



## Revivals And Church History :: The Solemn Assembly -roberts

The Solemn Assembly -roberts - posted by sermonindex (), on: 2007/1/14 2:36

### Solemn Assembly

by Richard Owen Roberts

#### The Sad Fact

Most professing Christians have never heard of a Solemn Assembly. Of the relatively small number who have, a substantial portion consider it as merely an Old Testament practice of no particular relevance today.

#### THE BIBLICAL BACKGROUND

There are not less than twelve revival movements in the Old Testament. While each of these revivals is very different from the others, there are at least four factors preceding each revival which they all hold in common.

#### A Tragic Declension.

Every revival of the Old Testament is preceded by a period of moral and spiritual decline among the people of God. As illustrations of this problem, consider that preceding the revival of Exodus 32-33, the decline included the building of the golden calf and its worship, while the revival under David was preceded by a period of more than six decades in which the Ark of the Covenant of God was out of its rightful place in Jerusalem.

#### A Righteous Judgment From God.

Without any exception, Old Testament revivals have always been preceded by some kind of a righteous judgment from God. While some of these judgments are immediate and final, resulting in deaths among the wicked, others are gracious and remedial, resulting in brokenness, prayer, repentance and extraordinary seeking of God's face.

#### The Raising Up of An Immensely Burdened Leader or Leaders.

This fact can be illustrated by a simple listing of the Old Testament revivals themselves:

The Revival under Moses - Exodus 32ff.

The Revival under Samuel - 1 Samuel 7 (with chapters 1-6 providing the background).

The Revival under David - 2 Samuel 6,7.

The Revival under Asa - 2 Chronicles 14-16.

The Revival under Jehoshaphat - 2 Chronicles 17-20.

The Revival under Jehoida - 2 Chronicles 23-24.

The Revival under Hezekiah - 2 Chronicles 29-32.

The Revival under Joash - 2 Chronicles 34-35.

The Revival under Zerubbabel - Ezra 1-6.

The Revival under Ezra - Ezra 7-10.

The Revival under Nehemiah - Nehemiah 1-13.

The Revival under Joel - Joel 1-2:27.

Obviously, in each case God Himself raised up a leader who was under the heavy burden of the moral and spiritual needs of his people. The words of Moses in Exodus 32:32 forcefully emphasize this: "But now, if Thou wilt, forgive their sin - if not, please blot me out from Thy book which Thou hast written."

Some Extraordinary Action.

While this action varies from revival to revival, the most common action taken was that of a Solemn Assembly. Again, note the record in the revivals themselves:

Exodus 33:7-11 - Moses took the tent and pitched it outside the camp, a good distance from the camp. He called it the place of meeting and required everyone who sought the Lord to go outside the camp, away from the place of sin, to the tabernacle to meet the Lord.

1 Samuel 7:5, 6 - Samuel required all of Israel to gather at Mizpah in a Solemn Assembly where he prayed for them and they fasted and confessed their sins.

2 Samuel 6:14 and 1 Chronicles 13-18 - After a bad start in sinning against the Lord by moving the Ark of the Covenant on a new cart (the Philistine method), David and the people moved it according to the Word of the Lord and in joyful humiliation, he danced before the Lord with all his might in a linen ephod - having laid aside his crown and royal robes, he acted as common man among common men. While no mention is made of a Solemn Assembly in the Second Samuel account, it is detailed in the parallel passage in First Chronicles.

2 Chronicles 15:9-15 - Asa called a Solemn Assembly in Jerusalem where the people entered into a covenant to seek the Lord God of their fathers with all their hearts and with all their souls.

2 Chronicles 20:3-13ff - Jehoshaphat called a Solemn Assembly throughout all Judah and Jerusalem and the people fasted and sought the Lord.

2 Chronicles 23:16 - Jehoiada, in a Solemn Assembly, made a covenant between himself and all the people and the king that they should be the Lord's people. They then proceeded to cleanse the land of the evil.

2 Chronicles 29:5ff - Hezekiah and the leaders established a decree which was very extensively circulated requiring all the people to gather for a Solemn Assembly and the celebration of the Passover. An entire fourteen days were devoted to seeking the Lord and worshipping Him.

2 Chronicles 33:31-33 - Josiah gathered the people together in a Solemn Assembly, and they entered into a covenant with the Lord to walk in all his ways and to perform all the words of the covenant written in the Book.

Ezra 6:16-22 - Zerubbabel led the people in a Solemn Assembly and seven day celebration of the Passover in which they separated themselves from the impurity of the nations and pledged themselves to seek the Lord God of Israel.

Ezra 8:21-23; 9:5-15 - Ezra proclaimed a fast at the River Ahava that they might all humble themselves and seek the Lord. They later engaged in public humiliation and putting away of sin in the form of a Solemn Assembly.

Nehemiah 8:1ff - A Solemn Assembly was held in front of the Water Gate where the Book of the Law of Moses was read by the hour and an agreement was made in writing to put away sin and to seek the Lord with all their hearts.

Joel 1:13; 2:12-17, etc. - Joel called a Solemn Assembly in which all the people were required to be in attendance and where all were required to return to the Lord with all their hearts, with fasting, weeping and mourning, and where they were required to rend their hearts and not their garments.

Consider the situation at the time of the Solemn Assembly called by the Prophet Joel. The people, as was common, were guilty of flagrant sin which had not been confessed and put away. God visited them with a remedial judgment - a plague of locusts of such proportion that nothing like it had happened before: "What the gnawing locust has left, the swarming locust has eaten; and what the swarming locust has left, the creeping locust has eaten; and what the creeping locust has left, the stripping locust has eaten." In addition to the terrible plague of insects, a fierce drought had afflicted the land. The drunkards wailed because they had no new wine to drink. The priests mourned because the grain offering and the libations were cut off from the House of the Lord. The fields were ruined and the land itself mourned, the vinedressers wailed, and the beasts groaned while the herds of cattle wandered aimlessly because there was no pasture for them. The people themselves wailed like a virgin girded with sackcloth for the bridegroom of her youth.

The Prophet issued orders: "Gird yourselves with sackcloth, and lament, O priests; Wail, O ministers of the altar! Come, spend the night in sackcloth, O ministers of my God... Consecrate a fast, proclaim a solemn assembly; gather the elders and all the inhabitants of the land to the House of the Lord your God and cry out to the Lord... Blow a trumpet in Zion, and sound an alarm on My holy mountain! Let all the inhabitants of the land tremble... Yet even now, declares the Lord, ret

urn to Me with all you heart, and with fasting, weeping and mourning; and rend your heart and not your garments. Now r  
eturn to the Lord your God... Blow a trumpet in Zion, consecrate a fast, proclaim a solemn assembly, gather the people,  
sanctify the congregation, assemble the elders, gather the children and the nursing infants. Let the bridegroom come out  
of his room and the bride out of her bridal chamber. Let the priest, the Lord's ministers, weep between the porch and the  
altar, and let them say, 'Spare Thy people, O Lord, and do not make Thine inheritance a reproach, a byword among the  
nations.'"

