

Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit.

A VIVID CONTRAST.

A Sermon

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“And every man went unto his own house.”—John vii. 53.

“Jesus went unto the mount of Olives.”—John viii. 1.

THESE verses furnish a striking illustration of the unwise way in which, in certain cases, the Bible has been divided into chapters. The meaning of many portions of Scripture would be much more manifest if Gospels, Epistles, and even Prophecies were left in their undivided state. The two sentences, which I have selected for my text, ought never to have been separated; and we may rightly say of them, “What God hath joined together, let no man put asunder.” So we will consider them together as they should be considered: “Every man went unto his own house. Jesus went unto the mount of Olives.”

I. Here we have, in the first place, A FACT FOR OUR EARNEST CONSIDERATION. Let us turn it over in our mind under the Holy Spirit's gracious guidance. While Christ's friends and enemies had, every one of them, a house to go to, he must needs go to spend the night in the open air watching and praying on the mount of Olives.

Observe, first, *his extreme poverty*. Among them all,—friends or foes,—there was not one without a house excepting himself. Nay, more, among some of the meanest of his creatures, there was not one without a shelter. Foxes, though they were but worthy to be exterminated, had holes in which they could hide; and the birds of the air, though many ruthlessly sought to destroy them, had nests wherein they could rest; but the Son of man had not where to lay his head. Possibly, in all Judæa, there was only that one houseless man; certainly, there was no other who was so voluntarily houseless as himself. He had brought himself down from the glories of his Father's court, from the majesty of reigning with his Father in heaven, to become dependent upon the bounty of his own disciples for his daily bread; and he had no house that he could call his own, no home to which he could retire when his day's work was

done. Believers, admire his amazing condescension in that, "though he was rich, yet for your sakes he became poor, that ye through his poverty might be rich." If any of you are poor in this world, be comforted, for you are not poorer than your Master was. Remember that every true Christian man is the image of Christ; but the godly poor man is the *express* image of Christ. He has one quality beyond those which other Christian men have, that is, his poverty, which makes him even more like his Master than they are. He who was born in a stable, and cradled in a manger; he who wore the homely garb of the peasantry of Palestine, the garment which was without seam, woven from the top throughout; he who made fishermen his chosen companions was the poor man's Christ, poorer than the poorest of you, and able therefore to sympathize with you in all the pangs and griefs which penury may bring upon you. And ye great ones of the earth, despise not the unlettered and the poor, for "hath not God chosen the poor of this world rich in faith," to be "heirs of the kingdom which he hath promised to them that love him," and hath he not "exalted one chosen out of the people," even his only-begotten and well-beloved Son, to sit with him on the throne of his glory?

Further, when "every man went unto his own house," Christ had no house to go to; and this denotes, not only his extreme poverty, but *the forgetfulness and unkindness of his friends*. Each of us is apt to say, "Had I been there, he should not have spent that night amid the cold dews of the mount of Olives. He should have had the best accommodation my house could have afforded. I would always have had a chamber prepared for the Lord's prophets, like that of the Shunammite woman, with 'a bed, and a table, and a stool, and a candlestick,' and I would have entertained this Prince of Prophets with the greatest joy." So you think; but, had you lived in Christ's day, John might still have written, "He came unto his own, and his own received him not;" and the prophet's lamentation might again have become true, "He was despised, and we esteemed him not;" even we, his own people, his blood-bought people, his beloved, "esteemed him not."

Surely, never was such a Friend used so ill as the Lord Jesus Christ was used even by his friends and followers. His head must have been wet with the dew of heaven, and his locks with the drops of the night, yet no one gave him shelter. Yet we must not blame his disciples for their neglect of their Master unless we are willing also to blame ourselves. He has often stood at our door, and knocked; perhaps he is knocking now; but we, in some form or other, refuse to give him a lodging in our hearts, and willingly keep in his place some darling sin; and so the Saviour still has to stand without, for he will not come into our hearts to dwell in peace with sin, and must remain without until we expel the intruder, or call upon him to do so.

