

The Preservation of Christians in the World

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DELIVERED BY C. H. SPURGEON,

AT NEW PARK STREET CHAPEL, SOUTHWARK, ON A THURSDAY EVENING,
IN THE YEAR 1855.

"I pray not that You should take them out of the world, but that You should keep them from the evil." [John 17:15](#).

THE text, as we observed on a former occasion, [Sermon #47, Volume 1—CHRIST'S PRAYER FOR HIS PEOPLE contains two prayers—a negative prayer and a positive prayer. First, there is the negative prayer—"I pray not that You should take them out of the world." There are wise ends to be observed by their remaining here. It will ultimately increase their happiness in Heaven. It will give glory to God. It shall be the means of the conversion of others—therefore, "I pray not that you should take them out of the world," but I do pray—and here comes the positive prayer—"that, while they are in it, 'you should keep them from the evil.'"

I. Let us first, then, CONSIDER THE EVIL FROM WHICH CHRIST PRAYS THAT HIS PEOPLE MAY BE KEPT.

We have no hesitation in declaring that the only evil here intended is the evil of sin. It may be true that Jesus Christ pleads with His Father to preserve us from some of the direful afflictions which might be too much for our mortal frame to endure. It may be that, sometimes, the blows and attacks of the enemy are warded off by the arm of the intercession of Jesus. It may be that the great aegis of Almighty God is often held over our heads in matters of Providence to keep us from evil when we walk, and to guard us lest we dash our feet against a stone. We feel persuaded, however, that neither of these things is here intended, but that, "the evil," so continually spoken of in Scripture, the evil pre-eminently here meant, is sin and nothing else. "I pray that you should keep them from the evil."

Afflictions are often beneficial, therefore Christ does not plead that we should be kept entirely from this kind of evil. Trial brings us to His feet and gives new life to prayer, therefore Christ has not asked that this bittersweet might not be given to us. Death itself, which seems an evil, is a good thing for Believers, so Christ does not ask that we may not die. The petition He puts up here for His people is, "I pray that You should keep them from the evil"—the special evil, the particular, the deadly evil of sin.

Let us here remark that sin is an unqualified evil. It is the evil without the mitigation of any good in it. In sin there can be no good—it is evil, only evil and that continually. The lowest form of sin is "the evil." The highest is "the evil" more fully developed. Sin in an angel was "the evil," for it turned him into a devil. Sin in Eden was "the evil," for it plucked up the

fair trees by the roots and blasted all their fruits—and sent Adam out to till the ground from where he was taken. Sin is always an evil—it brings no profit to anyone. It shall not profit a man if he shall gain the whole world, and lose his own soul, and in especially the Christian it is evil, nothing but evil. Sin can never benefit him, it is an evil, only an evil, a powerful evil and a dreadful evil—it is unmitigated evil—it is "the evil."

It is true, out of evil God brings good. Sometimes the very sins of God's people are overruled so as to preserve them from some greater sin, but that does not destroy "the evil." If God sends out bears from the woods to execute his commission, and they slay the mocking children, they are still bears. And if sin is sometimes made to be the means of honoring God, yet sin is sin, notwithstanding any purpose that God may accomplish by it. And no false preaching can ever make us

believe any doctrine which would take away the deadly character which by right belongs to sin. It is always hurtful and dangerous.

