

# The Vanguard and Rearward of the Church

by C.H. Spurgeon

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*The Church's warfare is a reliance on Jehovah as its vanguard and rearward, and its ultimate goal is to gather up all things in one, whether they be things in heaven or things on earth.*

**Duration:** 39:27

**Scripture:** Exodus 23:28, Deuteronomy 7:1-2, Psalm 68:1-2, Isaiah 43:1, Micah 5:2, Matthew 3:1-2, Romans 5:8

**Topics:** "Church Triumph", "Faith Assurance"

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## Description

In this sermon, the preacher begins by describing the victory of Zion over its oppressors, emphasizing the power of God in saving and freeing the people. The sermon then shifts to discussing the challenges faced by the church in the present and the future. The preacher suggests that the church's journey through the world with God leading the way is a subject worthy of an epic poem. Despite the trials and persecutions faced by the church, the preacher encourages believers to take comfort in the fact that God is with them and has overcome their enemies. The sermon concludes with a call to action, urging believers to rise up, have faith, and continue their journey with confidence.

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## Transcript

The Prince of Preachers Charles Haddon Spurgeon has been called England's greatest contribution to the spread of the Gospel in the 19th century. One of his contemporaries said that the chief secret of Spurgeon's attractiveness was the fact that in every sermon, no matter what the text or the occasion, he explained the way of salvation in simple terms. Spurgeon's messages remain one of the great treasure houses of Christian literature, still bringing the light of the Gospel and the comfort of the Scriptures to hungry souls long after the preacher has passed into glory.

This is Charles Kelch inviting you to listen to a message from the Prince of Preachers. C. H. Spurgeon preached this message on December 26, 1858, in the Music Hall of the Royal Surrey Gardens. It is entitled, The Vanguard and Rearward of the Church.

The text is found in Isaiah 52, verse 12. The Lord will go before you, and the God of Israel will be your rearward. The Church of Christ is continually represented under the figure of an army, yet its captain is the Prince of Peace.

Its object is the establishment of peace, and its soldiers are men of a peaceful disposition. The spirit of war is at the extremely opposite point to the spirit of the Gospel. Yet, nevertheless, the Church on earth has,

and until the second advent must be, the Church militant, the Church armed, the Church warring, the Church conquering.

And how is this? It is in the very order of things that so it must be. Truth could not be truth in this world if it were not a warring thing, and we should at once suspect that it were not true if error were friends with it. The spotless purity of truth must always be at war with the blackness of heresy and lies.

I say again, it would cast a suspicion upon its own nature. We should feel at once that it was not true if it were not at enmity with the false. And so, at this present time, the Church of Christ, being in herself the only incarnation of truth left upon this world, must be at war with error of every kind of shape.

Or if she were not, we should at once conclude that she was not herself the Church of the living God. It is but a rule of nature that holiness must be at enmity with sin. That would be but a mock purity which could lie side by side with iniquity and claim its kinship.

Shall the throne of iniquity have fellowship with thee? Shall Christ and Belial walk together? Shall the holy be linked with the unholy? If it were so, beloved, we might then not only suspect that the Church was not the holy, universal and apostolic Church, we might not only suspect it, but we might beyond suspicion pronounce a verdict upon her. Thou art no more Christ's bride. Thou art an antichrist, an apostate.

Reprobate silver shall men call thee, because thou hast not learned to distinguish between the precious and the vile. Thus, you see, if the Church be a true Church and a holy Church, she must be armed. There are so many untrue things and unholy things that she must be perpetually with her sword in her hand, carrying on combat against them.

And every child of God proveth by experience that this is the land of war. We are not yet come to the time when every man shall sit under his vine and under his fig tree, none daring to make him afraid. The mountains do not bring peace to the people, nor the little hills of righteousness.

On the contrary, the children of God hear the sound of war. The shrill clarion is constantly sounding in their ears. They are compelled to carry with them the sword and the shield, and constantly to gird their armor on.

