

ZION'S BLESSINGS

Preached on Lord's Day Evening, July 16th, 1843, at Zoar Chapel, Great Alie Street, London

"I will abundantly bless her provision: I will satisfy her poor with bread. I will also clothe her priests with salvation: and her saints shall shout aloud for joy." Psalm 132:15, 16

The most inattentive reader of Scripture must perceive that great things are spoken in the Word of God concerning Zion. As the Bible lies now open before me, my eye rests upon nine Psalms, and out of those nine Psalms in five I observe Zion spoken of, and blessings mentioned as belonging to her. This is but one instance out of many, and one that has only just struck me, wherein we see that "glorious things are spoken of Zion" (Psa. 87:3).

But what is the meaning of Zion that such blessings should belong to her? Zion, literally, was the hill in Jerusalem on which the temple was built; and it was this circumstance which laid the foundation for a spiritual meaning. What, then, did the temple signify? For in blessing Zion, God did not bless the literal hill of Zion, but He blessed that which stood upon Zion, the temple which was built upon that hill. But what did that temple represent? since we cannot think that God would lavish His blessings merely on a building erected by human hands; for the great God "dwelleth not in temples made with hands, neither is worshipped with men's hands, seeing He giveth to all life and breath and all things" (Acts 17:24). But the reason why "the Lord loveth the gates of Zion more than all the dwellings of Jacob," and why "the Highest Himself establishes her," (Psa. 87:2, 5), is because it was typical of that on which the eyes and heart of God are fixed perpetually (2 Chron. 7:16).

The temple, then, typified and represented two things. First, it typified the human nature of the Lord Jesus; as He Himself said, "Destroy *this temple*, and in three days I will raise it up." And the evangelist adds, "But He spake of the temple of His body" (John 2:19, 21). The temple, then, on Mount Zion was typical of that holy human nature of the Lord Jesus which is indissolubly united to His eternal Godhead; and in which "it pleased the Father that all fulness should dwell," that "out of His fulness we might receive, and grace for grace" (Col. 1:19 John 1:16).

But there is another thing which Zion typified, and that is, the Church of the living God, as the Apostle Paul declares: "Ye are come unto Mount Zion, and unto the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, and to an innumerable company of angels, to the general assembly and Church of the Firstborn, which are written in heaven" (Heb. 12:22, 23).

The Church never had a being except in Christ. Could we view the Church for a moment distinct from Christ, we should behold nothing but a dead carcass, the head being severed from it. But as the Church is a living body, it can only be so as eternally connected with its Head; and therefore the Church of God is never for a moment to be looked at except in its standing in Christ, its eternal being in the glorious Mediator, "Immanuel, God with us." And this is the reason why the temple not merely set forth the human nature of the Lord Jesus, but typified also the Church, seeing that there is a vital, indissoluble union betwixt the Head and members.

If we look at the verses immediately preceding the text, we shall find Zion spoken of: "The Lord hath chosen Zion; He hath desired it for His habitation. This is My rest for ever: here will I dwell; for I have desired it" (Psa. 132:13, 14). That the Lord should choose Zion, desire it for His habitation,

eternally rest and dwell in it, cannot be true of any literal hill, or material temple. It can only, therefore, be spiritually understood as applicable to the human nature of Christ, which is the habitation of God (Col. 2:9), and to the Church, which is "His body, the fulness of Him that filleth all in all" (Eph. 1:23) "Know ye not," says the Apostle, "that ye are the temple of God, and that the Spirit of God dwelleth in you?" (1 Cor. 3:16). When the text then says, "I will abundantly bless her provision: I will satisfy her poor with bread. I will also clothe her priests with salvation; and her saints shall shout aloud for joy," it speaks of Zion's provision, of Zion's bread, of Zion's priests, and of Zion's saints. Thus, in viewing the text, we must take it as it stands in connection with Zion, the Church of the living Jehovah.