Observe, too, in the fact of Christ having no home to go to, *the loneliness of his spirit*. If he had asked one of his friends to entertain him, probably none would have refused his request. Had not his mother Mary still a home? What had become of his reputed

father, Joseph the carpenter? Were not his brethren with him? Would not one of them entertain him? There was James, who is called the Lord's brother, could not he find him a shelter? Peter had a wife, for we read of his wife's mother lying sick of a fever, and being cured by Christ; had he no place to which he could invite his Lord? The loving John had a home, for he took the mother of Jesus, after the crucifixion, to his own home. Then there were the women who followed Jesus, and ministered to him of their substance, and Martha, and Mary, and Lazarus, would not they give Christ a shelter? Oh, yes, they would gladly have done so; but he was, just then, in the midst of trials, he was beset by the Pharisees; they were tempting him on all sides, and he wanted something better than the companionship of men. He wants a place where he can rest; but there is no one disciple upon whose bosom he can lean his head. John may lean his head upon Christ's bosom, but Christ cannot lean his head upon John's bosom; so the Saviour must go away by himself to the mount of Olives, for he has a lonely spirit, and no human being can fully enter into his griefs and woes. We sometimes see a Christian minister, of high spirit, living in a country village; he is the only educated man in the place. There is no one to whom he can talk upon many themes that are interesting to him; and his spirit often feels very lonely. His people seem to have nothing to think of but their farms, their milkings, their ploughings, and their sowings; he cannot get them above all these things, and there he stands with, perhaps, not a single companion with whom he can discuss his doubts, and questions, and thoughts about things divine. It is lonely to be a missionary engaged in Christian work in a heathen land; his loneliness may be even greater than that of such a man as I have been describing. But the Saviour's loneliness was greater still; there was not one man upon the earth with whom he could talk at all times. Even in his hours of keenest conflict, Christ knew that his chosen followers would leave him alone; all would forsake him, and flee. It is true that, even then, he could say, "Yet I am not alone, because the Father is with me;" but, apart from his Father's presence, his whole life may be compressed into those two sentences, "I have trodden the winepress alone; and of the people there was none with me." So, that night, they could all go to their own houses, but Christ must go to the mount of Olives, for he must be a lonely man.

Thus, there are three things which are brought out by the text,—Christ's extreme poverty, the unkindness of his friends, and the loneliness of his spirit.

But there is another reason for his action,—*the fond resolution of his heart*. Why does he go to the mount of Olives, and not somewhere else? He knew that it was near that sacred retreat that he was to sweat, as it were, great drops of blood falling down to the ground, so he resolved to familiarize himself with the neighbourhood which was to be the scene of his terrible conflict with Satan. Do you not think that, if Wellington had known beforehand that the fate of nations would be decided on the field of Waterloo, he

would have gone to see it if it had been possible? I believe the great warrior would have gone to look at it, and study it, and observe the best positions for attack and defence; and the Saviour went, with solemn interest, to look at the place where he was to stand foot to foot with the great enemy of souls. If you and I had to bear some terrible suffering, it is very likely (for the flesh is so weak,) that we should try to forget all about it; but it was not so with the Saviour. He kept the fact of his atoning sacrifice constantly before his own mind, and spoke of it also to others again and again. So intense was his love to his people that he seemed eagerly to anticipate the time when he should suffer for their sakes even unto death. Remember his remarkable saying, "I have a baptism to be baptized with: and how am I straitened till it be accomplished!" What! was his death upon the cross to be, in any sense, a relief to him? Yes, it was even so, and he was "straitened" till it was accomplished. Oh, what wondrous love was that which impelled the Saviour onward to Gethsemane, the olive press, where he was to be pressed and crushed between the millstones of Jehovah's wrath, in order that he might suffer the penalty due to our transgressions!

I am not going to thresh these thoughts out for you; I merely suggest them as themes for your devout meditation, and I think that there is abundant reason for such meditation in those seven words, "Jesus went unto the mount of Olives."

II. Now I want to take the text in another way. The second thing which it presents to us is A VIVID CONTRAST FOR SELF-EXAMINATION.