For they are not yet come to the land of peace. They are in an enemy's country, and every day will convince them that such is their position. Now, how comforting is this text to the believer who recognizes himself as a soldier and the whole Church as an army.

The Church has its vanguard. Jehovah will go before you. The Church is also in danger behind.

Enemies may attack her in her hinder part, and the God of Israel shall be her rearward, so that the army is safe from enemies in front, and God alone knoweth their strength. And it is also perfectly secure from any foes behind, however malicious and powerful they may be, for Jehovah is in the van, and the covenant God of Israel is behind. Therefore, the whole army is safe.

I shall first consider this as it respects the Church of God, and then, in the second place, I shall endeavor to consider it as it respects us as individual believers. May God comfort our hearts while considering this precious truth. First, consider the whole Church of God as an army.

Remember that part of the hosts have crossed the flood. A large part of the army are standing this day upon the hills of glory, having overcome and triumphed. As for the rear, it stretches far into the future.

Some portions are as yet uncreated. The last of God's elect are not perhaps yet in existence. The rear guard will be brought up in that day when the last vessel of mercy is full to the brim of grace, the last prodigal is restored to his father's house, and the last of Christ's redeemed ones, redeemed by power as they were of old redeemed by blood.

Now, cast your eyes forward to the front of the great army of God's elect, and you see this great truth coming up with great brilliance before you. Jehovah shall go before you. Is not this true? Have you never heard of the eternal counsel and of the everlasting covenant? Did not that go before the Church? Yea, my brethren, it went before manhood's existence, before the creation of this world that was to be the stage whereon the Church should play its part, before the formation of the universe itself, when as yet all things that we now behold were unborn, when God lived alone in solitary majesty without a fellow, when there were no creatures.

If there were such an eternity, an eternity filled with the Creator, and not one creature with Him, even then it was that God determined in His mind that He would form a people to Himself who should show forth His praise. It was then that He settled how men should be redeemed. It was then the counsel of peace was held between the three divine persons, and it was determined that the Father should give the Son, that the Son should give Himself, that the Holy Spirit should be the active agent to fetch out all the lost sheep and restore them to the fold.

Oh, think, beloved, of that great text which says, His goings forth were of old, even from everlasting. Do not think that the gospel is a new thing. It is older than your hoary mountains, nay, it is older than the firstborn sons of light.

Before that beginning, when God created the heavens and the earth, there was another beginning, for in the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. And assuredly, the gospel was ever in the Word, for Jesus was set up from everlasting as the great Head of the covenant of grace. Behold, then, the glorious Jehovah in the Trinity of His persons, treading the pathless depths of eternity, that a way for His elect might be prepared herein.

He has gone before us. Take another view of the case. Jehovah shall go before you.

Has He not gone before His church and act and deed? Perilous has been the journey of the church from the day when it first left Paradise, even until now. When the church left Paradise, I say, for I believe that Adam and Eve were in the church of God, for I believe that both of them were redeemed souls, chosen of God and precious. I see God give the promise to them before they leave the garden, and they go out from the garden, the church of God.

Since that time, what a path has the church had to tread! But how faithfully has Jehovah led the way! We see the floods gather round about her, but even then she floats safely in the ark, which Jehovah had provided for her beforehand, for the Lord has gone before her. I see the church going out from Ur of Achaldes. It is but a little church, with the patriarch Abraham at its head.

I see that little church dwelling in an enemy's country, moving to and fro. But I observe how the Lord is its constant leader. When they went from one nation to another, from one kingdom to another people, He

suffered no man to do them wrong.

Yea, He reprov'd kings for their sakes, saying, Touch not mine anointed, and do my prophets no harm. I see the church afterwards going down to the land of the cruel Pharaohs. It was a black part of her pilgrimage, for she was going to the lash of the taskmaster and to the heat of the burning fiery furnace.

But I see Joseph going down before Jehovah's great representative. Joseph goeth down into Egypt, and he saith, God sent me before you to provide a place for you in the time of famine. So sings the psalmist.

