

Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit.

“THE ZEAL OF THE LORD.”

A Sermon

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“The zeal of the Lord of Hosts will perform this.”—Isaiah ix. 7.

BEYOND all controversy, this is a most remarkable text. Zeal is an attribute which is attributable to man; but we do not often think or speak of the zeal of the Lord of Hosts. At first sight, it might seem to be a word misplaced: God's zeal, the divine arm, the fervency of the Infinite. Yet, if we think a little as we commune together to-night, I do not doubt but that much of comfort will cluster round the word, “The zeal of the Lord of Hosts.” When I turn to Holy Writ, I do not find that, in connection with the creation, the word zeal was ever used; and yet it was a glorious work, to make ten thousand thousand worlds, to fill space with ponderous orbs, before whose dimensions human imagination itself is staggered. It was no small work to make this world, with all its varieties of skill and art, adaptation and beauty. The morning stars might well sing together at the sight of it, and burst forth into a new hymn, as the light first shone upon this our planet. But the Lord seems to have done it much at his ease. In six days he finished it, and rested from all his work. No element of hardness, no token of zeal. Indeed, what is there in the mere creative act to awaken those marvellous attributes which dwell in the bosom of the infinite Jehovah? Wisdom? why, it is but the play of wisdom. Power? it was but a mere freak of power. There is such boundless power in God, that all that he hath created is but a drop of the bucket, and as a very little thing compared with him. Nor, if I remember rightly, does the idea ever come up in connection with the sustaining of worlds and the guiding of the events of Providence. It is true he calleth them all by their names, and by the greatness of his power, not one faileth. Arcturus with

his sons; Mazzaroth in his season; the Pleiades in their delightful influences—all these are swayed and governed by him. But we find not that he was awakened up to zeal at all concerning them. And in the wonders of Providence which have been wrought upon earth, it is remarkable how gently, how easily Jehovah seems to take them. Look at that splendid work at the Red Sea—a work which God himself seems to have selected as a masterpiece of his skill and of his power, for even in heaven they sing the song of Moses, the servant of God, and of the Lamb—that song, “Sing unto the Lord, for he hath triumphed gloriously; the horse and his rider hath he thrown into the sea.” But how did he accomplish that stupendous work? “Thou didst blow with thy wind, the sea covered them; they sank like lead in the mighty waters.” No enthusiasm, no stirring up of strength; just the tender breath of his mouth, and it is all done, and the chivalry of Egypt sinks into the middle of the sea. Nor when I hear of angels being formed of the Lord, whenever that event may have taken place, do I hear of anything like the zeal of the Lord in connection therewith. Nor even the creation of Adam, when he took the man and placed him in the garden to till it. I pray I may use no expression which will dishonour the Most High; yet when we speak of him, we are obliged to use language according to the analogies of human kind. It seems to me that when God created mere materialism, there was nothing to excite the divine mind beyond a mere complacency, when he looked upon it and said, “It was very good.” And when he created pure spirits that were incapable of singing such as angels, he rejoiced to see their happiness; but inasmuch as they could not have communion with him, being so good as not to know good or evil, his soul does not seem to have been stirred; but he desired, if I may use such language concerning him, to have a race of beings surrounding him who should know both good and evil, who should know evil by having practically fallen into it, having so smarted under it as to know it to be evil in a practical and experimental sense—a race of creatures who should from henceforth never choose evil, who should voluntarily choose that which is good for ever and for ever, because they should be so bound to him, the source of all goodness, by an overwhelming obligation of love, that while they know evil, they shall bewail it; while they understand what it is to sin, they shall never throughout eternity, either in thought or imagination, defile themselves with sin, but shall remain immaculate, perfect, through the constraint of a love which he shall reveal toward them, which shall be sufficient to wash their robes and make them white, world without end. It seems to me that he desired to have a race of creatures that should not be like angels, or a race of creatures apart from himself; but a race that should be his sons, that should be mysterious and wonderful; and his plan was this, that Jesus, his only Son, should come into this world and take upon himself the flesh and nature of fallen creatures, that in that flesh he should die, and put away the guilt

of all their sin, and that by his flesh, when risen, he should establish a link between them and God, so that there should be nothing between God and man. God blessed first for ever, and then Jesus, the Man, positively and really a man, clinging by his manhood through his Godhead to those chosen creatures whom he should have purified and made clean, who should for ever exist, the children of God, partakers of the divine nature, having escaped the corruption which is in the world through lust. It is not for me—it is not for anyone—to strike out the divine idea, and say this is what God meant and intended; but we have enough of Scripture to let us say that this was a part of his aim at any rate; that in Jesus Christ there should be a race of creatures distinct from all others, because actually alive with the Deity—creatures who, to use the expression of the serpent, should "be as gods, knowing good and evil," and be as gods always and for ever, preferring the good, though they have tasted the evil, and might have chosen it, but were constrained by divine grace to bewail it, and henceforth to keep close to God, world without end.

