. I need not read the two intervening verses, but I will put the 3rd and the 6th together: “I clothe the heavens with blackness, and I make sackcloth their covering . . . I gave my back to the smiters, and my cheeks to

them that plucked off the hair: I hid not my face from shame and spitting." Can you realize the tremendous descent from the Godhead of him who clothes the heavens with blackness, and covers them with sackcloth, to the manhood of him who gave his back to the smiters, and his cheeks to them that plucked off the hair? That is another illustration of the truth which is so singularly implied in our text, where we read that "Jehovah, which stretcheth forth the heavens, and layeth the foundation of the earth, and formeth the spirit of man within him," also says, "They shall look upon me whom they have pierced."

The next point I want you to notice is, the remarkable fact that Jesus Christ was crucified and pierced. Did it never strike you as being very singular that he should have been pierced? When the Jews brought Jesus to Pilate, he said to them, "Take ye him, and judge him according to your law." Would you not have supposed that the Jews, on hearing that, would at once have seized the opportunity of putting Christ to death according to their law? They accused Jesus of blasphemy, saying, "We have a law, and by our law he ought to die, because he made himself the Son of God." You know that the death ordained by the law of Moses for a blasphemer was by stoning; and, if I had not read any of the Old Testament prophecies, or the New Testament narrative, I should have felt morally certain that, when Pilate said, "Take ye him, and judge him according to your law," they would have taken him away, and stoned him to death; and I should have felt all the more certain that this would be the case because such was the animosity and hatred of the high priests especially against him that I should have thought that each one of them would have wanted to cast the first stone at him. But when he was sentenced to be crucified, the act of putting him to death was left to the Roman soldiers; and it is to me very surprising that, as the Jews had an opportunity of stoning him themselves, they did not avail themselves of it. Why was this? Why, because this ancient prophecy had said, "They shall look upon me whom they have pierced;" and because another still more ancient prophecy had said, "They pierced my hands and my feet." Therefore, Jesus Christ must die by crucifixion, and not by stoning.

There is another very notable thing in connection with this prophecy. The piercing of the hands and feet of Christ by the nails, might, perhaps, not seem sufficient to carry out the idea of the prophecy: "They shall look upon me whom they have pierced;" so, when our Lord hung upon the cross, when "he was dead already," as the Roman soldiers said when they came round to break the legs of the criminals to put an end to their sufferings, one of the soldiers, who had never read the Old Testament, and knew nothing about what was written there, probably just to gratify his heart's cruel instinct, takes his spear, and thrusts it into the heart of Christ, "and forthwith came there out blood and water." Now, if that had been done by someone who knew about the prophecy, it might have been said that there was some collusion to fulfil the prophetic Scriptures; but, as this Roman soldier was a barbarian, who did

not believe at all in the Jewish Scriptures, is it not a remarkable thing that this prophecy should have been fulfilled through his spear being thrust into the heart of Jesus Christ as he hung upon the cross? So now, as you read these words, "They shall look upon me whom they have pierced," adore the infinite wisdom of God, who was able to give the prophecy hundreds of years before its fulfilment in the most singular and literal manner.

