

Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit.

A CALL TO THE DEPRESSED.

A Sermon

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"Shake thyself from the dust; arise, and sit down, O Jerusalem: loose thyself from the bands of thy neck, O captive daughter of Zion."—Isaiah lii. 2.

I SHALL not attempt at this time to decipher the history of the prophecy with which these words are associated. To the Hebrew nation they were big with counsel, bright with hope. Apart, however, from the connection in which it stands, this verse supplies a pointed practical address of sterling value, not to be limited by any private interpretation. Such a charge was well fitted for Israel of old; such counsel would be suitable to any church in a low condition; such advice is equally adapted to any Christian who has fallen into a low state, who is grovelling in the dust or among the ashes of Sodom. He is bidden to rise from the ground, and sit down upon a throne, for Christ hath made him a king and a priest. He is admonished to unbind all the cords that are upon him, that he may be free and happy in the Lord. To those of you, then, who have sunk into this distressing plight, my text contains a vigorous appeal. Let me try to interpret it. First of all, I notice the obvious fact:—

I. SOME OF GOD'S TRUE PEOPLE ARE IN A VERY SAD CONDITION.

This is an important consideration to us just now. If just on the eve of battle a commander should discover that an epidemic has broken out among his troops, he will be extremely anxious that any available remedy shall be tried; for if the soldiers be sick, how can they be expected to behave well on the morrow? So it will sometimes happen that when we mean to serve our Master most, we are impeded in Church action by the prevalence of some

spiritual disease among the members of the Church. Perhaps I may be the means to-night of finding out the sick ones, and indicating their symptoms, and—who can tell?—perhaps this very night ere you come to the Table the blessed remedy may be applied, and at the Table, while you are feasting with Christ, your souls may become perfectly restored.

Sometimes the children of God fall into a grievous state *as to their faith*, and their assurance of their own interest in Christ. They doubt whether they are Christians at all; whether their experience is genuine; whether they ever did really repent with a truly broken heart; whether they have received the precious faith—the faith of God's elect. At such times they question all their graces, and they are not able to get a satisfactory answer from one. At the same time these people of God may be so walking in outward consistency that everybody else thinks well of them. No one has any suspicion of them; but they suspect themselves grievously, and are tormented with the fear that they have a name to live, and are dead. I have known at such times that there will come at the back of all this some terrible doubts about the substantial verities of our faith. "What," say you, "doubts about the God-head—doubts about the Saviour—doubts about the world to come?" Ay, yes, and to the true people of God. They will hate these doubts, and, in their hearts, they will still believe all the great fundamental and cardinal truths; but yet will they be sore put to it, and be frequently distressed. Thoughtful minds, and men of reading, will have philosophical doubts buzzing about them like mosquitoes on a summer's day. Others who are ignorant of philosophy, and, perhaps, it is well that they are, will be troubled with doubts of a rougher, coarser quality. Although they will not permit them so to dwell in their hearts, that they actually become unbelievers; yet they will be sore distressed with questions which they cannot answer, with enigmas which they know not how to solve, and with strange intertwistings of difficulty, which they know not how to untie. Perhaps, too, at such a time as this, there will be over all, and worse than all, a state of dreadful indifference creeping over them. They want to feel, but cannot feel. They would fain wring tears of blood out of their eyes; but not an ordinary tear will drop. They want to be cut to pieces; they would welcome the most poignant sorrow, but they can only say:—

" If ought is felt 'tis only pain
To feel I cannot feel."

In such cases true believers are sure to resort to the extraordinary use of the means of grace. I mean they will add to their ordinary use something more. Have you never been in such a state that the Bible has become uninteresting, or the only passages of Scripture that seemed to strike you were dreadful threatenings concerning your own coming doom, as you thought; not a word of comfort,

not a syllable that made glad your spirit? You have gone to prayer, and the heavens have seemed to be brass, and, worse still, your own heart seemed to be brass too, and you could not stir it up to anything like an intensity of desire. You did not wonder that you got no answer. You would have wondered if such a prayer as yours could be heard at all. Ah! and then you have gone up to the assembly of God's people, where, at other times, your heart has danced within you with holy joy. The minister was not changed; perhaps at first you thought he was; but on more attentive hearing, you noticed that there was the same truth, and spoken in the same honest fashion; but you could not hear it as you once did. Clouds without rain, and wells without water, all the ordinances seemed to be to you, and all the while, though you felt that you could not live like this, and said:—

