

Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit.

OUR BANNER.

A Sermon

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“Thou hast given a banner to them that fear thee, that it may be displayed because of the truth.”—Psalm lx. 4.

Most writers upon this Psalm, after having referred the banner to the kingdom of David, say that there is here a reference to the Messiah. We believe there is. Nor is that reference an obscure allusion. In the Lord Jesus we find the clue to the history and the solution of the prophecy. He is the banner,—he is the ensign that is lifted up before the people. He is Jehovah-nissi, “the Lord my banner,” whom it is our joy to follow, and around whom it is our delight to rally. We shall not stay to prove,—though we might readily do so,—that the banner here intended is no other than the Lord Jesus Christ in the majesty of his person,—in the efficacy of his merit,—in the completeness of his righteousness,—in the sureness of his triumph,—in the glory of his advent. If you read it with an eye to him, you have the meaning at once: “Thou hast given Christ as a banner to them that fear thee, to be displayed because of the truth.” So let us consider *our Lord Jesus Christ*, first, *as he is compared to a banner*; secondly, *by whom he is given*; thirdly, *to whom he is given*; and fourthly, *for what purpose*.

I. Let us consider OUR LORD JESUS CHRIST AS HE IS COMPARED TO A BANNER.

The banner was far more useful, I suppose, in ancient than it is in modern warfare. Times have changed, and we are changed by them. Yet we still speak with reverence of the old flag. There is much meaning in the phrase, “the flag that’s braved a thousand years the battle and the breeze.” The soldier still loves the flag of his country, and the sailor still looks with patriotic pride to the flag that has so long floated at England’s masthead. Our metaphor, however, rather points to ancient than present usage.

We should notice, first of all, that *the banner was lifted up and*
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displayed as the point of union. When a leader was about to gather troops for a war, he hoisted his banner, and then every man rallied to the standard. The coming to the standard, the rallying round the banner, was the joining with the prince, the espousing of his cause. In the day of battle, when there was ever a likelihood that the host would be put to flight, the valiant men all fought around the banner. Its defence was of the first and chief consequence. They might leave the baggage for a while; they might forsake the smaller flags of the divisions; but the great blood-red banner that with prayer had been consecrated, they must all gather round it, and there, if need be, shed their heart's blood.

Christ, my brethren, is the point of union for all the soldiers of the cross. I know of no other place where all Christians can meet. We cannot all meet—I am sorry that we cannot,—at the baptismal stream. There are some who will not be baptized; they persist still in the sin of putting drops of water in the place of the ordained flood, and bringing infants where faith is required. We cannot all meet even around the table of the Eucharist; there are some who thrust aside their brethren, because they do not see eye to eye with them; and even the communion table has sometimes become a field of battle. But all Christians can meet in the person of Christ; all true hearts can meet in the work of Christ. This is a banner that we all love, if we be Christians, and far hence be those who are not. Hither to thy cross, O Jesus, do we come! The Churchman, laden with his many forms and vestments; the Presbyterian, with his stern Covenant, and his love of those who stained the heather with their blood; the Independent, with his passion for liberty, and the separateness of the free churches; the Methodist, with his intricate forms of Church Government, sometimes forms of bondage, but still forms of power; the Baptist, remembering his ancient pedigree, and the days in which his fathers were hounded even by Christians themselves, and counted not worthy of that name; they all come to Christ. Various opinions divide them; they see not eye to eye on many matters; here and there, they will have a skirmish for the old landmarks; and rightly so, for we ought to be jealous, as Josiah was, to do that which is right in the sight of the Lord, and neither decline to the right hand nor to the left. But we rally to the cross of Christ; and there, all weapons of internecine warfare being cast aside, we meet as brethren, fellow-comrades in a blessed Evangelical Alliance, who are prepared to suffer and to die for his dear sake. Forward then, Christians, to the point of union! In the crusade against the powers of darkness, with the salvation of sinners for my one undivided aim, little care I for anything but the lifting up of my Master's gospel, and the proclamation of the Word of mercy through his flowing blood.

Again, *the banner, in time of war, was the great guide-star*; it was the direction to the soldier. You remember what special care they took, in the day of battle, that, in case the standard-bearer should fall, there might still be some means of guiding the warriors.

