

The Northern Iron and the Steel

by C.H. Spurgeon

C.H. Spurgeon teaches that God's people, like northern iron and steel, are made strong by divine grace to withstand all trials and opposition, ensuring ultimate victory for the faithful.

Scripture: Jeremiah 15:12, Romans 8:35, Romans 8:37, Revelation 18:2, Revelation 18:20

Topics: "Perseverance", "Divine Strength", "Faith Under Trial"

Description

In 'The Northern Iron and the Steel,' C.H. Spurgeon explores the profound strength God grants to His people amid trials and opposition. Using the metaphor of northern iron and steel, Spurgeon illustrates how believers, though seemingly weak, are made resilient through divine grace. He encourages Christians to persevere faithfully in their service, confident that neither persecution nor hardship can ultimately defeat the church or the individual believer. This devotional sermon offers hope, strength, and a call to steadfast faith.

Transcript

“Shall iron break the northern iron and the steel?”—Jeremiah 15:12.

THE prophet Jeremiah was, as we saw upon a former occasion, a man of exquisitely sensitive character; not a prophet of iron, like Elijah, but nearer akin to him who was a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief. He lived in times which were peculiarly trying to him, and in addition was called to exercise an office which involved him in perpetual sorrow. He loved the people among whom he dwelt, yet was he commissioned by God to pronounce judgments upon them; this in itself was a hard task to such a nature as his. As a loving father, fearful of Eli's doom, uses the rod upon his child, but feels each stroke in his own heart far more acutely than the child does upon his back, so every threatening word which the prophet uttered lashed his own soul, and cost his heart the direst panics. He went, however, to his work with unstaggering firmness; hopeful, perhaps, that when his countrymen heard the divine threatening, they would repent of their sin, seek mercy, and find it. Surely if anything can add weight to the prophecy of the judgments of God, it is the trembling love, the anxious fear with which such a messenger as Jeremiah would deliver his warning. The deep sorrow of him who warned them ought to have driven the sinful nation to a speedier repentance; instead of which they rejected his warnings, they despised his person, and defied his God. As they thus heaped wrath upon themselves, they also increased his sorrow. He was a delicate, sensitive plant, and felt an inward shudder as he marked the tempest gathering overhead. Though a most loyal servant of his God, he was sometimes very trembling, and though he never ventured,

like Jonah, to flee unto Tarshish, yet he cried in the bitterness of his soul, "O that I had in the wilderness a lodging-place of wayfaring men; that I might leave my people, and go from them!" The Jews treated him so harshly and unjustly, that he feared they would break his heart; they smote him as with an iron rod, and he felt like one crushed beneath their unkindness. To silence his fear, the Lord assures him that he will renew his strength. "Behold," saith he, "I have made thee this day a fenced city and an iron pillar, and brazen walls against the whole land, against the kings of Judah, against the princes thereof, against the priests thereof, and against the people of the land. And they shall fight against thee; but they shall not prevail against thee; for I am with thee, saith the Lord, to deliver thee." Thus the Lord promised to his servant the divine support which his trials demanded. He never did and never will place a man in a trying position and then leave him to perish. David dealt thus treacherously with Uriah, but the Lord acts not thus with his servants. If the rebellious seed of Israel were iron, the Lord declared that his prophet should be hardened by sustaining grace into northern iron and steel. If they beat upon him like hammers on an anvil, he should be made of such strong, enduring texture, that he should be able to resist all their blows. Iron in the olden times amongst the Israelites was very coarsely manufactured, but the best was the iron from the north. So bad was their iron generally, that an admixture of brass, which among us would be thought rather to deteriorate the hardness, was regarded as an improvement; so the Lord puts it, "Shall iron—the common iron—break the most firm and best prepared iron?" It cannot do so: and if the people acted like iron against Jeremiah, God would make his spirit indomitably firm, that they should no more be able to put him down than common iron could break the northern iron and the steel.