The Christian who trusts that, by any one sin, he may keep himself out of difficulty, or get himself out of difficulty, makes a terrible mistake. This cannot bring you good. "But," you say, "I am in real difficulties. My creditors are pressing me, what shall I do? If I could draw that accommodation bill, or forge that note, there might be some good in it." There cannot be any good in it! Sin is evil! It is "the evil." It is "the evil" without a single particle of goodness. It is "the evil" without any mitigation whatever. "Oh," says another, "if I were to do such-and-such a thing—it is but a little evil—I should then prosper in business! And then I could dedicate myself to God and serve Him better! And so, out of the evil, I could bring a good. The end would justify the means." No! If the means are bad, they are bad. If the means are evil, they are evil. Sin is sin and nothing but sin—and however there may, sometimes, appear to be temporary advantages in it—it is still evil, and only evil. What though the noxious draught may sometimes stimulate the man and seem to make him mightier, it really weakens him—and it will ultimately destroy him. A man may fancy sin to be good for a time. It may patch him up in respectability and make him stand a little more favorably in the eyes of worldlings, but the house repaired with such rotten material as that shall fall, notwithstanding all that is done to prop it up! All sin is unmitigated evil, and the only name we will give to it is, "evil." Let the monster plead as it may and ask us to call it good, we charge it with having slain our Lord—and we condemn it as an evil to be hated and avoided. A serpent may have beauteous blue hues upon his scales, but he is a deadly thing and is to be crushed to the earth.

Next, we say that sin is "the evil" because it is an unparalleled evil. You can find nothing in the world so evil as sin. Nothing has so desolated this fair earth of ours as sin has. Tell me that war has slain its tens and hundreds of thousands, that earthquakes have shaken down vast cities, that pestilence has devoured millions—describe to me the concussion of the elements, speak to me of the wild uproar of Nature abroad, and remind me of how it

smites down man, and destroys his handiwork—but when you have written out the black catalog of all the terrible things that have happened to man, I will still tell you that sin stands up as the monster evil, the giant topping them all, head and shoulders above them, the most unqualified and unparalleled evil in the world!

You ask me whether sin has done much evil, I answer you, "Yes." Look at Eden's garden blasted, a whole world drowned with water, even the tops of the mountains covered! Watch the earth open and Korah, Dathan, and Abiram go down into the Pit. Watch fire rained upon Sodom and Gomorrah and see the cities of the plain, with all their inhabitants, destroyed. But sin has done more than that—it has dug a Hell somewhere, we know not where—not in the caverns of the earth. That were a direful thought, that this home of the righteous for a season should become the dwelling of the damned. If there is anything worse than that, sin is guilty of it, for it slaughtered Emmanuel, it slew the Lord of Life and Glory! Sin betrayed Him, scourged Him, put a crown of thorns upon His head, spit in His face, crucified Him, nailed His hands and His feet to the accursed tree! Sin sat by and watched Him till He died. And that moment—blessed be His name!—the sins of all His people were finished. Sin is unparalleled. No evil can compare with it. Find what evil you please, sin stands out first and foremost as "the evil."

Sin also, in some sense, is an evil that has no remedy. You may, perhaps, be somewhat startled by that thought, especially when you have so continually heard me say that the death of Christ takes away from a Christian the very guilt of his sin, so that he is not guilty before God, but stands accepted in Christ, with his Savior's righteousness on, so that he can plead that before God and even claim the merits imputed to him through Jesus. Still, what I have said is true—that for sin there still remains no remedy, even to the Christian, when he has committed it. There is the remedy of forgiveness, so far as he is concerned, but there is no remedy for the sin itself. Where, for instance, is the remedy for a sinful word that I have spoken? Can my tears bring it back and stop it from doing an injury to my fellow creatures? Even though Christ has forgiven me, that will not end the wrong I may have done to others. When I drop a single stone of sin into the ocean of this universe, it will continue to make circle after circle, always expanding. I may, through my whole life, labor with more than seraphic zeal, and with a Christ-like heart to undo the evil I have done—but if I might work throughout eternity I could never untie those knots that I have tied, or dash down those mountains that I have piled, or dry up the rivers I have dug.

