

The Keeper of the Vineyard

by C.H. Spurgeon

C.H. Spurgeon teaches that God continually protects and nourishes His Church and believers like a vigilant gardener tending a vineyard, ensuring their spiritual growth and safety against all adversaries.

Scripture: Isaiah 27:3, Song of Solomon 2:15, Habakkuk 1:16

Topics: "Divine Protection", "Spiritual Growth", "Faith and Trust"

Description

In 'The Keeper of the Vineyard,' C.H. Spurgeon delivers a heartfelt devotional emphasizing God's continual protection and nurturing care for His Church and individual believers. Using the metaphor of a vineyard, Spurgeon illustrates the spiritual dangers believers face and the divine assurance of God's vigilant keeping and constant watering. This sermon encourages believers to trust fully in God's strength rather than their own and to live dependently on His grace every day.

Transcript

"I the LORD keep it. I will water it every moment: lest any hurt it, I will keep it night and day." Isaiah 27:3.

MY discourse this evening can hardly be called a sermon. It will be just a simple talk about a few experimental Truths of God, but I trust that it will be useful to some of the Lord's people.

The text follows a terrible verse in which the Lord's enemies are threatened with "His sore and great and strong sword." But even when God has the most anger against His adversaries, He is still full of love for His people. The Church of God is here compared to a vineyard. The vine is a tender plant, needing continual care, and if the vineyard is not well fenced and guarded, the enemies of the vine are sure to get in and destroy it. The Church is called "a vineyard of red wine," because the red grape happened to be the best kind grown in Palestine and, in like manner, God's Church is, to Him, the best of the best, the excellent of the earth, in whom is all His delight! But what is true of the whole Church is also true of every member—the same God who keeps the vineyard also protects every vine, no, not only so, but His care extends to every little branch, to every spreading leaf and to every clinging tendril of that vine which He undertakes to keep night and day. Well did Toplady sing—

"Upon my leaf, when parched with heat,

Refreshing dew shall drop.

The plant which Your right hand has set,

Shall never be rooted up.

Each moment watered by Your care,

And fenced with power Divine,

Fruit to eternal life shall bear

The feeblest branch of Thine." Our text mentions two much-needed mercies and upon each of these I will speak briefly. We find in the text, first, continual keeping. And then, secondly, continual watering. In these gracious Words of the Lord, we have a promise that we shall be kept from foes without and from foes within. God is both a wall and a well to His people—a wall to guard them from their adversaries—and a well to supply all their needs out of His ever living, over-flowing fullness.

I. First, then, concerning the CONTINUAL KEEPING which the Lord promises to His vineyard—"I, the Lord, keep it...lest any hurt it, I will keep it night and day." I will talk of that keeping in an experimental way, putting the subject before you in the form of questions which may be applied either to the Church as a whole, or to each individual Believer.

The first will be, "Do I need keeping? I trust I have been called by God's Grace, that I have been washed in Jesus' blood and that I have been made one of the Lord's children—do I need keeping?" Ah, if I know anything of myself, I shall be compelled to answer that I do, for my foes are innumerable and I, like the vine, am subject to all sorts of perils and dangers! Brothers and Sisters there is the arch-enemy—how he longs to lay the axe to the roots of God's vines! If we were in his power, you and I would not have a grain of faith or a spark of love left! He is desirous to have us, not only that he may sift us as wheat, but that he may burn us as chaff! When we think of his malice and cunning, we may well pray, "Deliver us not over unto the will of our enemy." When God's people have met Satan in a hand-to-hand conflict, they have always found it a stern and difficult struggle, for he is ferocious, malicious and powerful—and he comes

against us, not only to worry us—but seeking whom he may devour! We need keeping, then, if it were only because of that one adversary who would make a speedy end of us if we were left in his grip even for an hour!