That being the literal meaning, we shall draw from our text a general principle. It is a proverbial expression, no doubt, and applicable to many other matters besides that of the prophet and the Jews; it is clearly meant to show, that in order to achieve a purpose, there must be a sufficient force. The weaker cannot overcome the stronger. In a general clash the firmest will win. There must be sufficient firmness in the instrument or the work cannot be done. You cannot cut granite with a pen-knife, nor drill a hole in a rock with an auger of silk. Some forces are inadequate for the accomplishment of certain purposes. If you would break the best iron, you will be foiled if you strike it with a metal less hard.

I. We shall first of all apply this proverb to the PEOPLE OF GOD INDIVIDUALLY. Shall any power be able to destroy the saints?

We are sent into the world, if we are believers in Christ, like sheep in the midst of wolves, defenseless, and in danger of being devoured, yet no power on earth can destroy the chosen disciples of Christ. Weak as they are, they will tread down the strength of their foes. There are more sheep in the world now than wolves. There are parts of the world where wolves once roamed in troops where not a wolf can now be found; yet tens of thousands of sheep feed on the hillside: one would not be very bold to say that the day will come when the wolf will only be known as an extinct animal, while as long as the world lasts the sheep will continue to multiply. In the long run, the sheep has gained the victory over the wolf. And it is so with Christ's people. They appear to be weak, but there is a force about them which cannot be put down: they will overcome the ungodly yet, for the day will come when mighty truth shall prevail. God hasten that blessed and long-expected day. Till then, when persecuted we are not forsaken, when cast down we are not destroyed. Many Christians, are placed in positions where they are subject to very great temptations and persecutions; they are mocked, laughed at, ridiculed, called by evil names. Persecuted one, will you deny the faith? Are you going to put aside your colors, and relinquish the cross of Christ? If so, I can only tell you, you are not made of the same stuff as the true disciples of Jesus-Christ; for when the grace of God is in them, if the world be iron, they are northern iron and steel; they can bear all the blows which the

world may possibly choose to lay upon them, and as the anvil breaks the hammers in the long run, so will they, by their patient endurance for Christ's sake, break the force of all persecution, and triumph over it. Do I speak to a young Christian, who has come up to London, and finds himself placed where he is continually ridiculed? Will you shrink in the day of trial? Do you mean to play the coward? Shall the iron break the northern iron and the steel! Let it not be so. Be strong. Quit you like men; and in the energy of the Holy Spirit, endure as seeing him that is invisible. There is no need that we should fear, for amid all dangers the love of God shall live within us as a fire unquenchable. "Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword?" "Nay, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him that loved us."

Besides persecution, we are called frequently to serve the Lord under great difficulties. There are supreme difficulties connected with the evangelisation of this city. To stand here and preach to such a congregation as this, so large and so eager for the word, is a pleasure; but every sphere of labor is not equally cheering. Some of you who go to the lodging-houses to speak, or who visit the alleys, or stand up in the low neighbourhoods to preach the word of life, I know full well find it anything but child's play to serve your Lord under such conditions. Yours is rough hedging and ditching work, with very little in it of rosewater and gentility, and very much of annoyance and disappointment. What, then, is your resolution? I trust it is this: that as much strength is needed, you will wait more than ever upon the strong One till the needed power is given you. I trust you are not of that craven spirit which shrinks at difficulty or toil. Will you give way before the labors demanded of you? Do the redeemed of the Lord consent to give London up to Satan's rule? Do they say in despair that its darkest parts cannot be enlightened? Will the church of God despair of any race or country? Will it say: "There is no converting the Romanist; there is no convincing the literate and crafty Brahmin?" Is the iron to break the northern iron and the steel? Will we not rather take a firmer grip upon Omnipotence, and draw down almighty help by the blessed vehemence of prayer? What are we at? What aileth us that we are so soon dispirited? Is the Lord's arm waxed short? The apostles never thought of defeat; they believed that the gospel could break everything in pieces that stood in its way: and they went without hesitation to the work which the Lord sent them to do. 'Twas theirs to dare and die; questions and forebodings were not theirs. Into the bloody jaws of death those champions of Christendom rode on with dauntless courage, and won the victory. And are we to give way under difficulties? Are we to be as reeds shaken of the wind? You, Sunday-school teacher, are you going to give up your class because the boys are unruly? You in the Ragged-school, are you thinking of closing the doors, because as yet the children have not come in great numbers, or because the young Arabs are as wild as unbroken colts? You, who stood in the corner of the street the other night to preach, did you determine never to stand up and preach again, because of the rough reception you received? O man, be of different metal from this! If God has called you to do anything, do it, if you die in doing it. To a man for whom Jesus died, no work should seem hard, no sacrifice grievous. All things are possible to those who burn with the love of God. There is nothing but what you can make a way through if you can find something harder to bore it with. Look at the Mont Cenis Tunnel, made through one of the hardest of known rocks; with a sharp tool, edged with diamond, they have pierced the heart of the Alps, and made a passage for the commerce of nations. As St. Bernard says: "Is thy work hard? set a harder resolution against it; for there is nothing so hard that it cannot be cut by something harder still." May the Spirit of God work in thee invincible resolution and unconquerable perseverance. Let not the iron break the northern iron and the steel. Under persecutions and difficulties, let God's people resolve on victory, and by faith they shall have it, for according to our faith so shall it be unto us.