What a true description this first verse is of our own usual conduct! "Every man went unto his own house." We go, each one of us, to our own house *for ease*. That is right enough up to a certain point, but do we not often seek our own ease when we should be engaged in the service of our Lord? Christ goes to the mount to pray; but we go to our beds to sleep, or to our tables to feast, to our friends to while away an hour in empty talk, or to our amusements to kill the time which hangs so heavily upon our hands. I doubt not that the greatest saint among us has some cause to reproach himself for having wasted time, and disobeyed that solemn apostolic injunction, "See then that ye walk circumspectly, not as fools, but as wise, redeeming the time, because the days are evil." I can, in imagination, see the Saviour lifting up his hands in an agony of spirit on the mountain at midnight, while his disciples are all sleeping comfortably in their beds. As we think of our Saviour thus agonizing in prayer for his people, can we not find more time for prayer than the most of us usually do? Might it not be profitable to ourselves to mortify the body a little more that we might have a greater advantage in spirit? I am afraid we should have to present a very poor record if we gave a true account of the time we spend in prayer; yet we have no excuse to offer for being dilatory in this holy duty. It is not a bondage, a slavery; it is the highest privilege of the believer's soul to be engaged in prayer to our Heavenly Father, yet we often

prefer the disastrous ease of wasting our time instead of drawing nigh to God in prayer. I heard someone say to a woman, who had been converted, but whose husband kept a public-house, "There is one room in your house which will keep all the other rooms there from injuring your spiritual life; that is, the room where you retire for private prayer; if that room is kept right, the rest will do you little harm." Christian, imitate your Lord, who often retired for prayer to the mount of Olives, and it shall be well with your soul. At a certain missionary station in Africa, one of the brethren was accustomed to go for private prayer to a little clump of trees; and, to get there, he had to cross some long grass. He had gone so often that he had made a clear track to the spot where he went to pray. Others had done the same, and there were several tracks across the grass. After a while, this professor began to grow lax in many ways; he could not enjoy the ministry as he used to do, his dealings in trade were not so exact as once they were. An elder brother pointed out to him the cause of the change that had come over him. He took him aside to his track, and showed him that the grass was growing up, and that it was not trodden down as it formerly had been, and then he said, "Brother, there is the cause of all the mischief; the grass is growing on the track where you used to go for private prayer." If you and I, dear friends, had to go to some place like that for prayer, I fear that the grass would not always be well trodden down, and that we should often have cause to cry, "O Lord, give us the true spirit of prayer!" Like the people of whom the text speaks, we go to our houses for ease; but Christ goes to the mountain to pray in lonely solitude. We still have need to say to him,—

"Cold mountains, and the midnight air
Witness'd the fervour of thy prayer;
The desert thy temptation knew,
Thy conflict and thy victory too.

"Be thou my pattern; make me bear
More of thy gracious image here;
Then God the Judge shall own my name
Amongst the followers of the Lamb."

For what else do we go to our houses? We go there, very often, to take counsel. On the occasion mentioned here, Christ's enemies went home to talk together about how they might try to entrap him; and we sometimes go to our homes to consult with flesh and blood about matters that concern us. We say to one friend, "What do you think I had better do?" and to another, "This is my condition; what do you advise in such a case as mine?" In this way, poor, erring, human judgments are made to be our chart and our compass, our captain and our pilot. "Jesus went unto the mount of Olives," and took his case to his Father in prayer. He consulted not with flesh and blood, but with the Eternal, whose wisdom can make no mistake, and whose love can never err. Beloved, may we not be blameworthy in having gone hither and thither, wasting our breath on our friends and fellow-sinners,

instead of going to the great High Priest, who wears the Urim and Thummim, and who would have told us what we ought to do? The lines of Cowper are still true,—

“Have you no words? Ah! think again,
Words flow apace when you complain,
And fill your fellow-creature's ear
With the sad tale of all your care.

“Were half the breath thus vainly spent,
To heaven in supplication sent,
Your cheerful song would oftener be,
‘Hear what the Lord has done for me!’”