True, the sin is all forgiven. It will never be laid to my charge, but, I think, though Christ has forgiven me, I shall never forgive myself for some things in which I may have disgraced His name and dishonored His blessed Person. When

some of you old blasphemers recollect that some in Hell were damned by your means, you may thank God that you are saved, but you cannot undo that ruin to immortal souls. Sin is the evil. Well might Jesus pray for His people, "Father, keep them from the evil," for

an evil it is, which, though it has a remedy as to itself, has no remedy as to its consequences upon others. God grant that any evils which we may have worked, may be as much remedied as it is possible by the future holiness of our lives!

Once more, sin is a most pestilent evil because it brings every other evil with it I think the worst evil sin has ever done to me is this—it has sometimes robbed me of the Presence of my blessed Master. There have been seasons when the Spirit has been withdrawn from me. There have been times when I have sought my Beloved, but have not found Him—when I have ardently desired His Presence, but could not find it, and my only song was—

"What peaceful hours I once enjoyed,
How sweet their memory still!
But now I find an aching void
The world can never fill."

Sin was that veil that came between me and my Lord. Dear old Joseph Irons used to say, "Christ often hides His face behind the clouds of dust His own children kick up." So we make dust by our sins and Christ hides behind it. We build a wall by our transgressions and our Beloved hides behind that wall. Ah, Sin, you are, indeed, an evil, for you have robbed me of His sweet society, and taken away His blessed company! You have been sitting on the throne of my heart and He will not tolerate such an insult—He will not stay where sin is. You have entered into my soul and Jesus has said, "I will not tarry where there is sin. My Presence shall drive out sin, or sin shall drive out My Presence." "O Sin, how much misery I experience through you!" the Christian can say. Ah, Sin, how many poor and fettered Believers have had their fetters first forged by you? Sin, you are the anvil on which our doubts are welded. Sin, you are the fire in which our spirits are often molten down to grief. We could do all things were it not for you. O Sin—you clip the wings of faith, you dampen the flame of love, you destroy the energy of zeal—you are "the evil." My Master calls you so, and such you are. You need not to be renamed—that name once given you shall bear forever—and throughout eternity you shall be pointed at, in the pillory of scorn, by all the saints, as, "the evil." Well might Christ ask His Father that while He did not wish His children to be taken out of the world, He did wish that they might be kept from the evil!

I charge you, you young converts who are about to put on the Lord Jesus Christ, remember that sin is "the evil." Through all your future lives you must remember that this is "the evil" you are to shun. Fear not affliction, fear not persecution—rather, rejoice, and be exceedingly glad if that should be your lot, for great is your reward in Heaven! But, I charge you, fear sin! I commend you to the God of all Grace who is able to keep you from falling, and to present you faultless before the Presence of His Glory. But yet I beg you always to recollect that sin, itself, is "the evil" to you. It will always be so to you as long as you live and, though forgiven, it is still pardoned sin. Shun it in the least degree! Do not give way to little sins and you will not give way to big ones. Remember the proverb, "Take care of the pence, and

the pounds will take care of themselves." Beware of little sins and you will not commit great ones. I charge you, keep your hearts in the love of God and may God, Himself, preserve you, according to our Savior's prayer, "that You should keep them from the evil."

II. We can make only a very few remarks upon the second point, which is THE DANGER TO WHICH CHRIST'S PEOPLE ARE EXPOSED. Is there any danger of Christian men running into sin? After they have believed in Jesus and after they have been pardoned, will they commit sin again? After they have been adopted into God's family, will they sin? Will they, can they sin after all that! O Beloved! I thought once, when my Lord first pardoned me, that I could never sin against Him anymore. When black from head to foot, He spoke the cleansing word and made me white—when He took off my rags and clothed me in royal garments, and kissed me with the kisses of His love, and showed me His deep, affectionate heart, I thought, "O blessed Jesus! Can I ever again sin against You? Can it be that I, a pardoned rebel, whom You have forgiven so much, could do such a thing?" "No, precious Jesus," the young, convert thinks, "I can come and wash Your feet with my tears and wipe them with the hairs of my head, but I cannot sin, I will not sin." Ah, how soon is that beautiful vision taken away! How soon the theory is spoiled by experience!