So, to this day, Christ is the great Guide of the Christian in the day of battle. There is no fear that Jesus Christ, the same yester-

day, to-day, and for ever, will ever fail. Fix your eye upon him, Christian; and if you would know the best way to fight, fight in his footsteps, imitate his every action, let your life be a copy of his life. You need never stop to ask for directions: the life of Christ is the Christian's model. You need not turn to your fellow-believer, and say, "Comrade, what are we to do now? The smoke of battle gathers, and the cries are various; which way shall I go?" The apostle Paul has given us our directions: "Let us run with patience the race that is set before us, looking unto Jesus, the Author and Finisher of our faith; who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is set down at the right hand of the throne of God." Press forward, in Christ's footsteps, saying, "God hath given thee, my Saviour, to be to me a banner because of the truth."

In these two respects, as the central point for rallying, and as the direction to the warrior, Christ is our banner.

And the banner, let it be remembered, *is always the chief object of attack*. The moment the adversary sees it, his object is to strike there. If it be not the most vulnerable point, it will be at least the point where the adversary's power is most felt. Did they not of old aim their shots at the flagstaff so as to cut down the banner? Whenever the old Knights of the Red Cross fought the Saracens, they always endeavoured to make their steel ring upon the helmet of the man whose hand held the standard of Mohammed; the fight was ever fiercest around the standard. Sometimes, when the battle was over, the field would be strewn with legs, and arms, and mangled bodies; but, in one place, there would be a heap where they were piled one upon another, a great mountain of flesh and armour, broken bones and smashed skulls, and one would ask, "What means this? How came they here? How trampled they so one upon another, and fought in pools of human blood?" The answer would be, "'Twas there the standard-bearer stood, and first the adversary made a dash, and stole the banner; and then fifty knights vowed to redeem it, and they dashed against their foes, and took it by storm; and then again hand to hand they fought with the banner between them, first in one hand and then in another, changing ownership each hour."

So, dear friends, Christ Jesus has always been the object of attack. You remember that, when divine justice came forth against Christ on Calvary, it made five rents in the great banner, and those five rents, all glorious, are in that banner still. Since that day, many a shot has sought to riddle it, but not one has been able to touch it. Borne aloft, first by one hand and then by another, the mighty God of Jacob being the strength of the standard-bearers, that flag has bidden defiance to the leaguered hosts of the world, the flesh, and the devil; but never has it been trailed in the mire, and never once carried in jeering triumph by the adversary. Blessed are the rents in the banner, for they are the symbol of our victory. Those five wounds in the person of the Saviour are the gates of heaven to us. But, thank God, there are no more wounds to be endured; the person of our Lord is safe for ever. "A bone

of him shall not be broken." His gospel, too, is an unwounded gospel, and his mystical body is uninjured. Yes; the gospel is unharmed after all the strife of ages. The infidel threatens to rend the gospel to pieces, but it is as glorious as ever; modern scepticism has sought to pull it thread from thread, but has not been able so much as to rend a fragment of it. Every now and then, fresh adversaries have found out some new methods of induction or declamation, essaying to prove the gospel to be a lie, and Christ an impostor. Have they succeeded? Nay, verily, they have all had to fly from the field. The good old banner of the Lord Omnipotent, even Christ Jesus, still stands erect above them all.

And why should the banner be the object of attack but for this very reason, that *it is the symbol of defiance*? As soon as ever the banner is lifted up, it is, as it were, flaunted in the face of the foe. It seems to say to him, "Do your worst,—come on! We are not afraid of you,—we defy you!" So, when Christ is preached, there is a defiance given to the enemies of the Lord. Every time a sermon is preached in the power of the Spirit, it is as though the shrill clarion woke up the fiends of hell, for such a sermon seems to say to them, "Christ is come forth again to deliver his lawful captives out of your power; the King of kings has come to take away your dominions, to wrest from you your stolen treasures, and to proclaim himself your Master." There is a stern joy that the minister sometimes feels when he thinks of himself as the antagonist of the powers of hell. Martin Luther seems to have felt it when he said, "Come, let us sing the forty-sixth Psalm, and let the devil do his worst!" That was lifting up the standard of the cross. If you want to defy the devil, don't go about preaching philosophy; don't sit down, and write out fine sermons, with long sentences, three-quarters of a mile in extent; don't try and cull fine, smooth phrases that will sound sweetly in people's ears. The devil doesn't care a bit for this; but talk about Christ, preach about the sufferings of the Saviour, tell sinners that there is life in a look at him, and straightway the devil taketh great umbrage. Look at many of the ministers in London! They preach in their pulpits from the first of January to the last of December, and nobody finds fault with them, because they prophesy such smooth things. But let a man preach Christ, let him declaim about the power of Jesus to save, and press home gospel truth with simplicity and boldness, straightway the fiends of darkness will be against him; and, if they cannot bite, they will show that they can howl and bark. There is a symbol of defiance in the banner of the cross; it is God's symbol of defiance, his gauntlet thrown down to the confederated powers of darkness, a gauntlet which they dare not take up, for they know what tremendous power for good there is in the uplifting of the cross of Christ. Wave, then, your banner, O ye soldiers of the cross; each in your place and rank keep watch and ward, but wave your banner still; for though the adversary shall be full of wrath, it is because he knoweth that his time is short when once the cross of Christ is lifted up.