Our text is a prophecy of the conversion of the Jews. They practically pierced the Saviour when they clamoured for his crucifixion, although Pilate tried to make a way for his escape, and the whole Jewish race has continued to endorse their dreadful deed. Most of the Jews who are now living still reject Christ with the utmost scorn and contempt. The very mention of his name often produces a manifestation of the greatest fury. They call him "the Nazarene." I would not like to mention the various opprobrious epithets by which our Lord is called by the Jews. I marvel not that they speak of him as they do; for, as they reckon him to be an impostor, it is but natural that they should heap scorn upon him. But, in doing so, they show that they accept the act and deed of their forefathers, and so his blood is upon them and upon their children, according to the terrible imprecation uttered to Pilate. But the day is coming when all this will be changed. Israel, still beloved of the Lord, the firstborn of all the nations, shall yet recognize Jesus of Nazareth, the Son of David, as being the true Messiah; and then there will come over Israel such a sorrow for having rejected the Messiah as no nation ever knew before. They will look back on all the hundreds or thousands of years during which they have been a people scattered and peeled, exiled from their own land, which was the glory of all lands; and they will then realize that what Isaiah and the other prophets wrote was plain and clear, and that they ought to have seen it before. Judicial blindness has happened unto them even until the present day, but they will see then, and there will never be any other Christians in the world such as they will make, so devout, and earnest, and so anxious to do the will of God in all things. Then will the Gentiles also be gathered in when Israel shall at last receive her King. The first Christian missionaries were of the seed of Abraham, and so shall the last and most successful ones be. God will graft in again the natural branches of the good olive tree, together with us who were, by nature, only wild olive trees, but who have, by grace, been grafted into the good olive tree. O glorious day when that comes to pass; may God send it soon, and may some of us, if not all, live to see it! Yet remember that, though it will be a day of great joy to the repentant Jews, it will also be to them a day of deep sorrow as they recall their long rejection of their dear Lord and Saviour.

I want to remind you that the way in which the Jews will come to Christ is just the way in which you and I also must come to him if we ever come to him at all. They are to come mourning for him, and sorrowing especially because they crucified him. But you and I also crucified him just as much as the Jews did, at least in a certain

sense, of which I am going to speak to you ; and, consequently, when we come to Christ, we must come in just the same way that the Jews are to come to him. In fact, there is no difference, in this matter, between the Jews and the Gentiles. There is similar sin in each case, and the same Saviour ; and when we come to Christ, it must be with the same kind of mourning and the same kind of faith with which Israel shall come in the days when God, in his mercy, shall gather her to himself.

I. My subject is to be—Evangelical sorrow, godly sorrow for sin ; and my first remark concerning it is, that WHEREVER IT EXISTS, IT IS ALWAYS A CREATION OF THE HOLY SPIRIT : “ I will pour upon the house of David, and upon the inhabitants of Jerusalem, the spirit of grace, and of supplications : . . . and they shall mourn.” There never was any real godly sorrow, such as worketh repentance acceptable unto God, except that which was the result of the Holy Spirit’s own work within the soul.

True evangelical repentance is *not produced by mere conscience*, however much the conscience may be aroused and instructed. The Spirit of God must operate upon the heart ; otherwise, the natural conscience cannot rise to the heights of true repentance.

It is *not the product of mere terror*. I believe that men can be driven into a sort of repentance by preaching to them the wrath of God, or by a sense of that wrath overtaking them in times of sickness or of the approach of death. But terror alone is hardening, rather than softening in its influence. It produces a repentance that needeth to be repented of, but it cannot produce evangelical sorrow for sin.

And, certainly, *true repentance can never be produced in the soul by any outward machinery*. Attempts have been made to produce it by covering the so-called “ altar ” with drapery of a certain colour, —violet is, I think, the proper colour to represent repentance,—and by darkening the “ church ” as it is called, and by tolling a bell at a certain time during the service, and by a sort of spiritual charade, acting the tragedy of the cross with mimic blasphemy, or, rather, with real blasphemy, and a shameful mimicry of the crucifixion of our Lord. Surely, no true repentance will ever be wrought in that way. People may be made to weep, and made to feel, by such travesties ; but no spiritual result comes of it any more than of the weeping which may be produced at the theatre by some pathetic scene that is acted there. No, no ; the preaching of the gospel is the ordained means of getting at men’s hearts, and the Holy Ghost’s power alone can lead men to repent of their sins, and trust in the Lord Jesus Christ for salvation.

Therefore it follows that *genuine mourning for sin comes as a gift of divine grace* : “ I will pour upon the house of David, and upon the inhabitants of Jerusalem, the spirit of grace.” Grace comes into the heart, and enlightens the understanding, so that the man understands what his criminality is in the sight of God. Then the grace of God operates upon the conscience so that the man sees the evil and the bitterness of the sin which he has committed against the thrice-holy Jehovah. Then the same grace affects the heart, so

that the man beholds the infinite graciousness and eternal love of Christ, and then begins to loathe himself to think that he should ever have treated Christ so ill. So, by a work of grace upon the soul, and not by any other process, does the Spirit of God make men weep for sin so that they hate it, and turn away from it.

