

'The Controversy of Zion'

by T. Austin-Sparks

The sermon explores the deep spiritual significance of Zion as a symbol of God's calling and the ongoing controversy surrounding the Lordship of Jesus Christ.

Scripture: Psalm 2:6, Isaiah 30:8, Hebrews 12:22

Topics: "Spiritual Warfare", "The Controversy of Zion"

Description

T. Austin-Sparks emphasizes the significance of Zion as a spiritual center and the ongoing controversy surrounding it, highlighting that Zion represents the absolute lordship of Jesus Christ. He explains that the spiritual condition of God's people directly influences their standing in the world, and that the church is engaged in a battle against the world spirit that opposes the testimony of Jesus. Sparks warns that this controversy is not merely historical but continues to manifest in the present, with the church facing intense spiritual pressure and confusion. He calls for believers to recognize their role in this spiritual conflict and to stand firm in their testimony of Christ's lordship. Ultimately, the sermon serves as a reminder of the importance of spiritual readiness and the need for divine intervention in the face of opposition.

Transcript

Dear Lord, in no formal way, no mere custom, but in a very deep and strong consciousness of need, we pray. We must pray. We are this morning allowing ourselves to be put under new responsibility. If Thou shouldst Speak, as we have asked Thee to do, then the Words that Thou dost Speak will judge us in that day. We realize that it is no small thing even to allow ourselves to hear the Lord Speak, but, Lord, it is a matter of capacity also. We cannot understand unless the Spirit of wisdom and understanding gives us the ability. Things are going to be said which may be the truth, and we will not understand unless something is done by Thee in us. And we certainly cannot follow through in obedience unless Thou, Lord, dost do this thing. As Thou didst Say to a very beloved disciple, "You cannot follow Me now, whither I go you cannot follow Me now. You shall afterward." That "cannot" is over us and on us. We cannot follow through unless, Lord, there is something done by Thee.

Now all this we bring, and what is true of hearing and obeying is just as much true of speaking. We are not authorities. We are not teachers. We cannot speak unless Thou, Lord, dost the Speaking. The anointing must do it. We submit ourselves that this time shall be an anointed time, a Holy Spirit time, in both ways and all ways. It shall be the Lord this morning. Grant it that the Glory may come to Thee and any fruit may accrue to Thy Glory. In the Name of the Lord Jesus, we ask this, Amen.

We return to continue with that first fragment of Hebrews, chapter twelve, verse twenty-two: "But ye are come unto Mount Zion, and unto the city of the Living God, the heavenly Jerusalem."--"Ye are come to Mount Zion." Now for this morning, I want to link that fragment with one or two other passages of Scripture. First of all, back in the prophecies of Isaiah, chapter thirty at verse eight: "Now go, write it before them on a tablet, and inscribe it in a book, that it may be for the time to come for ever and ever." And then will you turn to the Second Psalm, and I want you to read this psalm, perhaps we will begin at verse six. "Yet have I set My King upon My holy hill of Zion. I will tell of the decree: the Lord said unto Me, Thou art My Son; this day have I begotten Thee."

Now you keep that psalm in mind, please, as we go on. All the rest of it, from that verse and before, take a glance; but I want you now to turn to the Letter to the Romans, and to your great favorite, chapter eight, at verse nineteen: "For the earnest expectation of the creation waiteth for the revealing of the sons of God. For the creation was subjected to vanity, not of its own will, but by reason of Him Who subjected it, in hope that the creation itself also shall be delivered from the bondage of corruption into the liberty of the glory of the children of God." Now I am leaving that and going on to verse twenty-nine: "For whom He foreknew, He also foreordained to be conformed to the image of His Son, that He might be the Firstborn among many brethren: and whom He foreordained, them He also called: and whom He called, them He also justified: and whom He justified, them He also glorified."