He sent a man before them, even Joseph, who was sold for a servant. Whose feet they hurt with fetters, he was laid in iron. Until the time that his word came, the word of the Lord tried him.

The king sent and loosed him, even the ruler of the people, and let him go free. He made him the lord of his house, and ruler of all his substance, to bind his princes at his pleasure, and teach his senators wisdom. Israel also came into Egypt, and Jacob sojourn'd in the land of Ham.

But now the church has come up out of Egypt, and God goes before her still. But made his own people to go forth like sheep, and guided them in the wilderness like a flock. And he led them on safely, so that they feared not.

But the sea overwhelmed their enemies. The Red Sea is before them. Jehovah goes in front and dries up the sea.

The desert must then be trodden. Jehovah marches in front and scatters manna with both his hands. He splits the rock and sends out a living stream.

For forty years the church wanders there. Jehovah is with them. The fiery cloud pillar leads them all their journey through.

And now they come to the banks of Jordan. They are about to enter into the promised land. Jehovah goes before them, and the Jordan is driven back, and the floods are dry.

They came into the country of the mighty ones, the sons of Anak, men that were of the race of giants. But Jehovah was gone before them. The hornet was sent, and the pestilence, so that when they came, they said it was a land that did eat up the inhabitants thereof.

For God Himself, with the sword and the pestilence, was mowing down their foes, that they might be an easier victory. And He brought them to the border of His sanctuary, even to this mountain, which His right hand had purchased. He cast out the heathen also before them, and divided them in inheritance by line, and made the tribes of Israel to dwell in their tents.

But why need I go through all the pages of the history of the church of God in the days of the old dispensation? Hath it not been true from the days of John the Baptist until now? Brethren, how can you account for the glorious triumphs of the church if you deny the fact that God is gone before her? I see the church emerge, as it were, from the bowels of Christ. Twelve fishermen! What are these to do? Do? Why, they are to shake the world, to uproot old systems of paganism that have become venerable, and whose antiquity seems a guarantee that men will never renounce them. These men are to blot out the name of Jupiter.

They are to cast Venus from her licentious throne. They are to pull down the temple of Delphos, scatter all the oracles, and disrobe the priests. These men are to overthrow a system and an empire of error that has stood for thousands of years a system which has brought into its help all the philosophy of learning and all the pomp of power.

These twelve fishermen are to do it. And they have done it. They have done it.

The gods of the heathens are cast down. They only remain among us as memorials of men's folly. But who bows down to Jupiter now? Where is the worshipper of Ashtaroth? Who calls Diana a divinity? The twelve fishermen have done it.

They have erased from the world the old system of superstition. It seemed old as the eternal hills, yet had they dug up its foundations and scattered them to the winds. Could they have accomplished it unless Jehovah had been in the van and led the way? No, beloved.

If you read the history of the church, you will be compelled to confess that whenever she went forward, she could discern the footsteps of Jehovah leading the way. Our missionaries in these later times tell us that when they went to the South Seas to preach the gospel, there was an evident preparedness in the minds of the people for the reception of the truth. And I believe that at this time, if the church were true to herself, there are nations and people and tribes that are just in the condition of the ancient Canaanites.

The hornet is among them, making way for the Lord's army to win an easy conquest. But sure I am that never minister ascends the pulpit, if he be a true minister of Christ. Never missionary crosses the sea, never Sunday school teacher goes to his work, but that Jehovah goes before him to help him if he goes in earnest prayer and constant faith.

If I were a poet, I think I have a subject that might suggest a grand epic poem. The march of the church through the world with Jehovah in her forefront. See, when first she comes forth, the kings of the earth stand up and the rulers take counsel together against the Lord and against his anointed.

Alas, poor church, what is now thy fate? But I hear a voice ahead. What is it? It is a laugh. Who laughs? Why, the leader of the army laughs.

He that sitteth in heaven shall laugh at them. The Lord shall have them in derision. And shall we that are behind be mourning? Shall the church tremble? Let her call to mind the days of old and comfort herself that the breaker hath gone up before her and the king at the head of her.