“Dear Lord, and shall I ever live
At this poor dying rate?”

yet somehow or other you could not get out of it. You felt like one manacled, as though a nightmare were upon you. You were distressed. You could not stir to break the spell. Your spirit cried out as best it could, “O, wretched man that I am! Who shall deliver me from the body of this death?” But the worst of it was that you did not feel that you were wretched enough, and you did not seem to cry enough. You were afraid you would sink into a terrible lethargy, which would forerun a spiritual death altogether.

Well, my dear friends, I should not wonder but you brought this very much upon yourselves. If you are in this state to-night, I would exhort you to question whether this is not the result of what you have often been warned of. Perhaps you restrained prayer; perhaps in your happier days you grieved the Holy Spirit just when you were most joyful and happy in his love. It may be that you grew worldly, or, perhaps, a long succession of little things, none of which you noticed at the time, have contributed to swell the stream of your present distress. At any rate, whatever may be the cause of this state, I grieve that you are in it—grieve for my own sake, for your sake, for the sake of this Church, and for the sake of the world around you; for, my brethren, your testimony is, to a great extent, silenced, and your strength to bear it enervated. That face of yours, once so happy, was a living advertisement of the gospel. Your cheerful temperament under trial was an invitation to sinners to come and find a like joy. But now you are distressed, and you go mourning without the light of the sun. What can you do while you abide in such a state as that? You are like the bruised reed, out of which no music can come, or like the smoking flax that yields no light, but only a dolorous and nauseous smoke. I am grieved that it should be so, because were you now to attempt a verbal testimony for Christ, it would be feeble, and could not produce any great result. I remember when I began

to teach in the Sunday School, and I was very young in grace then, having said to the class of boys whom I was teaching that Jesus Christ saved all those who believed in him. One of the boys asked me the question, "Teacher, do you believe in him?" I replied, "Yes, I hope I do." And he enquired again, "But are you not sure?" I had to look to myself to know what answer I should give. The lad was not content with my repeating, "I hope so." He would have it, "If you have believed in Christ, you are saved." And I felt at that time that I could not teach until I could say, "I know that it is so." I must be able to speak of what I had tasted and handled of the good Word of Life. So, brethren, you will find that you only perplex those whom you fain would persuade, if, by your doubts, you provoke them to say, "How can you expect us to believe at our mouth what you hesitate to seal with the witness of your own heart?" Unless the joy of the Lord is your strength, your soul will breathe a heavy atmosphere, and your utterance will be checked, if it is not choked by your misgivings. It is your confidence in Christ, and the peace it brings you, that helps you to speak to others as a true witness, because you are an experimental witness of the power of true religion. Your verbal testimony, I say, is weakened—I fear to a very great extent—by the fog and vapour of your scruples, the scruples of a conscience that droops and flags. It is sad to think that while you are looking to your own soul in doubt whether you are saved or not, you have but little energy to spare in caring about the souls of others. Indeed, it is your first concern to see that you yourselves be saved. Till that all-important matter is resolved, your zeal for your neighbour's welfare is ill-timed. Why busy yourselves to keep other men's vineyards, while your own is left to be overgrown with weeds. And then, my dear friends, another melancholy aspect of this disability is, that all this while you are a detriment to your fellow-Christians. It is hard enough to fight with Satan; but it is all the harder work for the army to have to carry so many sick folk with it, for it involves much more toil. You, whose faith is all but gone, are like the baggage of an army; you hinder the rapid march of the brave soldiers of the Cross. How you depress others that are round about you! Once your voice was that of a brave hero, and you inspired the troops; but now you pine, and cry, and make others hang their harps upon the willows, and learn the same doleful tune as your own. It is a sad thing. I do not condemn you, but I greatly pity you, and I also greatly pity the Church of God, and the cause of God, that it loses so much by you who ought, in gratitude to Christ, to do so much for him. Alas, that the people of God should be sunk into so mournful a condition!

II. THERE IS A SPECIAL EXHORTATION FOR THEM.

This is pressed in all earnest. Hear, it, oh! ailing Christian! "Shake thyself from the dust; arise, and sit down, O Jerusalem; loose thyself from the bands of thy neck, O captive daughter of Zion."

