

The Sieve (1868)

by C.H. Spurgeon

C.H. Spurgeon teaches that God sovereignly sifts His people through trials and persecutions to purify and preserve the true Church, ensuring that not one true believer is lost.

Scripture: Amos 9:9, John 16:33, Matthew 13:24-30, 1 Peter 1:6-7, Revelation 12:17, Hebrews 12:7-11

Topics: "Divine Sovereignty", "Church Purification"

Description

In 'The Sieve (1868)', C.H. Spurgeon expounds on Amos 9:9, illustrating how God's sovereign will purifies His people through trials, persecution, and doctrinal challenges. He draws parallels between the historical suffering of Israel and the spiritual testing of the Church, emphasizing that God's purpose is to preserve and refine the true believers. Spurgeon encourages Christians to embrace these trials as part of God's refining process, assuring them of God's faithfulness to keep every true grain safe.

Transcript

"For, lo, I will command, and I will sift the house of Israel among all nations, like as corn is sifted in a sieve, yet shall not the least grain fall upon the earth." Amos 9:9.

"I WILL command, and I will sift"—how easily the Divine purposes become facts! The Lord has but to command and His will is done. Omnipotence has servants everywhere. If those who serve Jehovah cheerfully shall not suffice to carry out His will, the very devils themselves, and the most rebellious of spirits shall be chained to the chariot of His Divine decree and made to effect His designs—

"When God commands, who dares oppose, Or ask Him why, or what He does?" And if they, in their impudent obstinacy should oppose, their opposition is made to subserve the very purpose which it was designed to thwart! And all their raving and their raging, their rebellion and their struggles merge into a wonderful adherence to the eternal plan by which Divine Wisdom and Grace shall be displayed.

We are led to make that remark by the text opening thus—"I will command, and I will sift"—as if the mere command were enough to effect the sifting. God has but to speak and it is done! And at His will His children shall be chastened with innumerable trials, or delivered in abundant mercies. The rills of comfort and the streams of woe, alike, flow at His bidding, or at His word are dried up.

This prophecy is no doubt originally applicable to the long-afflicted seed of Israel. How terribly has it been fulfilled! Have not the sons of Jacob been sifted among all nations? They have been removed to and fro as

a shepherd's tent. They have known no abiding dwelling place. Since the day when, in answer to their cry, "His blood be on us, and on our children," the firebrand of the Roman soldier set their Temple on a blaze, and the plow of the Roman conqueror went over the bloodstained foundations of the beloved city—since that day they have been a nation scattered and peeled— sons of the weary foot—a nation without a land—a people without a language!

The sufferings of the Jews are almost unparalleled. From the time of the famous siege of Jerusalem down to days almost within memory they have been a proscribed and persecuted people. Their name has been a word of scorn and their race a byword and a proverb. In almost every land they have been hunted like the partridges upon the mountain—he that killed them thought he did God service. The followers of that greatest of Jews, the meek and lowly Jesus, thought they displayed their Christianity by hounding to the death His Brethren according to the flesh! Perhaps no chapter in human history shows more how near akin man may be to a devil than the history of the Jews in Spain.

But why instance one nation—all have been barbarous and inhuman—England had her share in their murder. As a frugal and industrious people they have flourished wherever they have been allowed to trade, but their wealth has been extorted from them by greedy monarchs, or destroyed by lawless mobs. For them there were no laws except such as are made for the destruction of wolves and foxes. They could never be sure of life or limb. To mock them was the sport of children—to torture them was the amusement of kings and princes. Alas, poor Israel, what have you not suffered? What woes have been made to roll in billows over you!

Nation of God's election, yet to be restored to joy—for whom a glorious future is certainly ordained—how have you been trod as the mire in the street! The precious sons of God, comparable unto fine gold—how have they been esteemed as earthen pitchers—the work of the hands of the potter! Israel has forgotten her God and rejected her King, the Son of David, the crucified Jesus—and therefore long days of bitterness and centuries of grief have been appointed her! O God, how long? When will You return and bid Judah's Lion-standard once more wave in triumph? When shall the throne be restored unto Jerusalem and the kingdom unto Judah? When shall the long-expected Messiah set up the kingdom which shall endure forever?

I intend, this morning, not to discuss those matters, but to take the text as it applies to the spiritual Israel. Undoubtedly all these prophecies have a double teaching. And while it is atrocious to overlook the literal meaning, and a despoil to the Spirit of God to read literal passages as though they were altogether spiritual and figurative, yet after having once stated the literal meaning we are allowed to go on, in the way of teaching, to the spiritual sense, as we shall now do, so far as the Spirit of all Grace shall assist us.