One of the greatest trials to which the people of God are subject, in trying to serve their Master, is non-success. The seven lean kine, as they eat up the seven fat kine, sorely try the believer's faith. Alas! our disappointments seldom come alone, but like Job's messengers, follow close upon each other's heels. When a man succeeds, he continues to succeed, as a rule; he derives encouragement from what God has already done by him, and goes from strength to strength. Probably, however, there is more grace exhibited by the Christian, who, without present success, realises the things not seen as yet, and continues still to work on. To labor is not easy, but to labor and to wait is harder far. It is a grand thing to continue patiently in well doing, confident that in the end the reward is sure. He is a man indeed who under long-continued disappointment will not—

“Bate a jot

Of heart or hope, but still bear up and steer

Right onward.”

Such a man “plucks success even from the spear-proof crest of rugged danger.” The well-annealed steel within him ere long breaks in shivers the common iron which strikes him so severely. To him, to overcome by grace is glory indeed.

Some of the greatest works that were ever performed by Christian people were not immediate in their results. The husbandman has waited long for the precious fruits of the earth. The question has been asked, again and again, “Watchman, what of the night?” Some, no doubt, have had to labor all their lives, and have bequeathed to their heirs the promise whose fulfillment they had not personally seen. They laid the underground courses of the temple, and others entered into their labors. You know the story of the removal of old St. Paul's by Sir Christopher Wren. A very massive piece of masonry had to be broken down, and the task, by pick and shovel, would have been a very tedious one, so the great architect prepared a battering-ram for its removal, and a large number of workmen were directed to strike with force against the wall with the ram. After several hours of labor, the wall, to all appearances, stood fast and firm. Their many strokes had been apparently lost, but the architect knew that they were gradually communicating motion to the wall, creating an agitation throughout the whole of it, and that, by-and-by, when they had continued long enough, the entire mass would come down beneath a single stroke. The workmen, no doubt, attributed the result to the one crowning concussion, but their master knew that their previous strokes had only culminated in that one tremendous blow and that all the nonresultant work had been necessary to prepare for the stroke which achieved the purpose. O Christian people, do not expect always to see the full outgrowth of your labors! Go on, serve your God, testify of his truth, tell of Jesus' love, pray for sinners, live a godly life, serve God with might and main, and if no harvest spring up to your joyous sickle, others shall follow you and reap what you have sown, and since God will be glorified, it shall be enough for you. Let no amount of nonsuccess daunt you. Be uneasy about it, but do not be discouraged; let not even this iron break the resolution of your soul; let your determination to honor Jesus be as the northern iron and the steel.