Now, brethren, it was such a plan as this that awoke the zeal of God. This was what could not have been done by mere power, but must bring forth all the attributes of God; the work that had to be achieved here was worthy of a great Creator; it was a work which would reveal the Deity as no other work had ever done; and hence, if I may use the expression (I have often to excuse myself, not to you, but to him), he seems to brace himself up to a display of all the divine energy and Almighty omnipotence, to accomplish his purpose, to carry out his plan, and make Jesus the King of a chosen company. "The zeal of the Lord of Hosts shall perform this."

I. GOD ENTERS INTO THE PLAN OF GLORIFYING CHRIST AND MAKING TO HIMSELF A PEOPLE WITH GREAT ZEAL.

This can be proved in the following way: we judge of a man's zeal when the purpose has been long in his heart, and he has most industriously followed it through a long period. Now, the plan of grace through Jesus Christ was in the eternal heart before the worlds were made. He had it all in his mind. Hence he speaks of Christ as "the Lamb slain from before the foundation of the world," and never once has the divine mind turned aside from this purpose. Think, then, what zeal God must have towards the achievement of this design, when through these long ages, as we call them, he has continued still resolved to push on the work which he determined to do. Think, again, all the events of Providence that have ever occurred on this globe, have had an eye to that purpose, from the little up to the great. When he set the bounds of the people, he set them according to the children of Israel; he had an eye to the people of his love and to the Son of his choice, even when he was mapping out the territories which the different races should inhabit, and not a king has fallen from his throne, not an army has devastated a province, no changes

of government, no changes of race have ever taken place apart from the divine intent, that he would set his Son upon his holy hill of Zion, and make him to be a King over all the nations of the earth. To that purpose God has steadily adhered all this while, and hence I honour "the zeal of the Lord of Hosts."

Just think a moment, and I will show you God must be zealous in this matter. Behold *his Son stoops to become a man*. You see him lying as a babe in Bethlehem's manger. You behold him as a youth obedient to his parents; as a full-grown man, a servant of servants in his toil. Now, when the Lord looks down upon his son, how he must resolve to glorify him. Oh! what must be the thought in that fraternal bosom. Does my Son thus stoop, does he take such a nature into union with himself? Oh! I will crown his head with many crowns; for all his stoopings he shall have a glory. Does he sit there at a harlot's side at the well of Samaria? Does he sit there at the table with publicans and sinners? Does he go down to bear the sorrows of the sins of men? God seems to declare by himself that he will give him a name that is above every name—for all his stooping, he shall have an exaltation—the name at which every knee shall bow, even the name of Jesus, and every tongue shall confess that he is Lord to the glory of God the Father.

Or, look further through your tears, *behold the wondrous sacrifice of Calvary*. Can you behold Jesus, smarting, suffering, bleeding, dying, and can you imagine God looking on, a regular spectator? Oh! no. If we may suppose him to be capable of passions like ourselves, we shall have to say, as he looked upon his dying Son, he vowed that he would lift his head above the sons of men, and make him see a numerous seed to recompense his pain. If anything could make a man zealous in his cause, it would be to see it stained with the best blood on earth, to see it stained with his own son's blood. Surely a man would say, I consecrate myself over the blood of my child to live and die, to honour the name that was thus put to shame for my purpose, my design. And God saith the same. The zeal of God burned at Calvary.

Think again; *Jesus Christ at this moment is everywhere dishonoured*. Thousands use Christ's name in superstition, worshipping a crucifix, making a God out of the very images. Multitudes of people practise idolatry, enshrine and adore false deities, and what does God say? Think you that he looks on like Jove, fabled amongst the heathen an impassive spectator? Oh! it is not so. He hears the blasphemies of men; he sees their sins; and though he keeps his right hand in his bosom, and we sometimes say, "Now, where is thy zeal, and the soundings of thy bowels," it is only because he is divine and can put a divine restraint upon his zeal that he does not rise at once and sweep away the idols, and devastate the nations. His long suffering makes him wait; his pity bids him tarry; but the day shall come—and it draweth near—when, with the hammer, he shall break in pieces, and with the iron

rod he shall dash, like a potter's vessel, the usurpers who dare to stand in Christ's way and to take away the kingdom from the rightful heir. Yet the very sins of men are stirring up the Lord, and their iniquities, transgressions, and blasphemies almost are exciting his holy soul, making a zeal to burn within him, which one of these days, in the set time, will perform its work.