Promises were offered as encouragement: "Then the Lord will be zealous for His land, and will have pity on His people.  
And the Lord will answer and say to His people, "Behold I am going to send you grain, new wine and oil, and you will be  
satisfied in full with them; and I will never again make you a reproach among the nations. But I will remove the northern  
army from you , and I will drive it into a parched and desolate land, and its vanguard into the western sea, and its rear gu  
ard into the western sea. And its stench will arise and its foul smell will come up..."

And in response to the corporate repentance of the people through the use of the divinely ordained means of the Solem  
n Assembly, the land rejoiced and was made glad. The pastures of the wilderness turned green. The trees and the vines  
bore fruit. And the fruit borne was not ordinary but extraordinary for God moved the rainy seasons closer together, and c  
aused the sun to shine upon the earth, so that the threshing floors were full and the vats overflowing. So great was the b  
lessing bestowed by the God who delights in a broken and contrite people that He made up to them the years that were l  
ost to the mighty army of locusts. The people had plenty and were satisfied and praised the name of the Lord who had d  
ealt wondrously with them. They knew that God was in their midst, that He only was God, and that there was none other!

Unfortunately, some professed Christians will be disinclined to seriously think of a Solemn Assembly because the illustra  
tions above are all Old Testament. They would do well to weigh the entire season of preparation prior to Pentecost in the  
light of the Solemn Assembly and see that those days in the upper Room were indeed a Solemn Assembly if ever in the  
history of the world one was held.

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#### HISTORICAL FOUNDATIONS

Not only were Solemn Assemblies a very common aspect in the revivals of the Bible, but they were a very important part  
of the life of believers in America during all its early years. For verification of this one has only to consult the Sprague Co  
llection of Early American Pamphlets at the Weidener Library at Harvard University. There will be found a large number  
of sermons that were preached at the Fast Days and Solemn Assemblies which were frequently called and earnestly att  
ended by American believers prior to the general decline of true Christianity which characterizes twentieth-century Ameri  
ca.

Our Fathers believed God was offended by sin. They themselves were deeply troubled both by the existence of personal  
sin in their own lives and by the presence of unconfessed corporate sins in the churches and in the nation. They regarde  
d natural calamities as manifestations of the displeasure of God Almighty against sin and allowed such events as earthq  
uakes, fires, volcanoes, epidemics, floods, and droughts to prompt them to special seeking of God's face in fasting, pray  
er, and corporate repentance. They also sought the Lord in Solemn Assemblies in connection with wars, murders, rapes  
, etc., believing such outbursts of wickedness to be directly related to the general decline of moral and spiritual life in the  
churches.

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#### MISUSE OF THE SOLEMN ASSEMBLY

Like any other God-ordained means of grace, the Solemn Assembly has the potential of being corrupted. The very sever  
e denunciations of Isaiah 1:10-15 clearly indicate God's contempt for Solemn Assemblies that have lost their heart and h  
ave become mere form and ritual: "Bring your worthless offerings no longer, their incense is an abomination to Me. New  
moons and Sabbath, the calling of assemblies — I cannot endure iniquity and the Solemn Assembly. I hate your new  
moon festivals and your appointed feasts. They have become a burden to Me, I am weary of bearing them..."

But we must not think professed American Christians have abandoned the Solemn Assembly because of its perpetual m  
isuse and abuse. More accurately, as God has been degraded to a being scarcely a half inch bigger than man, humans  
have assumed gigantic proportions in their own eyes. In consequence of this professed Christians have felt at liberty to

neglect major portions of Scripture and to be virtually untaught in and unaffected by the long history of the Christian Church. The Solemn Assembly has simply fallen into oblivion at the hands of a people too arrogant to know that their own corporate sins - especially those heart sins of pride, unbelief, and rebellion - have created a nation ripe for destruction.

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#### GETTING THE FOUNDATION IN PLACE

One's view of the Solemn Assembly will be affected to a large degree by his understanding of the righteous judgments of God. As noted above, all Old Testament revivals have been preceded by some form of a righteous judgment. It must be understood that these righteous judgments are the result of unconfessed corporate sins. When the people of God sin against Him and do not repent, He judges them. While some of these judgments may be called final and consist of death and destruction, the more standard form of judgment is both remedial and gracious and consists of withdrawal of certain evidences of His manifest presence and merciful favors. In the absence of God's manifest presence there is always an immediate and extensive increase in iniquity. This may be compared to the effect upon a city of the police force going on strike. It is the visible manifestation of law and order in the form of policemen, police cars, etc., that keeps crime somewhat restrained. When the police are on strike, when they are known to be corrupt themselves, or when it is known that arrests are meaningless because of the laxity of judges, a community must anticipate a tragic increase in crime. Just so, when God withdraws evidences of His manifest presence from a people, there is always a horrendous increase in iniquity and decline in spirituality.

That there has been a very great increase of immorality and decrease of true biblical spirituality in America in recent years is a fact beyond controversy. Why has this very great change occurred? Is it because the devil is more powerful than he used to be or because God is older and not nearly as able to defend Himself, His people and His church against wickedness? Obviously not. It is because God has judged America with the remedial judgment of withdrawal of certain manifestations of His gracious presence and mercy.

As soon as it becomes evident that immorality is on the increase and spirituality is on the decline, the biblically sound and spiritually lively Church will not foolishly blame the world but will immediately recognize its own complicity. The Church must first repent, for the righteous judgment was not against the world but against the Church. Therefore, in times of spiritual declension and moral decadence, the great duty of every Christian is both to discover those sins which have caused the judgment and to put them away by that method which God Himself has chosen. The method God has chosen is the Solemn Assembly. Corporate sin must be dealt with by corporate repentance according to divinely ordained methods.

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#### PRACTICAL SUGGESTIONS

A Solemn Assembly is to be a time when all normal daily work is set aside. This is clearly the instruction of Leviticus 23:34-36, Numbers 29:35 and Deuteronomy 16:8. While the overwhelming teaching of Scripture is in favor of hard work, it is absolutely clear that all work must be subjugated to spiritual concerns. Just as man is to labor six days, and six days only, and then rest on the seventh, so also man is to labor in times of spiritual and moral advance; but he is to set aside his normal daily work in order to seek the face of God during times of righteous judgment.