Now between those two portions that we have just read, we have this, verse twenty-two and twenty-three: "For we know that the whole creation groaneth and travaileth in pain together until now. And not only so, but ourselves also, who have the firstfruits of the Spirit, even we ourselves groan within ourselves, waiting for our adoption, the redemption of our body."

We are occupied with what we have come to, "Ye are come," and we have been thinking about Zion, the Zion to which we are come. We have said seven things about Zion, seven things to which we have come, constituting this position; and I come to the eighth this morning, which is of very serious and solemn moment. I feel that if the Lord gets His Word through this morning, very largely (so far as this ministry is concerned) the conference may hang upon it. It is the most practical issue in this whole consideration, position,--what we have come to in coming to Zion. Here, as you note, in this passage in Hebrews, Zion and Jerusalem look to be synonymous. "You have come to Zion... to the heavenly Jerusalem." In this whole section, you are not dealing with different things in these various matters of dimension. This is all of one. It is all one thing. Here Zion and Jerusalem come together, are spoken of as being one, and that gives us our starting point for this present consideration.

Zion-Jerusalem: the Storm Center of the Nations

Zion, as the heart of Jerusalem; as the very essence of all that Jerusalem was intended to be; as the real spiritual meaning of Jerusalem; the concentrated point of all that Jerusalem represented; Zion-Jerusalem, in history and in the nations, has always been the storm center, the storm center of history, the storm center of the nations. Of course, it would take a long time for us to even look generally at the history of Jerusalem. You can do that at any time, but how many sieges, how many investments, how much was Jerusalem the object and center of world attention and concern! Again and again and again, eyes were turned toward Jerusalem, for Jerusalem's destruction, for Jerusalem's wiping out, for Jerusalem's possession. A long, troubled history is the history of Jerusalem, even to our own time. It is a world center of conflict and controversy. That fact everybody recognizes. Zion, what the prophet calls, "the controversy of Zion."

Zion-Jerusalem has been a controversial object in history and in the nations all the way along. It is extraordinary. You wonder, "Why? It is not such a wonderful city, is it? It is not so great. How long would it take you to walk across it, or even to walk around it? What was it, and what is it? Perhaps it is a better specimen of world cities today, so far as structure is concerned and modernization. But what was it and, even now, what is it?" How can it compare with London, New York, Paris, and any of these others you might mention? They might be centers of attraction, truly. There was a tremendous battle in our own lifetime to get hold of London. Oh, if you had been in the battle of London, you would have known. Fourteen months, day and night, without cessation, a city bombed, fired upon, attacked, assailed. If you had been in that, and seen it happening, great areas going up in dust and smoke, you would have said, "Well, London is an object. It counts for something." Of course, most of you people know nothing about it in that way. I hope you never will.

But Jerusalem,--what is Jerusalem? What is that? Not once or twice in a lifetime, but right through the long history of centuries there has been a controversy over Zion; and if you look closer and look into it more carefully, you will come to see this--that Zion, or Jerusalem, was always a sign. It was a sign. There was a significance attached to it, and the significance was not its temporal aspects of buildings and structures and economies and so on. Why, Babylon could go far beyond all that. But Zion's significance was a spiritual thing, for you notice this: whenever the spiritual life of Jerusalem, as representing the people, the nation, whenever the spiritual life was right; whenever it was a matter of right standing with God; Jerusalem was in the ascendancy. Attack if you like, let the hoards of Babylon, or Assyria, come against Jerusalem and encamp. There is a Hezekiah inside! There is a people inside who are right with the Lord! waiting on the Lord! crying to the Lord! making the Lord their trust! And so much the worse for Assyria, for Babylon. In a night, their hosts are wiped out by the Angel of the Lord. When things are spiritually right, it does not matter how fierce, forceful, and great the assault--the antagonism--they stand, they come through.

