

Mercy for the Meanest of the Flock

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"In that day, says the Lord, will I assemble the lame, and I will gather the outcast, and those whom I have afflicted." [Micah 4:6](#).

THIS is spoken, I suppose, in the first place, of the Jewish people who have been so afflicted on account of their sin that they almost cease to be a nation. They are driven here and there among the lands and made to suffer greatly. In the last time, when Christ shall appear in His Glory in the days of halcyon peace, then shall Israel partake of the universal joy. Poor, limping, faltering Israel, afflicted with tempest, shall yet be gathered and rejoice in her God!

However, I am sure that the text applies to the Church of God and we shall not do amiss if we also find in it promises to individual Christians. We will regard the text in those two lights as spoken to the Church and as spoken to individual souls.

I. First, then, AS REFERRING TO THE CHURCH OF GOD. "In that day, says the Lord, will I assemble the lame, and I will gather the outcast, and those whom I have afflicted."

The Church of God is not always equally vigorous and prosperous. Sometimes she can run without weariness and walk without fainting, but at other times she begins to limp and is lame. There is a deficiency in her faith, a lukewarm-ness in her love, doctrinal errors spring up and many things that both weaken and trouble her—and then she becomes like a lame person. And, indeed, Beloved, when I compare the Church of God at the present moment with the first Apostolic Church, she may well be called, "the lame." Oh, how she leaped in the first Pentecostal times! What wondrous strength she had throughout all Judea and all the neighboring lands! The voice of the Church in those days was like the voice of a lion—and the nations heard and trembled. The utmost isles of the sea understood the power of the Gospel and before long the Cross of Christ was set up on every shore. Thus was the Church in her early days—the love of her espousals was upon her and her strength was like that of a young unicorn!

How the Church now limps! How deficient in vigor, how weak in her actions! If I compare the Church now with the Church in Reformation times, when, in our own land, our fathers went bravely to prison and to the stake to bear witness to the Lord Jesus! When, in Covenanting Scotland and Puritan England, the Truth of God was held with firmness and proclaimed with earnestness and, what is, perhaps, still better, when the Truth of God was lived by those who professed it—then was she mighty, indeed, and not to be compared

to "the lame," as I fear she is now in these days of laxity of Doctrine and laxity of life—when error is tolerated in the Church and loose living is tolerated in the world!

I might almost use the same simile for the Church, today, as compared with those early days of Methodism when Whitefield was flying like a seraph in the midst of Heaven—preaching in England and America the unsearchable riches of Christ to tens of thousands! When Wesley and others were working with undiminished ardor to reach the poorest of the poor and the lowest of the low! Those were good days with all their faults. Life and fire abounded, the God of Israel was glorified, and tens of thousands were converted! The Church seemed as though it had risen from the dead and cast off its grave clothes, and was rejoicing in newness of life! We are not without hopeful signs today. There is not everything to depress, but much to encourage. At the same time, the Church limps—she does not stand firm and run fast. Oh, that God would be pleased to visit her!

Moreover, if I look at the text, I perceive that the Church not only is sometimes weak, but, at the same time, or at some other time, the Church is persecuted and made to suffer, for the text speaks of "the outcast." And it has often happened that the Church has been driven right out from among men. It has been said of her, "Away with her from the earth! It is not fit that she should live." But how wondrously God has shown His mercy to His people when they have

been driven out! The days of exile have been bright days! The sun never shone more fairly on the Church's brow than when she worshipped God in the catacombs of Rome, or when her disciples "wandered about in sheepskins and goatskins, being destitute, afflicted, tormented." In our own country, those who met in secret, perpetually pestered by informers who would bring them before the magistrate for joining in prayer and song, often said, when they got their liberty, that they wished they had the days, again, when they were gathered together in the lonely house and scarcely dared to sing loudly! They had brave times in those days, when every man held his soul in his hand. When he worshipped his God not knowing whether the hand of the hangman or the headsman might not soon be upon him. The Lord was pleased to bless His people when the Church was driven out. If the snowy peaks of Piedmont, if the lowlands of Holland, if the prisons of Spain could speak, they would tell of Infinite Mercy experienced by the saints under terrible oppression—of hearts that were leaping to Heaven while the bodies were bruised or burning on earth! God has been gracious to His people when they have been driven out.