We have not quite exhausted the metaphor yet. *The banner was*

ever a source of consolation to the wounded. There he lies, the good knight; right well has he fought without fear and without reproach; but a chance arrow pierced the joints of his harness, and his life is oozing out from the ghastly wound. There is no one there to unbuckle his helmet, or give him a draught of cooling water; his frame is locked up in that hard case of steel, and though he feels the smart, he cannot gain relief. He hears the mingled cries, the hoarse shouts of men that rush in fury against their fellows; and he opens his eyes,—as yet he has not fainted from his bleeding. Where, think you, does he look? He turns himself round. What is he looking for? For friend? For comrade? No. Should they come to him, he would say, "Just lift me up, and let me sit against that tree, but go you to the fight." Where is that restless eye searching, and what is the object for which it is looking? Yes, he has it; and the face of the dying man is brightened. He sees the banner still waving, and with his last breath he cries, "On! on! on!" and falls asleep content, because the banner is safe. It has not been cast down. Though he has fallen, yet the banner is secure. Even so, every true soldier of the cross rejoices in its triumph. We fall, but Christ does not. We die, but the cause prospers. As I have told you before, when my heart was most sad,—as it never was before nor since,—that sweet text, "Wherefore God also hath highly exalted him, and given him a name which is above every name," quite cheered my soul, and set me again in peace and comfort. Is Jesus safe? Then it never matters what becomes of me. Is the banner all right? Doth it wave on high? Then the adversary hath not won the day; he hath felled one and another, but he himself shall be broken in pieces, for the banner still glares in the sun.

And, lastly, *the banner is the emblem of victory*. When the fighting is over, and the soldier cometh home, what does he bring? His blood-stained flag. And what is borne highest in the procession as it winds through the streets? It is the flag. They hang it in the minster; high up there in the roof, and where the incense smoketh, and where the song of praise ascendeth, there hangs the banner, honoured and esteemed, borne in conflict and in danger. Now, our Lord Jesus Christ shall be our banner in the last day, and when all our foes shall be under our feet. A little while, and he that will come shall come, and will not tarry. A little while, and we shall see—

"Jehovah's banner furled,
Sheathed his sword; he speaks! 'tis done,
And the kingdoms of this world
Are the kingdoms of his Son."

And then Jesus, high above us all, shall be exalted, and through the streets of the holy city the acclamations shall ring, "Hosanna, Hosanna, blessed is he that cometh in the name of the Lord."

II. Let us turn to our second point for a few moments. It is this: Who gave us this banner? BY WHOM WAS CHRIST GIVEN TO US? Soldiers often esteem the colours for the sake of the person who

first bestowed them. You and I ought greatly to esteem our precious Christ for the sake of God who gave him to us: "*Thou hast given a banner to them that fear thee.*" God gave us this banner in old eternity. Christ was given by the eternal Father, from everlasting, or ever the earth was, to his elect people, to be the Messiah of God, the Saviour of the world. He was given in the manger, when "the Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us." He was given upon the cross when the Father bestowed every drop of his Son's blood, and every nerve of his body, and every power of his soul, to bleed and die, "the Just for the unjust, that he might bring us to God." "*Thou hast given a banner.*"

That banner was given to each one of us in the day of our conversion. Christ became, from that time forth, our glory and our boast. And he is given to some of us, especially, when we are called to the ministry, or when the Holy Spirit's guidance puts us upon any extraordinary work for Christ. Then is the banner, in a direct and especial manner, committed to our care. There are some here who have had this banner given to them to carry in the midst of the Sunday-school. A dear sister here has it. A beloved brother has it to bear in the midst of many of this congregation. The young men of our College, of our Evening Classes, and many others of you, workers for Christ, have that banner, that you may bear it in the streets, that you may lift up the name of Jesus in the causeways, and in the places of assembly. And, in a certain measure, all of you, who love the Lord, have that banner given to you, that in your various spheres of service you may talk of Jesus, and lift up his holy name.