This work of grace is always attended by prayer. Notice the promise in the text: "I will pour . . . the spirit of grace and of supplications." Despairing repentance dares not pray, so that is not the kind of repentance that God accepts. Remorse for sin has often been wrought in men's minds, and it has driven them to despair, and that despair has prevented them from praying. But the godly repentance, which the Holy Ghost gives, always sets the sinner praying. Judas Iscariot repented, after a fashion; but he could not pray, so he went out, and hanged himself. God save all of you from a prayerless, tearless repentance! But if you repent of sin, and at the same time really pray, then I believe we have the right to say that God has poured upon you the spirit of grace and of supplications; and that your mourning for sin will prove to be a godly sorrow that will work in you every blessed thing. God grant to you more and more of this grace as long as ever you live!

This leads me to make a further remark, which is, that *true repentance is continuous in a Christian.* When a man mourns for sin as he ought to do, he does not leave off mourning as long as he is in this world. I am sure of this because we are told that it is "the spirit of grace and of supplications" that God pours upon his people. Now, grace abides in the Christian all his life, and supplication also abides in the Christian all his life; so that we may infer that the third gift of the Spirit, namely, mourning for sin, will also abide in the Christian as long as ever he lives. I have frequently quoted to you the saying of good old Rowland Hill, that the only thing he regretted about going to heaven was that he supposed he should have to say "Good-bye" to repentance when he entered the pearly gates; "but," said he, "she has been my sweet companion, together with faith, all my pilgrim journey, and I expect to have these two graces with me as long as I am in this world." Oh, yes, beloved; we have not done with repenting, and we never shall have done with repenting as long as we are here. The more we rejoice in God, the more we repent to think that we should ever have sinned, and that we do still sin against him. The more we see of the loveliness of Christ, the more we repent that we ever were blind to it. The more we taste of his amazing love, the more we smite upon our breasts, and grieve to think that we should ever have refused him, and should have felt no love in our hearts in return for his great love to us. If you have done repenting, brother, the Holy Spirit has done working in you; for, as long as he works, grace, supplications, and repenting all go together.

II. Now, having shown you that, wherever there is true evangelical mourning for sin, it is the work of the Spirit of God, I pass on to remark, in the second place, that, wherever there is this acceptable mourning for sin, IT IS CAUSED BY LOOKING TO CHRIST.

"They shall look upon me whom they have pierced." What is

the inference from that fact? Why, that repentance is not a preparation for looking to Christ. Do you not see that? The looking is put first, and the mourning afterwards. Yet I know what many of you have thought. You have said to yourselves, "We must mourn for sin, and then look to Christ to pardon it." That is not God's order, and we must always be careful to keep all truths in the order in which he has put them. Remember, sinner, that there will never be a tear of acceptable repentance in your eye till you have first looked to Jesus Christ. "Oh, but!" says someone, "I have had many terrors and horrors concerning sin, yet I have never looked to Christ." Then, all those terrors and horrors are unacceptable. They may be the work of conscience, or, perhaps, partly even the work of the devil himself; but evangelical repentance begins with a believing look at Christ. Thou must first fix thine eye upon Christ before thou canst truly repent. And I tell thee that all thy repentings, apart from believing in Jesus, are of no value, of no avail; therefore, away with them! If thou weepest for sin without fixing thy gaze upon Christ, thou wilt have to weep again over thy repentance, for it is itself another sin. Look away from everything else to Jesus, for he can melt that hard heart of thine, and enable thee to repent. Do not, as our proverbs say, put the cart before the horse, or put the fruit into the ground instead of the root; but begin with looking unto Jesus, and then true repentance will surely follow.