Sometimes trouble comes to God's people in another way. The Church is afflicted by God Himself. It seems as if God had put away His Church for a time and driven her from His Presence. That has happened often in all Churches. Perhaps some of you are members of such Churches now, or have been. Discord has come in and the Spirit of peace has gone. Coldness has come into the pulpit and a chill has come over the pews. The Prayer Meetings are neglected, the seeking of souls is almost given up—the candlestick is there, but the candle

seems to be gone, or not to be lighted. The means of Grace have become lifeless. You almost dread the Sabbath which once was your comfort. It is wretched for Christian people when it comes to this! And yet, in scores of villages and towns in England this is the case. The sheep look up and the shepherd looks down but there is no food for the sheep, neither does the shepherd, himself, know where to get the food because he has not been taught of God. It is a melancholy thing, wherever this has been the case, but I would encourage the saints to cry mightily for the return of God's Spirit, for the restoration of unity and peace, earnestness and prayerfulness, that once again the wilderness and the solitary place may be made glad and the desert may rejoice and blossom like the rose!

My Brothers and Sisters, may God never treat the Church in England as she deserves to be treated, for when I look around me and see her sins, they seem to rise up to Heaven like a mighty cry! We have been lately told in so many words, by an eminent preacher, that all creeds have something good in them—even the creed of the heathen—and that out of them all the grand creed is to be made, which is yet to be the religion of mankind! God save us from those who talk in this way and yet profess to be sent of God! They who know in their own souls what God's Truth is, will not be led astray by such delusions. But God may visit His Church and chasten her sorely by depriving her of His Spirit for a while. If He has done so, or is about to do so, let us still pray that He may gather the outcast and afflicted.

I may not dwell longer upon these points, but hasten to notice the blessing that will come, in answer to prayer, upon Churches that are weak, or sorely persecuted. There are scattering times, no doubt, but we should always pray that we may live in gathering times, that we may be gathered together in unity, in essential oneness around the Cross, in united action for our glorious Master, and that sinners who are far away may be gathered in, too, and backsliders who have wandered may be restored! Pray for gathering times, Brothers and Sisters, and may the day come when the Lord will assemble the lame and will gather the outcast and afflicted.

Notice that the text speaks of a "day." So we may expect that God will have His own time of benediction. "In that day, says the Lord, will I assemble the lame." I believe that to be a day in which we enquire after the Lord, a day in which we are prayerful, in which we become anxious, in which an agony lays hold upon the souls of Believers until the Lord shall return unto His people—a day when Christ is revealed in the testimony of the Church and the Gospel is fully preached—in that day will the Lord assemble the lame! May that day speedily come! But if we do not see the blessing tomorrow, let us remember that tomorrow may not be God's day, and let us persevere in prayer till God's day does come. There are better days in store for the Church—and before the page of human history closes, there will be times of triumph for her in which she shall be glorious—and God shall be glorified in her!

II. I shall, however, pass from this first point about the Church, because I wish to speak to mourners, to melancholy ones. I trust I have a message of mercy to some that are despond-

ing. We shall look on the text, secondly, AS REFERRING TO INDIVIDUAL SOULS. "In that day, says the Lord, will I assemble the lame." There are three characters described here. Let us look at each of them.

First, the soul that limps. Of course by that is intended those Christians who are very weak. Some are "strong in the Lord and in the power of His might." It would be a great mercy if all God's people were so, but there are some Christians who have faith of but a feeble sort. They have love to God, but they sometimes question whether they do love Him at all. They have piety in their hearts, but it is not of that vigorous kind one would desire. It is rather like the spark in the flax, or the music in the bruised reed. They are like Little-Faith and Miss Much-Afraid. They are alive, but only just alive. Sometimes their life seems to tremble in the balance and yet it is hidden with Christ in God and, therefore, it is really beyond the reach of harm! They are the weak ones and God speaks to such weak ones, and says, "I will assemble the

lame."