I might thus enlarge, but I have so many other things to speak of, that I shall pass on. The pith of what I want to say is this: if any dear brother here, as a Christian, is put to very severe trials, he may depend upon it there is nothing that happens to him but what is common to men, and that there is grace enough to be had to enable him to bear up under all. There is no need for any one soldier of God to turn his back in the day of battle. It is not right that any one of us should consider himself doomed to be defeated. The

Holy Spirit giveth power to the weak, and lifts the common warriors into the ranks of the mightiest. Fulness of grace is provided for us in Christ Jesus, and if we draw from it by faith we shall not need to fail. Let us not be slow to arm ourselves with the divine might. Let us ask the Captain of our salvation to make us as tough in the day of battle as the northern iron was beneath the blow of the common iron; that having done and suffered all, we may still stand, and none may be able to rob us of our crown.

II. But we shall now make a second use of this same proverb. It is applicable to the cause of God in the world—to THE CHURCH. I shall speak but little upon this, for time would fail me. What power, however like to iron, shall suffice to break the kingdom of Jesus, which is comparable to steel? We every now and then hear the babyish talk of persons who say that the gospel will die out in England—that Romanism will return in all its darkness, gospel light will be extinguished, and the candle which Latimer helped to light will be blown out. Atrocious nonsense, if not partial blasphemy. If this thing were of men it would come to nought; but if it be of God, who shall overthrow it? It has sometimes happened that fear has been the father of the thing it feared: let it not be so in this case; let us not court defeat by anticipating it. As surely as the Lord liveth the end of the Romish Anti-Christ will come, and the long-expected angel shall cry with a loud voice, "Babylon the great is fallen, is fallen, and is become the habitation of devils, and the hold of every foul spirit, and a cage of every unclean and hateful bird." "Rejoice over her, thou heaven, and ye holy apostles and prophets; for God hath avenged you on her." Revelation 18:2, 20. Other desponding prophets foretell that infidelity will so spread through all the churches and the fabric of society, that at last we shall see this country without a gospel ministry, and perhaps, through the spread of revolutionary principles, bereft of all respect for law and order. We are to go down by way of Paris to the foulness of Sodom, and thence into Pandemonium. Brethren, let those who will believe these evil tidings, I am not greatly moved thereby; for there are eternal principles and immutable decrees which uphold my joyful hopes. Consider for a moment what is involved in these gloomy forebodings. Then the gates of hell are to prevail against the church, are they? Then Christ is to be defeated by anti-Christ, is he? Then the pleasure of the Lord is not to prosper in his hand? Who said that? Who but a lying spirit that would lay low the faith and confidence of the people of God? It is no more possible for the truth of God and the church of God to be defeated, than for God himself to be overcome in conflict. Lo! Jehovah girds his church like a buckler on his arm: this is his battle-axe; this his weapons of war; and if you can wrench from his hand the weapons of his choice, then may you lift up the shout of triumph over the Eternal himself. But it never can be, for who shall stand against the Lord and prosper? My brethren, we may well fear the crafty machinations of the church of Rome, for all the subtlety of the old serpent is within her; but with the wisdom of God to meet it, there can be no alarm. He taketh the wise in their own craftiness: there is no device nor counsel against the Lord. We may well be dismayed at the insidious attacks of scepticism; but while there remains a Holy Ghost to create and sustain faith in the world, we need not fear that the faithful will utterly cease out of the land. The thousands will still be reserved whose knees have never bowed to Baal. Infidelity and Socinianism have ready tongues, but every tongue that rises against the church in judgment she will condemn. The forges of hell are busy in fashioning new weapons with which to assail us, but the Lord will break their bows and cut their spears in sunder. They may and will defeat the dogmas of superstition, but the truths of revelation and the people who believe them they can never overthrow. The iron will never break the northern iron and the steel. The church can bear the blows of Ritualism and Infidelity, and survive them all, and be the better for them too. See what the cause of Christ is. It is truth: therein is victory. Who knows not that the truth must prevail? There is in the church of God, moreover, life, and life is a thing you cannot overcome. A dead thing may be cut in pieces, and strewn to the winds of heaven; but the life in Christ's church is that which has defied and overcome Satan a thousand times already. In the dark ages the enemy thought he had destroyed the church, but life came into the monk in