Only one more proof on this point, and it is this: brethren, *we become zealous when we hear the cries and tears of the oppressed*, I think I see a senator standing on the floor of the House of Commons, pleading, in years gone by, the cause of Africa's down-trodden sons. I do not wonder at the zeal of Wilberforce, or the marvellous eloquence of Fox. What a cause they had! They could hear the clanging of the fetters of the slaves, the sighs of prisoners, the shrieks of women, and this made them speak, for they burned with an indignation which carried them away. Pity pulled up the sluices of their speech, and their souls ran out in mighty torrents of overwhelming eloquence. Now, think, the Lord this day hears the sighs of the oppressed all over the world; he hears the sighs of the sorrowful; and beyond that there comes up the daily cries of his elect, who day and night beseech his throne. Oh! that we were more clamorous! Oh! that we gave him no rest until he would establish and make Jerusalem a praise on the earth; for, remember the words of the Lord Jesus, how he said, "And shall not God avenge his own elect? Though they cry night and day unto him, I tell you he will avenge them speedily."

You see, then, proofs of God's zeal, and the source of it, if we may use such a term. It is his purpose; a purpose to which he has kept so long. His zeal is, moreover, excited by Christ's humiliation, by the blasphemies and sins of men, and by the tears of his people. God is not as we are—cold, insensible. He is full of zeal; and in the great good old cause, which shall at last win the day, there may be zealous partisans; but none is so zealous as the Lord of Hosts; a Master in the midst of Israel. We will now change the strain, and notice the second point. The text saith his zeal will perform it; that is to say:—

II. HIS ZEAL WILL PERFORM THE SETTING OF CHRIST UPON HIS KINGDOM, AND THE ESTABLISHING OF IT FOR EVER.

But it will perform everything that has to do with that kingdom. God's zeal will not leave a single jot or tittle of the covenant of his grace unfulfilled. He hath lifted his hand; he hath sworn by himself that Christ shall see of the travail of his soul; and the zeal of God will carry this out.

Notice, then, men and brethren, to-night, first, that *the Lord will secure the salvation of all his chosen*. Nothing else could secure it but God's own zeal. The zeal of all the Church would not secure it. Men might perish notwithstanding every act; but God knoweth them that are his, and he will find them out. If there be some

of them to-night plunged into the depths of sin, or others far gone in Atheism or unbelief, the zeal of God will find out every blood-bought one, and Christ shall have every single soul that the Father gave him, and that he redeemed with blood from amongst men. Oh! there is joy in this; but we cannot stay to think of it.

This secures, in the next place, *the spread of the truth*. Sometimes we sit down and say, "Truth, though mighty in itself, does not prevail amongst a godless generation set upon their idols"; and oftentimes we mourn and lament because the battle has turned against the Lord. But, brethren, God's truth is wide enough and safe enough, we need not weep over a few defeats. God has ordained that the laurels of the King are all safe. He hath trodden the winepress alone, and the victory is sure to him. We have but to keep on in the patience and tribulation of the saints till the set time shall come, and every truth that God has declared shall be crowned and honoured. Wisdom is justified of all her children, and the infinite wisdom of Jesus shall be justified in all his teaching. But the grand meaning is this: that the day is sure to come when all the nations shall be converted unto God. I am not going into any pre-millennial or post-millennial theories. I am neither a prophet nor the son of a prophet; but if there is anything plain in Scripture, it seems to be this: that there is a kingdom of Christ; that there will be a reign of Christ over the people; that the Son of David shall rule the kingdom, from the rivers even to the ends of the earth; they that dwell in the wilderness shall bow before him; the heathen shall come and lick the dust at his feet, and he shall be King of kings and Lord of lords. "The zeal of the Lord of Hosts will perform this," saith the text. I thank the Master for that word. All the missionary societies in the world never will know how to perform it; if they were strengthened to the uttermost, they would never be able to achieve this work. Not all the ministry will ever be able to perform this. Nor do I see any means adapted to achieve so sublime an end. Why, the population is increasing upon Christianity. We do not hold our own. Relatively, to the population, I suppose, there are not so many believers in Christ to-day as there were a hundred years ago. We are going backward instead of forward. See, ye sons of men, your zeal and your earnestness—nay, your lack of zeal and your lack of earnestness—see what it will come to! Poor, vain instruments, what can we perform? But in the rear there is One who will do it. As in the days of battle, when the front ranks are beaten, and one rank after another is driven back, up come the old guards, and they never quail, and know not how to say retreat, and so they win the day. Now, behold a greater than all the hosts of men, the Eternal Ages, the Ancient of Days, the Infinite himself, shall bring up his servants in the day of battle, and he shall thunder gloriously; the gospel shall be proclaimed; the kingdom shall be won; Christ shall reign, and the "Hallelujah" shall come up unto the Lord Omnipotent, who not only gets the kingdom, but gets