Now, my brother, content not thyself any longer with the state into which you have fallen. May the Holy Spirit come to you, and prompt you to strike. Do strive to get out of this condition into one of happiness and strength. Let me try to encourage you a little, and may God enable you to the utmost.

Remember, my dear friend—suppose I am now talking to you alone—I almost wish I could grip your hand, and look you close in the face—*remember from whence you have fallen*. Think of the peaceful hours you once enjoyed. Oh! thy stony heart was not always so cold; the Word of God was not always so dry; the sanctuary was not always so unprofitable. You have wrestled and prevailed; you know you have. You have pleaded with God, and you have had the desire of your heart. You have communed with Christ, and your soul has been like the chariots of Aminadab; and can you bear to think of this, and not cry:—

“Return, O Holy Dove, return,
Sweet Messenger of rest!”?

Can you once have known these things, and had the flavour of them in your mouth, without hungering and thirsting after them again? Think of them, and, perhaps, while you are musing upon the past, you may be helped by strong desires to return unto the place from which you went out.

Think of the danger you are in at present. Who are they that are most likely to fall into open sin? They are those who walk at a distance from Christ. If you live in close communion with Jesus, you shall so share of your Shepherd's company that you shall hear the wolf's howl, but you shall not be likely to feel his fang. I believe that when any professor falls into a filthy sin, it is not the beginning, but the culmination of a process and growth in iniquity. The open sin comes at the heels of a long succession of neglected prayers, of neglected worship of God in the family, a neglect of all communion with Christ, and negligence of every good thing. It is the fruit, not the seed of the evil, which poisons the air and excites the public odium. Beware, then, O professor!—thou who hast lost the light of God's countenance—beware! beware, I pray thee, of that ill-condition of soul which is the prolific parent of all distempers.

Remember, too, that there is real cause for apprehension, *lest you never were safe*. It is just possible that those doubts you feel are no insinuations of Satan, but the suggestions of an enlightened conscience, or even the whispers of the Holy Spirit. Unless you are indeed a Christian, in all probability, unless you now turn to God, you will become the willing servitor of the Devil. Unless you now, with full purpose of heart, seek to Christ, perhaps the time has come when you will turn aside, like Balaam, for reward, or perish in the gainsaying of Korah. In some of those shapes in which wicked men have perished, you may despondingly or pre-

sumptuously rush on to destruction, and precipitate your final doom. Beware again, I say, O cold professor!—in God's name, beware of trifling when you have so much reason to tremble.

My dear friend, I would put another thought into your mind which may help you. Perhaps you may think it is rather hampering than helping you, and tends more to depress than to deliver you. Remember *how justly you might now be left to your own devices*. You became carnally secure; you sinned away the light of God's countenance; you grieved his Spirit. What if he were now to say, "He is given unto idols; let him alone"? What if from this day the Spirit should no more strive with you? What if, after all, though you have talked and preached to others, you yourself should be a castaway? I do but mention this to arouse you, my brother, if you are insensible. You know how sometimes the surgeon fears last a man should sleep himself to death; and he will even drive pins into him, or make him walk, and drag him about the chamber, so as to arouse him. I would say anything, however sharp, if I might but wake you out of your lethargy. I know you would welcome it, and in due time thank me for the severity of the operation.

But I shall refrain, for methinks there is a better way than this. I want you to arise and shake yourself from the dust, my poor desponding friend; because if the worst be the worst, and you be no Christian, no true believer, yet "Come now, let us reason together, saith the Lord; though your sins be as scarlet, they shall be as wool; though they be red like crimson, they shall be white as snow." What if it has been all a mistake, and you never ought to have made a profession; yet *Jesus Christ receiveth sinners: come to him now*. I always find this the short way out of a long, dreary road, a quick relief for acute maladies, a ready antidote for doubts and fears. The Devil has been arguing with Christians for so many years, that he understands the case against them a great deal better than any of us do; and if we begin to controvert with him, we shall soon find that that old hater of man will soon get the mastery over us. But if we say, "I give it in, Satan—I give it in; I am a sinner—the chief of sinners: hast thou anything more to say? I give it all in; but I answer thee with this—'The blood of Jesus Christ, his Son, cleanseth us from all sin; I believe in him, and my sins are, therefore, washed away,'"—this is the high road to perfect comfort. I beg thee, my dear brother, to take it at once. Hear the word of the Spirit, which saith, "Repent, and do thy first works." The very first works were repentance and faith; and so even begin again. Away to the fountain filled with blood! Away to the cross, and give that life—look once more! Away to the finished substitutionary sacrifice, and beneath the crimson canopy of the atonement hide thy guilty head. Oh! if thou doest this, thy light shall break forth as the morning, and thy glory as the noon-day. The Lord help thee to do this now, and end the strife!