But from time to time, it was not like that inside. The spiritual state was low. There was declension. There was wrong. The standing before God was not right, and then Jerusalem was always in weakness, always in fear, always in dread. Weakened from the inside, spiritually it could not stand; and at last, at last, after more than one successful assault, or breaking down; at last, simply because of this poor, low, spiritual condition, Jerusalem is destroyed. Finally destroyed, that is, robbed of its place in the Divine economy and purpose. Zion is a sign of a spiritual condition. It has always been such a sign, a barometer of spiritual life.

It is absolutely useless, dear friends, to refer to tradition and say, "Well, God did this in the beginning, and this is the place where the oracles of God are found and the temple of God is and the great tradition of Israel as the chosen people. It is here, and we rest on that." No, tradition will not support now. History will not support now. Institutions will not support now. It seems as though God has no regard, at length, for temple or ark or altar or priesthood. He cries through the prophets: "Away, away with you. I want none of your sacrifices." Isaiah 58. What a chapter! "Cry aloud, spare not, lift up thy voice." Then, what follows? "Yet they seek Me daily, and delight to know My ways." "I will have none of it, says the Lord. I will have none of it. These are not the sacrifices I want. This ritual is not what I am after. This traditional system is not what I desire. It is a spiritual state." And only on that can the Lord associate Himself, ally Himself, to Zion.

I am saying that Zion has always been a sign of spiritual condition, and that has been made evident by whether there was ascendancy--ascendancy, the support of God--making them superior to every adverse force; or whether they were a shame among the nations, a reproach among the nations. With the

prophetic element pointing on to something else, as is always so in the prophets, you have Jerusalem crying, crying the great heart cry: "Woe is me. Woe is me. All ye that pass by, all ye that pass by, have pity. Have pity, all ye that pass by." What a tragic situation for Zion. A shame amongst the nations! And these two things, ascendancy or shame, glory or dishonour--right at the center of history and the nations--are bound up with a spiritual condition, are dependent upon a spiritual condition.

You know, there is a lot to be gathered into that statement, dear friends. But if you look again at this letter to the Hebrews, you will see that we are come to Zion. We are not come to some thing, some religious thing, some tradition, we are not come to historic Christianity--if I may put it that way--we are come to a spiritual situation which is calculated to startle us. Oh, we say, "We are in the day of Grace. This is the dispensation of Grace." True! Is the Letter to the Hebrews on any other ground than the ground of Grace? Surely not, but do you know that in this letter the most awful things in the Bible are written? "How shall we escape [we, we escape, we Christians, we believers of this dispensation] how shall we escape if we neglect so great salvation? ...our God is a consuming fire... it is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the Living God." This is said to these people, these Christians; and other things like that are said. But I am pointing this out, that this letter is written in the day of Grace; and it is a day which brings into view not some new Christian system, not the formation of a new Christian tradition, but a spiritual condition, without which everything else is as nothing. You have come to Zion, yes, but you have come to the controversy of Zion. You have come, we have come, to the great battle of Zion; and it is a spiritual battle. Where it is then. WHAT A BATTLE! That is the background of it all.

Well, now, I do not want to make you glum. I see your faces are getting a bit heavy, your chins are dropping, and you would think I am getting back to Sinai from Zion, but no, no, as I have said, this is a very solemn time. You are going to have a lot of teaching this week. It is not going to avail one little bit if there is not a corresponding spiritual position. So having said that and laid that as the background of all, it is the battle--the controversy--of Zion. And, what is the nature of this controversy? Let us look at one or two things about it, and I am working toward a very, very vital thing, which I trust we shall reach before we are finished.

What Is the Nature of the Controversy?

The nature of the battle? What was the nature of the battle with Israel, centered and represented by Zion-Jerusalem? It was the battle in relation to a calling and a vocation. They were called by God, they were chosen by God, they were an elect race [you see why we came to Romans eight], an elect race, a chosen people, in history on the earth they were the elect of God. Chosen and called and separated, what for? Just to be saved? Just to be different? Just to be that? No! for a vocation, a calling, a testimony in the world, a testimony among the nations. They were called for a mighty, heavenly vocation on the earth, to reveal God! what God is like! the reality of God! the glory of God! the holiness of God! the power of God! A vessel of testimony among the nations, to the nations--to the world. Zion, as we have been saying, is that which represents God's full thought for mankind. The fulness of God's thought is vested in, centered in, Zion, "the city of the Living God." And because of that, the battle starts.