his cell, and Luther shook the world. The church in England fell into a deadly slumber in the days of Whitfield and Wesley; but she was not dead, and therefore a time of awakening came. The flame burned low but the heavenly fire still lingered among the ashes, and only needed the Holy Spirit to blow upon it, and cause a hallowed conflagration. Six young men in Oxford were found guilty of meeting to pray: their offense was contagious, and soon there sprang up hundreds glorying in the same blessed crime. Earnest servants of the living God were forthcoming and no man knew whence they came; like the buds and blossoms which come forth at the bidding of spring, a people made willing in the day of God's power came forward at once. Seeing that there is life in the church of God, you can never calculate what will happen within its bounds to-morrow, for life is an unaccountable thing, and scorns the laws which bind the formal and inanimate. The statues in St. Paul's Cathedral stand fixed on their pedestals, and the renowned dead in Westminster Abbey never raise a riot; but who can tell what the living may next conceive or attempt? Men have said: "We will put down the troublesome religion of these gospellers. Build prisons enough, forge chains enough, make racks enough, concoct tortures infernal enough, slay enough victims, and stamp out the plague." But their designs have never been accomplished. They hatched the cockatrice's egg, but that which came of it died. They burnt the gospel out in Spain, did they not? And in the Low Countries they erased the memory thereof. How is it now? Has not Spain achieved her liberty at a blow? Is not also Belgium free to the preacher of the word? Not even Italy or Rome itself is safe against the obnoxious heretic. Everywhere the gospel penetrates. Even the earth helps the woman, and swallows up the flood which the dragon casts out of his mouth to drown the man child: political rulers restrain the violence of those who otherwise would slay the saints in one general massacre. It shall be so, right on through all the ages till Christ comes—the iron shall not break the northern iron and the steel. Glory be to God, we have confidence in this, and in the name of God we set up our banner. This, too, is a pleasing theme; but we must leave it and pass on to another.

III. We may apply the principle to a very different matter indeed—THE SELF-RIGHTEOUS EFFORTS WHICH MEN MAKE FOR THEIR OWN SALVATION. We may remind them that the iron will never break the northern iron and the steel. The bonds of guilt are not to be snapped by a merely human power. Here is a man with the fetters of his transgressions about him, but "he will get them off," he says: prayer shall be his file; tears shall be the aquafortis to dissolve the metal, and his own resolutions shall, like a hammer, dash the links in fragments. But it cannot be: the iron shall never break this northern iron and the steel. Habits of sin yield not to raspings of the unregenerate resolves. You are condemned, and only Christ the Son of God can set you free from the fetters which hold you in the condemned cell. All your efforts apart from Jesus are utterly useless. He must bring liberty—you cannot emancipate yourselves. You say that you will break off the chains of evil habit. There are some you can break off, but can you alter your nature? "Can the Ethiopian change his skin, or the leopard his spots?" That were an easy task compared with a man renewing his own heart. The imaginations of the thoughts of your heart are evil, only evil, and that continually, and do what you will they will remain so. The dead cannot give themselves life: it needs superior power to hew off the fetters which hold you prisoner in the sepulcher of your natural death. Your iron can never break the northern iron and the steel which bind you to the slavery of hell. Do you think to force your way to heaven by ceremony? Do you imagine that baptism can wash away your sin, that confirmation can convey to you grace, that outward ceremonies of man's devising, or of God's instituting can deliver you from wrath? Believe no such thing; there is no potency in all these to deliver you from the bonds which hold you. The iron cannot break the northern iron and the steel. Come, sinner, with thy fetters, and lay thy Christ here at the cross-foot, where Christ can break the iron at once. Come, bring thyself, chained as thou art, to him, or if thou canst not stir an inch, cry out to him! Ask him to deliver thee! He can do it. Trust in him, for trust in his precious blood and reliance upon his perfect sacrifice will make

thee a free man in a moment, never to be a bondsman again. But, oh, let not thy puny strength be wasted on so futile an effort as that which aims at self-salvation; how shall weakness achieve the labor of omnipotence, or death accomplish the sublime miracle of the Immortal? Remember the work of salvation think how great it is, how worthy of a God; and then cease utterly from all self-reliance, for it is madness and blasphemy. Where were the need of the Holy Ghost, if you could regenerate yourself? Where would there be room for a display of the power of sovereign grace, if man's will and effort could accomplish all? But I leave that topic, also, and pass on to another consideration.