Like the vine, too, we have not only to dread him who would cut us down, but there is a wild boar of the woods that would gladly tear us up by the roots! I mean that wild boar of unbelief that is constantly prowling around us. How does it seek with its sharp tusks to tear our vines and fig trees! You know, dear Friends, how unbelief takes away your comforts, how it destroys your strength and how it mars your usefulness. Perhaps some of you, at times, hardly know whether you are the Lord's people or whether you are not His. Our friend, who addressed us last ordinance Sabbath, said that God's people ought never to have doubts and fears. I quite admit that they ought not to have them—but that they really do have them is quite as certain! I like that good old hymn of Dr. Watts and sing it as I find it—

"When I can read my title clear

To mansions in the skies

I bid farewell to every fear

And wipe my weeping eyes."

I am afraid, dear Brothers and Sisters, you and I cannot travel the same road if you are always confident and if you never have reason to look back and cry because you have lost your evidences. This I know—there are seasons with me when I do not doubt my Lord and Master, but I do doubt my interest in Him—and I have to come to Him just as I came at first, as an empty-handed sinner and accept His Grace as He freely presents it. Yes, if the Lord did not keep us, the wild boar of unbelief would soon tear us to pieces, and we would have no Grace left, but would become useless forever!

Then, you know, the vine is often subject to injury from various kinds of insects. Almost all plants of any value are attacked, at times, by a peculiar kind of fly which devours the leaves and prevents fruit-bearing. And the vine is specially liable to attacks of this sort. So is it with Christians—we have the fly of pride. If the great enemy never came to knock us down and unbelief never tried to root us up, the very quietude of the atmosphere and the calmness of the soft summertime would begin to breed that deadly fly which goes before destruction! I think we have even more cause to fear the effects of carnal security, self-confidence and pride than the assaults of Satan, himself! I do not know how it is with you, my Brothers and Sisters, but at times I feel so dead that I would almost welcome a temptation from Satan, so that I might feel a little spiritual life stirring within me in opposition to it!

There have been dark times in our experience which have caused us great sorrow of heart and yet we have come to look back upon those sad seasons almost with a sort of envy—and we have wished that we might have them over, again, so that we might feel at least some pulsing, some palpitations of the new life within us! Oh, that dreadful fly of pride! John Bunyan tells us, in his Holy War, that it was Mr. Carnal-Security who drove Emmanuel from the town of Mansoul. He would have always stayed there and have given Mansoul high holiday, but that Diabolonian, Mr. Carnal-Security, whose father was Mr. Self-Conceit, and whose mother was Lady Fear-Nothing, filled the townspeople with such high notions of their greatness that the blessed Prince went His way in sorrow and anger!

Alas for us when we say, "My mountain stands firm, I shall never be moved." For we are then in direst peril! That cankerworm of conceit, that caterpillar of pride, that locust of carnal security would soon destroy God's vineyard if it were not written, "I the Lord keep it. I will water it every moment: lest any hurt it, I will keep it night and day." This promise assures us that the Lord will preserve us from the assaults of pride as well as from the attacks of unbelief and from the malice of the great adversary of our souls!

Then, dear Friends, beside the enemies I have mentioned, the vine is subject to the attacks of the little foxes that Solomon speaks of in the Canticles—"Take us the foxes, the little foxes, that spoil the vines." There are plenty of little foxes of all sorts about, nowadays. I mean false doctrine and skeptical teaching. Some of these crafty foxes come nibbling at us, trying to make us doubt the Inspiration of Scripture. Some of them even dare to try to root up and destroy our confidence in the Divinity of Christ! Others of these little foxes are still more insidious—they seek to tempt us away from the outward means of Grace and aim at making us forsake the assemblies of God's saints. Men pour into our ears all sorts of heresies and lies till our souls scarcely know the Truth of God from error and we are carried to and fro, and have a hard battle to fight! Ah, if the Lord did not keep His Church, she would soon become a prey to the graft of her adversaries! But He does preserve His vineyard from the little foxes and from the great foxes, too! His vines have tender grapes and the foxes would devour them if they could, but, blessed be the Lord, they are unable to do so! Our Lord preserves us and protects us from all the craft and cunning of our adversaries!