A Solemn Assembly is a time when the entire body of people affected by the righteous judgment is required to be in attendance. This is clear in the several passages on Old Testament revivals noted above, but nowhere more clear than in Joel where even the honeymooners had their honeymoon revoked, and the mother with an infant at her breast was required to be present (Joel 2:16). Part of the corporate sin that must be put away is that spirit of rebellion that exists in many professed Christians that causes them to believe that no spiritual leader can order them about. Such wicked sinners would do well to observe the severity of the denunciations against rebellion and stubbornness recorded in I Samuel 15:23.

A Solemn Assembly is a time of fasting. Rather than wondering concerning the physical significance of fasting, professed Christians would do well to face squarely the immediate spiritual importance. On a normal basis we realize that the care of our bodies is a proper responsibility we assume before God. The care of ourselves is part of our normal service to God. But there are issues vastly more important than the care of our bodies. In fasting, a believing people acknowledge to God that the urgent concerns of the spiritual take precedence over the normal concerns of the physical. In short, fasting is an outward means of demonstrating that humility before God which acknowledges that the discovery of all those sins that have provoked His judgment and putting away of them in an orderly corporate manner is of vastly greater consequence

nce than the feeding of the body. There are times when the bodies of believers must be brought into subjection so that t he overwhelming necessities of the spiritual may receive their due attention.

A Solemn Assembly is a time for sacrifice. Numerous Old Testament passages dealing with the Solemn Assembly make this clear (including Numbers 10:10 and 15:3). One of the greatest blessings God has given to mankind is the gift of time . What sacrifice could be more significant than the sacrifice of time in order to participate fully in God's commanded meth od of reversing a righteous judgment against a church or nation?

A Solemn Assembly is of protracted duration. While most professed Christians may content themselves with hour-long " worship" services, the call to a Solemn Assembly is a call to a greatly elongated meeting. In many of the passages wher e Solemn Assemblies are described, the Assembly met for days on end - even as long a seven or fourteen days. On oth er occasions, however, it would appear that a full day was sufficient. In 2 Chronicles 7:8-9 it is noted that the feast was o bserved for seven days and then on the eighth day a Solemn Assembly was observed. It was at this Solemn Assembly t hat God said, "If My people, which are called by My name, shall humble themselves, and pray, and seek My face, and tu rn from their wicked ways, then will I hear from heaven, and will forgive their sin, and will heal their land" (verse 14). No Solemn Assembly would be worth the name that did not allow at least an entire day for the great tasks of humiliation, pra yer, repentance and seeking God's face.

A Solemn Assembly is a season of earnest prayer. Churches in general allot altogether too little time for prayer. Enough time may be taken to present requests to God but precious little time is given corporately for God to present requests to men. But not only should much time be given to prayer at a Solemn Assembly, much time in prayer should be given in pr eparation for a Solemn Assembly. If the Solemn Assembly is to be held throughout the day on Saturday, the people of a church would do well to give considerable time to prayer throughout each day of the preceding week in preparation for th e day itself.

A Solemn Assembly is a mandatory occasion for corporate repentance. In preparation for this, a catalogue of sins to be corporately confessed and put away should be prepared in advance. Some churches have solicited the involvement of t he entire congregation in this catalogue. Various entities within the fellowship have been asked to prepare lists of the off enses against both God and man that they know the church has never corporately put away. The leaders have then gon e over these lists and compiled them into a catalogue. The intent is not to manufacture wrongs but to seriously investigat e any and all matters that might have contributed to the righteous judgment.

A Solemn Assembly is an opportunity for Spirit-anointed preaching of the searching truths of Scripture to deeply touch af resh the lives of God's people. In Solemn Assemblies where only a single day is devoted, it is not uncommon to have a t least one or possibly two such sermons specifically aimed at the issues of the day and assisting the people in fulfillmen t of the responsibilities and grasping the opportunities the day presents.

A Solemn Assembly is a most wonderful opportunity for children to see their parents and elders demonstrating Christiani ty at its deepest corporate levels. Since the entire family is summoned, the youth and older children have a very special privilege of being deeply touched by the solemnities of the day. In some churches, outside baby-sitters have been hired t o look after infants and the smallest children so that parents can devote their full attention to the work of the day.

A Solemn Assembly gives God an opportunity to respond to His people at a level He cannot possibly do when they are li ving in neglect of His Word or in direct violation of His commandments. Historically, God has responded to Solemn Asse mblies by sending fresh waves of blessings into both the personal and corporate lives of believers and on some occasio ns even, glorious revivals have resulted. One of the most amazing instances of this is the Revival of the General Assem bly in the Church of Scotland in 1596.

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## ILLUSTRATIONS

John Davidson of Prestonpans, Scotland, became burdened for the welfare of his beloved Church and gave expressions of concern at the Synod of Fife in 1593 and the Assembly of 1594. His Presbytery of Haddington joined with him in petiti oning the General Assembly of the Church to set aside time for a Solemn Assembly at the annual meeting of 1596. The Assembly met at St. Giles Cathedral, Edinburgh, in March. A very thorough catalogue of sins was prepared which cover ed the misdeeds of every class of persons from the King on down to the meanest subjects. More space was given to the sins of ministers than to the wickedness of all other classes put together. The Solemn Assembly occurred on the Tuesda y of the second week of the General Assembly and some 400 men, mostly ministers, participated. Davidson preached o

n Ezekiel 13 and 34 and dealt with the lying prophets and the shepherds who feed themselves and not their flocks. He then exhorted his brethren to enter into private meditation and confession and it was then that the Holy Spirit of God came down and the ancient Cathedral Church resounded with the sobs and cries of hundreds of ministers humbling themselves before God on the dirt floor. A public pledge of fresh surrender to God Almighty was called for and all but one of the men present joined in waving their hands as evidence of binding commitment. This spirit of corporate repentance was carried into all the Presbyteries and the revival of 1596 followed.