Beloved, do you not find that you are in danger of sinning right now? Those of us who are young—what danger of sinning we are in! While our passions are strong and our lusts furious, we have need to be kept of God, or we shall sin against Him. And you middle-aged gentlemen, to you, also, I have a word or two to say. You always pray so particularly

for the young and the young people are very much obliged to you—and they always intend to pray especially for you, because you are in the most dangerous position! I remind you of what I have told you before, that there is in Scripture no instance of a young man falling into sin, but there is more than one such instance of a middle-aged man!

You grandparents with snowy heads, whose hairs are whitened with age—know you not that you still have need of Divine keeping or you will fall? O you veterans in the army of the Lord, do you not acknowledge that if His Grace were withdrawn from you, you have enough tinder in your hearts to catch fire, for your souls are not yet perfectly purified? When I ask my old Brothers and Sisters whether sin is still present with them, each one of them always says, "Well, I thought I had a bad heart, once, but I know I have one now. I thought I was vile, once, but I know I am now. I grow viler and viler as the years roll on and I see myself to be more and more so every day." Is it not so with you? Ah, is it not just so with you perpetually? And will you not confess, till your last dying moment, that you will be kept if God keeps you, but that if He were to leave you, you would be lost? I was pleased to hear some of the good answers the young people gave me when I asked them, "Do you think you will be kept faithful to Christ to the end?" "Yes, by God's Grace," they said. "But suppose God should leave you?" I next asked, and how exceedingly proper the answer was! "God will not leave me, so I cannot tell anything about that." That was a sweet way of answering the

question. He has promised that He will not leave us, nor forsake us, so, Christian, while we warn you of the danger if God should leave you, we comfort you by telling you that He will not leave you!

Mark the terrible threats that those poor Arminians have been speaking of so much. Those who know nothing of the Doctrines of Grace make out that sinners fall and come in again, and fall again, and come in again—and a more unscrip-tural doctrine cannot be propounded, for God solemnly declares that if it were possible for a man, once regenerated and sanctified, to apostatize, he would be lost beyond all remedy and there would remain no hope for him—"but a certain fearful looking for judgment and fiery indignation." I charge you to remember that if it were possible for you thus to fall, there is the precipice over which you must drop. There is no ransom for you in such a case as that! If true conversion fails, God will never try twice! If once He puts His hand on you, and fails, He has done with you. But it is not possible, glory be to His name! He has not yet failed and He never will! Still, we warn you, and Scripture tells us to do so, to remember that we shall be kept only through faith unto salvation and that our Lord Jesus Christ said, "My sheep hear My voice, and I know them, and they follow Me: and I give unto them eternal life; and they shall never perish, neither shall any man pluck them out of My hand. My Father, which gave them to Me, is greater than all, and no man is able to pluck them out of My Father's hand."

III. This brings us to speak, thirdly, concerning THE KEEPER OF CHRIST'S PEOPLE. "I pray that You should keep them from the evil."

We often get to keeping ourselves, Beloved, and a bad job we make of it, when we do that. If a Christian tries to keep his own heart without asking the help of God, he will be just as good a keeper as those guards whom Herod set to watch the Apostle Peter, and who, when they opened the prison doors in the morning, found that the prisoner had escaped. You may stand and watch your heart without God, but you will find that it has escaped and gone after sin, notwithstanding. The Christian must not trust to his guarding himself because he will sometimes be asleep, and then the enemy will catch him unawares. People are often ready, as the saying is, to put a lock on the stable door when the horse is gone. And Christians are sometimes very careful after they have sinned. Ah, but the thing is to lock the door while the horse is in the stable—and to take care before you sin. It is better to keep your house from being on fire than to get the fire put out ever so quickly.