Two things there are in the text for God's people to remember—the sifting and the saving. We shall be sifted, everyone of us, yet shall not the least grain fall to the ground. Tried much, but never forsaken, often near to death, but never suffered to perish!

I. Let us begin with THE SIFTING. God has ordained that this side of the Jordan there shall be no rest for His people as to their outward circumstances. The Covenant of Grace has for one of its clauses, "In the world you shall have tribulation." As long as the wheat lies on the threshing floor, the flail must be kept in motion. And so long as the corn-heap of the Church is a mingled mass of chaff and wheat, the winnowing fan must not be laid aside. The Church of God, since its institution, has never been perfectly pure.

It has been the object of all true ministers, as the Lord's watchmen, to keep His Church pure—and the servants of God in every age have longed and desired that the tares might be rooted up from among the wheat—but it has never been so. The Church has shared in the imperfection of everything else that is human, and therefore, upon God's floor there has never been a heap of perfectly pure, well-winnowed wheat—some chaff has always been introduced by some means or other. No matter how stringent your regulations, how Scriptural your rules, how judicious your officers, how precise your examinations, for all that, as certainly as Judas thrust himself in among the Twelve, so will there creep in unawares among us ungodly men who were of old ordained unto this condemnation—who shall be as chaff in the midst of the wheat.

Because of this we must expect, wherever and whenever God has a Church, to find that it is in the sieve. As long as the farmer's corn is not clean, he will keep on sifting it. And as long as God's Church is not pure, He will continue to purify it. He will, in fact, fulfill the words of the text, "Sift the house of Israel among all nations, like as corn is sifted in a sieve." Now take this great fact in reference to the Church at large, and you will see it worked out in her history. No sooner had the Lord a Church after the time of His Ascension, and that Church had begun to multiply through the Pentecostal blessing, than Herod rose up, and, strong-handed tyrant as he was, took the sieve and sifted the Church most terribly—till the saints of God were scattered, and many of them slain!

Persecution set in as soon as the Church appeared—the Man-Child was scarcely born into the world before the dragon began to pour forth floods out of his mouth—hoping that he might utterly drown the woman's Seed. From that first day until now the page of history is crimson with the blood of the faithful. Notice the persecutions by the Pagan emperor—through what seas of blood the Church swam in those cruel days! What horrors make the flesh to creep as we turn to Papal times! Surely the blood of saints shed for the testimony of Jesus might have filled the Mediterranean to its brim! I know not whether every drop of the Atlantic ocean might not have been colored red if the warm blood of all the martyrs had been poured into its all but boundless deeps. So many were the saints of God that were offered, that arithmetic can scarcely compute their number, and time would fail us to narrate their torments and their triumphs.

The Church was sifted by these persecutions. The vain and light, the formal and the insincere went off from her, too glad to earn inglorious safety by dastardly apostasy! They could not afford to lose their lives for the Truth of God's sake. The Cross was too heavy for their galled shoulders and they turned aside. Yet not the least true grain fell to the ground! The Church was never the worst for her fiercest persecution! In fact, she seemed to derive new vigor from her baptism of blood—and her voice was never so piercing and so potent as when it was uplifted from the rack and the stake! Her soldiers never fought so well as when the martyr's ruby crown hung visibly before their eyes! Sifted, she has been, but never injured! She has been a grand gainer through the Grace of God by all her tribulations and afflictions.

Brothers and Sisters, we need not suppose that the sacramental host of God's elect has come to the end of persecution! We may have done so in this country. I cannot tell. This I know, I would not aid in maintaining an unjust law to escape from persecution. I would not deny to the Roman Catholic his natural rights though I thought he would burn me and my fellow Believers as soon as he had the power! I would do him no wrong under the pretext of preventing him from doing a wrong to me. God forbid that we should do evil that good may come!

True Protestantism does not live upon political favoritism or national supremacy. Truth can afford to let justice be done, for she knows that the right can never hurt her. We who worship Jesus in spirit can afford

to do what is right and let consequences take care of themselves. My Brothers and Sisters, let the worst come—let violence again assail us—we have overcome in days gone by, and can overcome again! Weak and feeble as we are today, when filled by the Holy Spirit we shall be strong and shall form a fresh band of martyrs to illustrate the faithfulness of God again! But we cannot, we cannot do violence to our consciences and the rights of other men even though it is to save our lives and preserve our liberties.