it by his own power, wins it by his own zeal. "The Lord of hosts, the Lord of hosts shall perform this." Now, our last word is practical:—

III. THE PRACTICAL TEACHING WHICH ARISES OUT OF THIS TRUTH.

The expression of the text is only used four times in Scripture. One of these is a repetition of another. Virtually it is only used three times. In Isaiah lxiii. 15, "the zeal of the Lord of hosts" is used, as I have used it already, *as an argument for prayer*. God is thus addressed, "Where is thy zeal, and the sounding of thy bowels, and of thy mercies towards me? Are they restrained?" What a plea in prayer for us to-morrow night! O God, convert the sons of men; put an end to blasphemy and sin. If thou do not, we have heard of thy zeal, but where is thy zeal? Thou canst do it; why dost thou not do it? Thou canst save. The hardest heart will yield to thee. The rod of iron and steel shall be broken by the iron of the Cross. Oh! God, where, where, where is thy zeal? Hast thou forgotten the great fall, and the kingdom, and the covenant, and thine oath? Hast thou forgotten thy Son, his griefs, his merits; thy promised recompense to him? Where is thy zeal? Oh! but this is a battering-ram with which to shake the very gates of heaven. Men of prayer and faith, learn how to use this! The next time you are wrestling with the angel, if you would overcome him, here is the master-plea, "Where is thy zeal, and the sounding of thy bowels?" Let us thus flee to God!

But the text may be used, in the second place, *as a ground of hope*. If you turn to Isaiah xxxvii. 32, you will see that there it is used in relation to the salvation of a remnant—the remnant of Judah. When you and I feel ourselves to be like a remnant, cut off, and put away—when we feel ourselves to be unworthy of the divine notice, let us recollect that God is zealous to save his remnant, and let us ask him to save us, and appeal to the very zeal of God to give salvation to us who need it so much.

But not to dwell longer on this part of the subject, I am sure you will perceive that our text, practically, is *a good reason for confidence*. You begin to be dispirited in God's work; it ought not to be so. If any of you are ready to give up your Sunday-school work, or whatever it is you are engaged in, oh! say not so. God is so zealous that he will not let the good cause fail. There may be, as there will be, in every great battle, a certain sort of temporary defeat, which may be but a retiring of the troops that they may the more sternly and successfully advance again to the front. So is it with the Cross of Christ. There are slight repulses, but everything is working to ultimate victory. Look at the sea as it comes up towards flood, and then the waves retire. A child might sit down and weep, and say, "I thought the sea was coming up to here, but see it has gone back again, and it has not washed my feet." In the long run the sea is still coming up, and it is thus a type of the good cause of Christ. Our lives are but like seconds in the tide of this great time of ours, which is itself but

a second in the great duration of eternity. Because the good old cause does not seem to prosper for a single day, and the kingdom does not come to Christ in my short life, shall I sit down and weep? Nay, I am but one amongst millions who shall achieve the divine purpose—one little coral insect, helping to pile up the rock on which, by and by, shall grow the cedar and the palm-tree, and the lovely flowers, and the winds shall waft across it insects in every gale—I will do my work, though it be beneath the waves; I will do my work and die; and others shall do the same, but the rock is rising, God's purpose is being accomplished. In the words of the prayer of Moses, "Let thy work appear unto thy servants, and thy glory unto their children." Lord, let us take the work, and give our children the glory. Let us work on; they shall live to see the glory. Some future generation shall see the triumph. And the best of it all is, we shall see it too, for it will be but a sleep betwixt now and then, but a little leaning upon the Saviour's bosom in our disembodied state, and then the trumpet shall ring so shrill and clear through heaven and earth, and we shall come to dwell again in these bodies of ours, restored and rendered fit for purified spirit to dwell in; and our eyes shall see in that day the God that died for us, and oh! how we will adore him, and magnify him, and we will say together, the cause for which we struggled, the kingdom for which we fought, has come at last. It was a long day, and a weary one, and we feared the Master would not come. Some of us fell asleep before his appearing; but we awaken at the knockings at the door; we awaken up even with the blessed sleepers, and we come to see the triumph as we once of old saw the praise. Glory be to God, the victory is secure. Let us work on till then.