But Solemn Assemblies must not be thought of merely as vestiges of the past. Recently the First Baptist church of Pagosa Springs, Colorado, was grievously affected by a divisive spirit. Two of the censorious persons, a husband and wife, were removed from membership because of their continued trouble-making activities. Rather than church discipline bringing them to repentance of their wickedness, these persons led the way in filing three lawsuits against the church, claiming that the two of them plus eleven of their friends and relatives were the true First Baptist Church of that community. The first suit was for all the church property and bank accounts. The second suit was for seventeen million dollars in damages: four million each for the husband and wife, four million each for their two daughters, plus an additional million in family damages against the pastor, Grant Adkisson. The third suit was a temporary injunction against the church, seeking to prevent the members from the use of their own building and finances. After much prayer and consultation the congregation determined to obey the Word of God in the resolution of the matter and called a Solemn Assembly. For three weeks prior to the day of Assembly extensive prayer was uttered. The fourth to second days prior to the Solemn Assembly were devoted to general prayer and fasting. The day immediately preceding the Assembly was given to round-the-clock prayer with fasting. Virtually the entire congregation met for the Solemn Assembly itself and spent nine hours together in prayer, fasting, and corporate repentance. Three days after the Solemn Assembly the four members of the family that had brought the suits against the church were all killed in the crash of a private airplane. As a direct result of divine intervention, the damages suit was dismissed, the temporary injunction was settled in favor of the church, the suit for the church property and bank accounts was dropped, and God Himself crowned the faithfulness of the dear people of that congregation with a season of most blessed nearness. God's work, done in God's way, still triumphs!

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#### ENCOURAGEMENT

Historically, unheeded remedial judgments have turned into final judgments. America, as a nation, is ripe for destruction. The Evangelical Movement in this country is characterized by an arrogance that is almost beyond belief. The neglect of prayer, the involvement in Philistine methodology, the moral evils, and the doctrinal corruptions that characterize the Movement are sufficient to cause Sodomites to wonder at God's justice in destroying their city while sparing the United States.

If the youth of the nation are to live out their lives in a land of freedom and opportunity, they will do so because their parents had grace sufficient to humble themselves, pray, repent of their sins, and seek God's face in Solemn Assemblies.

Obedience is still better than sacrifice. Joel's call requires prompt response, "Consecrate a fast, proclaim a Solemn Assembly; gather the elders and all the inhabitants of the land to the House of the Lord your God, and cry out to the Lord."

#### Re: The Solemn Assembly -roberts - posted by crsschk (), on: 2007/1/14 13:13

Solemnity it is to just once again absorb all this. So many questions arise having read this once before some time back. How to organize such a thing? Who might even be included to embrace it ...

Actually went searching for some of the sermons mentioned by Mr. Roberts during those times and not finding precisely what I was looking for did happen upon the following;

#### A Sermon for the Time Present

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A Sermon  
(No. 1990)  
Delivered on Lord's-day Morning, October 30th, 1887, by  
C. H. SPURGEON,  
At the Metropolitan Tabernacle, Newington

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"In that day it shall be said to Jerusalem, Fear thou not: and to Zion, Let not thine hands be slack. The Lord thy God in the midst of thee is mighty; he will save, he will rejoice over thee with joy; he will rest in his love, he will joy over thee with singing. I will gather them that are sorrowful for the solemn assembly, who are of thee, to whom the reproach of it was a burden."—Zephaniah 3:16-18.

HOLY SCRIPTURE is wonderfully full and abiding in its inner sense. It is a springing well, whereat you may draw, and draw again; for as you draw, it springs up for ever new and fresh. It is a well of water springing up everlastingly. The fulfillment of a divine promise is not the exhaustion of it. When a man gives you a promise, and he keeps it, there is an end of the promise; but it is not so with God. When he keeps his word to the full, he has but begun: he is prepared to keep it, and keep it, and keep it for ever and ever. What would you say of a man who had wheat upon his barn floor, and threshed it until he had beaten out the last golden grain; but the next day he went and threshed again, and brought back as much as the day before; and on the day after, again taking his flail, he went to the same threshing, and again brought back his measure as full as at the first, and so on for all the days of the year? Would it not seem to you as a fairy tale? It would certainly be a surprising miracle. But what should we say if, throughout a long life, this miracle could be prolonged? Yet we have continued to thresh the promises ever since faith was given us, and we have carried away our full portion every day. What shall we say of the glorious fact that the saints in all generations, from the first day until now, have done the same; and of that equal truth, that as long as there is a needy soul upon earth, there will be upon the threshing floor of the promises the same abundance of the finest of the wheat as when the first man filled his measure and returned rejoicing? I will not dwell upon the specific application of the text before us: I do not doubt that it was specially fulfilled as it was intended; and if there still remains some special piece of history to which this passage alludes, it will again be fulfilled in due time; but this I know, that those who have lived between whiles have found this promise true to them. Children of God have used these promises under all sorts of circumstances, and have derived the utmost comfort from them; and this morning I feel as if the text had been newly written for the present occasion, for it is in every syllable most suitable to the immediate crisis. If the Lord had fixed his eye upon the condition of his church just now, and had written this passage only for this year of grace 1887, it could scarcely have been more adapted to the occasion. Our business shall be to show this; but I would aim at much more. Let our prayer be that we, may enjoy this marvellous portion of the sacred word, and take intense delight in it. As God rests in his love, so may we rest in it this morning; and as he joys over us with singing, so may we break forth into joyous psalms to the God of our salvation.

I am going to begin with the last verse of the text, and work my way upwards. The first; head is, *a trying day for God's people*. They are sorrowful because a cloud is upon their solemn assembly, and the reproach thereof is a burden. Secondly, we will note *a glorious ground of consolation*. We read in the seventeenth verse, "The Lord thy God in the midst of thee is mighty; he will save, he will rejoice over thee with joy; he will rest in his love, he will joy over thee with singing." And, thirdly, here is *a brave conduct suggested thereby*: "In that day it shall be said to Jerusalem, Fear thou not: and to Zion, Let not thine hands be slack."

I. Beginning at the eighteenth verse, we notice A TRYING DAY FOR GOD'S PEOPLE. *The solemn assembly had fallen under reproach*. The solemn assemblies of Israel were her glory: her great days of festival and sacrifice were the gladness of the land. To the faithful their holy days were their holidays. But a reproach had fallen upon the solemn assembly, and I believe it is so now at this present moment. It is a, sad affliction when in our solemn assemblies *the brilliance of the gospel light is dimmed by error*. The clearness of the testimony is spoiled when doubtful voices are scattered among the people, and those who ought to preach the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth, are telling out for doctrines the imaginations of men, and the inventions of the age. Instead of revelation, we have philosophy, falsely so-called; instead of divine infallibility, we have surmises and larger hopes. The gospel of Jesus Christ, which is the same yesterday, to-day, and for ever, is taught as the production of progress, a growth, a thing to be amended and corrected year by year. It is an ill day, both for the church and the world, when the trumpet does not give a certain sound; for who shall prepare himself for the battle?