But what is there, in looking to Christ, to make a man hate sin, and repent of it? I answer that,—*Looking to him, we see how sin hates purity.* There was an eloquent, flowery preacher, who, as he delivered his discourse, one Sunday morning, exclaimed, "O Virtue, fair and beauteous maid, if thou shouldst once descend from heaven to earth, and stand amongst the sons of men, they would be all charmed by thy beauties, and would fall down and worship thee!" It so happened that there was a certain plain, blunt preacher, who was not at all an eloquent orator, who had to preach, in the afternoon, in the same building; and having heard the morning discourse, he ventured to repeat the apostrophe to Virtue which I quoted just now, and when he had finished the quotation, he said, "But, O Virtue, thou didst descend from heaven to earth in the form of Jesus Christ, the Son of God; but *did* all men worship thee? Nay, they vilified thee, they abhorred thee, they said, 'Let him be crucified;' and they took thee, and nailed thee to the accursed tree, and put thee to a shameful death!" The death of Jesus Christ upon the cross was an impeachment of the whole world. It showed how bitterly fallen man hates perfection; and if Christ were to come again to the earth as he came before, men would again crucify him; and if Christ's disciples were more like their Lord, I doubt not that they would be far more persecuted than they now are, even as they were in the ages that are past.

Further, when we look on Jesus Christ upon the cross, *we see sin's ingratitude to love.* Christ was not merely pure and perfect, but he came to earth upon no errand but that of love and mercy. There were no thunderbolts in his hands with which to smite the

guilty, but even his enemies said, "This man receiveth sinners, and eateth with them." He himself said, "God sent not his Son into the world to condemn the world; but that the world through him might be saved." Love and pity to men were in his bosom, yet see how the world treated him. It would not have pure benevolence in its midst. The Friend of men, the greatest philanthropist who ever lived, loving the most degraded, and seeking to uplift them,—they took him, and nailed him to the cross of wood. O sin, what an accursed thing thou art, that thou didst not only hate purity itself, but also perfect purity combined with infinite love, and that thou didst shoot thy sharpest arrows into the heart of the best Friend that man has ever had!

Yet even that is not all that a sight of Christ upon the cross shows to us, for *it also shows us man's abhorrence of God*; for, after all, that which excited the bitterest enmity of the world was the Godhead of Christ, his Divine attributes. Jesus Christ was God, and he came to this earth; and wicked men, though they could not kill God, went as near to it as they could by killing Christ, who was God as well as man. We use the word "regicide" when we speak of a man who kills a king, and we rightly use the word "Deicide" in speaking of the crime of which the world made itself guilty when it put Christ to death. It was the ever-blessed Son of God whom wicked men nailed to the tree; and the world would commit the same crime again if it could. If all men were gathered together, taking the human race as it now is, and it were put to the vote, "Shall there be any God?" every fool would hold up his hand for "No God." "The fool hath said in his heart, No God." And as the mass of mankind belong to that category, in spiritual things, they say, "No God." It is quite possible that I am addressing some people who would be delighted if it could be said to them, "Now, if you hold up your finger, there will be no more religion to bother you, no judgment-day for you to dread, no resurrection, no hell, no heaven; in fact, God himself will be put away; so far as you are concerned, there will be no God." What good news it would be to you if it were really so, for the thing which troubles you now is that there is a God. Well, that only shows that you also are among those who are guilty of the death of Christ, for, if you could do it, you would extinguish God himself; and this is what they did, as far as they could, when they nailed the Son of God to the cross of Calvary.

But, dear friends, when we rightly look to Christ, *we see that our guilt was so great that only an infinite sacrifice could atone for it*. Our sin comes home to us; at least, mine comes home to me. I see Christ upon the cross, and my self-righteousness says, "I did not crucify him." But my conscience replies, "No, but you heard, for many years, about Christ being put to death, without being at all affected by that fact; and, therefore, you virtually sanctioned the dreadful deed, by not reprobating it; and you were not moved to any feeling of shame even though Jesus died in your room and place." That is all true, my Lord. For many a day, I thought nothing of thee. Then my conscience added, "You know that,