In history, Zion was the city of David, God's anointed king. And do you notice the history of David? Up from birth... up? It looks like down and out... but, no, steadily, steadily up. Let all the forces of Saul and his malice, his devil-driven soul, be concentrated against this young man,--and what that young man suffered! You know the story. He seems to be a marked man, [as we say, I do not know whether you have the phrase in this country] "a speckled bird." He seems just right from the beginning to be a marked man. The

devil had put a mark on that man and was watching him, pursuing him. Poor David cries: "I am like a pelican of the wilderness... a sparrow upon the housetop." Oh yes, he is the object of a fierce and furious, relentless malice, meant for his undoing. But he holds on his way, steadily; not because he is so strong, for there were times when David broke down: "I shall now perish," I shall now be killed. He resorted to some subterfuges, was a man of like-passions with us, very human; nevertheless, through it all, whether it is in the land of the Philistines by compromise (a mistake from which God sovereignly delivered him) or wherever it is--in the cave of Adullam, in the wilderness driven hither and thither for his very life--wherever it is, his spiritual course is on and up, spiritually. It does not look like it outwardly, but on and up until eventually anointed, David comes to the place of the anointing, the throne; and Zion is the place of the consummation of that history of Divine election, Divine choice, Divine [dare I use the word in these days] foreordination. He is there, on the throne. He is in the place of the full thought of God, and that is centered in him. Zion is the place of the absolute sovereignty and Lordship of God's anointed. That is Zion, and we are come to Zion. We have been saying this: there is Another Greater than David that is here, and there is another Zion greater than that is here. But it is on that point, dear friends, just focused upon that one inclusive and consummate point of the Absolute Sovereign Lordship of Jesus Christ that all the conflict rages and is centered.

THE NATURE OF THE CONTROVERSY: THE ABSOLUTE LORDSHIP OF JESUS CHRIST

You turn to your New Testament, you know their message, as they went out into the world that then was, everywhere their message was, "Jesus Christ is Lord: we preach Jesus Christ as Lord." That brought them up against Cæsar, and all the Cæsars, because Cæsar said: "I am lord." The Roman Empire said: "Cæsar is lord," and they worshipped Cæsar; and the argument, contention, accusation, was--"These men are preaching another king but Cæsar." Ah, yes, that is where the controversy was, on this one thing: the Absolute Lordship of Jesus Christ. The controversy of Zion is on that point ultimately: God's Anointed.

Now you see why we read Psalm 2. "Why do the nations rage?"--Raging nations, we are coming to that in another connection shortly. The raging nations, the kings of the earth, gathering themselves together against the Lord and against His Anointed. "Let us cast their bonds from us, let us get rid of them. They are a menace, a menace."--"Yet I have set My King upon My Holy Hill of Zion." I have set My King! The raging, the storming, the controversy, focused about the Anointed One, in the Anointed One, God's Anointed.

But you notice, it was not very long in the New Testament, you only reach in Acts what is marked off mechanically by chapter 4 (and I have said this often, it is a very good thing to wipe those things out and read straight on, blind to the chapters), and you notice when you read chapter 4, as it is marked, you reach a point in the controversy, the controversy of Zion,--oh, the battle is on! The battle is on, the forces of evil and the forces in this world have set their mark upon this Anointed One and the proclamation of Him; and when they are at work killing James and imprisoning Peter, the Church meets, Zion gathers, Zion gathers. And what do they do? They quote the Second Psalm. They quote the Second Psalm to the Lord. "Lord, Lord," and then they quote, "Why do the heathen [or the nations] rage, and the people imagine a vain thing... against the Lord, and against His Anointed?" They quote it, and what happens? What happens? "The King is in His Holy Mount Zion": He intervenes, He intervenes. Oh, yes, Herod seems to have scored a great success in killing James; and he is so pleased with himself, and the people are so pleased with him, it seems he is going to do the whole business. He takes Peter and puts him in prison. That is all right. So much the worse for you, Herod. What is the end of that story? He was eaten of worms and died, and the next sentence: "But the Word of the Lord grew and multiplied." There is the Holy Hill of Zion and the