Having seen, then, what Zion represents, we may enter into the meaning of the word, "*her*," so frequently repeated in the text; and if the Lord the Spirit is pleased to lead us into its spiritual import, we may gather up a little of the sweet promises contained in it. I shall, with God's blessing, take them in the order in which they lie before me.

I. The first promise runs thus: "I will abundantly bless her provision." Mark the emphasis laid upon the pronoun, "*her*." You see how it runs all through, "*her* provision," "*her* poor," "*her* priests," "*her* saints." And the repetition of the personal pronoun seems to intimate as though God, who is "a jealous God," would exclude from any appropriation of the promises in the text all but those who have an eternal interest in Christ; as though He would not suffer the children's bread to be given to the dogs; but would guard the promises He has made to His Church by that special and repeated limitation.

"I will abundantly bless her provision." We have a "*provision*" spoken of here, and this provision is limited to Zion. It is not

scattered abroad for every person to claim, or for anybody to feed upon; but is spoken of as a distinct provision set apart and reserved especially for Zion.

But what is this "provision?" It is, I believe, the fulness of spiritual blessings which are stored up in the Son of God, as "Head over all things to the Church." As the Apostle speaks, "Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who hath blessed us with all spiritual blessings in heavenly places in Christ" (Eph. 1:3). And again the apostle John says, "And of His fulness have all we received, and grace for grace." This "provision," then, is the fulness of Christ as the covenant Head of His Church and people. And God has given to the Church this rich "provision," which He has stored up in Christ, that the poor and needy of Zion's children may "eat and be satisfied."

But the Lord promises to "bless" this "provision," and that "*abundantly*." It is not then sufficient for the Church of the living God that there should be a fulness for her stored up in her covenant Head; it must be "*blessed*;" it must be brought down out of the storehouse into her heart. Joseph, instructed by divine wisdom, gathered up the seven plenteous years into storehouses, and when the Egyptians cried for bread, Pharaoh's answer to all their entreaties was, "Go unto Joseph" (Gen. 41:55). *He* kept the key. But what if Joseph had never unlocked the stores? Why, they must all have perished of famine. He that kept the stores opened the stores, and by opening them, saved their lives from destruction. So the spiritual Joseph has "the key of David:" and of Him it is said, "He openeth and no man shutteth, and shutteth and no man openeth" (Rev. 3:7) He deals out of this "provision" at such times, in such a way, and in such a measure, as "seemeth good" in His own eyes.

But what are the channels or conduits through which this provision flows that God has promised thus to bless?

1. One of the channels or conduits through which this provision flows is *the gospel*. And what is the gospel? It is the revelation of a free grace salvation, the manifestation in God's Word of pardon, mercy, and love for a peculiar people through the finished work of the Son of God. The gospel, then, is the proclamation and publication of the treasures that are stored up in Christ; and through the gospel, which is the revelation of God's love and mercy, does this "provision" flow, as through a blessed channel, into the hearts of God's people. God has promised to bless the gospel, and wherever the gospel is preached by God's sent servants, it is more or less blessed to souls; not from any works performed by them; not because they are poor and needy; but because God has stored up provision for them in their covenant Head, and because the preached gospel is one of the blessed channels of conveyance through which that provision flows into their heart.

You or I might have a sum of money lodged for our use in a banker's hands; but that would not profit us unless we had liberty to draw a cheque upon the banker. We might perish of starvation, and yet have a large sum lodged in his hands for our use. So it is with the gospel. A living soul cannot be satisfied with knowing that there is a treasure stored up for the Church in Christ. A few coins put into his hands by the gospel will more sensibly enrich him, and do his soul more present good than all the treasures of mercy and grace in Christ to which he has no feeling access. I can fancy a pauper, or a sweeper of the streets, or a beggar that lives upon alms walking by the Bank of England, and knowing perfectly that there are millions of bullion in its coffers and cellars. But will *that* clothe his nakedness? Will *that* relieve

his famished appetite? Will *that* raise him from poverty to riches? The bare knowledge that there is money in the Bank will not relieve his poverty. And so you and I may know in our judgment, as a matter of doctrinal speculation, that there is in Christ all fulness treasured up. Will *that* profit us? We must have the communication of it: the handling of it; the sweet manifestation of it, that our souls may be savingly blessed by it. And the gospel in the hands of the Spirit does this. When God is pleased to bless the gospel, either preached or read (and sometimes without the one or the other), and communicates through it a taste of the riches of Christ, of the beauty of Christ, and of the salvation that is in Christ, He then abundantly blesses this provision to the hearts of His people.

