

Comfort for the Church

by Thomas Watson

Thomas Watson's sermon emphasizes the comforting truth that God is present with His church, providing strength and deliverance amidst trials and enemies.

Scripture: Exodus 20:24, Deuteronomy 23:14, Psalm 46:5, Psalm 139:7, Proverbs 25:11, Isaiah 52:1, Jeremiah 14:9, Hosea 14:4, Zechariah 2:5, Luke 18:27

Topics: "Gods Presence", "Church Comfort"

Description

Thomas Watson preaches about the comforting presence of God in the midst of His church, emphasizing that despite external and internal enemies, God's refuge and strength are always available. The sermon highlights the privilege and safety of having God in the midst of the church, explaining the two-fold presence of God and the reasons why He defends and blesses His people. Watson encourages the church to trust in God's compassion, love, and protection, reminding them that God's presence brings beauty, strength, and hope to His people.

Transcript

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"God is in the midst of her, she shall not be moved." Psalm 46:5

Solomon said, "A word fitly spoken is like apples of gold in pictures of silver," Proverbs 25:11. In which regard I have made choice of this Scripture, which may be a word in season to revive the desponding hearts of God's people. "God is in the midst of her, she shall not be moved."

This psalm is a triumphant exaltation wherein the church, with joy, commemorates former deliverances and, by faith, depends on God for future mercies.

"God is our refuge and strength," verse 1. The saints, in all their dangers, have an asylum or garrison to retreat to; they know where to put into for harbor. The name of the Lord is a strong tower, and this is their refuge and royal fortress.

"A very present help." God is a help in a pinch. An army may be beaten before their auxiliary forces come--but God never comes too late. His help is at hand; His forces are in the field; He is a present

help--a help in trouble. One renders it, "in vehement trouble."

"God is in the midst of her, she shall not be moved." What is meant by "in the midst of her?" This looks back to the former verse where there is mention made of the city of God. "There is a river, the streams whereof shall make glad the city of God," verse 4. By this city of God is meant Jerusalem, which is called the city of Jehovah, Isaiah 52:1. This city of Jerusalem is a figure for the church of God here upon earth; and of this the text speaks, "God is in the midst of her."

The words consist of two parts:

1. The church's privilege--"God is in the midst of her."
2. The church's safety--"she shall not be moved;" that is, so as to be removed.

DOCTRINE. When the church of God is beleaguered and environed with enemies, "God is in the midst of her." "For the Lord your God walks in the midst of your camp to deliver you," Deuteronomy 23:14. "You O Lord, are in the midst of us," Jeremiah 14:9. The church of God has not only enemies without her to conflict with, but within her--hypocrites and apostates. She complains that "her own sons vex her," Song of Solomon 1:6. That is, those who had been bred up in her bosom and pretended religion, these false friends, vexed her. The church's enemies are of her own house; but be they what they will, foreign or internal, the church has One who will take her part. When she is most assaulted, she is most assisted, God is in the midst of her.

QUESTION. But what privilege is this, to have God in the midst of His church? Where is He not? He is an immense, infinite Being--and His circumference is everywhere. "Where shall I fly from Your presence? If I take the wings of the morning, and dwell in the uttermost parts of the sea--even there shall Your hand lead me," Psalm 139:7-9. What privilege is it to have God in the midst of His church, seeing He is in the midst of His enemies too?

ANSWER. There is a two-fold presence of God:

1. There is His universal presence, whereby He is in all places. "Do not I fill heaven and earth, says the Lord," Jeremiah 23:24. This is no privilege at all, for this universal presence is with the damned. They have the presence of His power and justice.
2. There is a peculiar presence of God, and that is confined to His people. The presence of God is either in heaven, which is nothing else but His glorious presence. "The Lord's throne is in heaven," Psalm 11:4); or on earth, and that is either:

(1) His favorable presence, whereby He manifests the pledges of His grace and goodness towards His people. He is present in the assemblies of His saints, breathing forth the sweet perfume of His Spirit. "In all places where I record My name, I will come unto you, and I will bless you," Exodus 20:24. This is that presence the saints desire in the ordinances--God's quickening, sanctifying, comforting presence--the smiles of His face, the kisses of His lips. Nothing is so delightful, as to behold the king in the galleries, Song of Solomon 7:5, and have the banners of His love sweetly displayed, Song of Solomon 2:4.

(2) His providential presence, wherein the Lord appears admirably for His people in His providential actings, showing Himself to be a wonder-working God. This is chiefly meant in the text, "God is in the midst of her"--to defend, to deliver, to bless. Thus He was with His people of Israel by the pillar of fire and

a cloud, and thus will He be present with His church to the end of the world.