If added to this we should see *creeping over the solemn assembly of the church a lifelessness, an indifference, and a lack of spiritual power*, it is painful to a high degree. When the vitality of religion is despised, and gatherings for prayer are neglected, what are we coming to? The present period of church history is well portrayed by the church of Laodicea, which was neither cold nor hot, and therefore to be spewed out of Christ's mouth. That church gloried that she was rich and

increased in goods, and had need of nothing, while all the while her Lord was outside, knocking at the door, a door closed against him. That passage is constantly applied to the unconverted, with whom it has nothing to do: it has to do with a lukewarm church, with a church that thought itself to be in an eminently prosperous condition, while her living Lord, in the doctrine of his atoning sacrifice, was denied an entrance. Oh, if he had found admission—and he was eager to find it—she would soon have flung away her imaginary wealth, and he would have given her gold tried in the furnace, and white raiment with which she might be clothed. Alas! she is content without her Lord, for she has education, oratory, science, and a thousand other baubles. Zion's solemn assembly is under a cloud indeed, when the teaching of Jesus and his apostles is of small account with her.

If in addition to this, *worldly conformity spreads in the church*, so that the vain amusements of the world are shared in by the saints, then is there reason enough for lamentation, even as Jeremiah cried: "How is the gold become dim!" Her Nazarites, who were purer than snow and whiter than milk, have become blacker than a coal. "All our enemies have opened their mouths against us." If no longer there is a clear distinction between the church and the world, but professed followers of Jesus have joined hands with unbelievers, then may we mourn indeed! Woe worth the day! An ill time has happened to the church and to the world also. We may expect great judgments, for the Lord will surely be avenged on such a people as this. Know ye not of old that when the sons of God saw the daughters of men that they were fair, and they were joined unto them, then the flood came and swept them all away? I need not pursue this subject further, lest our burdens take from us the time which is demanded for consolation.

It appears from the text that *there were some to whom the reproach was a burden*. They could not make sport of sin. True, there were many who said that the evil did not exist at all, and others who declared that it was not present in any great degree. Yes, and more hardened spirits declared that what was considered to be a reproach was really a thing to be boasted of, the very glory of the century. Thus they huffed the matter, and made the mourning of the conscientious to be a theme for jest. But there was a remnant to whom the reproach of it was a burden; these could not bear to see such a calamity. To these the Lord God will have respect, as he said by the prophet:—"Go through the midst of the city, through the midst of Jerusalem, and set a mark upon the foreheads of the men that sigh and that cry for all the abominations that be done in the midst thereof." The many drank wine in bowls and anointed themselves with their chief ointments, but they were not grieved for the affliction of Joseph (Amos 6:6); but these were pressed in spirit and bore the cross, counting the reproach of Christ greater riches than all the treasures of Egypt. God's people cannot bear that Christ's atoning sacrifice should be dishonored; they cannot endure that his truth should be trodden as mire in the streets. To true believers prosperity means the Holy Ghost blessing the word to the conversion of sinners and the building up of saints; and if they do not see this, they hang their harps upon the willows. True lovers of Jesus fast when the Bridegroom is not with his church: their glow is in his glory, and in nothing else. The wife of Phinehas, the son of Eli, cried out in her dying agony, "The glory has departed," and the reason that she gave was once because of the death of her husband and his father, but twice because "the ark of God is taken." For this she named her new-born child Ichabod—"The glory is departed from Israel, for the ark of God is taken." The bitterest pain of this godly woman was for the church, and for the honor of our God. So it is with God's true people: they lay it much to heart that the truth is rejected.

This burdened spirit, is a token of true love to God: those who love the Lord Jesus are wounded in his woundings, and vexed with the vexings of his Spirit. When Christ is dishonored his disciples are dishonored. Those who have a tender heart towards the church can say with Paul, "Who is offended, and I burn not?" The sins of the church of God are the sorrows of all living members of it. This also marks a healthy sensibility, a vital spirituality. Those who are unspiritual care nothing for truth or grace: they look to finances, and numbers, and respectability. Utterly carnal men care for none of these things; and so long as the political aims of Dissenters are progressing, and there is an advance in social position, it is enough for them. But men whose spirits are of God would sooner see the faithful persecuted than see them desert the truth, sooner see churches in the depths of poverty full of holy zeal than rich churches dead in worldliness. Spiritual men care for the church even when she is in an evil case, and cast down by her adversaries: "thy servants take pleasure in her tones, and favor the dust thereof." The house of the Lord is to many of us our own house, his family is our family. Unless the Lord Jesus be extolled, and his gospel conquer, we feel that our own personal interests are blighted, and we ourselves are in disgrace. It is no small thing to us: it is our life.

Thus have I dwelt upon the fact that it is an ill day for God's people when the solemn assembly is defiled: the reproach thereof is a burden to those who are truly citizens of the New Jerusalem, and because of this *they are seen to be sorrowful*. The Lord here says, "I will gather them that are sorrowful for the solemn assembly." They may well be sorrowful when such a burden is laid on their hearts. Moreover, they see in a hundred ways the ill effect of the evil which they deplore. Many are lame and halting; this is hinted at in the promise of the nineteenth verse: "I will save her that halteth." Pilgrims on the road to Zion were made to limp on the road because the prophets were "light and treacherous persons." When the pure gospel is not preached, God's people are robbed of the strength which they need in their life-journey. If you take awa



y the bread, the children hunger. If you give the flock poisonous pastures, or fields which are barren as the desert, they pine and they become lame in their daily following of the shepherd. The doctrinal soon affects the practical. I know many of the people of God living in different parts of this country to whom the Sabbath is very little of a day of rest, for they hear no truth in which rest is to be found, but they are worried and wearied with novelties which neither glorify God nor benefit the souls of men. In many a place the sheep look up and are not fed. This causes much disquietude and breeds doubts and questionings, and thus strength is turned to weakness, and the work of faith, the labor of love, and the patience of hope are all kept in a halting state. This is a grievous evil, and it is all around us. Then, alas! many are "driven out," of whom the nineteenth verse says, "I will gather her that was driven out." By false doctrine many are made to wander from the fold. Hopeful ones are made to stray from the path of life, and sinners are left in their natural distance from God. The truth which would convince men of sin is not preached, while other truths which would lead seekers into peace are beluded, and souls are left in needless sorrow. When the doctrines of grace and the glorious atoning sacrifice are not set clearly before men's minds, so that they may feel their power, all sorts of evils follow. It is terrible to me that this dreadful blight should come upon our churches; for the hesitating are driven to destruction, the weak are staggered, and even the strong are perplexed. The false teachers of these days would, if it were possible, deceive the very elect. This makes our hearts very sorrowful. How can we help it?