when Christ came to you, in the preaching of the Gospel, for a long while you refused him. Many a time, your conscience was awakened, and you were urged to accept Christ as your Saviour; but you said, 'I will not have this Man to reign over me.'" Yes, Lord, that also is true. I, who now love thee with all my heart, once refused thee;—nay, not merely once, but a thousand times I refused thee; and so I did what the Jews of old did,—rejected thee. Ah, beloved! we chose the pleasures of the world, instead of the love of Christ, so that we were as bad as they were who said, "Not this man; but Barabbas." We chose the poor, paltry, trivial joys of time and sense, and let the Saviour go. Must not all of you confess that you were guilty in this respect?

Possibly, I am addressing some who, in the days of their ignorance, even cursed the name of Jesus, and persecuted or ridiculed his people. You have a loving sister, of whom you used to make what you called "rare fun" because of her love to Christ, and you knew that you were wounding Christ himself through one of his followers. Perhaps there was someone whom you used to persecute very violently for being a lover of the Lord. If you did so, you were persecuting Jesus, even as Saul of Tarsus did. Do not say that you never spat in his dear face, do not say that you never scourged his blessed shoulders. You have done so, as far as you could do it; in spirit you have done it, though not in very deed. Look to him now; look to him now; and, as you see him on the cross, and see what wicked men did to him there, say, "They were only doing it in my place,—doing what I should have done if I had been there,—doing what I have, in effect, done for a great part of my life."

Even we, who have believed in Jesus, must accuse ourselves of guilt concerning our treatment of our dear Lord, as we look into his face. He has forgiven us, blessed be his dear name! He has not a word to say against us. There is nothing but love in his heart toward us; but we cannot forgive ourselves for all the wrong we have done to him. Oftentimes, we have plaited a crown of thorns, and put it on his head, as the soldiers did. That silly talk, when we ought to have been telling out his gospel;—those doubts and fears, that wicked unbelief, when we ought to have been fully trusting him;—that love of the world, that greed of gain, when we ought to have been honouring him with our substance;—all this was the plaiting of thorny crowns to put upon his blessed brow. Ah, yes! we may well look at him, and mourn; who among us can look at him, and not mourn? God forgive us if we can do so!

III. My time is almost spent; but I was going to show you, in the third place, that EVANGELICAL SORROW FOR SIN IS THE CHIEF OF SORROWS. Whenever it comes into the heart, it is not a sham sorrow, but a very real one. Our text says, "They shall mourn for him, as one mourneth for his only son, and shall be in bitterness for him, as one that is in bitterness for his firstborn."

The grief of one who has lost his only child is very acute. There is hardly a more painful errand on which a minister of the gospel, or any other Christian, has to go, than to visit a family in which the only child lies dead. There is real sorrow there, for they are

thinking that their name will not be continued ; and their dear child was one in whom they took great delight. An only child is usually very much beloved ; so, for that child to die, causes special sorrow ; and it is a great grief for a man to lose his firstborn,—the beginning of his strength, in whom he had taken such pride. Well now, such is the kind of grief that a true Christian feels concerning his sin. May we have it more and more, O Lord ! It were better that I lost every child—better that I lost life itself—than that I should sin against thee ; that is a cruel crime which may well make me mourn.

The prophet then goes on to compare the mourning for sin to the mourning of the whole nation when Josiah died, and the land rang with bitter lamentations for the loved monarch who had been slain in battle. The weeping men and wailing women went through every street, and Jeremiah, the weeping prophet, was the chief mourner among them all. Now, such is the sorrow of a soul when it realizes that it crucified Christ. It is a sweet and blessed sorrow ; but, still, it is a very deep and real one. I ask that I may be made to feel more and more of it.

“Lord, let me weep for nought but sin,
And after none but thee ;
And then I would—oh, that I might!—
A constant weeper be.”