One Enthroned because there was right standing with God then. So they quoted Psalm 2, meaning that time has no place in this, geography has no place in this; but wheresoever there is a true representation of Zion, there may be assaults, seeming successes of the evil one and his powers, yet, the issue is with Him Who is in Zion. The issue is victory. God has set His Holy One upon His Holy Hill Zion. The Anointed is there.

THE NATURE OF THE CONTROVERSY: THE WORLD SPIRIT AGAINST THE TESTIMONY OF JESUS

Now, dear friends, you are listening to all this as Bible exposition. Perhaps I do not know what you are thinking, what your reactions are; but I know what I am after. I am after something, and I hope you will move with me to the object that we are seeking to reach. If we have come to Zion--and you have, perhaps, been very pleased with the seven things about Zion and have been saying, "Oh beautiful! oh, wonderful! oh, glorious! yes, Zion. Let's sing more about Zion. Let's have it as the city of our solemnities. Let's have some festivities!"--all right, all true, but you have to meet number eight. If we have come to Zion, we have come to the controversy of a spiritual position on the part of a people, the controversy of history over this people in union with the Ascended Exalted Lord. It is a controversial matter in this universe. Principalities, powers, the world rulers of this darkness, hosts of wicked spirits, all focused upon one thing: the denial of the Absolute Lordship of Jesus Christ; and the Church is the custodian of that testimony. That is our calling. That is the vocation of the people of God, to be that testimony. Against that the battle rages. All that is of the enemy forces is against the testimony of Jesus: a terrific battle is on for "the testimony of Jesus."

Well, that is the focal point of it, but then the battle, mark you, not only is in the atmosphere, so to speak (it is there, that is its realm, the heavenly places, the atmosphere, in a sense an abstract thing); but notice again, as in the type in the Old Testament, so in the spiritual reality in the New, this antagonism has its media, its vehicles, its channels, its means. And what is it? It is the world spirit. The world spirit, this evil world in its spirit.

I do not think we have really grasped what the New Testament has to say about this world. This world: it is an enemy of God. It is an enemy of all that is of God. "Love not the world, neither the things that are in the world." In a great cry from the heart of the Lord Jesus, the prayer just before the Cross is: "They are not of the world, even as I am not of the world." "I pray not that Thou shouldest take them out of the world, the geographical sphere that is called the world, but that Thou shouldest keep them from the evil" one who rules in it. No, this has not registered yet upon the Church. The world spirit--I think you must know something of what I mean.

You see, in the Old Testament, it was these world interests, world forces, the world, that was all the time against Zion. If you had asked them why, they would have had to sit down and think hard. "Why is it that we do not like that silly little city? Those people--who are they, what are they, why don't we like them?" They would have had difficulty in answering their own question, but there is something sinister behind it all. Those sinister intelligences know something. What do they know? They know what the elect is called for, and in the long run the enemy knows that the elect is going to be his undoing. He is going to lose his world power, his world title as prince of this world. He is going to lose it all at the hands of this One in Zion and through that corporate expression of His Sovereignty, His Lordship.--That Zion we are come to. He knows that, and if you are related to that, I am going to comfort you by telling you, "You are a marked man; you are a marked woman"; and do not succumb to second causes and say, "It is my landlord. It is this and that and something else." Oh, that may be the vehicle and the medium, but there is something much more

sinister than that behind it all. Our wrestling is not with flesh and blood, landlords, or anybody else, in the ultimate issue. Committees? Organizations? No, there is something behind all this. The world spirit. The world spirit.