But the enemy approaches. They bring out the rack, the bloody sword, the burning faggot. The march of the church lies through the flames.

The floods must be thwarted. Torments must be endured. Did the church ever stop a moment in its march for all the martyrdoms that fell upon her like drops of a fiery shower? Never, never did the church seem to march on with feet so ready.

Never were her steps so firm as when she dipped her foot each time in blood and every moment passed through the fire. It was the marvel of those days that men were better Christians then and more willing to make a profession of Christ than they are even now. And whereas this seems to be the day of cravens, the time of persecution was the age of heroes, the time of the great and the bold.

And why? Because God had come beforehand with His church and provided stores of grace for stores of trouble, shelter and mercy for tempests, abundance of strength for a superfluity of trial. Happy is the church because God has gone before her. Whether it were over the tops of the mountains where her pastors fell frozen by the cold, or whether it were in the depths of the dungeon where her confessors expired upon the rack, whether it were in the flame or at the block, everywhere God went before His church and she came forth triumphant because her great vanguard had cleared the way.

And now, beloved, we come to the sweet part of the text which says, And the God of Israel shall be the rearward. The original Hebrew is, God of Israel shall gather you up. Armies in the time of war diminish by reason of stragglers, some of whom desert and others of whom are overcome by fatigue.

But the army of God is gathered up. None desert from it if they be real soldiers of the cross, and none drop down upon the road. The God of Israel gathers them up.

He who goes before, like a shepherd before the flock, providing pasture for them, comes behind that He may gather the lambs in His arms, that He may gently lead those that are with young. The God of Israel is your rearward. Now the church of Christ has been frequently attacked in the rear.

It often happens that the enemy, tired of opposing the onward march by open persecution, attempts to malign the church concerning something that has either been taught or revealed or done in past ages. Now the God of Israel is our rearward. I am never at trouble about the attacks of infidels or heretics, however vigorously they may assault the doctrines of the gospel.

I will leave them alone. I have no answer for their logic. If they look to be resisted by mere reason, they look in vain.

I have the simple answer of an affirmation grounded upon the fact that God had said it. It is the only warfare I will enter into with them. If they must attack the rear, let them fight with Jehovah Himself.

If the doctrines of the gospel be as base as they say they are, let them cast discredit upon God, who revealed the doctrines. Let them settle the question between God's supreme wisdom and their own pitiful pretensions to knowledge. It is not for Christian men to fear about the rear of the church.

The doctrines of the gospel, which are like the heavy baggage carried in the rear, or like the great guns kept behind against the time when they are wanted in the hour of battle, these are quite safe. The Amalekites may fall upon the stuff, or the Philistines may attack the ammunition, all is safe, for God is in the rearward. Let them but appear against our rear, and they shall instantly be put to the rout.

But I am thinking that perhaps the later trials of the church may represent the rearward. There are to come, perhaps, to the church, in days that are approaching, fiercer persecutions than she has ever known. We cannot tell.

We are no pretenders to prophecy, but we know that it always has been so with the church. A time of prosperity, and then a period of persecution. She has a Solomon, and she reigns in all her glory under his shadow.

But in after years, Antiochus oppresses her, and she needs a Judas Maccabeus to deliver her. Perhaps we are living in an age too soft for the church. The Capuan holidays that ruined the soldiers of Hannibal may ruin the church now.

Ease and lack of persecution may put us off our guard. Perhaps there may come yet fiercer times for us. I know not what is meant by the battle of Armageddon, but sometimes I fear we are to expect trouble and trial in years to come.

But certain I am, however fierce those troubles shall be, that God, who has gone before His church in olden times, will gather up the rear, and she who has been ecclesia victrix, the church, the conqueror, will still be the same, and her rear shall constitute at last a part of the church triumphant, even as already glorified. Can you now conceive the last great day when Jehovah the rearward shall gather up His people? The time has come. The last of the salt is about to be removed.