It not only means that they are weak, but that they are slow and limping persons. A lame person cannot travel quickly and, oh, how slowly some Christians move! What little advance they make in the Divine Life! They were little children ten years ago and they are little children now. Their own children have grown up to be men, but they themselves do not appear to have made any advance. They are just babes in Grace and still have need of milk. They are not strong enough to feed upon the strong meat of the Kingdom of God. They are slow to believe all that the Prophets and Apostles have spoken, slow to rejoice in God, slow to catch a Truth of God and perceive its bearing, but still slower to get the nutriment out of it and learn its application to themselves. But, slow as they are, I trust we may say of them that they are as sure as they are slow! What steps they do take are well taken. And if they come slowly, like the snail, yet they are like the snail in Noah's days crawling towards the ark—they will eventually get in!

With this slowness there is also pain. A lame man walks painfully. Perhaps every time he puts his foot to the ground, a shock of pain goes through his whole system. And some Christians, in their progress in the heavenly life, seem afflicted in like manner. I meet with some Christians who are very sensitive and every time there is anything wrong they are ashamed and grieved. I wish some other Christians had more of that feeling, for it is an awful fact that many professors seem to tamper greatly with sin and think nothing of it at all. Better the sensitive soul that is fearful and timorous, lest it should in any way grieve the Spirit of God—with a watchful eye over itself and a conscience that is quick and tender as the apple of the eye—than such presumption and hardness of heart as others have! But some have this sensitiveness without the other qualities which balance it—and it makes their progress to Heaven a painful one, though a safe one. They do not look enough at the Cross. They do not remember that, "if we walk in the light, as He is in the light, we have fellowship,

one with another, and the blood of Jesus Christ, His Son, cleanses us from all sin." They have not come to see that the Lord Jesus Christ is able to deliver us from all sin, so that indwelling sin shall not have dominion over us, because we are not under the Law, but under Grace. So their progress is painful. But, limping one, this word is for you, "I will assemble the lame, when I call My people together, I will call her; when I send an invitation to a feast, I will direct one specially to her. She is weak, she is slow, she is in pain, but for all that I will assemble her with My people."

The allusion, perhaps, is to a sheep that has somehow been lamed. The shepherd has to get all the flock together and, therefore, he must bring the lame ones in, too. And the Good Shepherd of the sheep takes care that the lame sheep shall be gathered. I find that the original word has somewhat of the import of one-sidedness—a lame sheep goes as if it went on one side. It cannot use this foot, and so it has to throw its weight on the other side. How many Christians there are that have a one-sidedness in religion and, unfortunately, that often happens to be the gloomy side! They are very properly suspicious of themselves, but they do not add to that a weight of confidence in the Lord Jesus Christ. Looking back upon their past and seeing their own unfaithfulness, they forget God's faithfulness! Looking upon the present, they see their own imperfections and infirmities—and forget that the Spirit helps our infirmities—and that if we had no infirmities, there would be nothing for the Spirit to do to glorify Himself in our weakness! When they look forward to the future, they see the dragons and the dark river of death, but they forget that promise, "When you pass through the waters, I will be with you." What a mercy it is that the Lord will not forget these one-sided limpers, but that even they shall be assembled when, with the Shepherd's crook, He gathers His flock and brings them Home!

We may add to these, those who have got tired with the trials of the way. It is a weary thing to be lame. It saddens my heart to often see the sheep go through the London streets. They go limping along, poor things, so spent and spiritless. There are many Christians who are like they are—they seem to have been so long in trouble that they do not know how to bear up any longer. What with the loss of the husband and the loss of the child. What with poverty and many struggles and no apparent hope of deliverance. What with one sickness and then another in their own bodies. What with one temptation and then another temptation, and then a third, they feel very wearied by the way. They are like Jacob when he limped on his thigh. The blessing is that the Lord says, "I will assemble the lame." Lay hold on that, you limping ones! I daresay you suppose you are the last one of the flock. You have got so tired and lame that you think that though all the others are close by the Shepherd's hand, you are forgotten. You remember that the Amalekites in the wilderness fell upon the children of Israel and smote some of the hindmost of them and, perhaps, you are afraid that you will get smitten in that way. Let me remind you of a text—"The Lord will go before you, and the God of Israel will be your rereward." Those that lead the way can rejoice that God

goes before them, but you can rejoice that God is behind you, as we read again, "The glory of the Lord shall be your rereward." He will take care that you shall not be destroyed.