I remember that Dr. Campbell Morgan in his lecture on the Letter to the Corinthians simply said this: "The whole reason for those conditions in Corinth--so shameful, so terrible, from which you turn from some matters in disgust and shame--it is because the world spirit in Corinth had got into the church." Well, there you are. The battle is with the world spirit. As in the old literally, so now in the new spiritually. I need not dwell upon 1 Corinthians, need I? The world spirit? The wisdom of this world: the apostle is up against that. The conception of power in this world: he is up against that. "The wisdom and the power of God are Jesus Christ," he says, "as Lord." All right, that is another line. Let us go on, and this is the final phase to which I so definitely want to get to this morning. It is what Romans eight, the parts we have read, brings us to as the very sum of all this that we are saying about the controversy of Zion.

THE NATURE OF THE CONTROVERSY: THE WHOLE CREATION TRAVAILETH, GROANETH?--FOR THE ELECT

The tumult of the nations. Psalm 2, of course, is the nations rage, the kings of the earth gather together: tumult in the nations. And the reason for it? Why the tumult in the nations? Is there anybody here this morning who would not agree with me when I have said the nations are in tumult just now?! Was there ever a time when the world, almost in its entirety, if not in its entirety, was in tumult as it is now? Tumult, not only in the peoples and the nations, but convulsions in nature. We have never had it like this, have we? All these convulsions. I do not know how much you are in touch with it, but somehow or other we know about it. The earthquakes, the famines, a disruption of seasons, and what not. There is, and it is the best word for it: "convulsions in the nations." Romans 8--"The whole creation gro-o-aneth."

"The whole creation groaneth and travaileth in pain together." There is an integration in a groan. It is integrated by this travail in the whole creation. "And not only so, but ourselves also, who have the firstfruits of the Spirit, even we ourselves groan within ourselves, waiting..." Waiting! The creation is groaning inwardly like this and travailing, if we had a spiritual ear to hear, groaning with us for something. It is subjected to vanity, not of its own will, but by the will of Him Who subjected it. What is it groaning for? What is this travail? To bring forth something, and what is it that is to be brought forth? Note the rest of the passage. The elect!

You come on that section, that great controversial section of Romans about predestination, foreordination, the election. Now do not come to me about that. I am not having anything to do with these systems of predestination or the rest of it. What I am saying is, there is such a thing as God's elect hidden, hidden in the nations. God knows. You do not know. I do not know, and I cannot tell you who is elect and who is not elect. God knows. They are there hidden, and within such there is this spirit of travail, longing, groaning: "Oh, that this vanity, void, not attaining, would be removed; and we should emerge, come out, be born." The travail should precipitate.

There we touch the heart of things. What are all these convulsions in the nations about, and in nature? As we are moving toward the end of the dispensation, why this tumult, convulsions? Why? Because God has something here that is not wanted here by this world and its prince. It is something like Jonah in the big fish. The moment or the hour came when the big fish said, "Oh, look here, what have I got inside? What is this that I have got?" And the fish got a most awful attack of dyspepsia. "Oh, to get rid of this. I will never

be comfortable until I have precipitated this that I have got inside. Let me get rid of this. Let me get this out." Of course, under the Sovereignty of God, he makes for shore "and vomited out Jonah upon the dry land." And I can think when that fish turned back into the sea he said, "Oh, there, now I feel all right. He is gone. He is gone."

Now am I exaggerating, imagining, but come back with me, to Israel in Egypt. What is happening? Convulsion after convulsion in Egypt. Convulsion, under the Sovereignty of God, yes, so that steadily, gradually, persistently, Egypt is coming to the place: "Oh, won't it be a good day and a good thing when we get rid of these people." You notice what happens at the end? "They were thrust out!" "They precipitated them, they vomited them out"; and I suppose although Pharaoh's army pursued to bring them back, the many (if not all) in Egypt said, "Thank God, they have not succeeded and brought those people back again. We are rid of them, and it is a very good riddance." Now, that is not interpretation. No, there is a people in there, God's elect, and sooner or later the place where they are will want to get rid of them. "They are a menace, a menace."