The church of God is now about to be carried up to dwell with her husband. Do you see the church moving upwards towards heaven? Behind her she leaves the world in flames. She sees the earth destroyed.

God removes it as a shepherd's tent. The inhabitants thereof are gone, and the tent must be folded up. As a vesture shall they be folded up, and they shall be changed.

But between the church and a blazing world, between the church and the terrible destruction of hell, there is the bright pillar of God's presence, black to His enemies behind, but bright to His church in front. The close of the great dispensation of the mediator shall be that the God of Israel shall be all in all. His church shall be completely safe.

He shall have gathered up all things in one, whether they be things in heaven or things on earth. Then shall the sonnet of the poet be more than fulfilled to the rejoicing and perfected church. Daughter of Zion, Awake from thy sadness! Awake, for thy foes shall oppress thee no more.

Bright o'er the hills dawns the day-star of gladness. Arise, for the night of thy sorrow is o'er. Strong were thy foes, but the arm that subdued them and scattered their legions was mightier by far.

They fled like the chaff from the scourge that pursued them. Vain were their steeds and their chariots of war. Daughter of Zion, the power that hath saved thee, extolled with the harp and the timbrel should be.

Shout, for the foe is destroyed and enslaved thee. The oppressor is vanquished, and Zion is free. Let us turn now to the second part of the sermon.

Two troubles present themselves, the future and the past. We have had mercies, but still we find this house of our pilgrimage is not an abiding city, not a mansion of peace and comfort. Perhaps we are trembling to go forward, for seeing trouble we know not how we shall be able to endure to the end.

We are standing here, pausing for a while, sitting down upon the stone of our ebenezer to rest ourselves, gazing dubiously into the future, saying, Alas, what shall I do? Surely I shall one day fall by the hand of the enemy. Brother, arise! Arise! Anoint your head and wash your face, and fast no longer. Let this sweet morsel now cheer you.

Put this bottle to your lips, and let your eyes be enlightened. The Lord Jehovah will go before you. He hath gone before you already.

Your future path has all been marked out in the great decrees of His predestination. You shall not tread a step which is not mapped out in the great chart of God's decree. Your troubles have been already weighed for you in the scales of His love.

Your labor is already set aside for you to accomplish by the hand of His wisdom. Depend upon it. Your times of trial and of grief, your times of joy and sweet relief, all shall come and last and end, as shall please your heavenly friend.

Remember, you are not a child of chance. If you were, you might indeed fear. You will go nowhere in the days ahead except where God shall send you.

You shall be thrust into the hot coals of fire, but God shall put you there. You shall perhaps be much depressed in spirit, but that heaviness shall be for your good and shall come from your Father. You shall have the rod, but it shall not be the rod of the wicked.

It shall be in God's hand. Oh, how comfortable the thought that everything is in the hand of God and that all that may occur to me during the future years of my life is foreordained and overruled by the great Jehovah, who is my Father and my friend. Now stop, Christian, a moment, and realize the idea that God has gone before mapping the way.

And then let me ask you if you could now this morning be allowed to draw a fresh map. Would you do it? If He should condescend to say, Now your circumstances next year shall be just what you like. You shall have your own way and go your own route to heaven.

Would you dare, even with God's permission, to draw a new chart? If you should have that presumption, I know the result. You would find that you had gone the wrong way. You would soon be glad enough to retrace your steps, and with many tears you would go to your Heavenly Father and would say, My Father, I have had enough to do with the helm of this ship.

It is hard work to hold it. Do what Thou wilt with it. Steer which way Thou pleasest, though it be through the deepest floods and the hottest flame.

I am weary. I sleep at the tiller. I cannot guide the ship.

My tears fall fast from my eyes. For when I think to be wise, I find myself to have committed folly. When I thought I was promoting my own advantage in my scheme, I find that I am rushing into a sea of losses.

God, then, has gone before you in the decree of His predestination. And recollect, God has gone before you in all your future journey, in the actual preparations of His providence. I do not think I am capable this morning, for my mind seems to wander far more than I could desire, of sketching how it is, but so it is, that God always makes a providence beforehand, ready for His people when they get to the place.