The reasons why God is in the midst of His church to defend and bless it are three:

1. The dear interest He has in it. The people of God are called "peculiar people," 1 Peter 2:9. The world lies in common and is as so much waste ground--but the church is God's vineyard and enclosure. Therefore, He will hedge it with protection. "My vineyard which is Mine, is before Me," Song of Solomon 8:1. The saints are called God's jewels, Malachi 3:17. Therefore, He will not let them be lost. For their sins, He may sometimes lay these jewels to pawn. The church is Christ's mystical body, the least bone whereof He will as surely preserve as He did every bone of His natural body. "A bone of it shall not be broken," John 19:36.

2. God is in the midst of His church because of the entire love which He bears to it. "The Lord has chosen Zion, He has desired it for His habitation, this is My rest forever, here will I dwell, for I have desired it," Psalm 132:13-15. God loves His people with the choicest of His love; they have the quintessence of His love, and, to show this, He calls them by those titles which denote love: "The apple of His eye," Deuteronomy 32:10; "The dearly beloved of His soul," Jeremiah 12:7; "His treasure," Psalm 135:4; "His dove," Psalm 74:19; "His spouse," Song of Solomon 4:13; and "His glory," Isaiah 46:13.

God loves the world with a more common love. His church, however, has the cream of His love. It is one love with which a man loves his bird--and another with which he loves his child. And God cannot but love His people, because He sees His own image shining in them. They are adorned with the graces of His Spirit like a chain of pearls; and they have the beauty of the unspotted holiness of Christ.

God's love to His church is vehement, like coals of juniper, or the sunbeams contracted in a magnifying glass, which are more intense and ardent. And, because He loves Zion, therefore He is in the midst of it to defend and bless it. "The Lord your God in the midst of you is mighty, He will save, He will rejoice over you, He will rest in His love," Zephaniah 3:17.

3. God will be in the midst of His people because they are engaged in His cause. "Know that for Your sake, I have suffered rebuke," Jeremiah 15:15. All the oppositions the godly meet with, are for standing up in the defense of truth. If they would desist from religion and throw off Christ's colors, they would have none to oppose them. But, because they espouse Christ's cause, and fight under the banner of His gospel, therefore and all the powers of hell unite and muster their forces against them. The princes of Persia had no other accusation against Daniel, but the law of His God, Daniel 6:5. Now, because the church of God appears in His cause, and loses blood in His quarrel, therefore God is in the midst of her. He counts Himself concerned in point of honor, to stand by His people.

QUESTION. But wherein does it appear that God is in the midst of His church?

It appears by His preserving and delivering His church.

1. By UNTHOUGHT-OF means. When Israel was hemmed in, the Red Sea before them, and Pharaoh and his host pursuing behind them--God preserved them by unthought-of means. They never thought of the parting of the waters. Who would have imagined that God would have made a causeway in the sea? Likewise, when food failed in the wilderness, the people of Israel could not devise how God would spread them a table there. There was no plowing or sowing, nothing to be seen but wild beasts and serpents. The Lord made the heavens a granary, and rained down bread upon them; here He was in the midst of His

people.

2. By CONTEMPTIBLE means. The blowing of trumpets and the blazing of lamps made the walls of Jericho fall down, Judges 7:20. Jeremiah was drawn out of the dungeon by rotten rags, Jeremiah 38:12. God often saves His church by despicable instruments. He makes use of rotten rags. God raised up Luther in Germany against the Pope. The enemy looked upon him with a contemptible eye and one of them said, "He was more fit to pray in a cloister than to do any great exploits abroad." But God made him a rare instrument in his church. He so shook the Pope's chair that never, to this day, has he sat safely in it.

3. By CONTRARY means. That Jonah should be saved by being swallowed up--God made the fish a ship in which he sailed safe to shore. That the raven, who is so unnatural that she will hardly feed her young, should bring meat to the prophet Elijah--this shows God is in the midst of His people. How often is it seen that God makes use of a contrary wind? The enemies of His church shall do His work; He will play His game by their hand.

Either He will make His enemies friendly to His people, "The Israelites asked the Egyptians for articles of silver and gold and for clothing. The Lord had made the Egyptians favorably disposed toward the people, and they gave them what they asked for; so they plundered the Egyptians." Exodus 12:35 (God makes wolves to suckle His lambs!) Or He will work divisions among His enemies and turn their own weapons against themselves. "The men of Ammon and Moab rose up against the men from Mount Seir to destroy and annihilate them. After they finished slaughtering the men from Seir, they helped to destroy one another." 2 Chronicles 20:23. Thus God makes the seed of the serpent a means to break the serpent's head. We read in ecclesiastical history that, in the time of the good emperor Theodosius, when the Persians shot their arrows against the Christians, by a sudden and violent wind, their arrows were driven back and flew in their own faces.