2. But again, the *promises* of God are also channels of communication, through which the provision stored up in Christ flows into the hearts of God's people. They are therefore spoken of in Scripture as "breasts of consolation," at which the new-born babes of the household of faith suck. We are also said "*by them* to be made partakers of the divine nature" (1 Pet. 1:4), they being channels of heavenly communication through which grace flows to renew us in the spirit of our minds. But what are the promises unless they are applied, brought home with power, sealed with a divine influence, so that we may enjoy them, feed upon them, and taste the sweetness that is in them? But when the promises come home with power, when a sweetness is tasted in them, and the heart is filled with the marrow and fatness of them, *then* the promises are so many channels and conduits of communication through which the provision stored up in Christ flows into the soul.

3. The *ordinances*, too, of God's house, Baptism and the Lord's Supper, when God is pleased to bless them, are

channels through which grace and mercy flow into the soul. They are indeed nothing in themselves, absolutely valueless as mere forms; but when blessed of God, they are channels of communication, through which God is pleased sometimes to manifest His love and mercy to His people.

But the Lord has promised to bless Zion's provision *abundantly*. He does not, then, give grudgingly or niggardly, as though He ever repented of what He bestowed; but what He gives He bestows as a God, as a Prince, freely, bounteously, over-flowingly, worthy of an infinite, eternal, self-existent Jehovah. "He giveth to all liberally, and upbraideth (or grudgeth) not" (Jas. 1:5). "The gifts and calling of God are without repentance" (Rom. 11:29); that is, He never repents of what He gives to, and does for His people. And thus when He does bless, He blesses "abundantly," so as to make the soul like Naphtali, "satisfied with favour, and full with the blessing of the Lord" (Deut. 33:23).

But who are *the characters* that God thus abundantly blesses? If He blesses Zion's provision, He blesses it only to those who are poor and needy, hungry and naked, who have nothing and are nothing; and therefore can only have what God gives them, feel what God works in them, and be what God makes them. To such and such only is the provision of the gospel stored up in Christ blessed abundantly.

II. But we pass on to consider the second branch of blessings promised to Zion. "I will satisfy her poor with bread." As I before remarked, see how the Holy Ghost limits the expression, "*Her* poor!" And what gather we from this limitation? That there are poor who are not Zion's poor. It is said of many professed beggars in our London streets that they are impostors, clothed indeed in rags and wearing every

appearance of poverty, but could you follow them to their cellars, you would see them throwing off all their apparent miseries, and feasting upon delicacies which the honest poor cannot procure. Are there not many such sham beggars in the religious world? Are there not many who in prayer profess to be all poverty and emptiness, and the next moment begin to boast of the mighty acts that free will can perform? These are sham beggars, impostors, that have rags of poverty and nothing but the rags of poverty; who use indeed expressions that might almost make us think they are really poor and needy, while all the time they have no feeling sense of their poverty before a heart-searching God. And, again, there are persons in a Calvinistic profession of religion who have learnt, if I may use the expression, "the cant of poverty." You know the professed beggar always begs in a certain whining tone; he never speaks in his natural accent: he has a kind of professional whine. It is so with many, I fear, who profess to love experimental truth. They have the cant of poverty; they have got the true professional whine. But if you could look into their hearts, you would find them not really poor and needy by a work of grace upon their souls; but, like the Laodicean church, "rich and increased with goods, and in need of nothing." Now it is not of these sham poor that God speaks in the text—these religious impostors, these mock beggars, these tied up cripples, who on getting away from religious company, are as merry and cheerful as the London beggar is amongst his own crew. The text makes no promises to such, but limits the blessing to "*her* poor;" as though the heart-searching God saw that there were a great many professed poor who were not Zion's poor. Zion's poor are real paupers, true mendicants, unfeigned dependants upon alms; they have nothing and they are nothing in themselves but poverty, misery, and rags; they know it and they feel it; and when they tell God about it, it is not professional whine nor religious cant which

they have learnt from others, but the genuine feelings of their broken hearts.