But now, secondly, the soul that is exiled—"I will gather the outcast." Perhaps I address someone here who has been driven out from the world. It was not a very great world, that world of yours, but still, it was very dear to you. You loved father, mother, brothers and sisters, but you are a speckled bird among them now. Sovereign Grace and electing love have lighted on you, but not on them. At first they ridiculed you when you went to hear the Gospel—but now that you have received it and they perceive that you are in earnest—they persecute you. You are one by yourself. You almost wish you did not live among them because you are farther off from them than if you were really away from them. Nothing you can do pleases them. There are sure to be a thousand faults and they fling the taunt at you when you fail, and say, "This is your religion!" You cry out, "Woe is me that I dwell in Meshech!" Do you remember what became of the man when the Pharisees cast him out? Why, the Lord met him and graciously took him in! Remember what Jesus said to His disciples, "If you were of the world, the world would love his own, but because you are not of the world, but I have chosen you out of the world, therefore the world hates you." When I go to a man's house and his dog barks at me, he does it because I am a stranger. And when you go into the world and the world howls at you—it is because you are different from worldlings and they recognize in you the Grace of God—and pay the only homage which evil is ever likely to pay to goodness, namely, persecute it with all their might!

Perhaps, however, it is worse than that. "I should not mind being driven out from the world," you say, "I could take that cheerfully, but I seem driven out from the Church of God." There may be two ways in which this may come about. Perhaps you have been zealous for the Lord God of Israel in the midst of a cold church and you have spoken, perhaps not always prudently. The consequence is that you have angered and vexed the brethren, and they have thought that you fancied yourself to be better than they, though such a thought was far from your mind. It is an unfortunate thing for a man to be born before his time, yet he may be a grand man. Some Christians in certain churches seem to live ahead of their brethren. It is a good thing but, as surely as Joseph brought down the enmity of his own brothers upon himself because he walked with God and God revealed Himself to him, so is it likely that you, if you are in advance of your brethren, will draw down opposition upon yourself which will be very bitter. Never mind if the servants repulse you! Go and tell their Master—do not go and grumble at them! Pray their Master to mend their manners. He knows how to do it!

But it is just possible that you have been driven out only in your own thoughts. Perhaps the members of the church really love you and esteem you, and think highly of you. But you have become so depressed in spirit that you do not feel that you have any right to be in the church. You have made up your mind that you will not be a hypocrite and, therefore, you

have given up all profession. You have a notion that some of your fellow members think evil of you and wonder how ever such an one as you can come to the church. Oh, the many poor little lambs that come bleating around me with their troubles! And when I tell them, "I never heard anything against you in my life! I never heard anybody speak of you but with love and respect. I never observed anything in you but tenderness of conscience and a quiet holy walk with God," they seem quite surprised!

Brethren, look after your fellow members—do not let them think you are cold to them. Some of them will think it whatever you may do. Some of you, Brothers and Sisters, are thought to be so proud that you will not look at people! If they did but know the truth, they would see that you are very different. Now, you lambs, do not be grieved about nothing. But you who are stronger than they, mind that you do not give any offense that can be prevented. It is impossible but that offenses will come, but "woe unto him through whom they come." Let us be careful not to break the bruised reed, even by accidentally treading upon it. But, dear Brother or Sister, if that is your condition, let me tell you that you are not driven out—it is quite a mistake. But if you think so—go to your Lord. If you will tell Jesus, He will make up for any apparent change that may come over His people.

Ah, but I think I hear one say, "It is not being driven out from the world that hurts me, nor being driven out from the Church. I could bear that—but I am driven out from the Lord, Himself! I seem to have lost His company and losing that I have lost all—

"What peaceful hours I once enjoyed! How sweet their memory still! But they have left an aching void The world can never fill.

Thank God if you feel like that! If the world could fill your heart, it would prove that you are no child of God! But if the world cannot fill it, then Christ will come and fill it! If you will be satisfied with nothing but Him, He will satisfy you. If you are saying, "I will not be comforted till Jesus comforts me," you shall get the comfort you need. He never left a soul to perish that was looking to Him and longing for Him! Cry to Him, again, and this text shall be true to you, "I will gather the outcast." May that Word come home to some of you! I do not know where you may be, but the Master does— may He apply the promise to your hearts!