ANSWER 2. It is evident that God is in the midst of His church, by His seasonable appearing for His people. When the Church of God has been brought very low, nothing in view but desperation, their power and their hopes gone--then God has stepped in for their relief and gave the victory on the church's side. "The Lord will indeed vindicate His people and have compassion on His servants when He sees that their strength is gone," Deuteronomy 32:36. When Peter was sinking, then Christ put forth His hand and took him into the ship. When the Church of God has been in trouble, like Isaac on the altar, going to be sacrificed to the rage and fury of men, then has the providence of God stepped in as the angel and said, "Lay not your hand upon the child." God may let the enemy nibble at the heel of His church--but still He defends the head. When malice is boiled up to revenge, and the design of men is to destroy the church--then the church's morning star of deliverance appears. This shows God is in the midst of Zion, because, when things have seemed to be in the forlorn hope and all given for lost--then God has come riding in the chariots of salvation!

USE 1. Here is good news for the church of God. God's people are apt to despond when they see things move strangely, and go cross to their expectation. "God is in the midst of Zion." He has a special superintendence over the affairs of His church. God has more care of His church, than we can have. We read in Ezekiel's vision of a wheel within a wheel, Ezekiel 1:16. God's decree is the inner wheel, which turns all the outward wheels of providence. The church never lacks enemies to assault and make inroads upon her--but "God is in the midst of her."

USE 2. Here is a river of consolation, whose crystal streams may refresh the city of God. God's eye is upon His people for good. "The eye of the Lord is upon those who fear Him;" and it is a watchful eye, for He neither slumbers nor sleeps, Psalm 121:4.

QUESTION. But what privilege is this that God's eye is upon His people? His eye is upon the wicked too?

ANSWER. I answer, God's eye, which is upon Zion, is not only an eye of inspection--but an eye of benediction. Zion has not only His eye--but His heart, "For surely, O Lord, you bless the righteous; you surround them with your favor as with a shield." Psalm 5:12.

USE 3. If God is in the midst of Zion--then see the church's beauty and strength.

1. The church's BEAUTY--"God is in the midst of her." This is her glory and beauty. "I will be the glory in the midst of her," Zechariah 2:5. This is the best jewel in the church's crown. As the diamond to the ring, as the sun to the world, which bespangles it with its beams, so is God's presence to His church. The ark, which was the emblem and sign of God's presence, was called "the glory of Israel." Why is the church called a royal diadem and a crown of beauty, Isaiah 62:3? Because God casts His resplendent luster upon her. "I will be the glory in the midst of her."

2. See here the church's STRENGTH--God is in the midst of her. He is with His church not only to behold her--but uphold her. The church of God is like a castle walled in with rocks. "His place of defense shall be the munition of rocks," Isaiah 33:16. But a man may starve upon a rock. Therefore it follows, "bread shall be given him, his waters shall be sure." If God is in the midst of Zion, He will be both defensive and offensive. He is both a shield and a sword. "Happy are you O Israel; who is like unto you, O people saved by the Lord, the shield of your help, and who is the sword of your excellency!" Deuteronomy 33:29.

God is a golden shield to His people and a flaming sword to His enemies. "For I, says the Lord, will be unto her a wall of fire round about," Zechariah 2:5. A wall, that is defensive; a wall of fire, that is offensive. "In that day we will sing of the pleasant vineyard. I, the Lord, will watch over it and tend its fruitful vines. Each day I will water them; day and night I will watch to keep enemies away." Isaiah 27:2-3. They who go to overthrow the church must do it in such a time when it is neither night nor day, for God has promised to keep it night and day.

USE 4. See, then, how vain are all the attempts and plots of wicked men, against the church of God. God is in the midst of her. When we look upon things with a human eye, we may wonder that the church of God is not overrun. That the sea should be higher than the earth yet not drown it, is a wonder. In like manner, that the power and force which seems to be so much above the church should not overflow it, is to be wondered at. But God is in the midst of her; therefore she is impregnable. Men must first overcome God, before they can overcome the church!