But come over to Babylon, they are there. The elect are there. We have not very much to indicate, but we have Daniel and his three friends; and we must conclude that they were not the only true ones in Babylon. There is Ezekiel. There is a remnant in Babylon. God has a people. He is doing something through seventy years, and then the seventy years are completed and what happens? The Prophet Isaiah cries, chapter forty-three: "For your sake have I sent to Babylon, and have brought down all their nobles." And how did it happen? Belshazzar has his feast, the hand writes on the wall: "thy kingdom is divided, and removed." That night was Belshazzar slain, how? Cyrus and his army went stealthily through the night, moved along the wady, the valley, the dry valley, through, into Jerusalem, underground, and to use the phrases of the prophet: "had broken in pieces the gates of brass, and cut in sunder the bars of iron" and come up in the middle of Jerusalem. Slain Belshazzar-- "For your sake, for your sake, because of you, the elect, I have sent to Babylon, and have brought down all their nobles," their high ones. The people inside are a menace to the world, but they are the object of all God's activities --world convulsions, if you like.

And I believe, dear friends, as we get nearer to the end when the Church is to be extricated, these convulsions are significant, very significant, that the day of our emergence is near. You remember the phrase in the literal Greek, the words of the Lord, the prophetic words of the Lord, about "the end." He says, "The tumult of nations, men's hearts failing them for fear" for the terrible things which are coming upon the earth (Luke 21:25-26); but the literal there is not "distress of nations," the literal Greek is "no way out for the nations." No way out for the nations. Oh, my word, is that not true today-- they are trying to find a way out; and there is no way out for the nations. But then note, when that time comes: "Lift up your eyes, for your Way out draws near." Your way out--there is a way out for the elect when there is this investment.

Involvement in the Controversy of Zion: Intense Spiritual Pressure

Well, you have got the teaching now. "You have come to Zion." I wonder, I do not know, of course in the smaller world of the New Testament, it may have been true under those persecutions and martyrdoms, I think it was; but the world is such a much bigger world now than then, this great world compared with the little world of the Roman Empire then--I wonder if there was ever a time in the history of this world when the saints were going through spiritual pressure more than they are now? Spiritual pressure. I am not talking now only of outward persecutions. Some are in that, but even here, at this time, this week, dear children of God said to me: "I never in my life knew so much spiritual conflict, spiritual pressure. It sometimes gets unbearable, intolerable. I wonder how I am going to get through." Many of you may not

know anything about that. If you do not, do not worry at the moment. But if you do know that, dear friends, and some of us do, we have never in our lives-- and some of us have a long life with the Lord--known such intense and almost naked spiritual pressure. At times it does seem to get to the point where we will break, where it seems we will break. Many dear children of God all over the world write to me on these terms about this. What does it mean? You have come to Zion --that is what it means. Leave your theology of election and predestination. Leave that--that will not get you anywhere, only into trouble and confusion; but take the fact that God has a people in this world, in the nations, hidden in the nations, whom He knows.

"The Lord knoweth them that are His." He knows them, and they are of the greatest interest to the devil. They are marked, and they are involved in the controversy of Zion. If you would like to leave the word "Zion," if that creates mental pictures, leave it, forget it, see the meaning--the spiritual meaning--of something that is standing for "the testimony of Jesus," that is standing for the Absolute Lordship of Jesus Christ, that is standing for the true vocation of the Church! A people like that are not going to have an easy time. I am sorry to say that to you, but we have been told that this week very, very pointedly.