Again, we go to our houses, very properly, for *the enjoyment of sympathy*. We feel that we shall find tender sympathy there if it is to be found anywhere; and that, if the whole world outside should misunderstand and misrepresent us, we shall be understood and not misrepresented at home. Whoever may slander us, away from our home, no one will falsely accuse us there, all hearts there will beat in sympathy with us; so we go to our own homes, but Jesus went to the mount of Olives. I say not this to blame you or myself for seeking sympathy here, for Christ himself did the same. On that memorable night, in Gethsemane, when he sweat as it were great drops of blood, he said to his disciples, “What, could ye not watch with me one hour?” He seemed to feel the need of sympathy in that dread hour, but he had to learn, as we also must learn, that there is a point where human sympathy cannot avail us. We must say, as Jesus did, “O my Father,” for only in his heart can true sympathy be found. Yet this I may say, without any harshness, that, while we prize the sympathy of beloved friends, let us not forget to go to God in prayer. Let us tell the sad tale of all our griefs into his ear, and pour out the story of all our sorrows into his heart. He hath a bottle for our tears, and a book for our complaints. Precious in the sight of the Lord is the grief (as well as the death) of all his people. He telleth the number of their wounds as well as the number of the stars. So, while we may seek sympathy from our friends at home, let us not forget to go to the mercy-seat, that we may also secure the sympathy and help of the best Friend we have.

We go home, also, for *rest and refreshment*. We are toil-worn; it is not mere ease that we want, but real repose. We go to our beds, not because of idleness, but that we may be ready for to-morrow's labour. There are times when the strongest men must turn aside from their toil, and rest for a little while; and it is right for us to go to our homes for this purpose. Yet Jesus went to the mount of Olives when every man went to his own home; and this suggests to us that we are not to be so concerned for the health of the body as to neglect the requirements of the soul. We must cry, with David, “Renew a right spirit within me,” and go to our God in prayer in the hope that we may be quickened in his way. Prayer to God is a better refreshment even than sleep, just as the soul is better than the body. A certain amount of sleep is necessary for the body; but prayer is just as needful for the soul.

The bed will give rest to the tired limbs, but the mercy-seat will give refreshment to the powers and passions of the spirit. Let us get strength for service, power for endurance, and might for conflict by going to the mount of Olives with the Saviour, and watching and praying with him.

I think that I have said sufficient upon this point of contrast. To my mind, there is a very suggestive line of thought in these two sentences: "Every man went unto his own house. Jesus went unto the mount of Olives."

III. Just for a minute or so, dear friends, I want to remind you that we also have here A COMPARISON FOR OUR INSTRUCTION.

Perhaps I shall startle and surprise you when I say that Jesus Christ did exactly what his disciples and the other people did. They went to their own houses, and he went to his own house. They went home, and he went home. They sought ease, and he sought ease. They sought counsel, and he sought counsel. They sought sympathy, and he sought sympathy. They sought refreshment, and he sought refreshment. The mount of Olives was, to all intents and purposes, Christ's home. It was there that he met with his Father; it was there that the Man Christ Jesus met with kindred spirits in the Father and the Holy Ghost; it was there that he cast off the cares of the day, and unburdened himself as a weary son does in his parent's presence; it was there that he told the tale of all the traps which had been laid to inveigle him in speech, of all the ways that his enemies had tried to catch him; it was there that he cried to heaven for wisdom; and it was there that, made strong by fresh contact with his Father, he girt on his golden armour to go forth once more fully protected from all the arrows of the evil one. Beloved brethren and sisters in Christ, that season of prayer upon the mount of Olives was to Jesus what our going to our houses and to our loved ones is to us. We grieve that his body was wet with the dews of the night, yet we would fain have some of those same drops upon our body if we could have communion with him in spirit. We have sympathy with the members of his physical frame, because they were tried by the cold of the mountains, and the loneliness of his night vigil; but we wish that our souls could be braced with something like the same vigour which he received upon the mount of Olives, or in the garden of Gethsemane. Yes, the cold mountain was his home; there, he had a place where he could lay his head, and rest, though only in a spiritual sense.