How simple is the wisdom of man when it sets it self against God! What do men do, when they engage war against the church? They attempt the impossible, since God is in the midst of her. What an infinite disproportion is there between the church's enemies--and the church's God? As much as between finite and infinite. Will weak man go to measure arms with God? How easily can God check the pride, break the power, and confound the councils of the wicked! He can destroy His enemies with the turning of an hand, Psalm 82:14; with a word, Psalm 2:5; with a breath, Isaiah 30:28; with a look, Exodus 14:24. It costs God no more to destroy all His adversaries, than a cast of the eye. For men to contend with the great God, is as if a child should go to fight with a giant or archangel; or as if the thorns should set themselves in battle

against the fire! Oh, how vain and silly are all attempts against the church! God is in the midst of her. "On that day I will make Jerusalem a heavy stone, a burden for the world." Zechariah 12:3. The enemies are heaving at the church to remove it--but it is a heavy stone which will fall upon them and grind them in pieces. "I will make the governors of Judah like a torch of fire in a sheaf," Zechariah 12:6. The grand opposers of Zion shall be as combustible matter, and the church as a torch of fire to burn them up.

USE 5. If God is in the midst of Zion--then it follows that all providences towards the church shall be for the best. There is nothing which stirs in the world, but shall carry on God's designs, like the cross wheels in a watch carry on the motion of it and serve to make the alarm strike. That which the wicked intend for destruction, shall turn to the deliverance of the church. As Luther wrote to the Elector of Saxony, "Let your Highness know, that the affairs of the church are ordered in heaven--and not by the Emperor." While the adversaries go about to ruin the church, they shall only repair it. God is in the midst of His people; therefore, the most violent storms of persecution are but as the beating of the wind against the sails, which make the ship go faster and bring it sooner to its desired haven!

USE 6. Let us labor that--as God is in the midst of His church, so He may be in the midst of our hearts. It is little comfort to hear that God is in the midst of his church unless we find Him in the midst of our hearts. A drowning man seeing a rainbow said, "What am I the better, that the world shall not be drowned--if I drown?" So how are we the better that God is in the midst of His church by His providential presence--if He is not in the midst of our hearts by His sanctifying presence? It should be our care not only to have Christ with us--but in us. "Christ in you, the hope of glory," Colossians 1:27. This will be a cordial when we are dying. It doesn't matter if death is in our body--if Christ is in our heart! This should be our wisdom and ambition, not only to have the presence of God with within the church--but the Spirit of God in us. "God has sent forth the Spirit of His Son into your hearts," Galatians 4:6.

If God is in the midst of His church to uphold and preserve it, then let not God's people give way to distrust and despondency. Let them not fear the enemies of the church. "God is our refuge and strength, an ever-present help in trouble. Therefore we will not fear, though the earth gives way and the mountains fall into the heart of the sea, though its waters roar and foam and the mountains quake with their surging." Psalms 46:1-3. If we should be in new straits and difficulties, let us not say that we shall be undone. God will set all His attributes to work for His people! His wisdom shall be theirs--to guide them, His power shall be theirs--to defend them, His holiness shall be theirs--to sanctify them, His mercy shall be theirs--to save them. To fear the creature is to undervalue God.

When Antigonus overheard his soldiers saying how formidable their enemies were, he stepped in suddenly with these words, "And how many do you reckon for me?" This word, God is in the midst of her, should beat down unbelief and put to flight a whole army of fears that are apt to arise in the heart! It is high ingratitude either to murmur or distrust, after so many signal mercies and preservations as we have received.

But because the hearts of God's own people are ready to be overpowered with a spirit of fear, I shall, therefore, prescribe these five antidotes against fear:

1. God will have a church upon earth. "I will build my church, and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it," Matthew 16:18. Neither the serpent's subtlety, nor the dragon's fierceness, shall overturn the church! The ship in the gospel was tossed because sin was in it--but not overwhelmed because Christ was in it. Be of good comfort--Christ is in the ship! "The angel of the Lord appeared in a flame of fire out of the midst

of the bush, and the bush burned and was not consumed," Exodus 3:2. This is an emblem of the church on earth--this bush burns, but is not consumed--for God is in the midst of her. The church of God may be oppressed but not totally suppressed. Cain put the knife to Abel's throat, and ever since the church's veins have bled--but she is not so weak that she cannot stand upon her legs. The church cannot be extinguished!

Nevertheless, the church of God may suffer in several parts of it. For as by virtue of the covenant made with Noah, the whole earth shall never be drowned with a deluge; yet there may, and have been such inundations since, that several parts of the earth have been swallowed up with water. So the church universal cannot be extinct--yet it may suffer in some parts and branches of it, as the seven Asian churches had their golden candlesticks removed.