We, all of us, have need to be kept by God. We think we can keep ourselves, but we cannot, for poor flesh and blood will fail. Though the spirit may be willing, the flesh is weak, and if it were possible for us to keep ourselves a little while, we should soon be overcome with spiritual slumber. And then, you know, the devil would come walking into the camp in the middle of the night, and if he caught us slumbering, and off our guard, he would, if allowed of God, hurry us away to perdition! If you trust yourselves to God, He will preserve you. But if you try to keep yourselves, you will fail. How many different schemes people

have for keeping themselves from sin! Why do they not go and ask God to keep them, instead of binding themselves hand and foot to this thing and the other, and so thinking to avoid sin? Let us give our hearts to God thoroughly, for He will preserve His own people. Oh, what a gracious promise the Lord has given concerning His vine-yard—"I the Lord do keep it; I will water it every moment; lest any hurt it, I will keep it night and day." Is not that a

precious expression, "I the Lord do keep it"? The Lord seems to speak in His own defense, "They say I do not keep it, but I do. They say that I let My people fall away, but I do not. Look at My vineyard, 'I the Lord do keep it.' Whatever they may say, 'I will water it every moment; lest any hurt it, I will keep it night and day.'" This is the only ground of our confidence—that God keeps the feet of His saints and none that trust in Him shall be desolate.

We must now conclude, praying on behalf of the Lord's people that God would keep them. Remember, Believer, that while it says God will keep you, He does it by means. You must look after each other. I like to admonish you to look after your Brothers and Sisters. Why, there are some of you sitting with only a rail between you, and yet you do not know your next door neighbors! Some of you, I know, sometimes talk too much, but I would rather you talk a little too much than not talk at all. Oh, how little like Christians some of you are—sitting down, side by side, and yet not knowing one another! The Church is meant to be a place where we shall be like children at home. Be sure to look after these young friends who are coming into the Church—try and take care of them. We need a few fathers who will lead them in the right way. Poor Souls, you cannot expect them to know much. Some of them, indeed, may have been long in the service of God—others have just commenced to run the Christian race—you must look after the young ones, and then the prayer of Christ will be fulfilled in their case, "I pray that You should keep them from the evil."

Finally, remember that the only Keeper of the saints is God, and put your souls day by day into His hands. I beseech you, by the love of Christ, forget not His holy prayer of which I have been speaking to you! Often meditate upon the Grace that put you into the Savior's custody. Oh, forget not that you have been His from all eternity, and that it ill becomes you to sin! Do not forget that you are elect in Christ and it would be a disgrace to you to transgress. Recollect that you are one of the aristocracy of the universe—you must not mix with vile worldlings! Remember that the blood royal of Heaven runs in your veins—therefore do not disgrace yourselves by acts which might be tolerated in a beggar, but which would demean a prince of the heavenly household! Stand on your dignity! Think of your future glory! Remember where you stand and in whom you stand—in the Person of Jesus! Fall at His feet daily! Grasp His strength hourly, crying out—

"Oh, for this no power have I My strength is at Your feet to lie."

O Beloved, you who do not love the Lord, I cannot pray that God would keep you from the evil because you are already in it! But I do pray God to take you out of it. There are some of you who do not feel sin to be an evil and shall I tell you why? Did you ever try to pull a

bucket up a well? You know that when it is full of water, you can pull it easily so long as the bucket remains in the water—but when it gets above the water, you know how heavy it is. It is just so with you. While you are in sin, you do not feel it to be a burden—it does not seem to be evil! But if the Lord once draws you out of sin, you will find it to be an intolerable, a heinous evil! May the Lord, this night, wind some of you up! Though you are very deep down, may He draw you up out of sin and give you acceptance in the Beloved! May you have new hearts and right spirits which are alone the gift of God! Remember the words of the Lord Jesus—"Ask, and it shall be given you; seek, and you shall find; knock, and it shall be opened unto you: for everyone that asks receives; and he that seeks, finds; and to him that knocks it shall be opened." God give you Grace to ask, and seek, and knock, for Jesus' sake! Amen.