Other sieves beside persecution have been used. Not long after the days of the Apostles, yes, even in their days, God was sifting His Church in the sieve of heresy. There arose men who taught contrary to the Truth as it is in Jesus. They were cunning and smooth-spoken men who, by sleight of words and craftiness of argument, led aside many and perverted the faith of not a few. Ever since those times notorious heresies have, at various seasons, afflicted the Church like epidemics among sheep—deadly and hard to cure. Professors have fallen before the hurricane of false doctrine like leaves in autumn. Thick as leaves in Vallambrosa have been the apostates who have been hurried here and there by the fitful winds of novel opinions, subtle refining, and pestilent errors! Denying the Lord that bought them—denying the cardinal doctrines of the faith—they have perished in their iniquity.

Doubtless the uprising of false doctrine is intended by God to be a test to the professing Church. While men hear the Truth of God and nothing but the Truth of God, and it is the fashion to avow it, who shall judge between the pretended and the real? But when a strong party is made for error, then some son of Levi lifts up the banner of separation and cries, "Who is on the Lord's side? Let him come unto me!" Then straightaway there is a division in the camp, and it becomes known who has the Truth of God written in his heart and who has it merely on his tongue! By the fierce blasts of false teaching, which are apparently so injurious, a difference is made between the rotten boughs which only adhere to the tree from force of habit, and the living boughs which keep their hold because they suck their vital sap from the stem.

We need not fear if even worse heresies should arise in these times than in the past, for God will defeat them! It seems to me very likely that Antichrist has yet more deceptive inventions to reveal—we have not yet fathomed all the depths of Satan. Puseyism, with its many attractions, is about as cunning a device as we could well imagine. It has outdone Rome, itself, in some respects! But yet there may be worse to come. If so, so be it, for God will overrule it for good. These devices of men and doctrines of devils are only so many sieves by which the Lord will separate the chaff from the wheat—and make it to be known who are His elect and who are not.

So, too, the uprising of new infidelities are intended to act as a test to the Church. At different times the public mind exhibits a stronger tendency towards unbelief. One wave rolls up black with superstition and the next is pale with infidelity. The mind of man oscillates like a pendulum between believing a lie and believing nothing. Frequently the Church is assailed by a crafty philosophy and then by a brutal ignorance. Every Truth which she declares is exposed to the most violent and even ferocious assaults. She has been assailed from all quarters and at all points. In modern times she has been peculiarly attacked by criticism upon her Bible which she upholds as the revealed will of God. Men have even been found calling themselves bishops and presbyters of the Church who have sought to undermine the foundations of the Gospel by impugning the truthfulness of the Word of God!

This is no strange thing—it is but an old device. Those who have read the history of the Church from the very beginning will remember how she had to contend with Atheism, Deism, Arianism and all shapes and forms of doubts and skepticism in her earliest days. This is no new conflict, O soldiers of the Cross—neither is it one concerning which you have any ground for alarm! We have overcome Atheism in

the past, and we shall vanquish it in the future. There will be benefit reaped by the Church from skeptical attacks, and certainly no detriment shall accrue to her. She will come out of her trial, however fiery, like gold seven times purified! She shall shine with a clearer luster because of the ordeals which she has triumphantly endured.

I will mention one more sieve in which the Church at large has been tested. It is that of providential examination by public opinion and sense of justice. You must never expect that any professing Church of God will be, for a long time, flourishing if it abides exactly in the same state. Whenever our Churches run for years in the same rut, little good is done.

To many of our old established Baptist Churches, it would be the greatest possible blessing if the Chapel were burnt down, or if some disorderly zealot would break all their proprieties to shivers—anything to break the deadly stagnation under which they wither!

As it is in small Churches, so it is in the Church at large—change and stir are necessary. We must expect, often, to hear that the ship of Christ's Church is in a storm—there must not be smooth sailing for the vessel of the Church—it must be tossed with tempest and driven to and fro. At the present juncture all established Churches are in the sieve. I believe there is much good corn in the established Church, though intermixed with a sad amount of chaff—and now the whole is being sifted and will be sifted yet more and more. I do not care who holds the sieve—whether it is a politician or an ecclesiastic—I am persuaded that by God's Grace good will come of all this strife, and debate, and agitation.