2. The suffering of any particular church is for their good. "I have sent them into captivity for their own good. I will see that they are well treated, and I will bring them back here again. I will build them up and not tear them down. I will plant them and not uproot them." Jeremiah 24:6. God makes use of the wicked for the good of His church. He sometimes allows His people to be cast out into the open field and lets the wicked pour the water of affliction upon them--but He is all this while purifying his people. "Many shall be tried and made white," Daniel 12:10. The wicked are flails to thrash off the husks of His people. They are files to brighten their graces. They are leeches to suck out their bad blood. Cicero makes mention of Phereus, whom his enemy, piercing him with a sword, accidentally opened his abscess and so cured him! The enemies of the church only cure the abscess of pride!

God's fire is in Zion, Isaiah 31:9. This fire is not consuming--but refining. The church is God's house; the enemies try to break down the walls of this house--but they shall only purge the floor. They try to crucify--but they shall only clarify God's church and remove her rough edges. Thus God turns all the sufferings of His people to their good. He stretches the strings of His violin to make the music better.

3. The more God's church is opposed--the more it increases. It revives by opposition. "The more they afflicted them--the more they multiplied," Exodus 1:12. Witness the effect of the persecutions in the time of Nero, Diocletian, and Trajan.

Showers have always made the church grow more. The more the torch is beaten, the more it flames. Julian the Apostate, therefore, forbid to persecute the Christians, not out of pity--but envy, because they grew so fast under persecution. Religion has always revived and flourished in the ashes of holy men. The church of God is a palm-tree with this motto, "The more weight is laid upon it, the higher it rises."

4. When the church of God is lowest, mercy is nearest. The sorer the pangs, the nearer the deliverance. "The earth mourns, Lebanon is ashamed, Sharon is like a wilderness. Now will I rise, says the Lord, now will I lift up myself," Isaiah 33:9-10. If you go to the ocean, you will observe that when the ebb is at the lowest--that high tide is ready to come in. Just so, when the church of God seems to be at a dead, low water--the tide of deliverance is nearest. When Diocletian raged and things seemed desperate for the church, soon after was the golden time of Constantine. It is usually darkest--a little before morning.

5. Though the church of God may seem sometimes to be in the wain--yet, when she loses ground in one place, she gains in another. When the fire is quenched at one end of the house, it breaks out at the other. At Rome, there were two laurel trees; when one withered, the other flourished. This is an emblem of the church--when it seems to wither in one place, it shall revive and flourish in another. All this may comfort us concerning the church of God, and may be as medicine to kill the worm of unbelief and fear in our hearts.

God is in the midst of her; therefore, will we not fear though the earth be moved. If God is in the midst of His church, let us do two things:

First, If God is in the midst of His church--let us take heed of driving God from us. There are ways whereby we may drive God from the nation. When bees are in the hive and bring their honey, you may drive them out with smoke. So sin is a smoke which will drive God out from a people. "A people which provokes Me to anger, these are a smoke in My nose," Isaiah 65:3, 5. In particular, there are nine sins which drive God out of a land--when He marches out, judgment marches in.

1. Idolatry. "For they served idols, whereof the Lord had said unto them, you shall not do this thing, therefore the Lord was angry with Israel, and removed them out of His sight!" 2 Kings 17:12, 18. Idolatry is a sin which breaks the marriage knot--and makes the Lord disclaim His interest in a people. "Your people have corrupted themselves," Exodus 32:7. Before God called Israel His people--but once they had defiled themselves with idolatry, then God disclaimed them. He does not say to Moses, "My people"--but "your people", as if He had quite discarded them and cut off His mercy. Take heed of idolatry, yes, and of superstition too, which is a bridge leading over to it. Superstition is an intermixing of our thoughts and inventions with divine institutions; it is an affront offered to God, as if He were not wise enough to appoint the manner of His own worship.

2. Cruelty and oppression. "I have forsaken my house, my heritage is to me as a speckled bird," Jeremiah 12:7-8, or as a bird of prey. When God's dove becomes a vulture, and is given to oppression and cruelty, staining her feathers with blood--God will then break up house and be gone.

3. Immorality. "They are all adulterers, burning like an oven," Hosea 7:4. They who should have been temples of the Holy Spirit--are hot ovens burning in lust! "I will spread my net upon them," verse 12. That is, I will spread the net of My judgments over them, and they shall be taken in the net!

4. Covetousness. "I will stretch out My hand upon the inhabitants of the land, for from the least of them, even to the greatest, everyone of them is given to covetousness," Jeremiah 6:12. When men shall reek of the earth--when they love the theater better than the Temple, and are more for the earthly mammon than the heavenly manna--then God will take His leave and be gone! God is a Spirit, and He can no more converse with an earthly people, than a prince can converse with a swine!