But, last of all, if God is thus zealous for the crown rights, the kingdom of Christ, *let us be zealous too*. This is not the day of zeal, this is the day of cleverness and achievement; it is not the day of solid earnestness. It is the day of mere sensationalism, and nothing more. Oh! what a sight it would have been to have seen old John Knox, when old and worn, go up into his pulpit, and though before he began to preach he seemed so weak that he could scarcely stand, yet he did not proceed far in preaching up the Master's name, before, as an old historian says, "he did seem to use such force that one would think he would dash the pulpit into fragments"—dash it into shivers, I suppose, before the Popish priests and hypocrites of the age. How his eyes flashed fire as he spoke out his Master's truth, as he denounced Popery, and held up the truth and the kingdom of the Lord Jesus. We want more men of this sort. Oh! that God would but send us one such, and then to back him a race of Covenanters, who should with their very blood dedicate themselves to the truth and the Kingdom of Christ against the insidious advances of Popery, and the infidelity of Rome and hell, which are twin brothers. Oh! that once again the Church were earnest to have no head or king of the Church

but Christ, no creed but the Bible, no baptism but the baptism which he has taught, no sacrament but what he reveals, no doctrine but what that book dictates—the Bible, the whole Bible, and nothing but the Bible. May we come back to this in purity, to this with earnestness; and then it will not be long before we shall hear him coming in the chariot, paved with love for the daughters of Jerusalem, and we shall go forth to meet him, even to meet King Solomon, with the crown wherewith his mother crowned him in the day of his espousals, and in the day of the gladness of his heart. Oh! God of zeal, drop thy zeal upon us now, and make us zealous too, even we, by blood redeemed, by thy Holy Spirit, inhabit, consecrate us afresh, for Jesus' sake. Amen.

Expositions by C. H. Spurgeon.

ISAIAH XL. 1—17; 25—31. JOHN I. 29—42.

ISAIAH XL. 1—17; 25—31.

Verses 1, 2. *Comfort ye, comfort ye my people, saith your God. Speak ye comfortably to Jerusalem, and cry unto her, that her warfare is accomplished, that her iniquity is pardoned: for she hath receiveth of the LORD'S hand double for all her sins.*

God would have his people happy. He knows that we are not in a strong, vigorous state, neither do we honour his name while we are lacking in holy joy. Let the sinners be uncomfortable. Let them be "like the troubled sea that cannot rest"; but as for God's people, it is his great joy that they should be happy. He bids his servants again and again to comfort them. Sometimes we are in a condition of warfare, and we are under the chastising rod, but now the Lord appears graciously to his servants, and he says, "Your warfare is over: your chastisement is ended." Now the Lord returns in mercy, and he grants a sense of forgiven sin.

3. *The voice of him that crieth in the wilderness, Prepare ye the way of the LORD, make straight in the desert a highway for our God.*

You know this was John the Baptist coming to proclaim the Saviour. That was the best comfort God's people could have—the coming of the Lord. So it is now. The joy of the Church is the coming of the Lord, and to each one of us the greatest source of joy is the drawing near to us of our Lord. If he appears to us, our winter is over, our summer's sun has come. If Christ be with us, the time of the singing of birds has come, and our heart is glad.

4, 5. *Every valley shall be exalted, and every mountain and hill shall be made low; and the crooked shall be made straight, and the rough places plain: And the glory of the LORD shall be revealed, and all flesh shall see it together: for the mouth of the LORD hath spoken it.*

Wherever Christ comes, it is so. All things are right at his appearing, and if the Lord do but manifest himself to us to-night, each one, we shall find the crooked things made straight. We shall see the mountains of difficulty levelled, and the deep depressions will all be filled up, and there will be a causeway along which the Lord triumphantly shall ride to display the greatness of his power. There is nothing that shall hinder the coming of the Lord to us, and when he comes, there is nothing that shall stand against him.

6-8. *The voice said, Cry. And he said, What shall I cry? All flesh is grass, and all the goodliness thereof is as the flower of the field: The grass withereth, the flower fadeth: because the spirit of the LORD bloweth upon it: surely the people is grass. The grass withereth, the flower fadeth: but the word of our God shall stand for ever.*

Now that is a cry that we all need to hear—the death-cry of all creature-confidence for man at his very best is only like grass in the flower. It