Besides, dear Friends, when we have a few grapes that are beginning to ripen, there are the birds that come and try to pick the fruit—those dark-winged thoughts of worldliness and selfishness which come to us all. We begin to say, "Well done!" to ourselves and then it is always ill-done. The Prophet Habakkuk tells us of those who "sacrifice unto their net, and burn incense unto their drag." And if we ascribe our success to our own perseverance, our own zeal and so forth, we shall be like the birds which steal the fruit that belongs to the master, or like dishonest workmen who are set to till the garden and rob their employer of the produce. Let us never try to get our Master's money, to put it out to usury, and then, when the interest comes in, spend it on ourselves! The temptation to selfishness—to live for this world alone— or to seek to bring forth fruit merely for our own aggrandizement, is so strong and comes so easily upon us, that if the Lord did not keep us, we would, none of us, retain our Christianity for a single hour—but would be wholly given up to worldliness, selfishness and every other form of sin!

I ask again the question with which I began and I pray you, each one, to ask it yourself—"Do I need keeping?" Oh, my Heart, never did the tender vine so much need the gardener's care as you need to be kept by your Lord! You are like an infant suffering from a thousand diseases and unable to cure itself of any one of them! You are helplessly weak and if your Father, God, should leave you, there is nothing for you but to die in despair! Dear Brothers and Sisters, let us have a deep consciousness of the dangers to which we are exposed—not that we may live trembling lives—but that we may be weaned from all trust in self and may be driven nearer to God and always seek to live under His Divine protection!

Another question may occur to someone here—"Even if I have to face all these dangers, can I not keep myself if I am very watchful and very prayerful? May I not by my own power and vigilance keep off these adversaries?" Ah, there is something wrong in the very question, itself, for who is to keep me watchful? Who is to make me prayerful? If my watchfulness and prayerfulness depended upon myself, I might slumber, and so I would, very soon, be destroyed! Brethren, it is a great mercy that the text puts it not that we must keep the vineyard ourselves, but, "I, the Lord keep it." Watchfulness is our duty—it is our privilege to abide much in earnest, wrestling prayer—but still, to keep up the watchfulness and the prayerfulness, there must constantly be the secret incoming of Divine Strength! Our watchfulness and prayerfulness are proofs of God's gracious working! The real cause of the vineyard of the Church and each individual vine being preserved must always be found in this blessed assurance—"I, the Lord keep it. I will water it every moment: lest any hurt it, I will keep it night and day."

What did you say—"Cannot I keep myself?" Alas, you are your own worst enemy! Augustine was known to say, "Lord, save me from that evil man, myself!" And you and I have good reason to pray the same prayer. We can very soon destroy ourselves, but we can never save ourselves. I bless the Lord that there is not even a semblance of truth in that verse in Wesley's hymn book—

"A charge to keep I have A God to glorify! A never-dying soul to save, And fit it for the sky."

It is the Lord who saves the souls of His people, and it is the Lord who fits them for the sky! If they had to do it, themselves, not a solitary soul among them would ever see His face with acceptance, or stand with joy before His Throne! "I, the Lord keep it. I will water it every moment: lest any hurt it, I will keep it night and day." It is always so put and for us to entirely get rid of all idea of carnal strength is both right and safe! It is well for us to feel that, in ourselves, we are as weak as water and as insignificant as the insects that die in a day—and that for all true strength we must look to God, and to God alone! Rest assured that you and I are never so weak as when we fancy that we are strong, and that we are never so strong as when we are conscious of our greatest weakness! This is an enigma, but our experience has often proved it to

be true. Our supposed riches are generally the marks of deep spiritual poverty, while conscious poverty is an indication of the unsearchable riches which faith is enjoying. Learn to live every day, dear Brothers and Sisters, in Jesus, as having nothing, yet possessing all things!