EXPOSITION BY C. H. SPURGEON: ISAIAH49:1-23.

Verses 1, 2. Listen, O isles, unto Me; and hearken, you people from far; the Lord has called Me from the womb; from the bowels of My mother has He made mention of My name. And He has made My mouth like a sharp sword; in the shadow of His hand has He hid Me, and made Me a polished shaft; in His quiver has He hid Me. Our Lord Jesus, that great Prophet of the Church, was in a special manner the Lord's in the matter of His birth. A wondrous holy mystery hangs about His birth at Bethlehem—He was, in that respect, the Lord's in a very remarkable sense. "He has made My mouth like a sharp sword." You know how our Lord's mouth, or the Word of His Gospel that issues from His mouth, is like a sharp sword—how it conquers—how it cuts its way—how, wherever it goes, it pierces "even to the dividing asunder of soul and spirit, and of the joints and marrow, and is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart." "In the

shadow of His hand has He hid Me." You know how the protecting hand of God always covered Christ and how His Gospel is always sheltered by the Providence of God.

3. And said unto Me, You are My servant, O Israel, in whom I will be glorified. It is wonderful condescension on Christ's part to take the name of His Church so that He, Himself, is called, "Israel," in this passage. And there is another passage, equally remarkable, where the Church is allowed to take one of the names of Christ—"This is the name wherewith she shall be called, The Lord Our Righteousness." Such an intermingling of interests, such a wonderful union is there between Christ and His Church, that these two are truly one!

4. Then I said, I have labored in vain, I have spent My strength for nothing, and in vain: yet surely My judgment is with the LORD, and My work with My God. Our Savior did, in His earthly ministry, to a large extent labor in vain. "He came unto His own, and His own received Him not." He was sent to the lost sheep of the house of Israel, yet how few of them recognized Him as the good Shepherd. He told His disciples that after He returned to His Father, those who believed in Him should do even greater things than He had done. That

promise was fulfilled on the day of Pentecost and since then it has been fulfilled over and over again in the history of the Christian Church.

5. And now, says the LORD that formed Me from the womb to be His servant, to bring Jacob again to Him, Though Israel is not gathered, yet shall I be glorious in the eyes of the LORD, and My God shall be My strength. What though the Jews still reject the Messiah, their sin does not affect His honor. His Glory is still as great as ever it was in the esteem of the Most High!

6. And He said, It is a light thing that You should be My Servant to raise up the tribes of Jacob, and to restore the preserved of Israel: I will also give You for a light to the Gentiles, that You may be My salvation unto the end of the earth. What a blessed passage this is for you and for me, Beloved! Strangers to the commonwealth of Israel were we, but, now, we who were afar off are made near by the blood of Jesus and so are made fellow-heirs with the seed of Abraham, partakers of the same Covenant blessing as the father of the faithful enjoys. In this let us exceedingly rejoice! And for this let us praise and magnify the name of the Lord.

7. Thus says the LORD, the Redeemer of Israel, and His Holy One, to Him whom man despises, to Him whom the nation abhors. What a true picture this is of the way in which the Jews still treat the promised Messiah! To this day they gnash their teeth at the very mention of the name of Jesus of Nazareth. And the bitterest words of blasphemy that are ever uttered by human lips come from the mouth of Israel against the Lord Jesus—"Him whom the nation abhors."

7. To a Servant of rulers, Kings shall see and arise, princes also shall worship, because of the LORD that is faithful, and the Holy One of Israel, and He shall choose You. The Father has chosen Christ to be the precious cornerstone of the eternal Temple and He has also chosen all the living stones that are to be joined to Him forever.