Now, inasmuch as God himself gives us this banner, with what reverence should we look upon it, with what ardour should we cluster round it, with what zeal should we defend it, with what enthusiasm should we follow it, with what faith and confidence should we rush even into death itself for its defence!

III. Thirdly, TO WHOM IS THIS BANNER GIVEN?

The text says, "*Thou hast given a banner to them that fear thee.*" Not to all men. God has a chosen people. These chosen people are known, in due time, by their outward character. That outward grace-wrought character is this, they fear God, and *they that fear God are the only persons who ought to carry this banner.* Shall the banner be put into a drunkard's hands? Shall the great truth of Christ be left to those who live in sin? Oh, it is a wretched thing when men come into the pulpit to preach who have never known and felt the power of the gospel themselves! Time was—but times are changed somewhat,—when, in multitudes of our parish pulpits, men whose characters were unhallowed preached to others what they never practised themselves. To such, the banner ought not to be given. Men must fear God, or else they are not worthy to bear it.

Moreover, *none but these can bear it.* What others bear is not the banner; it is but an imitation of it. It is not Christ they preach; it is a diluted thing that is not the gospel of Jesus. They cannot proclaim it to others till they know it themselves. It is

given to them that fear God, because they will have courage to bear it. Fear is often the mother of courage. To fear God, makes a man brave. To fear man, is cowardly, I grant; but to fear God, with humble awe and holy reverence, is such a noble passion that I would we were more and more full thereof, blending, as it were, the fear of Isaac with the faith of Abraham. To fear God, will make the weakest of us play the man, and the most craven of us become heroes for the Lord our God.

Now, inasmuch as this banner is given to those that fear God, *if you fear God, it is given to you.* I do not know in what capacity you are to bear it, but I do know there is somewhere or other where you have to carry it. Mother, let the banner wave in your household. Merchant, let the banner be fixed upon your house of business. Let it be unfurled and fly at your masthead, O sailor! Bear the banner, O soldier, in your regiment! Yours is a stern duty, for, alas! the Christian soldier hath a path of trial that few men have trodden. God make you faithful, and may you be honoured as a good soldier of Jesus Christ! Some of you are poor, and work hard in the midst of many artisans who fear not God. Take your banner with you, and never be ashamed of your colours. You cannot be long in a workshop before your companions will pull their colours out. They will soon begin talking to you about their sinful pleasures, their amusements, perhaps their infidel principles. Take your banner out likewise. Tell them that it is a game two can play at; never allow a man to show his banner without also showing yours. Do not do it ostentatiously; do it humbly, but do it earnestly and sincerely. Remember that your banner is one that you never need be ashamed of; the best of men have fought under it; nay, he who was God as well as man hath his own name written on the escutcheon. Surely, then, you need not be ashamed to wave it anywhere and everywhere. You can think bravely; now be great in act as you have been in thought.

“Presence of mind and courage in distress
Are more than armies to procure success.”

IV. This is our last question, FOR WHAT PURPOSE WAS THIS BANNER GIVEN TO US?

Our text is very explicit upon that point; it was given to us to be *“displayed because of the truth.”* It is to be displayed. In order to display a banner, you must take it out of its case. Members of this congregation, brethren in the church, I pray you study the Scriptures much. I would not have men attempt to preach unless they have some power. To go forth without some study, would be like a man attempting to do execution with a gun that had much powder in it and no shot. Do unfurl the banner; to this end, husband well your time. Young men, save your spare hours to study the Bible. Steal them from your sleep if you cannot get them anyhow else. Sunday-school teachers, be diligent in your preparations for your classes. Get your banner out of the case. It is of little service lifting it up in the midst of the ranks without its being unfurled. See that ye know the holy art of

unfurling it. Practise it; study it; be well acquainted with him who is the wisdom of God and the power of God.

And, *after the flag is unfurled, it needs to be lifted up.* So, in order to display Christ, you must lift him up. Lift him up with a clear voice, as one who has something to say which he would have men hear. Speak of him boldly, as one who is not ashamed of his message. Speak affectionately, speak passionately, speak with your whole soul, let your whole heart be in every word you say, for this is to lift up the banner.