But here it is, and you will go back and perhaps there will be troubles, difficulties, this kind and that, family, business, what not; and then you will say: "What has happened to me? What has gone wrong?!" On the contrary, it has all gone right. Oh, I wish we could believe that. If what I am saying is true, it is the controversy of Zion, the conflict over something very precious to the Lord, because Zion was very precious to the Lord in history. Read the Psalms. Something very precious to the Lord is being challenged, combated, by all the forces of evil, nakedly and by every kind of means; and this is the explanation of the present convulsions. The prince of this world and this world spirit and system, knowingly or unknowingly, is sick of us. The nations are closing their doors, driving out those who represent the Lord. The world is narrowing down its scope for what is of Jesus Christ. It is pressing in. The explanation?--It is the time of "The Way out for the Church."

Of course, it is a false hope on the part of the world. It may have been true that the Egyptians were very glad when those people had gone. They got a rest for a time, but it did not last very long. It was a transient thing; their later history was a bit troublesome. Babylon may have felt a bit more comfortable when that remnant had gone back to Jerusalem, but it did not last very long. "I have brought down...." The Lord destroyed Babylon, as He destroyed Egypt. And it may be that when the Church is gone, the prince of this world and his kingdom may say: "There, they have gone. They are out. Now we can have it all to ourselves." But, if you notice, the context of that is they do not have it to themselves very long. Then there comes the judgments. The judgment of this world is just waiting until the Church is out, and that time is drawing near.

I think I have said enough. I could say much more as to the aspects of this conflict, the means used by the enemy to try and undo this testimony, to try and destroy Zion. The means used? Well, one is confusion. These evil powers and spirits are spirits of confusion. They always were. There never was a time, I venture to say, in the history of this world, when there was more confusion, and confusion in Christendom, in Christianity; and it is brought down to the least local expression of Zion. Confusion. Is it true? Is it true you do not know what to do? where you are? how to answer? what it means? Spiritual confusion invading everything that is on this earth --confusion.

There are spirits of corruption to defile, to defile-- corruption. There are spirits of deception. Was there ever a time when there was more deception? Everywhere, deception. Oh, I dare not stay with that, dare I?

But here it is, the things that are misleading, that are assuming a divine complexion, that are false, that are a lie, they will not last. They will have their day and cease to be. The roots, the seeds of their disintegration, are in them. In the semblance of good and right, there is falsehood--deception.

There are divisions. No end to this, no end. To the last two of the Lord's people there will be this attack to divide, to get us apart somehow. Yes, in the Church universal, an attack to split up; in the local churches, yes, division, and division following division; and in the family, and in the two--husband and wife. We are in a battle! It is a terrible thing to say, but you know however much there may be of love and certainty that the Lord brought you and your wife together, or you and your husband together, very often there is a battle over your fellowship. Is that saying too much? But it is true. A battle, misunderstandings, can come in there and divide and isolate. Anywhere! Anywhere! The spirits of division are at work today, and the slogan of their forces is "divide and conquer." It depends on the ground on which you are standing. If you are standing on natural ground; on doctrinal ground; on theological ground; on interpretation ground; if you are standing on any of those grounds, you will not hold together. You will not hold together. If you are standing on the ground of Christ only, and His Lordship, that is the answer.

Now I close with this: Zion is very precious to God, for the reason that His Son is His Appointed King on His Mount Zion. Ah, there is a great love of this testimony of Zion. It is for His Son's Sake. You and I must have His Son's Sake as the motivating part of all our ways. "Ye are come to Zion," but you have come to an involvement in a great conflict! So, help us, God.

We just ask Thee, Lord, that all the authority which has been given to Thee in heaven and on earth may cover, encompass, and embrace what has been said here this morning. Thou knowest it is not easy. It is a battle even to get it out; but, Lord, we need to be protected. The Word needs to be protected. We trust Thee, Lord. We trust Thee and all the Mighty Virtue of Thy Blood to Protect, for the Glory of Thy Name, Amen.

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