Yet, beloved, all the time that the people of God are in this evil case, *they are not without hope*; for close upon all this comes the promise of the Lord to restore his wandering ones. We have the sense twice over: "I will get them praise and fame in every land where they have been put to shame." "I will make you a name and a praise among all people of the earth, when I turn back your captivity before your eyes, saith the Lord. "The adversaries cannot silence the eternal testimony. They hanged our Lord himself upon a tree; they took down his body and buried it in a tomb in the rock; and they set their seal upon the stone which they rolled at the mouth of the sepulcher. Surely now there was an end of the Christ and his cause. Boast not, ye priests and Pharisees! Vain the watch, the stone, the seal! When the appointed time had come, the living Christ came forth. He could not be holden by the cords of death. How idle their dreams! "He that sitteth in the heavens shall laugh: the Lord doth have them in derision." Beloved, the reproach will yet be rolled away from the solemn assembly: the truth of God will yet again be proclaimed as with trumpet tongue, the Spirit of God will revive his church, and converts as many as the sheaves of the harvest shall yet be gathered in. How will the faithful rejoice! Those who were burdened and sorrowful shall then put on their garments of joy and beauty. Then shall the ransomed of the Lord return with songs and everlasting joy upon their heads. The conflict is not doubtful. The end of the battle is sure and certain. Methinks I even now hear the shout, "The Lord God omnipotent reigneth."

II. Secondly, let us think of something which shines like a star amid the darkness. The second verse of the text presents A GLORIOUS GROUND OF CONSOLATION. Here is a rich text indeed. This passage is like a great sea, while I am as a little child making pools in the sand which skirts its boundless flood. A series of discourses might well be founded on this one verse: I mean the seventeenth.

*Our great consolation in the worst times lies in our God.* The very name of our covenant God—"the Lord thy God"—is full of good cheer. That word, "the Lord," is really JEHOVAH, the self-existent One, the unchangeable One, the ever-living God, who cannot change or be moved from his everlasting purpose. Children of God, whatever you have not got, you have a God in whom you may greatly glory. Having God you have more than all things, for all things come of him; and if all things were blotted out, he could restore all things simply by his will. He speaketh, and it is done; he commandeth, and it stands fast. Blessed is the man that hath the God of Jacob for his trust, and whose hope Jehovah is. In the Lord Jehovah we have righteousness and strength; let us trust in him for ever. Let the times roll on, they cannot affect our God. Let troubles rush upon us like a tempest, but they shall not come nigh unto us now that he is our defense. Jehovah, the God of his church, is also the God of each individual member of it, and each one may therefore rejoice in him. Jehovah is as much your God, my brother, as if no other person in the universe could use that covenant expression. O believer, the Lord God is altogether and wholly your God! All his wisdom, all his foresight, all his power, all his immutability—all himself is yours. As for the church of God, when she is in her lowest estate she is still established and endowed in the best possible sense—established by the divine decree, and endowed by the possession of God all-sufficient. The gates of hell shall not prevail against her. Let us exult in our possession. Poor as we are, we are infinitely rich in having God; weak as we are, there is no limit to our strength, since the Almighty Jehovah is ours. "If God be for us, who can be against us?" "If God be ours, what more can we need? Lift up thy heart, thou sorrowful one, and be of good cheer. If God be thy God, thou hast all thou canst desire: wrapped up within his glorious name we find all things for time and eternity, for earth and heaven. Therefore in the name of Jehovah we will set up our banners, and march onward to the battle. He is our God by his own purpose, covenant, and oath; and this day he is our God by our own choice of him, by our union with Christ Jesus, by our experience of his goodness, and by that spirit of adoption whereby we cry "Abba, Father."

To strengthen this consolation, we notice next, that *this God is in the midst of us*. He is not a long way off, to be sought

with difficulty, if haply we may find him. The Lord is a God nigh at hand, and ready to deliver his people. Is it not delightful to think that we cry not to God across the ocean, for he is here? We look not up to him from afar, as though he dwelt beyond the stars, neither do we think of him as hidden in the fathomless abyss; but the Lord is very near. Our God is "Jehovah in the midst of thee." Since that bright night in which a babe was born at Bethlehem, and unto us a Son was given, we know God as "Emmanuel, God with us." God is in our nature, and therefore very near unto us. "The Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us." Though his bodily presence is gone, yet we have his spiritual presence with us evermore; for he saith, "Lo, I am with you alway." He walketh among the golden candlesticks. We have also the immediate presence of God the Holy Spirit. He is in the midst of the church to enlighten, convince, quicken, endow, comfort, and clothe with spiritual power. The Lord still works in the minds of men for the accomplishment of his purposes of grace. Let us think of this when we are going forth to Christian service: "The Lord of hosts is with us." When you call your class together in the Sabbath school, say to your Lord, "If thy presence go not with me, carry me not up hence." Ah, friends! if we have God with us, we can bear to be deserted by men. What a word that is, "Where two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst of them!" Shall not the army shout when the King himself is in their ranks! Let God arise, let his enemies be scattered! When he is with us they that hate him must flee before him. Be it our concern so to live that we may never grieve away the Spirit of God. Beloved, there is such abundant consolation in the fact of the presence of God with us, that if we could only feel the power of it at this moment, we should enter into rest, and our heaven would begin below.

Let us go a step further, and note that our consolation is largely to be found in the fact that *this God in the midst of us is full of power to save*. "The Lord thy God in the midst of thee is mighty; he will save." That is to say, "Jehovah, thy God, is mighty to save." His arm is not shortened, he is still "a just God and a Saviour." Nor is he merely able to save, but he will display that ability; "he will save." Come, my brother, we see around us this and that to discourage us; let us, like David, encourage ourselves in the Lord our God. We may very well forget all difficulties, since the God who is in the midst of us is mighty to save. Let us pray, then, that he will save; that he will save his own church from lukewarmness and from deadly error; that he will save her from her worldliness and formalism; save her from unconverted ministers and ungodly members. Let us lift up our eyes and behold the power which is ready to save; and let us go on to pray that the Lord may save the unconverted by thousands and millions. Oh, that we might see a great revival of religion! This is what we want before all things. This would smite the enemy upon the cheek-bone, and break the teeth of the adversary. If tens of thousands of souls were immediately saved by the sovereign grace of God, what a rebuke it would be to those who deny the faith! Oh, for times such as our fathers saw when first Whitefield and his helpers began to preach the life-giving word! When one sweet voice was heard clear and loud, all the birds of paradise began to sing in concert with him, and the morning of a glorious day was heralded. Oh, if that were to happen again, I should feel like Simeon when he embraced the heavenly babe! Then would the virgin daughter of Zion shake her head at the foe, and laugh him to scorn. It may happen; yea, if we are importunate in prayer it must happen: "God shall bless us, and all the ends of the earth shall fear him." Let us not seek power of rhetoric, much less of wealth; but let us look for the power which saves. This is the one thing I crave. Oh, that God would save souls! I say to myself, after being badgered and worried through the week by the men of modern thought: "I will go my way and preach Christ's gospel, and win souls." One lifting up of Jesus Christ crucified is more to me than all the cavillings of the men who are wise above what is written. Converts are our unanswerable arguments. "Happy is the man," saith the Psalm, "that hath his quiver full of them: they shall speak with the enemies in the gate." Blessed is the man who has many spiritual children born to God under his ministry; for his converts are his defense. Beholding the man who was healed standing with Peter and John, they could say nothing against them. If souls are saved by the gospel, the gospel is proved in the surest manner. Let us care more about conversions than about organizations. If souls are brought into union with Christ, we may let other unions go.