IV. I must not dwell upon this sacred topic, but close with what would have been my fourth division if there had been time for it. That is, that **EVANGELICAL REPENTANCE DOES NOT ITSELF CLEANSE US FROM SIN.**

Are you startled by that statement ? Then, read the 1st verse of the 13th chapter : “In that day there shall be a fountain opened to the house of David and to the inhabitants of Jerusalem for sin and for uncleanness.” Now, dear friends, if mourning for sin took the sin away, there would not be any need of the cleansing fountain ; but, although the mourning was so real and so bitter, it did not take away the mourners’ sin. Toplady was right when he sang,—

“Could my zeal no respite know,
Could my tears for ever flow,
All for sin could not atone :
Thou must save, and thou alone.”

But while evangelical repentance does not take away sin, wherever it is present, it is a proof that sin is taken away. If thou hast repented of thy sin, and hast believed in Jesus, then thou hast been cleansed in the open fountain, and that same blood, which has cleansed thee from guilt, will yet prove that it can also cleanse thee from the power of sin. Am I addressing any who are now mourning on account of sin ? “Blessed are they that mourn, for they shall be comforted.” That blessedness awaits you, for “blessed is he whose transgression is forgiven, whose sin is covered.” Go and confess your transgression unto the Lord ; say to him, with David, “Against thee, thee only, have I sinned.” Go and stand at the foot of the cross, and view the flowing of your Saviour’s precious blood ; and while

you stand there, and mourn for him, the Holy Spirit will be pleased to bear witness with your spirit, and you shall have the blessed assurance which will enable you to know that the blood of Jesus has washed all your sin away, and you shall go on your way rejoicing,—hating the sin that made him suffer, and praising the grace that has forgiven it.

Ere I close, I would that some poor sinner, instead of trying to mourn for sin, would first look to Jesus Christ upon the cross, for that is the way to be made to mourn for sin. Instead of thinking that repentance can cleanse you, look to the finished work of Jesus, and believe in him, for that is the only way by which pardon can come to you. May God bless us all, and keep us ever repenting, and ever believing, and he shall have the praise and the glory for ever and ever! Amen.

Exposition by C. H. Spurgeon.

ZECHARIAH XII., AND XIII., 1.

Chapter xii. Verse 1. *The burden of the word of the LORD for Israel, saith the LORD, which stretcheth forth the heavens, and layeth the foundation of the earth, and formeth the spirit of man within him.*

Note how this chapter begins: "The burden of the word of the Lord for Israel,"—not against Israel. The gospel is always, to the true preacher of it, the burden of the Lord; but, to those who receive it, it is a burden of blessing, a load of mercy. To those who reject it, it will become a burdensome stone, crushing them to their eternal ruin. God grant, in his infinite mercy, that none of us may belong to the last class!

2. *Behold, I will make Jerusalem a cup of trembling unto all the people round about, when they shall be in the siege both against Judah and against Jerusalem.*

This is a promise of God's abounding mercy to his chosen people Israel. When he comes to their aid, they shall be a cup of trembling to their enemies. Those enemies will try to swallow them, but they will find that they are drinking a cup of poison, which will cause their own death. Oh, that the day might soon come when God would remember his ancient people, the Jews, and bring them back to their own land, as he certainly will do in the fulness of time; and when he has done it, then it shall come to pass that all who fight against them shall find his people to be as a cup of trembling to them.

This promise, which is to be literally fulfilled to God's chosen people, the seed of Abraham, is also spiritually true to all believers. Christian, your enemies cannot really hurt you. If they could drink you up, as men drink a cup of wine, you would be a cup of trembling to them, they would find that they had taken in more than they wanted. All the persecutors of the Church of God, in smiting this stone, have themselves been broken on it. They have found that they have undertaken a task which has ended in their own destruction. Woe unto the man who fights against the Church of the living God! Victory must always come to the Lord's people, for greater is he who is with them than all that can be against them.

3. *And in that day will I make Jerusalem a burdensome stone for all people: all that burden themselves with it shall be cut in pieces, though all the people of the earth be gathered together against it.*

This is true literally, but it is also true spiritually. As the Church of God is to be a cup of trembling to its enemies, so is it also to be a burden-