IV. This same text is applicable to the case of any persons who are making SELF-RELIANT EFFORTS FOR THE GOOD OF OTHERS. How painfully are we made to feel, my brethren, after every series of our special services at this Tabernacle, that we of ourselves can do nothing! How are we driven to the conclusion that it is not by might nor by power, but by the Spirit of God, and by the Spirit of God alone! Man's heart is very hard; it is like the northern iron and the steel. Our preaching—we try to make it forcible, but how powerless is it of itself! The preacher seeks goodly words and illustrations; he brings forth the law of God, he gives forth threatenings in God's name; he reasons concerning judgment to come, and flinches not from declaring the eternal punishment of sin; he preaches the love of God, and the infinite mercy of Christ Jesus, and he blends all this with an affection which longs for conversion, and he prays for God's blessing; but in many many hearts there is no change, the northern iron and the steel remain unmovable. We call spirits from the vasty deep of their lost estate, but they come not at our bidding. We plead with sinners to be reconciled to God, and we beseech them as though God himself besought them by us; but they remain unreconciled; they are even the more obdurate in iniquity. The cries and tears of a Whitfield would not avail. Though all the apostles reasoned with them they would turn to them a deaf ear. Herein the best adapted means cannot break the northern iron and the steel. With some of you an instrumentality has been used which ought to have been more prolific of results. A mother's tears, to your knowledge, have been shed for you. How affectionately has she spoken to you of the Savior, whom she loves: but powerful as your mother's pleadings would be on any other point, you reject them in the matter of your soul. How would it make you gray-headed man, your father, rejoice if he might see you saved! In other matters this also would have weight with you, but it has none in this. You have had the gospel, too, some of you, put to you very, very tenderly by those whom you love best, but you are unsaved still. There could be no better means than human love sanctified and strengthened by indwelling grace; it has been strong as iron, and would have broken any ordinary heart, but it has not crushed yours, for it is hard as the northern iron and the steel. Ay, and you have been sick; you have been stretched upon the bed with fever, within a hair's breadth of hell; or you have been at sea, and escaped as with the skin of your teeth from shipwreck; but even the judgments of God have not aroused you. The iron has not broken the northern iron and the steel. This month, to some of you, there have been addresses delivered pointedly, plaintively, which should have moved a rock. I have been present at some of the meetings, when I have heard certain of our brethren speak in a way that made me inwardly say, "Surely these careless ones will yield to that." There has been much sighing and crying for your souls; and you have been spoken with personally, many of you; a kind hand has been put upon your wrist, and with tearful eye, brother and sister have looked into your face, and told you of your danger and of your remedy. Oh I if this does not save you, what will? "What shall I do unto thee?" "O Ephraim, what shall I do unto thee?" What other instrumentality can be employed? The iron will not break the northern iron and the steel. Children of God, you are driven to this, that here is a case in which you are powerless. You might as well reverse the wind, or move a star, or create a world, as soften these hardened hearts. What are you then to do? Certainly, you are to continue the effort; nothing must tempt you to relinquish it, or even to relax your zeal. If you cannot break the heart, truly it is no business of yours to do so; commit that work to him who is fully equal to the miracle, keep to