8, 9. Thus says the LORD, In an acceptable time have I heard You, and in a day of salvation have I helped You: and I will preserve You, and give You for a covenant of the people, to establish the earth, to cause to inherit the desolate heritages; that You may say to the prisoners, Go forth; to them that are in darkness, Show yourselves. They shall feed in the ways, and their pastures shall be in all high places. Dear Brothers and Sisters, what honor the Lord has put upon Christ! In proportion as He has been the despised of men and the abhorred of the Jewish nation, God has made Him to be His own delight, His Well-Beloved. He displays through Him the marvels of His saving power for His own Glory. I pray that it may be displayed in our midst just now, and in the way mentioned here—"I will preserve You, and give You for a covenant of the people, to establish the earth, to cause to inherit the desolate heritages; that You may say to the prisoners, Go forth; to them that are in darkness. Show yourselves." Come, Beloved, after you receive such a message as this from God's mouth, what prison can hold you? What darkness can conceal you? The Word of

Christ shall break your bonds asunder and change your darkness into the glory of noonday! May this gracious work be done for any of you who are prisoners!

10. They shall not hunger nor thirst. To the woman at the well, Christ said, "Whoever drinks of the water that I shall give him shall never thirst." That is a parallel to this passage—"They shall not hunger nor thirst."

10. Neither shall the heat nor sun smite them: for He that has mercy on them shall lead them, even by the springs of water shall He guide them. Oh, the wondrous sweetness of these exceedingly great and precious promises! They are all concerning Christ, you see. Undoubtedly they are given with an eye to us, but yet much more with an eye to Him, that He may be glorified in the deliverance and guidance of His people, in the protection of them from danger, and in the abund-

ant provision for the supply of all their needs. It would not be for Christ's honor to let you die of thirst, poor thirsty one! It would not glorify Him to lead you where there were no springs of water. Be sure, then, that God will always do that which will glorify His Son—and He will therefore deal well with you for His sake.

11, 12. And I will make all My mountains a way, and My highways shall be exalted. Behold, these shall come from far and, lo, these from the north and from the west; and these from the land of Sinim. From far-away China they must come to Christ! The result of His death is not left to chance. Some say that His death did something or other, which, somehow or other, will benefit somebody or other. But we never speak in that indefinite way. We know that Christ, by His death, did eternally redeem His people, and we are quite sure that He will have all those for whom He laid down the ransom price. He died with a clear intent, a definite purpose, and for the joy that was set before Him, He "endured the Cross, despising the shame." "He shall see of the travail of His soul and shall be satisfied." The Divine intent and purpose of the death of Christ cannot possibly be frustrated. He reigns from the Cross and He shall win and conquer world without end!

13. Sing, O heavens; and be joyful, O earth; and break forth into singing, O mountains: for the Lord has comforted His people, and will have mercy upon His afflicted. How? Why, by the very coming of Christ, by His birth at Bethlehem, and all the blessings which come with the Incarnate God, His afflicted ones are consoled and all His people are Divinely comforted. Shall we not, then, rejoice in Christ, who is Himself so full of joy that He teaches the very heavens to sing and the mountains to break forth in praise?

14. But Zion said. Hear the lament of the poor Jewish Church, like a castaway left all alone—

14. The LORD has forsaken me, and my Lord has forgotten me. When we are glad in the Lord and are singing out our heart's joy, there is pretty sure to be someone or other who sorrowfully sighs, "The Lord has forsaken me." People say that there never was a feast so well furnished but that somebody went away unsatisfied—but God will not have it so at His

festivals and, therefore, the rest of the chapter shows how the Lord comforted this poor Zion, whose lamentation and mourning He had heard. Notice how He begins.

15. Can a woman forget her sucking child, that she should not have compassion on the son of her womb? "Can a woman"—the most tender parent of the two—"forget her child"—her own child, her feeble little child that still depends upon her for its nutriment and life—"her sucking child"?

15. Yes, they may forget. It is just possible. There have been such monstrosities—"they may forget."

15. Yet will I not forget you—

"Yet, says the Lord, should Nature change, And mothers, monsters prove, Zion still dwells upon the heart Of everlasting love."