My God does not hastily erect a tent over me when I come to a certain spot. No, He builds an inn of mercy, and before I get there, He provides a bed of comfort and stores up the old wines of grace that I may feast upon them. And all this is done long before I come to the actual necessity.

None of us can tell how the future leans on the past, how a simple act of today shall bring about a grand event in a hundred years. We do not know how the future lies in the bowels of the past, and how what is to be is the child of that which is. As all men spring from their progenitors, so the providence of today springs from the providence of a hundred years past.

The events of next year have been forestalled by God in what He has done this year and years before. I am certain of this, that on the road I am to travel in the days ahead. Everything is ready for me.

I am not going a road of hills and deep valleys, but I have heard the voice of one crying in the wilderness, Prepare ye the way of the Lord, make straight in the desert a highway for our God. 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. I will open rivers in high places, and fountains in the midst of the valleys.

I will make the wilderness a pool of water, and the dry land springs of water, and I will bring the blind by a way that they knew not. I will lead them in paths that they have not known. I will make darkness light before them, and crooked things straight.

These things will I do unto them, and not forsake them. I say again, you are not going through a land that God has not prepared for you. O Israel, there is a well of Elam made for you long before you came out of Egypt.

There are palm trees that have been growing there, that they might just come to the fruit-bearing stage and have fruit upon them when you come there. O Israel, God is not going to extemporize a Canaan for you. It is ready-made.

It is even now flowing with milk and honey. The vines that are to bear you grapes of Eshcol are there already and coming to perfection. God has forestalled your trials and troubles for the next year.

The Lord Jehovah has gone before you. There is also another phase of this subject. Jehovah has gone before us in the incarnation of Christ.

As to our future troubles, the remnant of our days, Jesus Christ has borne them all. As for temptation, He has been tempted in all points like as we are, yet without sin. As for trials and sorrows, He has felt all we can possibly feel, and infinitely more.

As for our difficulties, Christ has trodden the road before. We may rest quite sure that we shall not go anywhere where Christ has not gone. The way of God's people in Providence is the exact track of Christ Himself.

The footsteps of the flock are identical with the footsteps of the shepherd, so far as they follow the leading and guidings of God. And there is this reflection also, that inasmuch as Christ has gone before us, He has done something in that going before, for He has conquered every foe that lies in His way. Cheer up now, thou faint-hearted warrior! Not only has Christ travelled the road, but He has slain thine enemies.

Dost thou dread sin? He has nailed it to His cross. Dost thou dread death? He has been the death of death. Art thou afraid of hell? He has barred it against the advent of any of His children.

They shall never see the gulf of perdition. Whatever foes may be before the Christian, they are all overcome. There are lions, but their teeth are broken.

There are serpents, but their fangs are extracted. There are rivers, but they are bridged or fordable. There are flames, but we have upon us that matchless garment which renders us invulnerable to fire.

The sword that has been forged against us is already blunted. The instruments of war which the enemy is preparing have already lost their point. God has taken away in the person of Christ all the power that anything can have to hurt us.

Well then, the army may safely march on, and you may go joyously along your journey, for all your enemies are conquered beforehand. What shall you do but march on to take the prey? They are beaten, they are vanquished. All you have to do is divide the spoil.

Your future life shall be only the dividing of the spoil. You shall, it is true, often dread combat, and you shall sometimes have to wield a spear. But your fight shall be with a vanquished foe.

His head is broken. He may attempt to injure you, but his strength shall not be sufficient for his malicious design. Your victory shall be easy, and your treasure shall be beyond all count.

Come boldly on, then, for Jehovah shall go before you. This shall be our sweet song when we come to the river of death. Black are its streams, and there are terrors there of which I cannot dream.

But shall I fear to go through the stream if Jehovah goes before me? There may be goblins of frightful shape, there may be horrors of hellish hue, but thou, Jehovah, shalt clear the way. Thou shalt bid each enemy be gone, and each fiend shall flee at thy bidding. I may march safely on.