This is how God would have you live, trusting Him for all the Grace you continually need. When you wake in the morning, you are to look forward to temptations and trials, but you are to cry to the Lord for deliverance from them— and not to think of keeping yourselves during the day, but to place yourselves, again, in the hands of God—to be kept and preserved by Him who has said of the vineyard of His Church, "I, the Lord keep it. I will water it every moment: lest any hurt it, I will keep it night and day." Then, when the day is over, let this be your evening song—

"Sprinkled afresh with pardoning blood,

I lay me down to rest,

As in the embraces of my God,

Or on my Sa vior's breast."

I will mention only one other question and then we will leave this part of the subject—"Do I enjoy this keeping??" This is a question that must make you search your heart. Do you enjoy this keeping? Is it your habit and mine, every day, to look to God to keep us? When we wake in the morning, is this our first desire, "Lord, keep me this day beneath the shadow of Your wings"? When we go out to business, or on our Lord's service, are we conscious that we are still under the Lord's eyes and protected by the Lord's power? When, at any time, we have slipped and erred, do we bitterly repent that we could have acted so wrongly as to wander away from the Good Shepherd? And at night, when we look back upon the engagements of the day, are we in the habit of blessing God for as His unseen mercies? Have we learned to bless Him for preserving us from all the mysterious spiritual dangers by which we are surrounded? Has it, in fact, become our practice to make this text experimentally our own, "I, the Lord keep it. I will water it every moment: lest any hurt it, I will keep it night and day"?

Beloved, do you not think that we often live all day long as if there were no God? Do you not, sometimes, find yourselves going about the world as if God and you were strangers to each other? Do you not, at least now and then, venture upon the stormy sea of another day without getting your Pilot on board? And do you not think that, at night, when you come to the temporary haven of your chamber, you may often have cause to say to the Lord, "Alas! Alas! My God, I have lived this day and You have protected me, I doubt not, but still, I have not been mindful of You, I have not looked up to You, I have not been hanging on Your breast, I have not been nestling under Your wings as the chick hides itself under the hen"? I would that, as Church members, you and I, all of us, would learn the blessed lesson of this text, "I, the Lord, keep it. I will water it every moment: lest any hurt it, I will keep it night and day. During My people's nights of adversity and during their days of prosperity, in their nights of soul-sorrow and in their days of hallowed rejoicing, in the nights when their spirit lies slumbering, and in the days when the sunlight of My Countenance shines upon them, and they go forth strong to labor and to do My will, I will keep them under all circumstances. I will never leave them, I will never, no never, forsake them."

I am always afraid, whenever I preach about the security of God's people, lest you should grow carnally secure, that is to say, lest, instead of realizing the preciousness of the doctrine and its practical bearing, you should merely be satisfied with the outward shell of it. I want you not only to know that God keeps you,

but to feel the power of that blessed Truth in your inmost soul—to enjoy it and to live upon it. You know that it is one thing to look at honey and to be told that it is sweet to the taste. But it is a very different thing to eat of it and to prove its sweetness for yourself! Be it yours, like Jonathan, to dip your rod into the honey of this text and to eat of it abundantly, for so shall your eyes be enlightened and every day you shall be able to say, "The Lord is my Keeper: the Lord is my Shade upon my right hand: the Lord is my Helper; I will not fear what man or even the devil, himself, may try to do to me."

II. Now, with greater brevity, let me talk to you upon the second part of the subject, the Lord's CONTINUAL WATERING. He that keeps, waters—"I the Lord keep it. I will water it every moment: lest any hurt it, I will keep it night and day."

I was rather struck, the other day, by this remark of a somewhat eminent horticulturist—"Depend upon it," he said, "that watering is a very essential part of a gardener's business." It is especially so in hot weather, for there is little doubt that if the flowers are to be kept constantly in bloom, and if the beds are to look fresh and beautiful, the watering pot must be in frequent use. In the summer, how very soon the grass looks brown and how very speedily the flowers begin to droop their heads and shrivel up their leaves, all for lack of watering! Well, now, we have this gracious provision in the text to meet the needs of the Lord's vines, the Keeper of the vineyard, Himself, says, "I will water it every moment."