5. Apostasy. "They are all hardened rebels. They are called rejected silver, for the Lord has rejected them." Jeremiah 6:28. This made God remove His golden candlestick from the church of Ephesus--because she had left her first love, Revelation 2:4. And if apostasy will make God depart from a people, then how can we expect He should stay long with us? Where is that zeal for God and love to the truth as before? We live in the fall of the leaf. There are many who courted the Queen of Religion when she had a jewel hung on her ear--but when she is in her night dress and her jewels are pulled off, now they desert her. Lot's wife was turned into a pillar of salt for looking back. If all who look back should have this judgment inflicted upon them, we would see pillars of salt filling our streets!

Merchants tell us of shipwrecks at sea. I believe there have been of late more shipwrecks at land--than at sea. I mean, such as have made shipwreck of faith and a good conscience. The golden head is degenerated into iron--a more filthy and impure metal.

6. Weariness of God's ordinances. "When will the New Moon be over so we may sell grain, and the Sabbath, so we may market wheat?" Amos 8:5. Verse 11, "The time is surely coming, says the Sovereign

Lord; when I will send a famine on the land--not a famine of bread or water but of hearing the words of the Lord."

God has fed this nation with the finest of the wheat, even the bread of life. We have had the cream of ordinances. God has come down to us in a golden shower of blessings. The vintage of other nations has not been as good as the gleanings of England--but have not we said, "what a weariness it is!" Malachi 1:13. Is not our sin, sermon excess? Though we have liked the dressing, we have loathed the food. We have said, "Who is this Moses? And what is this manna?" And may not we fear that God is now coming to punish us for this sin? When we have lost our appetite for God's Word--God may cause the Word to be taken away; and would not that be dismal? How sad is it for any nation when their seers are blind! In what a condition is that people who have husks given to them, instead of manna, and music instead of food! Weariness of the gospel, forfeits the gospel. If God sees that sanctuary blessings are not prized, He will remove them.

7. Perjury. "They have broken the covenant I made with their ancestors. Therefore, says the Lord, I am going to bring calamity upon them, and they will not escape. Though they beg for mercy, I will not listen to their cries!" Jeremiah 11:10. When a people play fast and loose with God, breaking their solemn vows and covenants, this is a God-provoking sin. It will make the Lord go away from a nation and, though they cry after Him, He will turn a deaf ear. God will pass by infirmity--but He will punish treachery.

8. Hatred of reformation. When God calls to a people by His Word, Spirit, and judgments--but they regard Him not, He will pack up and be gone. "While you were doing these wicked things, says the Lord, I spoke to you about it repeatedly, but you would not listen. I called out to you, but you refused to answer. So just as I destroyed Shiloh, I will now destroy this Temple that was built to honor my name, this Temple that you trust for help, this place that I gave to you and your ancestors. And I will send you into exile." Jeremiah 7:13-15. Why, what did God do to Shiloh? There the priests were slain, the ark was carried away captive, all the signs of God's presence were removed, the vision ceased--and we never read that the ark returned to Shiloh anymore. Has not God called us to be a holy people? But are there not many found among us, who hate holiness and cry down reformation? Oh, take heed that God does not do to us as He did to Shiloh--unpeople us, unchurch us, and send a flying scroll of curses against us!

9. Unkindness to those who labor in the Word and doctrine. God will avenge the wrongs done to His ambassadors. "The Lord repeatedly sent his prophets to warn them, for he had compassion on his people and his Temple. But the people mocked these messengers of God and despised their words. They scoffed at the prophets until the Lord's anger could no longer be restrained and there was no remedy!" 2 Chronicles 36:16-17.

Let us take heed of these sins which will cause God to depart from the nation.

Second, if God is in the midst of His church--let us do what we can to KEEP God among us. Israel endeavored to keep the ark among them, which was the sign of God's presence. "Woe to them--when I depart from them!" Hosea 9:12. If God is gone--then all other blessings go too; peace and prosperity will be gone. Oh, let us strive to keep God among us! What is the glory of a nation--but the presence of God in His Word and ordinances? I will be the glory in the midst of her, Zechariah 2:5. If God is gone, England will be like a house that has its furniture removed, and is falling to ruin. "Hyenas will howl in its fortresses, and jackals will make their dens in its palaces!" Isaiah 13:31. If God is gone--Satan will be the next tenant!

QUESTION. What shall we do to keep God among us?

ANSWER 1. By prayer. "We are called by Your name, leave us not," Jeremiah 24:9. Exercise eyes of faith and knees of prayer! Let us hang upon God by holy importunity, and not let Him go. "They constrained Him, saying, abide with us for it is towards evening," Luke 24:29. Is not God upon the threshold of His temple--and ready to flee? Are not the shadows of the evening stretched out? And may we not fear the sun-setting of the gospel? Oh, let us, by humble prayer, lie at Christ's feet and constrain Him to stay with us! Prayer makes a sweet sound in God's ears, and He will not go away where there is that music.