Let me also remind any Christian here, full of doubt, and with

the bands of his neck tight upon him, *that the blood has not changed its power to cleanse.* If it cleansed you twenty years ago, it can cleanse you still. Remember, Jesus has not lost his power to save, nor has he changed his character for willingness to save to the uttermost.

“Jesus sits on Zion’s hill,
He receives poor sinners still.”

Come, then, to the unchanging Saviour. Thou who hast been treacherous—thou whose heart hast played the harlot to Christ—come back; for his love to thee has not waned. “Return unto me, O backsliding daughter, saith the Lord; for I am married unto thee.” The prodigal’s heart may change towards his Father, but his Father’s heart never changes towards him. Return, then, for mercy waits thee, and not judgment long ago. He is God, and not man, else thou hadst been consumed. Return to-night; for he will put away thy sin like a cloud, and thy transgressions like a thick cloud. Duly acknowledge thy wandering—humble thyself because of thy treachery, and say, “My Father, thou shalt be the guide of my youth,” and thou shalt be restored perfectly, and thy former joy shall come back to thee.

Do I hear thee say, “But I am not fit to come back to Christ, and have joy in him at once”? Oh! sir, wert thou fit at first? No; and thou art not fit now, but come and welcome. Christ wants nought from thee. Come and trust him, and perfect salvation is thine. “Oh! but I cannot bear to look him in the face, for I have lived so long without walking in his counsel.” So much the more reason that thou shouldst not live another hour without him. I charge thee, my poor distressed brother—I charge thee, my troubled sister—by the love that Christ hath to thee, come to him now. Behold he stands at the door and knocks; if thou wilt open to him, though the house be not furnished, nor the table covered with a festival for him, as it should be, yet will he come in and sup with thee, even with thee, and thou shalt sup with him to-night. I see no reason why the most desponding Christian here should not rejoice before he comes to the Table of the Lord. I do not know why the most barren among us should not be made fruitful. This I do know, that we are not straitened in him; we are not straitened in his willingness to bless, nor in his ability to comfort. Oh! believe in him, Christian; believe him. If thou be not a Christian, cast thyself at his feet. He will not let thee perish. Lay hold, if it be but of the skirts of his garment, and do not let him go. Do thou even now shake thyself from the dust, and put on thy beautiful garments.

III. A GLAD OBLIGATION HENCEFORTH RESTS UPON THEM.

I must close with this remark. I know there are many of God’s people in the state I have been describing. I have the pain sometimes of trying to cheer them. I only hope that what I have said

to-night may be blessed of God to them. I fully anticipate it. Here, then, is the practical point. "*When thou art converted strengthen thy brethren.*"

Look out for those who are in the same state as you have been in, and be very tender over them. As you know their case, and have traversed that howling desert, you will be able to direct them. I have described your case, because I fear that I have sometimes been on the verge of it myself. I have found recovery by a fresh resort to the love of Christ, and a simple renewal of my trust in him. I can, therefore, enter into your feelings, and ask you to try the same remedy. After you have found the remedy to be a good one, it is but a small return, and certainly it is due from you, to tell others how you have been restored.