We will handle this part of the subject as we did the other portion, in the form of questions, and the first enquiry shall be, "Do I need watering within as well as keeping without??" The answer that must be given is—Yes, that I do, for there is not a single Grace I have that can live an hour without being Divinely watered! Have I not seen many a professor come forward to join the Church full of faith of a certain sort and full of zeal after a fashion? But, after a few months—and there are some hypocrites who hold out even for years—they begin to falter! They do not care for the House of God as much as they did. They grow worldly and careless and, at last, they give up their profession altogether! What is the

reason of their failure? Just this, they were not watered—they never had the living sap to nourish their roots—they never sucked up the Living Water of God's Grace and so, having no watering from the Most High, their flowers all withered, drooped their heads and died. There is no wonder at this result, for he who has only the strength that is within himself will be like snow that melts and passes away! It is only the man who derives His strength from God who will be like the sun that shines brighter and brighter unto the perfect day! There is no Grace I have, then, which does not need watering from above!

Beside that, the soil in which I am planted is very dry. Ask any Christian whether he ever gets any real good out of the world. Do you not find it a very dry soil where you go to business? The other day you said that you would change your employment—you would be a fool if you did—it would only be a change of troubles! The God who gave you your present set of trials knew that they were the best for you. If all the crosses in the world could be laid in a heap and I were told to take my pick of them, I would choose those that I have right now, for I know what they are, and God fits my back to them! But I do not know what the others are and I have no proof that I could bear them. You had better not take my troubles, for they might crush you, while I can bear them through the Divine Strength that is given to me. But if I had yours, they might crush me, while you can patiently endure them through God's Grace. This earth, however, is no very genial soil for a Christian's growth. Worldlings may flourish in it, but if the Christian would have Living Water, he must get it from some other place than this earth, for, spiritually, it is a dry and thirsty land where there is no water!

Then, again, the atmosphere that is round about us does not naturally yield us any water. The means of Grace, which are like clouds hovering over our heads, are often nothing but clouds—they come and they go—but we receive no rain from them. The other day we looked up and we said that it would rain, directly, but lo, the one black cloud was soon gone! So, you sometimes go up to the House of God and you say to yourselves, "Our minister has often cheered and comforted us, perhaps he will have a good word for us today." And when the text is announced and the sermon is begun, you think, "Here is a cloud, there will be some rain, presently," but, whether it is your fault or the minister's, we will not say, often there is not a drop of moisture to refresh your spirit! The reason is that the Lord will have you know that He, and He, alone, must water you if you are to be effectually revived! He will teach you that you need watering, that all your Graces constantly require fresh supplies of Divine Grace, and that you must have them directly and only from Him.

The beauty of the text seems to me to lie in the last two words—"I will water it every moment." There is no plant except a plant of Grace that needs to be watered every moment—but we do. I do not know to what object I can compare a Christian better than to one of those gas lights yonder. The Believer is not a candle, for a candle can burn of itself when it is once lighted because it carries its own burning materials. Neither is he a lamp that is supplied with a store of oil, except in a certain sense, but he is just like one of these gas lights. Turn the tap, cut off the connection with the gas meter, and out goes the light at once! There must be a stream of gas continually flowing to keep up the burning—and so is it with the Christian's spiritual life—it must be perpetually streaming in from his Lord! He cannot live even a tithe of a second unless life flows to him from God! Look at your hand. I suspect that if, for a moment, you could altogether suspend the circulation of your blood. If you could utterly cut off the life floods so as to dis sever your hand from the rest of your body, though it were but for a second, yet vitality would be gone! And so, if the Christian could be for one instant without union to Christ, without receiving supplies of Divine Grace, he would at once expire!