We go yet further, and we come to great deeps: behold *God's joy in his people*. "He will rejoice over thee with joy." Think of this! Jehovah, the living God, is described as brooding over his church with pleasure. He looks upon souls redeemed by the blood of his dear Son, quickened by his Holy Spirit, and his heart is glad. Even the infinite heart of God is filled with an extraordinary joy at the sight of his chosen. His delight is in his church, his Hephzibah. I can understand a minister rejoicing over a soul that he has brought to Christ; I can also understand believers rejoicing to see others saved from sin and hell; but what shall I say of the infinitely-happy and eternally-blessed God finding, as it were, a new joy in souls redeemed? This is another of those great wonders which cluster around the work of divine grace! "He will rejoice over thee with joy." Oh, you are trembling for the ark of the Lord; the Lord is not trembling, but rejoicing. Faulty as the church is, the Lord rejoices in her. While we mourn, as well we may, yet we do not sorrow as those that are without hope; for God does not sorrow, his heart is glad, and he is said to rejoice with joy—a highly emphatic expression. The Lord taketh pleasure in them that fear him, imperfect though they be. He sees them as they are to be, and so he rejoices over them, even when they cannot rejoice in themselves. When your face is blurred with tears, your eyes red with weeping, and your heart heavy with sorrow for sin, the great Father is rejoicing over you. The prodigal son wept in his Father's bosom, but the Father rejoiced over his son. We are questioning, doubting, sorrowing, trembling; and all the while he who sees the end of

From the beginning knows what will come out of the present disquietude, and therefore rejoices. Let us rise in faith to share the joy of God. Let no man's heart fail him because of the taunts of the enemy. Rather let the chosen of God rouse themselves to courage, and participate in that joy of God which never ceaseth, even though the solemn assembly has become a reproach. Shall we not rejoice in him when he, in his boundless condescension, deigns to rejoice in us? Whoever despairs for the cause, he does not; wherefore let us be of good courage.

It is added, "*He will rest in his love.*" I do not know any Scripture which is more full of wonderful meaning than this. "He shall rest in his love," as if our God had in his people found satisfaction. He comes to an anchorage: he has reached his desire. As when a Jacob, full of love to Rachel, has at length ended the years of his service, and is married to his well-beloved, and his heart is at rest; so is it spoken in parable of the Lord our God. Jesus sees of the travail of his soul when his people are won to him; he has been baptized with his baptism for his church, and he is no longer straitened, for his desire is fulfilled. The Lord is content with his eternal choice, content with his loving purposes, satisfied with the love which went forth from everlasting. He is well pleased in Jesus—well pleased with all the glorious purposes which are connected with his dear Son, and with those who are in him. He has a calm content in the people of his choice, as he sees them in Christ. This is a good ground for our having a deep satisfaction of heart also. We are not what we would be; but then we are not what we shall be. We advance slowly; but then we advance surely. The end is secured by omnipotent grace. It is right that we should be discontented with ourselves, yet this holy restlessness should not rob us of our perfect peace in Christ Jesus. If the Lord hath rest in us, shall we not have rest in him? If he rests in his love, cannot we rest in it?

My heart is comforted as I plainly see in these words love unchanging, love abiding, love eternal: "he will rest in his love." Jehovah changes not. Being married to his people, "he hateth putting away." Immutability is written on his heart. The turtle-dove, when he has once chosen his mate, remains faithful throughout life, and if the beloved dies, he will, in many cases, pine away with grief for her, for his life is wrapped up in hers. Even so our Lord hath made his choice of his beloved, and he will never change it: he died for his church, and so long as he lives he will remember his own love, and what it cost him: "Who shall separate us from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus our Lord?" "He will rest in his love."

The love of God to us is undisturbed: "The peace of God, which passeth all understanding," dwells with his love: he is not disquieted about it, but peacefully loves, and is never moved. The calm of God is wonderful to contemplate: his infallible knowledge and infinite power put him beyond fear or question. He sees no cause of alarm as to his redeemed, nor as to the cause of truth and the reign of righteousness. As to his true church, he knows that she is right, or that he will make her right. She is being transformed into the image of Jesus, and he rests in the full assurance that the image will ere long be complete. He can carry out his own purposes in his own way and time. He can see the harvest as well as the sowing; therefore he doth "rest in his love." You have seen a mother wash her child, and as she washes its face the child perhaps is crying, for it does not for the present enjoy the cleansing operation. Does the mother share the child's grief? Does she also cry? Oh, no! she rejoices over her babe, and rests in her love, knowing that the light affliction of the little one will work its real good. Often our griefs are no deeper than the cry of a child because of the soap in its eyes. While the church is being washed with tribulations and persecutions, God is resting in his love. You and I are wearying, but God is resting.

"He shall rest in his love." The Hebrew of this line is, "He shall be silent in his love." His happiness in his love is so great, that he does not express it, but keeps a happy silence. His is a joy too deep for words. No language can express the joy of God in his love; and therefore he uses no words. Silence in this case is infinitely expressive. One of the old commentators says, "He is deaf and dumb in his love," as if he heard no voice of accusation against his chosen, and would not speak a word of upbraiding to her. Remember the silence of Jesus, and expound this text thereby.

Sometimes also the Lord does not speak to his people: we cannot get a cheering word from him; and then we sigh for a promise, and long for a visit of his love; but if he be thus silent, let us know that, he is only silent in his love. It is not the silence of wrath, but of love. His love is not changed, even though he does not comfort us.

"His thoughts are high, his love is wise,  
His wounds a cure intend;  
And though he does not always smile,  
He loves unto the end."