your work, and fear not that the Lord will work with you. God bids you continue prayer, warning instruction, and invitation. If you knew that every soul you preached to or talked with would be lost, it were no less your duty to preach the gospel; for the duty to tell out the gospel is not influenced by our success, but is based upon the commission of Christ: "Go ye into all the world, and preach the gospel to every creature." It is not Ezekiel's duty to make the dry bones live; but whether they live or not, it is his duty to prophesy upon them. Noah was none the less a preacher of righteousness because none, save his own family, listened to his appeals and sought shelter with him in the ark. Go on with your work; but let a sense of your personal inability make you fall back upon your God. Let it keep you from one self-reliant prayer or word, much more from one self-confident sermon or address. Every time we try to do good in our own strength, the effort bears the certainty of defeat in its own bowels. You shoot pointless darts; you wield a blunted sword when you go to work for God without God. It is only when we go in God's power that we can save souls. "Except the Lord build the house, they labor in vain that build it: except the Lord keep the city, the watchman waketh but in vain." Lo, spiritual children are a heritage of the Lord, and the fruit of our soul's womb is his reward. Feel your weakness, my brethren, and then you shall know your strength. Go to the sinner in God's strength, and then shall you see the divine operation; but certainly not till then. What a blessing it has been to some of us at times to be made to lie very low in the dust, and see what unworthy creatures we are! I have often noticed that when God intends to give a great blessing upon my ministry, and to let me know it, he usually makes me feel as if I had rather die than dive, because I feel myself so utterly unworthy to preach his word, and am made to bemoan my wretched unfitness to be used at all by my gracious Master. Let the stone lie in the brook, and let it be rounded, and made smooth by trituration of the water—it will do nothing of itself; but when it has been worn away enough by the brook, and David slings it, and smites the giant's brow, the stone cannot say, "I slew the giant by my own force;" but all men will give glory to the champion who hurled it at the giant's forehead. Yes, God will have the glory, and he will take means to prevent us from usurping it. He will make us feel that the iron cannot break the northern iron and the steel, and then he will send us forth to victory. Truly my inmost heart confesses that if one heart has been won for my Lord Jesus by me, I am less than nothing in it, and he is all in all. My soul dares not touch the glory, but loathes every thought of self-praise. He hath done it, and to him be everlasting songs.

V. But now I must close—time warns me to do so—by remarking that this text has A VERY SOLEMN APPLICATION TO ALL THOSE WHO ARE REBELS AGAINST GOD. Men sometimes think themselves of very great consequence. I spoke with one some years ago who had professed to be a Christian, who addressed me very indignantly after some little argument, and said that ere long he intended to produce a pamphlet which would extinguish Christianity. I remember making the remark, that I dared to say that the world would hear as much about it as when a fly fell into a pail of water and was drowned, and not much more. And then he was more indignant still; but I told him I had seen many a moth dash against my gas-burner in the evening, but I had never seen the light put out, though I had seen the wretched insect fall with singed wings upon my table, to suffer for its fatal folly; and I feared that such a fate would happen to him. So rest assured it will be to you, O blasphemer of God, or hater of his Christ. Fight against God, would you? Measure your adversary, I charge you. The wax is about to wrestle with the flame: the tow is about to contend with the fire. It is too unequal a warfare. If you are wise, you will select another adversary, and not attempt to go to war with the omnipotent King, with such a puny force as yours. "Hast thou an arm like God? or canst thou thunder with a voice like him?" You may be like iron: go and break the potsherds of the earth; they are fair game for you; but do not contend against the northern iron and the steel, for these will break you. You will not be able to deprive Christ of a single atom of his glory. You may blaspheme, but even that shall, somehow or other by a holy alchemy, be turned to his glory. You cannot