I will not talk to you much longer, for we need to gather around the Communion Table, but I will just put this one question—"Have we all realized, as a matter of experience, that the Lord waters us every moment?" Brothers and Sisters, I am very much afraid that there are but few of us who have ever learned the full meaning of this gracious promise. You can, perhaps, say, "The Lord waters me every Sabbath and on Monday and Thursday nights." Possibly you can go even farther, and say, "He waters me every morning, and every evening," but to be watered every moment—to have continually such a conscious connection with Christ as to be really receiving His Grace—you ask, "Is this experience attainable? It may be possible for a minister, for he has time to think of these things, but it is not possible for us working people who have to earn our bread by the sweat of our brows! Nor for us business men who have to be all day long occupied with accounts."

Oh, but, Beloved, there are some of the Lord's people who have proved that this blessing can be obtained and that it is possible to be in the world and yet to be living near God, and every moment to be watered by Him! Have you never heard of that poor servant girl who expounded the meaning of the passage, "Pray without ceasing"? Some person could

not understand how anyone could pray without ceasing, but Mary said, "Why, when I dress myself in the morning, my heart prays that I may be robed in my Savior's righteousness. When I light the fire, I pray the Holy Spirit to kindle a flame of sacred love in my heart. When I spread the cloth for breakfast, I ask God to feed me with the Bread of Heaven and whatever I do, all day long, I try to turn it into something that will make me live near to my God!" Do you not see, dear Friends, that a stirring life may yet be a spiritual life?

There are some people, you know, who, when they get hold of some hobby, can attend to business and yet ride their hobby as well. It may be that they have taken to working out some mathematical problem—if so, you will see them attending to the shop, but all the while they are thinking about that problem—and the first opportunity they get, they begin figuring away on a scrap of paper, trying to work it out. Whatever takes place during the day, the man is always thinking of that problem! And when he is on his way home, as he is riding along, he is still thinking of that one thing because his heart is full of it. Thus it may be with you, so that while you are engaged in business and in the lawful affairs of your daily life, your heart may still be always going out towards

God.

I was struck by a remark of a dear friend, the other day, who said that Mr. So-and-So was so fond of everything Gothic that he had his chairs Gothic, his bedstead Gothic and all the furniture of his house Gothic. I think that a Christian should have everything full of Christ, so that whether he eats, or drinks, or whatever he does, he does all to the Glory of God! It was said of Ambrose that he used to eat, drink and sleep eternal life—so may it be said of each of us! Why, sometimes, when we have some dear one upon our hearts, we may go and attend to fifty thousand things, but we do not forget that beloved object of our affection! A mother may have to go on an errand and she may be compelled to stay away a long while, but her sick child at home is on her heart all the time! So I want that we should have Christ and have the Holy Spirit, and have our Father who is in Heaven continually upon our minds! And in that way shall we learn the meaning of this passage, "I, the Lord keep it. I will water it every moment: lest any hurt it, I will keep it night and day."

Now, as I close my discourse, I fear that there are some of you who are not saved—and to you I have to put a personal question—"Why should not this night be the time of your salvation?" Why did you come into the Tabernacle tonight? Some of you have been inconvenienced, for you have had to stand all through the service. I hope you have not come here for nothing. I trust that the Lord meant to bless you when He induced you to come up those steps and between those pillars. Remember that the righteous God must punish sin, but that His Son, Jesus Christ, was punished in the place of all those who will believe on Him! To believe on Him is to trust Him. Have you done that? Then, though your sins were as scarlet, they are now whiter than snow! If you have trusted Jesus, your iniquities, which were like a black cloud, have all been rolled away and you are so completely saved that there is, now, no condemnation to you, for you are in Christ Jesus! God bring you to trust in Christ, for believing in Him, you are saved!

May we, who are about to gather around the Communion Table, have our Master's special Presence and blessing! Amen.

EXPOSITION BY C. H. SPURGEON: Isaiah 64.