But, besides lifting up the banner, *you must carry it*, for it is the business of the standard-bearer, not merely to hold it in one place, but to bear it here and there if the plan of battle shall change. So, bear Christ to the poor lodging-houses, to the work-houses, to the prisons, if you can get admittance, to the back streets, to the dark slums, to the cellars, to the solitary attic, to the crowded rooms, to the highways and the byways; and you especially who are private Christians; and not preachers, bear it from house to house. We had a complaint, the other day, that some of you had been going from house to house to try and talk to others about their souls; you had entrenched upon the parochial bounds of the authorized gamekeeper! I pray you to entrench again. What is my parish? The whole world is my parish; let the whole world be your parish likewise. What does it matter to us if the world be parcelled out amongst men who probably do little or nothing? Let us do all we can. No man hath any right to say to me, "Visit in such-and-such a district; not here,—this is my ground." Who gave it to you? Who gave him lordship of the world, or any portion of it? "The earth is the Lord's, and the fulness thereof." The earth is your field, and no matter upon whose district, territory, or parish. Let me encourage you who love the Saviour, you who have the pure gospel, to go and spread it. Let nothing confine you, or limit your labours, except your strength and your time.

Still, after all, if we carry the gospel, and lift up the banner, *it will never be displayed unless there is wind to blow it.* A banner would only hang like a dead flag upon the staff if there were no wind. Now, we cannot produce the wind to expand the banner, but we can invoke heavenly aid. Prayer becomes a prophecy when we say, "Awake, O heavenly wind, and blow, and let this banner be displayed." The Holy Spirit is that gracious wind who shall make the truth apparent in the hearts of those who hear it. Display the banner, talk of Christ, live Christ, proclaim Christ everywhere. He is given to you for this very purpose. Therefore, let not your light be hid under a bushel. "Ye are the light of the world." "Let your light so shine before men." Let the old flag be held up by fresh hands. Go ye forth in new times, with new resolves, and may you have constant renewings as new opportunities open before you!

Oh, but are there not some of you who could not bear this banner? Let me invite such to come and take shelter under it. My Master's banner, wherever it goes, gives liberty. Under the banner of old England, there never breathes a slave. They tread

our country, they breathe our air, and their shackles fall. Beneath the banner of Christ, no slave can live. Do but look up to Jesus, relying upon his suffering in your stead, and bearing your sins in your place and room, and forthwith you shall have acceptance in the Beloved, and the peace of God, which passeth all understanding, shall keep your heart and mind through Jesus Christ. So may God enlist you beneath his banner, to his glory! Amen.

Expositions by C. H. Spurgeon.

GENESIS XXXII. ; AND PSALM CXIX. 33—40.

Genesis xxxii, v. 1. *And Jacob went on his way, and the angels of God met him.*

What an encouragement the visit of these angels must have been to Jacob after the strife which he had had with Laban! But, dear friends, angels often come to meet us, though we know it not. As in the old classic story, the poor man said, "This is a plain hut, but God has been here," so we may say of every Christian's cottage, "Though it be poor, an angel has come here," for David says, "The angel of the Lord encampeth round about them that fear him, and delivereth them." As the angels of God met Jacob, I trust that, if you have come here after some stern battle, and trial, and difficulty, you may find the angels of God meeting you here. They do come into the assemblies of the saints. Paul tells us that the woman ought to have her head covered in the assembly "because of the angels," that is, because they are there to see that all things are done decently and in order.

2. *And when Jacob saw them, he said, This is God's host: and he called the name of that place Mahanaim.*

He gave it a name to commemorate God's having sent the angels, and called it "two camps" or "two hosts."

3. *And Jacob sent messengers before him to Esau his brother unto the land of Seir, the country of Edom.*

He is cut of one trouble with Laban; now he is into another with Esau. Well did John Bunyan say.—

"A Christian man is seldom long at ease;
When one trouble's gone, another doth him seize."

4, 5. *And he commanded them, saying, Thus shall ye speak unto my lord Esau; Thy servant Jacob saith thus, I have sojourned with Laban, and stayed there until now: and I have oxen, and asses, flocks, and menservants, and womenservants: and I have sent to tell my lord, that I may find grace in thy sight.*

This is very respectful language, and rather obsequious, too; but when a man knows that he has done wrong to another, he ought to be prepared to humble himself to the injured individual; and, though it happened long ago, yet Jacob really had injured his brother Esau, and it was but right that, in meeting him again, he should put himself into a humble position before him. There are some proud people who, when they know that they have done wrong, yet will not own it, and it is very hard to end a quarrel when one will not yield, and the other feels that he will not either. But there is good hope of things going right when Jacob, who is the better of the two brothers, is also the humbler of the two.

6, 7. *And the messengers returned to Jacob, saying, We came to thy brother*