Some of you, beloved, have never been thus carried into captivity. I pray God you never may be. There is no necessity for it; but let me entreat you to walk very tenderly with your God. We serve a jealous God. He will wink at many an act of insubordination done by his enemies; the one tithe of which, if done by his favourite ones, his elect, his darlings, he will hide his face from them at once. "You only have I known of all the people of the earth, therefore I will punish you for your iniquities." Saith he not, "As many as I love I rebuke and chasten"? A sinner may go on wantonly unrebuked; he may add house to house, and field to field, and he may think himself secure; God will deal with him in the next world. But the heir of heaven is under a discipline of divine love, and God will deal with him in this world; and among the chastisements of departure from Christ will be the loss of comfort, the loss of power to do good, and I know not what other affliction added thereunto in his soul or in his circumstance. Dear brother, walk carefully, then; while you have light, walk in the light. Oh! prize the sweet love of Christ; never, never let it go. Say unto your soul, when Christ is in your heart, "I charge you, O daughters of Jerusalem, by the roes and by the hinds of the field, that ye stir not up nor wake my love until he please." Introduce no rival's love, and no worldliness; fall into no inconsistencies, but pray for grace that with holy jealousy you may still dwell in the light and find favour in his eyes.

And being thus kept near to God, and being strong in the power of his might, *come and give back the strength to him from whom you derived it.* Stand up for Christ. I believe we are never happier than when we have plenty to do. Idleness is the mother of vexation. A Christian who does but little for Christ, unless he is prevented from doing it by suffering, will, as a rule, be a miserable man. You active Christians, active in body and nimble in spirit—you joyous Christians who walk in the light of God's countenance—"work while it is day; for the night cometh when no man can work." Let us pledge each other to-night that we will now seek the good of Zion. Members of this Church, none of you be recreant to the loyalty which you owe to Christ, in this the hour when we

seek to press forward as one man in the battle of our Master. I would stand side by side with you to take my share; but what can one do if he abide alone? My brethren in office will not be backward, I know; but what can we do? Keep step with us, my brethren, in pleading for souls, in proclaiming the gospel, in seeking to win the many to the knowledge of the Saviour; and the Lord will bless us, even our own God will bless us. Shaking ourselves from the dust, and breaking off the bands of our own sloth, God will come with his crown of benediction, and place it on his Church's head; and when we get that coveted prize, let us hold it fast, that no man take it from us. Let us go forward as a Church in indissoluble union, and in unwearied service, until he shall come whose "Well done!" shall be our best reward.

The Lord bless you, and at his Table may the King's sweet spikenard give forth a delightful perfume to every spiritual heart. Amen.

Expositions by C. H. Spurgeon.

PSALM CXXXVIII.; ISAIAH LV. 1—11; ROMANS VIII. 28—39.

PSALM CXXXVIII.

Verse 1. *I will praise thee with my whole heart; before the gods will I sing praise unto thee.*

We cannot be too much occupied in the praises of God. He rightly deserves all the thanksgivings we can bring to him. It is the great engagement of heaven. Let us begin the music here. If we would be heavenly-minded on earth, we must be filled with the praises of God. Notice how David resolves that in praising God, it shall be done heartily. "I will praise thee with my whole heart." If there is ever a thing that ought to be done enthusiastically, it is the praising of God. I cannot bear to hear God's praises chirped out elegantly by polite people, as if they were ashamed of what they were doing, or to see a mass of pipes and bellows left by itself to blow the praises of God by machinery, instead of men and women praising him with their heart. Oh! how acceptable it must be to God to hear the heart speak. As for the tongue and voice, however sweet their sound, there is little in it. It is the heart. Soul-music is the soul of music. "I will praise thee with my whole heart." See how bold the psalmist is about this. "Before the gods," he says, "will I do it. Before the angels, before the kings and great ones that think themselves little gods, I will speak to the honour of Jehovah's name. Ave, and in the idol temples, where their worshippers will be greatly wroth about it, I will praise thee with my whole heart. Before the gods will I present praise unto thee."

2. *I will worship toward thy holy temple.*

That was God's way of worship. In the old times there was the shrine of God: there was the one altar which would render praise acceptable. David takes care to render praise to God in God's way: and that is a great principle in worship—to avoid will-worship, and to endeavour to present sacrifices such as God prescribes. "I will worship toward thy holy temple."

What blessed reasons are here given for praising. "I will praise thee for thy loving-kindness." Is not that the grandest word in any language—loving-kindness? It is a compound of perfect sweets to make up a yet more perfect sweetness—kindness and love mixed together. A marvellous blend! Loving-kindness! "And for thy truth"—thy fidelity—thy faithfulness to thy word. Loving-kindness gave the promise, but truth takes care to see it fulfilled. "So will I praise thy name."