Verse 1. Oh that You would rend the heavens. God's ancient people were in great trouble and the Prophet saw no way out of their perplexity. But God can make a way of escape where there is not one, He can rend even Heaven, itself, if need be, in order to deliver His saints. Therefore, the Prophet, or the people, pray, "Oh that You would rend the heavens"—

1. That You would come down. "Come down, Yourself, great God, in all the majesty of Your Glory! Burst through the firmament and appear in Divine splendor!"

1. That the mountains might bow down at Your Presence. The eternal hills are made to melt at the touch of God's feet. Mountains are the things that are last to move, but God moves them when He once comes near! How often we forget Omnipotence! That is a factor we are too apt to leave out of our calculations and yet, my Brothers and Sisters, Omnipotence is at the back of all our feebleness when that feebleness is with the truth and the right, and is engaged in the service of God! If the Lord's Presence is manifested, even the mountains will flow down, as we read in Micah's prophecy, "For, behold, the Lord comes forth out of His place and will come down, and tread upon the high places of the earth. And the

mountains shall be molten under Him and the valleys shall be cleft, as wax before the fire, and as the waters that are poured down a steep place."

2, 3. As when the melting fire burns, the fire causes the waters to boil, to make Your name known to Your adversaries, that the nations may tremble at Your Presence! When You did terrible things which we looked not for, You came down, the mountains flowed down at Your Presence. Where God is, everything begins to melt. He touches the mountains and makes them boil over with lava, like volcanoes in action! At His touch the very sea begins to boil with the fervent heat of Divine Power. Then, when these wonderful results are perceived, even God's enemies are compelled to say, "This is the finger of God," and they tremble at His Presence. We never know, Brothers and Sisters, what great things God will do, as we do not know all that He can do, but we do believe that all things are possible to the Omnipotent Jehovah! When He brings His reserve forces into the field, the battle is a short one. "When You did terrible things which we looked not for, You came down, the mountains flowed down at Your Presence." It was so when Sennacherib, in Isaiah's day, besieged the city of Jerusalem. There was, apparently, no way of escape from the stupendous hordes of the mighty monarch, but the Angel of the Lord killed a 185,000 of them in one night and utterly overthrew them! God has but to appear in His terrible power and His adversaries tremble at His Presence, or are destroyed in an instant!

4. For since the beginning of the world men have not heard, nor perceived by the ear, neither has the eye seen, O God, beside You, what He has prepared for him that waits for Him. The unexpected is always happening! God interposes in a way which we never thought of. Even if we have been listening for His footstep, we have not heard the sound of it—if we have been watching for His coming, we have not seen His approach. God alone knows all that He will do—

"He in the thickest darkness dwells," but out of that darkness He brings forth purposes of light and brightness to completely amaze His servants. "Ah," says one, "but is He not long in doing it?" No, no, it is our impatience that makes us think so, but the Lord never really delays.

5. You meet him that rejoices and works righteousness. God comes to meet us before we get to Him and then there is a blessed meeting. "You meet him that rejoices and works righteousness." If you do right, God will meet you. But He will meet you much sooner if you can rejoice at the same time, for there is no service for God that is so acceptable to Him as the service that is done with delight! "You meet him that rejoices and works righteousness." When we are glad to serve God. When we take a delight in suffering for His name's sake, then God will come and meet us for certain. We need not think that, under such circumstances, He will let us stand alone—"You meet him that rejoices and works righteousness."

5. Those that remember You in Your ways. If you remember God, He will certainly remember you! The fact that you are thinking of Him is proof positive that the Lord has thoughts of love towards you!

5. Behold, You are angry; for we have sinned: in those is continuance, and we shall be saved. God's wrath has no continuance in it towards His own people. He soon makes it to pass away from them. His anger may endure for a night, but His mercy comes in the morning. His own Word is, "For a small moment have I forsaken you, but with great mercies will I gather you. In a little wrath I hid My face from you for a moment; but with everlasting kindness will I have mercy on you, says the Lord, Your Redeemer." The Lord has a rod in His hand, but the scourging of His own children does not last long. It is a rod, mark you, not an axe that brings death. But His mercy, His goodness, the purposes of His Grace are perpetual—"In those is continuance, and we shall be saved." Now comes a very mournful passage. You have read some of the lamentations of Jeremiah. Here is one of the lamentations of Isaiah. He lived to see his country in a very sad condition. Perhaps this was the state of affairs when Sennacherib invaded the land.