Now you, my friends, (some of you at least, who approve of experimental preaching), know that God's people are spiritually a poor and needy people. But look into your hearts. You profess spiritual poverty. But has God really made you poor? Has the Lord Himself stripped you? Or have you learnt the words, and not learnt the feelings? Have you caught up the mere expressions, without knowing bankruptcy and insolvency before a heart-searching Jehovah? Now, my friends, if you have not learnt by divine teaching what soul poverty is, you have no present manifested interest in this promise. Poverty *naturally* is a thing that we shrink from naturally, and poverty *spiritually* is a thing we shrink from spiritually; and as people, naturally, in embarrassed circumstances, will try every shift and make use of every means to keep from sinking into beggary: so spiritually, when God begins to strip a man of his fancied wealth, he will make use of every shift and every evasion in order that he may escape that appalling sight of being poor and needy before a heart-searching God. There are many people who think that the standard in religion is usually set too high. I have read the remark, and I fully agree with it, that in general it is not placed sufficiently low. There are few people poor enough for Christ; they do not sink deep enough into soul trouble to be picked up by gospel consolation. They have not yet been in the Gazette; bankruptcy has not taken place; they have not come yet to thorough insolvency; they have not been brought into that spot which the Lord speaks of when He said, "When they had nothing to pay, he frankly forgave them both." Most persons—aye, and among them many of God's own dear children—are not poor enough for the gospel. Perhaps there are some here who are from time to time saying, "I cannot rejoice in Christ as I could wish; I

cannot see my name in the book of life as I desire; I have not those sweet consolations which others of God's people speak of." Shall I tell you the reason? Shall I be honest with you? You are not yet poor enough; you have yet a little store at home; the loaf has not altogether disappeared out of the cupboard; the last penny is not yet spent out of your pocket; you have something still in hand; you are not yet poor enough for Christ. But when you become so poor that you have nothing whatever, and sink down into the depths of creature wretchedness, and "have nothing to pay," the Lord will frankly forgive you, and manifest His grace, mercy, and truth in your needy and naked soul.

Now the Lord has given a special promise to Zion's poor. "I will satisfy her poor with *bread*." Nothing else? Bread! Is that all? Yes; that is all God has promised; bread, the staff of life. But what does He mean by "bread?" The Lord Himself, in that blessed chapter, John 6, explains what bread is. He says, "Moses gave you not that bread from heaven; but My Father giveth you the true bread from heaven." "I am," He says, "the bread of life." And again, "I am the living bread which came down from heaven; if any man eat of this bread he shall live for ever" (John 6:35, 51). The bread, then, that God gives to Zion's poor is the flesh and blood of His own dear Son; not received in the elements, as Popery and Puseyism teach, but fed upon by living faith, under the special operations of the Holy Ghost in the heart.

But must not we have an appetite before we can feed upon *bread*? The rich man who feasts continually upon juicy meat and savoury sauces could not subsist upon bread. To come down to live on such simple food as bread—why, he must be really hungry to be satisfied with that. So it is spiritually. A man fed upon notions and a number of speculative opinions cannot descend to the simplicity of the gospel. To feed upon

a crucified Christ, a bleeding Jesus! He is not sufficiently brought down to the starving point to relish such spiritual food as this. Before, then, he can feed upon this bread of life he must be made spiritually poor; and when he is brought to be nothing but a mass of wretchedness, filth, guilt, and misery, when he feels his soul sinking under the wrath of God, and has scarcely a hope to buoy up his poor tottering heart; when he finds the world embittered to him, and he has no one object from which he can reap any abiding consolation, then when the Lord is pleased a little to open up in his conscience, and bring a savour of the love and blood of His dear Son into his heart, he begins to taste gospel bread. Being weaned from feeding on husks and ashes, and sick "of the vine of Sodom and the fields of Gomorrah," and being brought to relish simple gospel food, he begins to taste a sweetness in Christ crucified which he never could know till he was made experimentally poor. The Lord has promised to satisfy such.