One other person is mentioned here—the soul that is troubled—"those whom I have afflicted." Yes, and in all Churches of God there are some dear, good friends that are more afflicted than others. They are often the best people. Are you surprised at that? Which vine does the gardener prune the most? That which bears the most and the sweetest fruit! He uses the knife most upon that because it will pay for pruning. Some of us seem scarcely to pay for pruning—we enjoy good health, but when trial comes, when the Lord prunes us, we may say—"Thank God! He means to do something with me after all!"

Perhaps this afflicted one is afflicted in body—scarcely a day without pain, scarcely a day without the prospect of more suffering. Well, if there is any child the mother is sure to

remember, it is the sick one! And if there are any Christians to whom God is peculiarly familiar, they are His afflicted ones. "You will make all his bed in his sickness," is said concerning a sick saint. The Lord makes your bed, dear Brothers and Sisters, if you are suffering bodily pain!

Some are mentally afflicted. Much of the doubts and fears we hear about comes from some degree of mental aberration. The mental trouble may be very slight, but it is very common. I suppose that there is not a perfectly sane man among us. When that great wind blew, at the time of the Fall, a slate blew off everybody's house—and some are more affected than others so that they take the black view of all things. This mental infirmity, for which they are not to be blamed, will probably be with them till they get to Heaven. Well, God blesses those who are thus troubled!

Then some are spiritually afflicted. Satan is permitted to try them very much. There is only one way to Heaven, but I find that there is a bit of the road that is newly stoned, a harder path to travel on, and some persons seem to go to Heaven all over the new stones—their soul is perpetually exercised—while God grants to others to choose the smoother parts of the way and go triumphantly on. Let those I have spoken of hear the Word of promise, "I will gather those whom I have afflicted," for when God, Himself, gives the affliction, He will bring His servant through and glorify Himself thereby.

To close, let us regard this promise, "I will gather her," as meaning, "I will gather My tried ones into the fellowship of the Church. I will bring My scattered sheep near to Me." The Lord Jesus will gather His dear people into fellowship with Himself. "I will gather them every day around My Mercy Seat. I will gather them, by-and-by, on the other side of Jordan, on those verdant hilltops where the Lamb shall forever feed His flock and lead them to living fountains of waters." Poor, tried, lame, afflicted, limping soul, the Shepherd has not forgotten you! He will gather all His sheep and they shall pass again under the hands of Him that counts them—there shall not be one missing! I cannot make out how some of my Brothers think that the Lord will lose some of His people—that there are some whom Jesus has bought with His blood who will get lost on the way to Heaven! It is an unhappy shepherd who finds some of his flock devoured by the wolf, but our Shepherd will never be in that strait with His sheep. He says, "I give unto them eternal life; and they shall never perish, neither shall any man pluck them out of My hand." What do you say to that, you limping ones? What do you say to that, you, the last of all? He has given eternal life to you as much as to the strongest of the flock and you shall never perish, neither shall any pluck you out of His hand! He will gather you with the rest of His sheep.

And when will He fulfill that promise, Beloved? He is always fulfilling it and He will completely fulfill it in the day when He is manifested. As this chapter describes Him, when He comes to make peace, and men beat their swords into plowshares, then will He gather you. Even now, when He comes as the great Peace-Giver, He gathers those whom are

lame. When the storms of temptation lie still, awhile, and He shows Himself in the heart as the God that walked the sea of Galilee of old, then are His people gathered into peace—they rest in that day. Thank God, the most tried and troubled Believer has some gleams of sunlight. In winter time, sometimes, you know there comes a day which looks like a summer's day when the gnats come out and think it is spring—and the birds begin to sing as if they thought that surely winter was over and past! In the darkest experience there are always some blessed gleams of light—just enough to keep the soul alive. That is in one measure the fulfillment of the promise, "I will assemble the lame...in that day."