6. But we are all as an unclean thing, and all our righteousness are as filthy rags. If this is true of our righteousnesses, what must our sins be? If even our righteousnesses are as filthy rags, where shall we find a metaphor to describe our sins?

6. And we all do fade as a leaf; and our iniquities, like the wind, have taken us away. This does not allude to our mortality, but to our sin—"We all do fade as a leaf; and our iniquities, like the wind, have taken us away." We are not like the green leaf on the tree—we may seem to be so for a moment, but very soon our righteousness fades like a withered leaf and, in consequence, our iniquities, like the wind which bears the withered leaves from the bough, carry us away. This is what we all are by nature. This is what the people were in Isaiah's day—the whole nation seemed to be unholy—its outwardly righteous men were not really righteous, its ministers were not truthful, its magistrates were not honest and even the professors of purity were, at heart, immoral!

7. And there is none that calls upon Your name, that stirs up himself to take hold of You. We have not come quite to that condition, yet. There are still some who stir themselves up to take hold upon God and who call upon His name. We are not left in so sad a state as the favored nation was in in Isaiah's days. It is a terrible thing when intercession fails! Perhaps the dark day that will mark the world's final doom will be a day unwhitened by prayer. Certainly, while prayer remains, the world is blessed, but when prayer shall cease, when that Divine disinfectant is taken away from this poor leper house, then the pestilence of sin will rage and destroy most terribly! It was so in the Prophet's day—"There is none that calls upon Your name, that stirs up himself to take hold of You."

7, 8. For You have hid Your face from us, and have consumed us, because of our iniquities. But now, O LORD, You are our Father. The Prophet, himself, begins to plead with God. Jehovah was known as the God of the children of Abraham. He was not recognized as the God of the Assyrian, Sennacherib worshipped Nisroch as his God—"But now, O Jehovah, You are our Father."

8, 9. We are the clay, and You our potter; and we all are the work of Your hands. Do not be furious, O LORD, neither remember iniquity forever! Behold, see, we beseech You, we are all Your people. Isaiah could plead that, in a certain way, they were nominally the people of God. But if we can plead this truly and spiritually on the behalf of any man. If we can plead it for ourselves, what a mighty plea it is! "Lord, You have made us. You have new-made us and You can keep us. We are the clay and You are our potter; we belong to You. Oh, break not the vessels that You have made! Cast not away the people You have chosen. Be merciful to us, O God, for we are Your people!" Then the Prophet gives a pitiful description of the condition unto which the land of Judah was reduced.

10, 11. Your holy cities are a wilderness, Zion is a wilderness, Jerusalem a desolation. Our holy and our beautiful house, where our fathers praised You, is burned up with fire: and all our pleasant things are laid waste. Their houses and God's House went together to destruction. When their houses were burnt, God's House did not escape. This is the most bitter part of the trial to a genuine Believer—when his own estate is impoverished, he can bear it, but when the Kingdom of God suffers damage—this cuts him to the quick! God's House is our house, the Prophet thus speaks of it—"Our holy and our beautiful house, where our fathers praised You, is burned up with fire: and all our pleasant things are laid waste."

12. Will you refrain Yourself for these things, O LORD? "Can You stand still and see all this?" This is the kind of pleading for the people of God to use when sin abounds. When the Truth of God is trampled like mire in the street, we may come before the Lord and say, "Will You refrain Yourself for these things, O Jehovah?"

12. Will You hold Your peace and afflict us very severely? May God teach us how to plead for His people and make us great intercessors on behalf of His Church and His cause in these evil days! Amen.

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