And what a sweetness there is in the word "satisfy!" The world cannot satisfy you and me. Have we not tried, and some of us perhaps for many years, to get some satisfaction from it? But can wife or husband "satisfy" us? Can children or relatives "satisfy" us? Can all the world calls good or great "satisfy" us? Can the pleasures of sin "satisfy" us? Is there not in all an aching void? Do we not reap dissatisfaction and disappointment from everything that is of the creature, and of the flesh? Do we not find that there is little else but sorrow to be reaped from everything in this world? I am sure I find, and have found for some years, that there is little else to be gathered from the world but disappointment, dissatisfaction, "vanity and vexation of spirit." The poor soul looks round upon the world and the creature, upon all the occupations, amusements, and relations of life, and finds all one melancholy harvest, so that all it reaps is sorrow, perplexity,

and dissatisfaction.

Now when a man is brought here, to want satisfaction, something to make him happy, something to fill up the aching void, something to bind up broken bones, bleeding wounds, and leprous sores, and after he has looked at everything, at doctrines, opinions, notions, speculations, forms, rites, and ceremonies in religion, at the world with all its charms, and at self with all its varied workings, and found nothing but bitterness of spirit, vexation and trouble in them all, and thus sinks down a miserable wretch; why, then, when the Lord opens up to him something of the bread of life, he finds a satisfaction in that which he never could gain from any other quarter. And that is the reason, my friends, why the Lord afflicts His people so; why some carry about with them such weak, suffering tabernacles, why some have so many family troubles, why others are so deeply steeped in poverty, why others have such rebellious children, and why others are so exercised with spiritual sorrows that they scarcely know what will be the end. It is all for one purpose, to make them miserable out of Christ, dissatisfied except with gospel food; to render them so wretched and uncomfortable that God alone can make them happy, and alone can speak consolation to their troubled minds.

My friends, if there be any young persons here whose heart God has touched with His Spirit, and you are yet seeking some satisfaction from the world; if your health and spirits are yet unbroken, and you are looking to reap a harvest of pleasure from the creature, depend upon it, if you are a child of God, you will be disappointed. The Lord will cut up by the roots all your anticipated pleasure. He will effectually mar your worldly happiness. He will never let you have an earthly Paradise, and it is your mercy that He will not. If you are looking for happiness from wife or husband, from business,

from the world, from whatever your carnal heart is going out after, depend upon it, God will let you take no solid nor abiding pleasure in them, but He will cut up by the roots all your earthly enjoyments. He will mar all your worldly plans, and bring you to this spot, to be a miserable wretch without Christ, to be a ruined creature without the manifestations of the Son of God to your soul. And when you can find no pleasure in the world, no happiness in the things of time and sense, but feel misery in your soul, and are fearing lest eternal misery be your portion in the world to come, *you, you,* will then be the very characters that God will comfort through the gospel, and give you a manifested interest in the promise made to Zion, "I will satisfy her poor with bread." You will not then be one of those full souls that loathe the honeycomb, but one of those hungry souls to whom every bitter thing is sweet. And it is your mercy, and in my right mind, I believe it is my mercy—(though few, perhaps, more dislike afflictions, troubles, and trials than I do)—that we cannot take pleasure in the world. If we could, I know where and what I should be. I should be pursuing the vain imaginations of my carnal heart, and trying to reap pleasure where real happiness never can be found; turning away from the gospel and all the promised blessings of the gospel, as the children of Israel turned away from the manna, "Our soul loatheth this light bread." Religion! what would you care for religion if you could love and enjoy the world? Why, a man's heart is so proud and worldly that he would not touch vital, spiritual religion unless he was absolutely forced by the hand of God in his soul. He absolutely would not so much as look at it, unless sorrow of heart, perplexity of mind, anguish of spirit, afflictions, and a conscience burdened with guilt made him seek happiness *there*, because every other path to happiness is effectually blocked up.