ANSWER 2. By setting upon the work of reformation. "Amend your ways and your doings!" Jeremiah 7:3. There is a profane people in the land who drink, roar, and declare their sin as Sodom. These Samsons are likely to pull down the house upon our heads. Instead of bringing the water of tears to quench God's anger--they add fuel to the fire! The men of Lystra, seeing the miracle wrought by Paul and Barnabas, cried out, "The gods have come down to us in the likeness of men," Acts 14:11. But we may now say that the devils are have come up to us in the likeness of men! Never was there such a spirit of wickedness in the land; never were there such heaven-daring abominations committed!

But, "though Israel plays the harlot--yet let not Judah offend," Hosea 4:15. Though others are licentious and worldly (being carried to hell with wind and tide), yet let us keep our garments pure and preserve the virginity of our consciences. Let us labor to reform ourselves, and mourn for what we cannot reform in others. Let us walk holily and uprightly, Ephesians 5:15. Let us shine forth in a kind of angelic brightness, that we may not only profess the gospel--but beautify it. Were we such a holy people, we might keep God still in the midst of us; and, as a pledge of His favorable presence, He would bestow His Gospel, that crowning blessing, both upon us and our posterity.

QUESTION. But is not the decree past? Are there any hopes that God will be still in the midst of England?

ANSWER. There is hope in Israel concerning this. I would encourage God's people, and speak something that might be as the cork to the net--to keep their hearts from sinking. I confess that, when I look upon the dark side of the cloud, it fills me with trembling and astonishment. The sins and divisions of the nation are grey hairs upon us; it is ominous when the joints of the same body begin to smite one another.

But though we have many symptoms of a dying patient--yet there are six seeds of hope left, that God will still abide in the midst of England.

1. One seed of hope, is that there is a generation of righteous people in the nation. God would have spared Sodom if there had been ten righteous people in it. It is to be hoped there are many tens in England. "But I will not destroy them all," says the Lord. For just as good grapes are found among a cluster of bad ones (and someone will say, 'Don't throw them all away--there are some good grapes there!'), so I will not destroy all Israel. For I still have true servants there." Isaiah 65:8. Though the vine in England is so blasted that the Lord might cut it down--yet there are some good clusters, and for these, God may spare the vine and say, "so I will not destroy all Israel. For I still have true servants there."

Were the godly gone, the Lord would make quick work of the nation. He would destroy the weeds, were it not for the corn. The ship of would soon be drowned--if the elect were not in it. The saints halt God's hand, when He is going to strike. "Hurry up! Run there, for I cannot do anything until you get there" Genesis 19:22. The saints are the excellent of the earth, Psalm 16:3; precious and honorable, Isaiah 43:4. And, for their sakes, God may yet he entreated to be propitious to us.

2. Another seed of hope, is that the Lord keeps up a spirit of prayer among His people. The Spartans' wall of defense was their spears. The wall and bulwark of a nation is prayer. As there are crying sins in the land--so there are crying prayers. Whole volleys of sighs and groans are daily sent up to heaven. When the Lord intends to pour out the vial of His indignation, He stops all the sluices of prayer. "Pray not for this people!" Jeremiah 7:16. God has not said this yet. Prayer is a powerful orator for mercy--it comes as with orders to heaven. "You give me orders about the work of my hands," Isaiah 45:11.

Prayer staves off wrath from a land. "Leave me alone so that My anger may burn against them and that I may destroy them!" Exodus 32:10. Why, what did Moses do? He only prayed. Prayer overcomes the Almighty! It finds God free--but leaves Him bound. This gives some crevice of hope that God will not wholly leave us. There are those who cry day and night, "Spare Your people, O Lord, and give not Your heritage to reproach," Joel 2:17. When prayer leads the van, deliverance brings up the rear! "You will prepare their heart, You will cause Your ear to hear," Psalm 10:17.

3. Another seed of hope, is the tender respect God has to His

own glory. This was Joshua's argument. "What then will you do for your own great name?" Joshua 7:9. If the people of God would be extinct and the cause of true religion trampled under foot--this would reflect upon the glory of God, and His name would suffer. The wicked seldom prevail--but they blaspheme. They say, "Where is your God?" Now God's glory is dear to Him--it is the most orient pearl of His crown. He will stand upon His honor. While He consults His people's safety--He promotes His own glory. "Nevertheless He saved them for His name's sake," Psalm 106:8.