How that gracious assurance should comfort the little handful, the "remnant, weak and small," of God's people among the Jews! How it should also comfort any of God's servants who are under a cloud and who have lost, for a while, the enjoyment of His Presence!

16. Behold, I have engraved you upon the palms of My hands. Where they must be seen and where He can do nothing without touching His people while doing it. When a name is engraved on the hand with which a man works, that name goes into his work and leaves its impress on the work.

16, 17. Your walls are continually before Me. Your children shall make haste; your destroyers and they that made you waste shall go forth of you. Jerusalem, the very Jerusalem that is in Palestine, shall be rebuilt! God will remember her walls and the Church of God in Israel shall yet rise from that sad low estate in which it has been these many centuries. And all God's cast-down ones shall be comforted and His churches that seem to be left to die, shall be raised up again, for our God is no changeling. His heart does not come and go towards the sons of men—

"Whom once He loves, He never leaves, But loves them to the end."

18. Lift up your eyes round about and behold: all these gather themselves together, and come to you. What are all converted Gentiles doing, after all, but coming to the one Church? It is no longer a matter of Jew or Gentile, but all who believe are one in Christ Jesus. Let poor Zion rejoice that she herself is enriched by the conversion of these far-off sinners of the Gentiles!

18. As I live, says the LORD, you shall surely clothe yourself with them all, as with an ornament, and bind them on you, as a bride does. Converts are the garments of the Church, her bridal array, her ornaments and her jewels. I wish that all churches thought so, but many of them think that gorgeous architecture, the garnishing of the material building in which they meet, the sound of sweet music and the smell of fragrant incense and choice flowers make up the dignity and glory of a church—but they do no such thing! Converts are the

true glory of a church—"You shall surely clothe yourself with them all, as with an ornament, and bind them on you, as a bride does."

19, 20. For your waste and your desolate places, and the land of your destruction, shall even now be too narrow by reason of the inhabitants, and they that swallowed you up shall be far away. The children which you shall have, after you have lost the others. The children of your childlessness—so it runs—the children of your widowhood. It was strange that she should have children then. It is not so among men, but it is so with the Church of God—"The children which you shall have, after you have lost the others."

20-23. Shall say again in your ears, The place is too small for me: give me a place that I may dwell. Then shall you say in your heart, Who has begotten me these, seeing I have lost my children, and am desolate, a captive, and removing to and fro? And who has brought up these? Behold, I was left alone; these, where had they been? Thus says the Lord GOD, Behold, I will lift up My hand to the Gentiles, and set up My standard to the people: and they shall bring your sons in their arms, and your daughters shall be carried upon their shoulders. And kings shall be your nursing fathers, and their queens your nursing mothers: they shall bow down to you with their face toward the earth, and lick up the dust of your feet I have heard this passage quoted as a reason why there should be a State Church—that kings should nourish the Church—Henry VIII, for instance, and George IV. It was poor milk, I am sure, that they ever gave the Church of God. Yet I have no objection whatever to this text being carried out to the fullest—yes, to the very letter—only mind where the kings are to be put! What place does the verse say that they are to occupy? "They shall bow down to you with their face toward the earth, and lick up the dust of your feet." There is no headship of the Church, here—nothing of that sort! The kings are to be at the feet of the Church, and that is what the State ought to do—submit itself to God and obey His commands, and give full liberty to the preaching of the Gospel! This is all that the true Church of Christ asks, and all she can ever fairly take if she is loyal to her Lord.

23. And you shall know that I am the LORD. "Jehovah." "You shall understand the greatness of your God, His in-finiteness, His majesty, His all-sufficiency. 'You shall know that I am the I AM.'"

23. For they shall not be ashamed that wait for Me. Glory be to His holy name, none that wait for Him shall ever have cause to be ashamed! May we all be of that blessed number, for Christ's sake! Amen.