But the day is coming when you and I who have been limping, feeble and weak, shall be gathered, never to limp, never to doubt and never to sin again! I do not know how long it may be. Some of you are a long way ahead of me, according to your years, but we cannot tell. The youngest of us may go soonest, for there are last that shall be first, and first that shall be last. But there is such a day written in the eternal decrees of God when we shall lay aside every tendency to sin, every tendency to doubt, every capacity for tribulation, every need for chastisement—and then we shall mount and soar away to the bright world of endless day! What a mercy it will be to find ourselves there! Oh, how we shall greet Jesus with joy and gladness and tell of redeeming Grace and dying love that brought Home even the limping ones and the weakest and the feeblest!

I think those that are reckoned strong and do the most for God are generally those who think themselves weakest when it comes to the stripping time. I read of a man who had been the means of the conversion of many hundreds of souls by personal private efforts—I refer to Harlan Page. On his dying bed he said, "They talk of me, but I am nothing, nothing, nothing." He mourned over his past life—to him it seemed that he had done nothing for his Master, that his life was a blank. He wept to think he had done so little for Christ while everyone was wondering how he had lived such a blessed and holy life! That man only is rich towards God who begins to know his emptiness and feels that he is less than nothing, and vanity.

Beloved, it is because those who serve God best often feel that they are lame, driven away, afflicted, and tossed with doubts and fears—it is because of this that this promise is put to the lowest case and the blessing given to the very meanest capacity! It is so in order that one who is strong may be able to come in, and when in depression of spirit say, "That promise will suit me! I will get a grip of it. I will come to God with it in my hands and at the Mercy Seat get it fulfilled to me, even to me." The Lord grant you, Beloved, to be numbered among His jewels in that day!

What shall I say to those who know nothing about the Divine Life at all, who, perhaps, are saying, "Well, we never get to limping or doubting. We have a merry time of it"? Yes and so does the butterfly, while the summer lasts, but the winter kills it. Your summer may last a little while, but the chill of death will soon be on you—and then what is there for you

but hopeless misery forever and forever? God give you Grace to fly to Jesus now and be saved with an everlasting salvation, through Jesus Christ, our Savior! Amen.

EXPOSITION BY C. H. SPURGEON: MCAH4.

Verse 1. But in the last days it shall come to pass that the mountain of the house of the LORD shall be established in the top of the mountains, and it shall be exalted above the hills and people shall flow unto it [See Sermon #249, Volume 5—a vision OF THE LATTER DAY GLORIES.] God's cause and Kingdom shall

not be hidden away in a corner—"the mountain of the house of the Lord shall be established in the top of the mountains," an Alp upon other Alps, higher than all the other hills! The day is coming when the Kingdom of our Lord Jesus Christ shall be the most conspicuous thing in the whole world, "and people shall flow unto it." The heathen, the people who knew nothing about it, shall flow to it like a great river!

2. And many nations shall come, and say, Come, and let us go up to the mountain of the LORD, and to the house of the God of Jacob; and He will teach us of His ways, and we will walk in His paths. That is the way the Grace of God works in us—He teaches and then we not only learn—but we obey.

2, 3. For the law shall go forth of Zion, and the Word of the LORD from Jerusalem. And He shall judge among many people, and rebuke strong nations afar off. The Kingdom of Christ, the Son of David, shall attract people and nations that were far off from the holy city where He lived and died.

3. And they shall beat their swords into plowshares, and their spears into pruning hooks: nation shall not lift up a sword against nation, neither shall they learn war anymore. They shall give up the study of the art of war. Their spirit shall be softened—in many cases renewed by Grace—and then they shall take to the useful arts. They shall not throw away their swords, but shall beat them into plowshares. They shall not hurl their spears into the earth, but shall bend them into scythes or pruning hooks. Oh, that the day were come when the wealth and ingenuity and power of nations were used in the pursuits of peace instead of in the arts of war! This is the tendency of the Kingdom of Christ, for wherever He comes, He makes peace. Nothing is more opposed to the spirit of Christianity than war—and when men are Christians, not in name only, but in deed and in truth—wars must cease.

4. But they shall sit, every man under his vine and under his fig tree: and none shall make them afraid: for the mouth of the LORD of Hosts has spoken it. The best evidence that this will be the case is that the Lord of Hosts, who has all power at His disposal, has said that it shall be so!