thwart his decrees. The great wheels of his providence grind on, and woe to him who throws himself in their track; they will surely grind him to powder. The huge Matterhorn lifts its colossal head above the clouds. Who will may speak against it; but it bows not its giant form; and no matter what of snow and sleet may dash against its ramparts, there it stands, still the same; emblem herein of the great throne of the Eternal, firm and immutable, though all the universe storm at its foot. To resist God is to strike with naked feet against a goad. "It is hard for thee to kick against the pricks." You will hurt yourself; you cannot injure him, nor change his purposes by so much as the turning of a hair. God will have his way: None shall resist his will. Everlasting and eternal are his decrees; and fast and fixed they ever must remain, though all earth and hell should unite in one great conspiracy. He thrusts a bit into the tempest's mouth, and rides upon the wings of the wind. Confusion there is none to him. Adversaries, what are they? They are utterly consumed as the stubble. But take ye heed that God come not out against you, ye who are rebels; for if he once put on the war-harness and fight against you, woe unto you! Have you not heard? Hath no one told you of the arrows of his quiver? They are sharp, heart-piercing, infallible. Sickness can shake you till every nerve shall become a road for pain to carry on its dreadful traffic. Poverty can come upon you, and want, like an armed man. Death shall strike down ail your lovers, and your acquaintances shall sink into the abyss. Let God but come forth in judgment against a man, or a people, and what can he not do? Look at the nation across the Channel, and see how God hath dealt with it. Turn to any other nation against whom his fiat has gone forth, and read the story of its overthrow. What can emperors do, and what their imperial guards, and what their novel instruments of war, and what their death-dealing machines, that were to mow down thousands in an hour? He that sitteth in the heavens doth laugh; the Lord doth have them in derision. He hath broken the bow and cut the spear in sunder; he hath burned the chariot in the fire. Contend no more against the Almighty: put back thy sword into the scabbard, and submit thyself to the inevitable; for remember, ere long, O rebel against God, he will deal with thee in another fashion than he doth now. Let that breath which is in thy nostrils go forth from thee, and where art thou then? I will quote one passage of Scripture and leave it to your thoughts. "Beware, ye that forget God"—that is, the very mildest form of rebellion—"Beware, ye that forget God, lest I tear you in pieces, and there be none to deliver." O may you never know what that means! Cast down your weapons. Come now, and ask for reconciliation. The ambassador of peace invites you. I point you no longer to his burning throne, but to yonder cross. See there God in human flesh—bleeding, suffering, dying. Those wounds are fountains of mercy. Look to them, and you shall live. Wrath is appeased by the death of Jesus. Fury is no more in Jehovah! Trust in Jesus, the crucified, and your transgression shall be forgiven you. That precious blood shall make reconciliation: there shall be peace between you and God; but O resist no longer, for the iron cannot break the northern iron and the steel.

The Lord bless you for Jesus' sake. Amen.

PORTION OF SCRIPTURE READ BEFORE SERMON—Isaiah 40. 9-31.

LETTER.

CLAPHAM, JUNE 5TH.

TO MY FRIENDS EVERYWHERE,

I HAVE now endured ten silent Sabbaths, and as I know that many of you are anxious to have accurate information as to my state of health, and as I have now something cheerful to communicate, I feel bound to add the present note to this week's sermon. The pain of my disease, which has been intense, has now

ceased for a week or more. I have had a succession of good nights, in which sweet sleep has so refreshed me that I felt each morning to be far in advance of the previous day. I am now very weak—weak as a little child—but by the same mercy which allayed the pain strength will be restored, and I shall have the pleasure of being again at my delightful labor. Please pray for me that I may be speedily and lastingly restored to health, if it be the Lord's will. Ask also that the furnace heat which I have suffered may produce its full effect upon me in my own soul and in my ministry. My heart's inmost desire, as the Lord knoweth, is the salvation of sinners and the building up of his people in their most holy faith, to the glory of the Lord Jesus: hence it has been very grievous to me to have been debarred my pulpit and shut out from other means of usefulness. Nevertheless, no work has flagged at the Tabernacle because of my illness; pecuniary help has been furnished just when it was needed, and spiritual help has been given by the Lord of Hosts. We desire to accomplish more and to receive more blessing when our health is restored to us. Surely the Master has some great design to be answered by laying his servants aside: we trust it will prove to be so. Let our prayers be more fervent, our zeal more ardent and our labors for the spread of the truth more abundant, and "God will bless us, and all the ends of the earth shall fear him."

I have one great favor to ask of all readers of the sermons, and that is, that they will try to spread them abroad, and increase the number of regular subscribers. What has been good to you will be good for others if the Lord bless it. If you cannot preach yourself, you can distribute the word spoken by others.

I hope to be able to occupy the pulpit again by June 25th, if the Lord will; but all things are uncertain to us, especially when one is slowly recovering from severe affliction.

Yours to serve till death,

Source: <https://sermonindex.net/speakers/ch-spurgeon/the-northern-iron-and-the-steel/>

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