Now the Lord says, "I will *satisfy* her poor with bread." And

they shall be satisfied. For He says, "Eat, O friends; drink, yea, drink abundantly, O beloved" (Song 5:1). He will make them drink "of the river of His pleasures" (Ps. 36:8); for "there is a river, the streams whereof shall make glad the city of God" (Ps. 46:4). And if any of you, my friends, are mourning, sighing and groaning, and sometimes heaving up with rebellion and fretful impatience because you cannot have what you wish naturally to enjoy, or because you cannot bring about your earthly schemes, and have little else but sorrow of heart and trouble of soul, you are far more favoured than if you could have all that heart could wish. God, who has made you wretched that you might find happiness in Him, will not leave you to live and die in your misery. He will bind up every bleeding wound, and pour the oil of joy into your troubled heart.

III. "I will also clothe her priests with salvation." Still the same limitation that we have before noticed, "*her* priests." And as "*her* poor" were divinely marked out and limited, so "*her* priests" are shut up in the same bound; and I think in our day, when Puseyism and Popery are so rampant, a very sweet and wise limitation. Who then are "priests," in the gospel sense of the word? Men on whom the Lord Bishop has laid holy hands? Men ordained by a conclave of dissenting ministers? Men who appear before the people in a gown, and bands, and gold rings? men who on their cards, and on the brass plates of their doors, call themselves, "The Rev. Mr. So and So?" Are these Zion's priests? I will not say that *none* such are gospel priests; but these externals neither make them nor manifest them to be so. Let us then turn from these inventions of man to what the Holy Ghost has said upon this subject. What read we there? "Who hath made *us* kings and priests unto God" (Rev. 1:6). And again: "Ye are a chosen generation, a *royal priesthood*, a holy nation, a peculiar people" (1 Peter 2:9). Then the true priests, "Zion's

priests," are God's spiritually taught people; all who, as the Apostle says, as "living stones are built up a spiritual house, a *holy priesthood*, to offer up spiritual sacrifices, acceptable to God by Jesus Christ" (1 Peter 2:5). God's praying people, then, His broken-hearted, mourning, sighing, crying, weeping, pleading people, all in whose hearts the Spirit of the living God intercedes with unutterable groanings, and works in them the sacrifices of a broken heart which in the sight of God are of great price—*these*, and *these only*, are Zion's priests. My friends, be not deceived by pretensions. Think not that there is something in the ministry under the gospel similar to the old Jewish priesthood. Be not imposed upon by priestcraft. *You* are priests, if God has given you a broken heart; you are a "holy, a royal priesthood," if God is kindling the sacrifices of prayer and praise in your soul. And these are the only priests of Zion, whether in or out of the ministry. All others are priests of Baal. And they may cry from morning until evening, they may cut their flesh with lancets, and inflict on themselves all the self-imposed austerities of Popery and Puseyism, there will be "neither voice, nor any to answer, nor any to regard them" (1 Kings 18:29). There will be no holy fire coming down from heaven, no still small voice whispering pardon and peace; as Zion's priests experience, who "worship God in Spirit and in truth." Do you then know what groaning prayer is? Do you know anything of secret sighs and cries unto God? Do you know what it is to pant after Jesus as the hart panteth after the water brooks? Is your soul alive unto God, seeking His face, groaning after the manifestations of His mercy? Then you are a priest, though holy hands were never laid upon you. And if you know not these inward teachings, not all the church priestcraft nor all the dissenting priestcraft that ever imposed on the minds of men can make you one of Zion's priests, or give you an interest in the promises made to them.