IV. There is just one other point for me to mention, and then I will close. We have here A TYPE FOR OUR EDIFICATION.

We hope to go to our houses after this service; but Jesus is still, in a certain sense, on the mount of Olives interceding for us. I suppose there are some people, in their houses, who are *plotting and scheming against the cause of God*. The Jesuit is seeking to spread his nets so that he may, with his many allurements, entice the unwary, and extend the evil influence of the harlot of Babylon. The persecutor is planning with the view of tripping up a saint here, and overthrowing another yonder. The devil is suggest-

ing, in the minds of atheists and infidels, crafty arguments against the inspiration of the Scriptures, new difficulties to startle youthful believers, fresh blasphemies concerning the person and work of the Lord Jesus Christ. If we could have the roofs taken off the houses in London to-night, or if we could look into the many evil hearts in this modern Babylon, how many might we see taking counsel together against the Lord, and against his Anointed! Very many will be going to their houses to-night, to plot, and plan, and imagine all sorts of evil; but, supposing they do, shall we sit down, and be afraid? Shall we give way to despair? No, verily; there is still hope, and more than hope, for the true Church of Christ, for Jesus has gone to the mount of Olives on high. There he stands, at the right hand of the Father, pleading the cause of his Church. Knowing her difficulties, foreseeing her perils, reading all that is in the hearts of her enemies and her own, he stretches out his hands, points to his wounds, and for Zion's sake he will not hold his peace, and for Jerusalem's sake he will not rest, until her righteousness shall go forth as brightness, and the salvation of his people shall be as a lamp that burneth. There, Church of God, is your star of hope. The interceding Saviour is our unfailling protection, our strong bulwarks, and our munitions of war. Fear not, O Zion, for, while the Saviour pleads, he that sitteth in the heavens doth laugh at his enemies; the Lord doth have them in derision.

“ Before the throne of God above
I have a strong, a perfect plea;
A great High Priest, whose name is Love,
Who ever lives and pleads for me.

“ My name is graven on his hands,
My name is written on his heart;
I know that, while in heaven he stands,
No tongue can bid me thence depart.

“ One with himself I cannot die,
My soul is purchased by his blood;
My life is hid with Christ on high,
With Christ, my Saviour and my God.”

But some will, I hope, go home in quite another mood. I trust that *some will go home to mourn over sin*. I hope that, out of this company which I am now addressing, there are some who are going home to pray. As you, by your bedside, pour out your supplications to “Our Father who art in heaven,” do not forget that Jesus went to the mount of Olives to pray, and remember that he is still praying for his people before his Father's face. Sinner, there will be two pleading for you while you are praying for yourself; as you plead with Christ, Christ pleads for you. When you put your case into his hands, every groan of yours is sprinkled with his precious blood, and every penitent tear of yours is made acceptable to God through the merit of Christ's sacrifice. Be not thou discouraged if thy words will not come, if there are within thee groanings which cannot be uttered, or if thou art half choked with

emotion, so that thou canst not speak out what thou really feelest within, for there is One who can speak for thee as never man spake; and if thou canst not plead for thyself, he can plead for thee, according to that gracious assurance, "If any man sin, we have an Advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the Righteous." Just as Jesus went to the mount of Olives to pray for his people, he has now gone up to heaven to continue pleading for them, and also to make intercession for the transgressors.

It is very likely that *many will go to their houses simply to sleep*, as most of those probably did in our Saviour's day. Many professing Christians come to God's house to sleep, and then go home to sleep. They walk about sleeping,—sleeping with their eyes open, spiritually sleeping while they are wide awake about mere secular matters. But it is a comfort to know that, while professors sleep, and saints sleep, Jesus still goes, spiritually, to the mount of Olives. The only hope for the slumbering Church is the wakeful Saviour. Even if the earthly watchmen sleep, the best of all watchmen keepeth guard over the vineyard which he hath planted. He saith, "I the Lord do keep it; I will water it every moment; lest any hurt it, I will keep it night and day." "The eyes of the Lord run to and fro throughout the whole earth, to show himself strong in the behalf of them whose heart is perfect toward him."