So confident would I feel in this great vanguard that shouldst thou bid me go through hell itself, I need not fear all the terrors of the place of doom. For if Jehovah went before, he would tread out even to the last spark, the fire. He would quench even to the last flame, that burning.

And the child of God might march safely through the flame that had been quenched and the ashes that were extinguished. Let us, therefore, never be troubled about the future. It is all safe, for Jehovah has gone before.

Now I hear one say, The future seldom troubles me, sir. It is the past. What I have done and what I have not done, the years that are gone, how I have sinned and how I have not served my master as I ought, these things grieve me, and sometimes my old sins start up in my recollection and accuse me.

What, shalt thou be saved, say they? Remember us. And they spring up in number like the sands of the sea. I cannot deny that I have committed all these sins, nor can I say that they are not the most guilty of iniquities.

Oh, it is the rearward that is most unsafe. I dread most the sins of the past. O beloved, the God of Israel shall be your rearward.

Notice the different titles. The first is The Lord, or, properly, Jehovah. Jehovah will go before you.

That is the I AM, full of omniscience and omnipotence. The second title is God of Israel. That is to say, the God of the Covenant.

We want the God of the Covenant behind, because it is not in the capacity of the I AM, the omnipotent, that we require Him to pardon sin, to accept our persons, to blot out the past and to remove iniquity by the blood of Christ. It is as the God of the Covenant that He does that. He goes behind.

Here He finds that His child has left a black mark, and He takes that away. Here He finds a heap of rubbish, a mass of broken good works, and here another load of evil, of filth. And He carefully removes all, so that in that track of His children there is not a spot or a blemish.

And though they have trodden the road, the most observant of their foes at the last great day shall not be able to find that they have done any mischief on the journey or one wrong thing in all their march, for the God of Israel hath so swept away that He hath taken away their iniquities and cast their sins behind His back. Now let me always think that I have God behind me as well as before me. Let not the memories of the past, though they cause me grief, cause me despair.

Let me never be moaned because of past trial or past bereavement. Let me never be cast down on account of past sin. But let me look to Christ for the pardon of the past and to God for the sanctification of my past troubles.

Let me believe that He who has cleared the way before me has removed all enemies from behind me, that I am and must be perpetually safe. And now, are there any here today whose hearts God hath touched who desire to join this great army? Have I one here who has been enlisted in the black army of the devil and has long been fighting his way against God and against right? I pray that he may be compelled this day to ground his arms and surrender at discretion to God. Sinner, if the Lord inclined thine heart this day to yield up thyself to Him, the past shall all be blotted out.

God shall be thy rearward. As for thy innumerable sins, leave them to Christ. He will make short work of them.

By His blood He will slay them all. They shall not be mentioned against thee forever. And as for the future, thou chief of sinners, if now thou enlistest in the army of Christ by faith, thou shalt find the future shall be strewn with the gold of God's grace and the silver of His temporal mercies.

Thou shalt have enough and despair from this day forth even to the end. And at the last thou shalt be gathered in by the great arms of God that constitute the rearguard of His heavenly army. Come, ye chief of sinners, come away to Christ.

He now invites you to come to Him. He asks nothing of you as a preparation. Christ's regiment is made up of men that are in debt and are discontented.

The ragtag of the world Christ will take. The scum, the dross, the awful of the universe Christ loves. The sweepings of our dens of iniquity, the very leavings of the devil's mill Christ is willing to receive.

The chief of sinners, those who have been ministers in guilt, abortions of iniquity. Come to Him. Lay hold of Him by faith.

Look to Him as He hangs upon the tree. Believe in His merits, and then shall this promise be yours with innumerable others that are rich beyond all estimation. And you shall rejoice that Jehovah is gone before you and that the God of Israel shall be your rearward.

This message, The Vanguard and Rearward of the Church, was preached by Charles Haddon Spurgeon on December 26, 1858. This is Charles Kelsch inviting you to join me again for another message from the Prince of Preachers.

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