But God has promised that "He will clothe these priests with *salvation*;" not clothe them with a gown and bands,—He makes no promise of that kind; but He will clothe them with salvation. And that is the only clothing that will suit Zion's priests. For a priest of Zion having a broken heart and a contrite spirit, having had the spirit of prayer communicated to him, and panting after God, the living God, wants a manifested salvation. He does not want the praise of men, or to be esteemed as some holy being, appointed of God to communicate blessings; he abhors such priestcraft. What he wants is the spiritual manifestation and divine application of salvation to his soul,—salvation in all its sweetness—salvation from sin, from self, from the curse of the law, from the wrath of God, from the snares of Satan, from the temptations which he is beset with, from the troubles which he is passing through—salvation in all its rich, glorious, and complete fulness. Now God has promised that He "will clothe these priests with salvation." He will cast around them this beautiful garment, this robe of Christ's righteousness; He will cover them therewith, "as a bridegroom decketh himself with ornaments, and a bride adorneth herself with her jewels" (Isa. 61:10).

If you have never yet known, then, what it is to sigh and cry and groan unto the Lord, and offer up these breathings of a broken heart, you have no present manifested interest in the promise, "I will clothe her priests with salvation." O, it is a mercy to be a broken-hearted sinner! In my right mind, I would sooner be a broken-hearted sinner than the most towering professor alive. I would sooner lie at Jesus' feet with a real contrite spirit and a broken heart, feel the blessed emotions of godly sorrow, clasp Him in my arms as my Lord and my God, and taste the beams of mercy shining into my soul out of the Sun of righteousness, than be the most eloquent, the most popular, or the most towering preacher

that ever stood up in a pulpit. I covet not such baubles. The real thing which I covet, in my right mind, is to lie at the feet of the blessed Lord, and feel Him to be precious to my soul.

IV. "And her saints shall shout aloud for joy." What! limitation again! Must the Lord be ever hedging His promises in, lest the dogs take hold of them? Must the Lord keep His own hand firmly fixed upon them, lest those to whom they do not belong should break in, and seize them? Even so; the Lord must limit them; for, after all His positive limitations, men will still break through the hedge.

"*Her saints.*" "Who is a *saint*?" A solemn visaged man? A fasting man? A man who macerates his body with austerities? These are not God's saints. They are such as carnal men may look up to with admiration; but they are not Zion's saints, whom the Lord has promised that they shall "shout aloud for joy." Who then are they? Those whom God has eternally sanctified by choosing them in Christ before the world began; those into whose hearts He has put the Spirit of holiness, that they may be a "peculiar people, vessels of mercy, sanctified and meet for the Master's use;" those in whom He is working "to will and to do of His good pleasure." These are Zion's saints. Now Zion's saints are all sinners to a man; that is, they are all feeling sinners; and the more they are saints, the more they are sinners; that is, the more God teaches them in their souls, sanctifies and separates them to His own use, the more vile, filthy, base, and polluted do they feel before Him. How are you to judge of your saintship? By becoming day by day more and more holy, more and more pure, more and more pious, and more and more religious? That is a false sanctity which only feeds the flesh; that is only nature masked and whitewashed. But Zion's saint grows downward—downward in self-aborrence, self-loathing, godly sorrow, brokenness of heart, contrition of spirit, low views of

himself. And just as he grows downward in self, will he grow upward in adoring, admiring, and loving the Lord of life and glory. And what then? Will this root sin out of him? Saints are partakers of a holy nature, and this "divine nature," as the Scripture calls it, in them makes known to them, but does not root out their sinfulness. A saint is rather one who is crying unto God on account of his sinfulness, who is abhorring himself on account of his baseness, who sees nothing in himself spiritually good, and loathes himself from time to time in dust and ashes.