It may be that *some of you will go home to be tempted*. It is a sad thing to go from the house of God to meet with temptation, yet that happens to many of you. You come in here, on Sabbath days or week-nights, and try to get spiritual food for your soul; and then, perhaps, the first word that you hear as you cross the threshold of your home is an oath. What a comfort it is that Jesus goes to the mount of Olives to plead for you, and that he knows, beforehand, the exact temptation which you will have to meet, even as he said to Simon Peter, "Simon, Simon, behold, Satan hath desired to have you, that he may sift you as wheat; but I have prayed for thee, that thy faith fail not." Be satisfied, O believer, that Christ will never put his gold into the furnace without himself sitting at the mouth of it to watch the whole purifying process. He never takes his eyes off the precious ingot as long as it is in the furnace; and only when he sees his own image reflected in the pure metal does he take it out of the fire. Be thou sure of this, though the devil may come out against thee, and assail thee in a fashion which shall utterly stagger thee, God hath not forgotten thee, Jesus has gone up on high, and he is pleading for thee that, in this thy time of utmost weakness and need, the grace of God shall be sufficient for thee, and make a way of escape for thee out of all thy troubles and temptations.

I might enlarge upon this fruitful theme, but I will not do so; and I close by expressing the hope that some of us intend, from this day forth, to serve God better than we have ever yet done. I know that there are some members of this Church who feel stirred up to do more than they have ever yet done for Christ; and, after all, the most of our members do not do much for him. There are some, in the church, who have no share in all that is done for

Christ. It is not the many, but the few, who really do the work. If all the members of this church felt such love for Christ as some do, and were all as ardently devoted to his cause as some are, I know not what we might not do for Christ, nor how rapidly his kingdom might be extended by us. If any of us go to our homes solemnly praying that we may, from this day forth, be completely consecrated to the Lord, to serve him with a perfect heart, we may rest assured that Jesus is praying a similar petition before his Father's face. He is praying that his people may be holy, that they may be happy, that they may serve him with their whole heart, and bring forth much fruit to the praise and glory of his holy name; so, when thou truly desirest to serve God, Christ hears thee, and his prayer and thy prayer agree well together. Let us, therefore, go to our houses remembering that thought of Jesus retiring in secret to pray for his people; and ere we close our eyes let us go again to the mercy-seat where Christ has often met with us; and ere we close this service, let us for a few moments go, in spirit, to the mount of Olives in prayer.

Exposition by C. H. Spurgeon.

JOHN VII. 30—53; AND VIII. 1.

Chapter vii. Verses 30, 31. *Then they sought to take him: but no man laid hands on him, because his hour was not yet come. And many of the people believed on him, and said, When Christ cometh, will he do more miracles than these which this man hath done?*

Well might they ask that question, for Jesus had wrought such marvellous miracles that they could not imagine anything greater. Surely this must be the Christ; or if he were not, when the Christ did come could he and would he do any greater miracles than this man had done?

32. *The Pharisees heard that the people murmured such things concerning him;—*

Whispered these things, afraid to speak out boldly because of the Pharisees, and therefore they quietly said it among themselves; and, after all, there is no fire more to be dreaded than a smouldering fire.

32, 33. *And the Pharisees and the chief priests sent officers to take him. Then said Jesus unto them, Yet a little while am I with you, and then I go unto him that sent me.*

That was a blessed way for Christ to describe his return to the heavenly world: "I go unto him that sent me." Possibly he said this to the very men who were sent to take him.

34. *Ye shall seek me, and shall not find me: and where I am, thither ye cannot come.*

No officers can arrest him now that he has gone up into his Father's glory; there is no fear of any of them being there to catch him in his speech, or to drag him before the ecclesiastical and secular judges, as they did when he was here.

35, 36. *Then said the Jews among themselves, Whither will he go, that we shall not find him? will he go unto the dispersed among the Gentiles, and teach the Gentiles? What manner of saying is this that he said, Ye shall seek me, and shall not find me: and where I am, thither ye cannot come?*