5. For all people will walk, everyone in the name of his god, and we will walk in the name of the LORD our God forever and ever. When we learn to know God in truth, we do not give Him up, but we walk in His name forever and ever. God's Covenant with us is an Everlasting Covenant, reaching beyond time and enduring throughout eternity. Some nations

have discarded their idol gods, but those who really know and love the Lord will walk in His name forever and ever.

6. In that day, says the LORD will I assemble the lame. God will bring to Himself you that limp, that hesitate, that tremble, that fear—"I will assemble the lame."

6. And I will gather the outcast Hunted by Satan and harassed by care. Frightened by depression of spirit. "I will gather the outcast"

6. And those whom I have afflicted. If God has laid His hand upon one of you so that you have a special affliction from Him you have this gracious promise that He will gather you to Himself!

7. And I will make those who limped a remnant, and those who were cast far off, a strong nation: and the LORD shall reign over them in Mount Zion from henceforth, even forever. Little scattered communities, Churches which have been weak and feeble, shall have the strengthening of God and they shall be, through His Sovereign Grace, a remnant saved by Grace to His praise and Glory! Note how everything here is done by God—you keep on reading, "I will," "I will," "I will." Oh, those blessed, "I wills" of God! Our wills are often defeated and disappointed, but God's, "I wills" stand fast forever!

8. And you, O tower of the flock, the stronghold of the daughter of Zion, unto you shall it come, even the first dominion; the Kingdom shall come to the daughter of Jerusalem. So it did. "Beginning at Jerusalem," was Christ's order concerning the preaching of the Gospel after His Resurrection. The first servants of Christ were of that ancient people who might be called the "tower of the flock, the stronghold of the daughter of Zion." Oh, that Christ would soon return in mercy to the—

"Chosen seed of Israel's race, A remnant weak and small"—

and gather them to Himself, for that would be the fullness of the Gentiles, also!

9. Now why do you cry out aloud? Is there no King in you? Is your Counselor perished? Sometimes our prayers may be the utterance of our fears rather than of our faith—and then the question comes, "Is there no King in you? Is your Counselor perished?" Can we not trust to Him whose name is "Wonderful, Counselor, The Mighty God, The Everlasting Father, The Prince of Peace"?

10. For pangs have taken you as a woman in travail. They are sharp pangs, but they lead to life and, therefore, they are blessed pangs after all!

10. Be in pain, and labor to bring forth, O daughter of Zion, like a woman in travail: for now shall you go forth out of the city and you shall dwell in the field, and you shall go even to Babylon: there shall you be delivered; there the LORD shall redeem you from the hand of your enemies. It looks more like a threat than a promise that God would send His people to Babylon, but there they were to be delivered. And it oftentimes happens with us that we must be brought into captivity before we are set free—we must feel the weight of the iron

bondage of sin and Satan before we are brought out into the glorious liberty wherewith Christ makes His people free!

11. Now also many nations are gathered against you that say, Let her be defiled, and let our eyes look upon Zion. All the enemies of Israel came together, hoping to destroy her. They saw that God had left her for a while in their hands, so they maliciously sought her destruction.

12. But they know not the thoughts of the LORD. They had their own thoughts and they thought that the Lord meant what they meant—the entire destruction of the chosen race! So the Prophet says, "But they know not the thoughts of the Lord"—

12. Neither understand they His counsel: for He shall gather them as the sheaves into the floor. God let them come together, great hosts of them, like the sheaves of wheat upon the threshing floor. Then see what the Lord says—

13. Arise and thresh, O daughter of Zion: for I will make your horn iron, and I will make your hoofs brass; and you shall beat in pieces many people. She was to be like the ox that treads out the corn and she was to have horns of iron and hoofs of brass with which to break in pieces those that had oppressed her!

13. And I will consecrate their gain unto the LORD, and their substance unto the Lord of the whole earth. So that, when they expected to destroy her, she destroyed them! And there may come a day when all the great men and the wise men and the proud men of the world will come together to destroy the Church of Christ, but, oh, how mistaken they will be! For when their pride is at its height, then will the poor weak Church of Christ be suddenly strengthened by the Most High and she shall tread them under her feet and they shall be utterly defeated to the praise of the Glory of the God of Zion who lives forever and ever!