4. Another seed of hope, is the blessed intercession of Christ. The Lord Jesus bears the names of His people upon His breast and sets them as a golden signet upon His heart. His prayers go up to heaven as sweet odors. "The smoke of incense ascended up before God, out of the angel's hand," Revelation 8:4. Though our sins go up to heaven as the smoke of a furnace--yet Christ's prayers go up as incense. Christ's intercession is meritorious. His blood will never stop crying out--until the blood of His enemies is shed.

5. A fifth seed of hope, is the mercy of God. "In His love and in His pity He redeemed them," Isaiah 63:9. "God is the Father of mercies," 2 Corinthians 1:3. Mercy naturally issues from Him. He is rich in mercy, Ephesians 2:4. He delights in mercy, Micah 7:18. God's justice is strange work, Isaiah 28:21. Mercy is His proper work. Why may not mercy give the casting vote? And that which may make us hope in this mercy is:

The mercy of God is free. "I will love them freely," Hosea 14:4. Mercy lends out its pardons to whom it will. Mercy does not go by desert--but by grace. "I will love them freely."

The mercy of God is healing. "I will heal their backslidings," Hosea 14:4. Mercy can heal the impurity and stubbornness of a people; mercy can as well give repentance as deliverance. Mercy can destroy the sins of a nation, and save the nation. It can burn up the chaff and save the corn. "I will heal their backslidings." Mercy can stop the bloody issue of sin. Psalm 48:20. The Roman historian Pliny said, "The aqueducts of Rome are the world's wonder"--but, behold, here is a sacred aqueduct of God's mercy. This is a sweet wonder! Mercy can overcome a sinful people; it can save a nation in its critical year. We read that the fire of the Lord fell and licked up the water, I Kings 18:38. Thus, the fire of God's mercy can lick up and devour the water of our sins.

6. The last seed of hope for England, is that there have been many sins committed in the nation, which are not the sins of the nation itself. Some have perjured themselves--but all have not. A sober and considerable party in the land (however slandered) have entered their dissent and openly protested against the scandalous actings of others. So that it is to be hoped the Lord will not impute the sin of some--to the whole.

Thus I have showed you a rainbow in the cloud, and given you some probable grounds of hope, that the Lord will still be in the midst of England. I intend this as a preservative against despondency, not as fuel for security.

QUESTION. But how is it possible there should be any good towards us--that the sins in which the nation have been so steeped and boiled, should be forgiven? That our divisions and animosities should be healed, God's ordinances refined, and the Lord continue His gracious presence in the midst of us?

ANSWER. I say with our blessed Savior, "The things which are impossible with men are possible with God," Luke 18:27. God can create--what can He not do? God can bring about those things which, in the eye of sense, are not feasible. That iron should swim, and that a rock should be a spring--is in nature impossible. But God has brought these things to pass. Cannot God untie those knots which confound and puzzle us? "All this may seem impossible to you now, a small and discouraged remnant of God's people. But do you think this is impossible for me, the Lord Almighty?" Zechariah 8:6.

Can difficulties oppose the Almighty? "Is anything too hard for Me?" Jeremiah 32:27. Did not He make the dry bones live? Ezekiel 37:7-8. God can bring light out of darkness, and harmony out of confusion. He can do more than we think--or else He would not be God.

How apt are God's own people to be discouraged with seeming impossibilities? Moses, who was one of the brightest stars that ever shined in the churches' orb--yet was ready to hesitate and sink at apparent impossibilities. "But Moses said, "There are 600,000 foot soldiers here with me, and yet you promise them meat for a whole month! Even if we butchered all our flocks and herds, would that satisfy them? Even if we caught all the fish in the sea, would that be enough?" Numbers 11:21-22. As Moses had said in plain English, he did not see how such a numerous people could be fed for a month. God gave him a kind of check for his infidelity. "Is the Lord's arm too short?" verse 23. "Is there any limit to my power? Do I make mouths and not meat? Cannot I make provision for My household? Is the Lord's arm too short? That God who brought Isaac out of a dead womb, and the Messiah out of a virgin's womb--what can He not do?"

When things act ever so irregularly, God can put them in joint again. When His church is so low that she seems to be in the grave and have a tomb-stone laid upon her, He can, in an instant, cause a glorious resurrection! Therefore, let us not lose heart--but still rest on the arm of God's power and sovereignty, remembering there are no desperate cases with God.

To conclude all, the Lord may let His church be awhile under trials to punish her carnal security and awaken her slumbering fits; yet, surely the storm will not continue long. The church shall not die in travail--but God will manifest that He is in the midst of Zion, and after the church has suffered awhile (as her head Christ has done) He will cause the morning star of her salvation to appear, and she shall come out of all her troubles, as the wings of a dove covered with silver and her feathers with gold.

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