When he does not answer our prayers with his hand, he yet hears them with his heart. Denials are only another form of the same love which grants our petitions. He loves us, and sometimes shows that love better by not giving us what we ask than he could do if he spoke the sweetest promise which the ear has ever heard. I prize this sentence: "He shall rest in

his love." My God, thou art perfectly content with thy church after all, because thou knowest what she is to be. Thou see'st how fair she will be when she comes forth from the washing, having put on her beautiful garments. Lo, the sun goes down, and we mortals dread the endless darkness; but thou, great God, seest the morning, and thou knowest that in the hours of darkness dews will fall which shall refresh thy garden. Ours is the measure of an hour, and thine the judgment of eternity, therefore we will correct our short-sighted judgment by thine infallible knowledge, and rest with thee.

The last word is, however, the most wonderful of all: "*He will joy over thee with singing.*" Think of the great Jehovah singing! Can you imagine it? Is it possible to conceive of the Deity breaking into a song: Father, Son and Holy Ghost together singing over the redeemed? God is so happy in the love which he bears to his people that he breaks the eternal silence, and sun and moon and stars with astonishment hear God chanting a hymn of joy. Among Orientals a certain song is sung by the bridegroom when he receives his bride: it is intended to declare his joy in her, and in the fact that his marriage has come. Here, by the pen of inspiration, the God of love is pictured as married to his church, and so rejoicing in her that he rejoices over her with singing. If God sings, shall not we sing? He did not sing when he made the world. No; he looked upon it, and simply said that it was good. The angels sang, the sons of God shouted for joy: creation was very wonderful to them, but it was not much to God, who could have made thousands of worlds by his mere will. Creation could not make him sing; and I do not even know that Providence ever brought a note of joy from him, for he could arrange a thousand kingdoms of providence with ease. But when it came to redemption, that cost him dear. Here he spent; eternal thought, and drew up a covenant with infinite wisdom. Here he gave his Only-begotten Son, and put him to grief to ransom his beloved ones. When all was done, and the Lord saw what became of it in the salvation of his redeemed, then he rejoiced after a divine manner. What must the joy be which recompenses Gethsemane and Calvary! Here we are among the Atlantic waves. The Lord God receives an accession to the infinity of his joy in the thought of his redeemed people. "He shall rejoice over thee with singing." I tremble while I speak of such themes, lest I should say a word that should dishonor the matchless mystery; but still we are glad to note what is written, and we are bound to take comfort from it. Let us have sympathy with the joy of the Lord, for this will be our strength.

III. I close with a brief word upon THE BRAVE CONDUCT SUGGESTED THEREBY. Let us not sorrow under the burdens which we bear, but rejoice in God, the great Burden-bearer, upon whom this day we roll our load. Here it is—"*In that day it shall be said to Jerusalem, Fear thou not; and to Zion, Let not thine hands be slack.*"

There are three things for God's people to do. The first is, to be happy. Read verse fourteen—"*Sing, O daughter of Zion; shout, O Israel; be glad and rejoice with all thy heart, O daughter of Jerusalem.*" Any man can sing when his cup is full of delights; the believer alone has songs when waters of a bitter cup are wrung out to him. Any sparrow can chirp in the daylight; it is only the nightingale that can sing in the dark. Children of God, whenever the enemies seem to prevail over you, whenever the serried ranks of the foe appear sure of victory, then begin to sing. Your victory will come with your song. It is a very puzzling thing to the devil to hear saints sing when he sets his foot on them. He cannot make it out: the more he oppresses them, the more they rejoice. Let us resolve to be all the merrier when the enemy dreams that we are utterly routed. The more opposition, the more we will rejoice in the Lord: the more discouragement, the more confidence. Splendid was the courage of Alexander when they told him that there were hundreds of thousands of Persians. "Yet," he said, "one butcher fears not myriads of sheep." "Ah!" said another, "when the Persians draw their bows, their arrows are so numerous that they darken the sun." "It will be fine to fight in the shade." cried the hero. O friends, we know whom we have believed, and we are sure of triumph! Let us not think for a single second, if the odds against us are ten thousand to one, that this is a hardship; rather let us wish that they were a million to one, that the glory of the Lord might be all the greater in the conquest which is sure. When Athanasius was told that everybody was denying the Deity of Christ, then he said, "I, Athanasius, against the world": *Athanasius contra mundum* became a proverbial expression. Brethren, it is a splendid thing to be quite alone in the warfare of the Lord. Suppose we had half-a-dozen with us. Six men are not much increase to strength, and possibly they may be a cause of weakness, by needing to be looked after. If you are quite alone, so much the better: there is the more room for God. When desertions have cleaned the place out, and left you no friend, now every corner can be filled with Deity. As long as there is so much that is visible to rely upon, and so much to hope in, there is so much the less room for simple trust in God: but now our song is of the Lord alone; "for great is the Holy One of Israel in the midst of thee."

The next duty is *fearlessness*: "Fear thou not." What! not a little? No, "Fear thou not." But surely I may show some measure of trembling? No, "Fear thou not." Tie that knot tight about the throat of unbelief. "Fear thou not": neither this day, nor any day of thy life. When fear comes in, drive it away; give it no space. If God rests in his love, and if God sings, what canst thou have to do with fear? Have you never known passengers on board ship, when the weather was rough, comforted by the calm behavior of the captain? One simple-minded soul said to his friend, "I am sure there is no cause for fear, for I heard the captain whistling." Surely, if the captain is at ease, and with him is all the responsibility, the passenger may be still more at peace. If the Lord Jesus at the helm is singing, let us not be fearing. Let us have done with every timor

ous accent. O rest in the Lord, and wait patiently for him. "Your God will come with vengeance, even God with a recompense; he will come and save you."

Lastly, let us *be zealous*: "Let not thine hands be slack." Now is the time when every Christian should do more for God than ever. Let us plan great things for God, and let us expect great things from God. "Let not thine hands be slack." Now is the hour for redoubled prayers and labors. Since the adversaries are busy, let us be busy also. If they think they shall make a full end of us, let us resolve to make a full end of their falsehoods and delusions. I think every Christian man should answer the challenge of the adversaries of Christ by working double tides, by giving more of his substance to the cause of God, by living more for the glory of God, by being more exact in his obedience, more earnest in his efforts, and more importunate in his prayers. "Let not thine hands be slack" in any one part of holy service. Fear is a dreadful breeder of idleness; but courage teaches us indomitable perseverance. Let us go on in God's name. I would stir up the members of this church, and all my brethren, to intense zeal for God and the souls of men. "Therefore, my beloved brethren, be ye steadfast, unmovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, forasmuch as ye know that your labor is not in vain in the Lord."

Would God that all were on Christ's side out of this great assembly! Oh, that you would come to Jesus, and trust him, and then live for him in the midst of this crooked and perverse generation! The Lord be with us. Amen.