Now the Lord has promised to *Zion's* saints (for there are mock saints, as well as mock beggars), that "they shall shout aloud for joy." They shall not be always mourning and crying; they shall not be always groaning from heaviness of heart and trouble of soul; but they shall "shout aloud for joy." When, where, and how? When the Lord blesses their souls, when He visits them with His gracious presence, and sheds His love abroad in their hearts, then they shall "shout aloud for joy." Not, however, because they are saints; not because of their mighty victories over sin, the world, and the devil; not because they are becoming more decidedly pious and more eminently religious; not because they have got a little pleasing holiness in the flesh which they can look at and admire. Of these who say, "Stand by, I am holier than thou," God says, "they are as a stench in His nostrils." But those who see and feel themselves to be filthy, base monsters of iniquity, crawling reptiles, guilty, defiled, and polluted before a heart-searching God; when these receive into their souls a precious Christ, in His love and blood, in His grace and glory, they "shout aloud for joy," not because of the mighty works they have done, are doing, or mean to do, but on account of what the Lord has done for them, and what the Lord has done and is doing in them.

See, my friends, how God has limited these promises! They are not thrown down for anybody to pick up, but they are limited; and I should not stand up as a faithful God-fearing man if I did not limit them. They stand in God's Word limited, and they come into my heart limited, and therefore they must come out of my mouth limited. But happy are those who are within the bound; happy are those who are "a peculiar people," who are walled about with God's promises and with God's mercy! They are within a fence, never to be broken, of God's eternal purposes, and God's eternal love. O happy are those whom God has gathered in with His own blessed hands, that they may be "a garden enclosed," in which the Lord walks, and "the spices flow out" as He visits and comes into this blessed garden; (Song 4:12, 16.)

You then whose hearts God has touched will not be offended because He has given limitations. That makes all the sweetness of them, that they are limited, and that you—(O wonder of wonders!) *you* have an interest in them. O, my friends, who am I, and who are you, that the Lord should take notice of us? Were any so far from salvation as you and I—any so proud, any so hypocritical, any so self-righteous, any so madly in love with sin, any so the servants of the devil, as you and I have been? And if God has taken notice of us, to what shall we ascribe it? I think sometimes that of all persons that were ever called by grace, I was the farthest from God's fold, the most unworthy, and the least likely for God ever to take out of the world, and to make and manifest me as "a vessel of honour meet for the Master's use." Not that I was living in open sin, or at least in those lengths to which others have gone, but so proud and worldly, and so buried in the things of time and sense was I, that it seems to me that it was not only a miracle, but a double miracle, that God should ever pluck my guilty soul out of the ruins of the fall, and bring me to this spot to be now preaching His truth

in His name and His fear. And I believe it is the conviction, the heartfelt conviction, of all who fear God, that of all they were the farthest from the kingdom of heaven, and of all they were the least likely for the Lord to look upon. They are all brought to the spot to which the Lord brought Ruth, when she wondered that Boaz "should ever take knowledge of her, seeing she was a stranger" (Ruth 2:10).

Then you and I have no reason to quarrel with God's limitation of His promises. If the Lord has put us within the bounds, remember He *keeps us in* as well as keeps others out; and if He did not keep us in, we should soon fall out through some gap. But the Lord by His limitations keeps His people in, and keeps the world out; and thus, by keeping His people in, He preserves them unto the end, and leaves the wicked to perish in their own justly deserved doom.

We shall not, then, contend with the Lord, and say He is an arbitrary God. We acknowledge His sovereignty; we bow before it with holy adoration and implicit submission. We quarrel not with Him because He is a Sovereign, but we adore Him and bless Him that His sovereignty should be displayed in a way of mercy, and not in a way of wrath. That He should limit His promises we quarrel not with Him; but that He should give us a name and a place amongst His children, that He should give you and me, the vilest, the basest, and the unworthiest, a standing in His Church and family, that, indeed, is a mercy, and that indeed is a wonder of matchless grace. And therefore so far from carping at God's limitation, and cavilling at the way in which God has fenced out some and fenced in others, in our right mind, under the sweet enjoyment of gospel blessings, we shall only bless Him and praise Him the more for it, and fall down before Him, ascribing honour and power and salvation and glory to God and the Lamb.