The public mind, when it stirs itself about religion, is often mysteriously guided to the right path. And even if it chooses a wrong thing for a season, yet the wrong only plays itself out and the right, by-and-by, comes to the fore and wins the victory. God will not have His Church in alliance with the State! And though they settle down upon their lees, and are at quiet in an adulterous connection with the powers that be—the trying time must come and the sieve must be used.

The true friends of the Church need not wish for the sifting to be withheld, for not one grain of precious Truth will fall to the ground! All that will perish will be the chaff, which is a signal blessing to lose. Purification will be the result of agitation. After the Episcopal Church is sifted, other Churches will endure the same. All must take their turn—and those Churches which have any mixture of tradition or man's teaching—those Churches which depart in anything from this Book will lose much by the sifting that they now hold to be precious. And a blessed loss it will be to them! We, as a denomination, shall have our sifting, too—how shall we come forth from it? It may not come yet, but the ordeal is surely ordained for us. Perhaps we shall rebel terribly at the trial of cherished prejudices, but our rebellion will be in vain.

So long as the Divine will shall be accomplished, what does it matter? Let us be content to abide what the Lord has appointed—

Let every turret of ecclesiastical citadels be cast down, however venerated they may be, if they are not of the Lord! Let every graceful pile, though hallowed with the moss of ages, be hurled down and not one stone left upon another if it is not of the Lord's building! Lord, send through the camp Your sharp two-edged sword to kill error everywhere! Search us with candles and try us as the refiner tries his gold till You have consumed every false thing and made Your people to be a Scriptural Church, a pure Church, a living and perfect Church fair as the sun, clear as the moon and terrible as an army with banners!

Thus far we have spoken of the Church of God at large. Other matters call us onward. God's Truths are like crystals which bear one uniform shape whether in larger masses or broken into fragments. Take, too, the great Truth of God that the whole Church shall be winnowed, and as you break it up you will see that each Church and each individual Christian must be sifted, too. The Lord will sift all His people—sift them most thoroughly and in all respects. Let us think of certain of the sieves in which you and I shall be tried. One is the preaching of the Word. Wherever the Gospel of Jesus Christ is faithfully preached it acts as a discernor of spirits.

There are certain searching and testing Truths taught in God's Word, which when spoken in plainness and distinctness, cause mere professors to be angry and voluntarily to withdraw themselves. This is the design of such Truths—that the vile may be separated from the precious. You remember when our Lord stated a certain doctrine, it is said that certain of them walked no more with Him? It was not that He had done anything evil, or laid any hard duty upon them, but He had simply stated a deep Truth of God. He had gone a little beyond His ordinary teaching, and at this deep Truth they were straightaway scandalized and walked no more with Him.

So in the preaching of the Gospel—if the minister declares the whole Truth of God, certain persons will say, "I cannot receive that"—not because it is not Scriptural, but because it does not jump with their prejudices, or suit their carnal tastes. Now, when such people go away, we have no cause to mourn except that they should be so foolish! Our cause is rather for rejoicing that God has made His Word to answer what always was its purpose—the separating of the precious from the vile. The Gospel is like a two-edged sword, piercing to the dividing asunder of soul and spirit—it is intended to cut between the joints and the marrow, and to lay bare the very heart of man!

I would hate to come into this pulpit and utter words which should be needlessly offensive, but I do delight to preach the Gospel that the Word shall find you out and make you perceive that we are speaking of you! Every true preacher of the Gospel will be sure to become a spiritual detective. He may not know anything of his hearers, but in the course of his ministry he will speak as if he had entered into the very chambers of their heart and read the secrets of their soul! There are some who do not like close dealings, though that seems to me to be the very ministry every Christian ought to prefer—a heart-searching, heart-trying ministry!

But to many, plain preaching is very distasteful—they want to be patted on the back, and praised, and extolled—they like to have human nature lifted on high, and have sweet things said unto them! They are like those of old who said unto the Prophets, "Prophecy smooth things unto us." But the genuine Gospel, wherever it comes with power, acts like a sieve, for vain and foolish people are offended at that which searches and tries them, and so they fall to the ground with the chaff—while the precious wheat, under such a ministry, remains to the glory of God! I have known some young ministers dreadfully alarmed because a few of their hearers have been indignant and threatened to withdraw when they have preached the Doctrines of Grace. This is the natural result of a faithful ministry—why, then, be alarmed? No, let the chaff blow away! If God's Gospel offends any man, let him be offended! Or, rather, let Divine Grace come and change his heart until he shall yield to it—for the Word of God cannot yield to him!

But, Brethren, we shall have severer tests than these! Every professing child of God will be tested by temptation. You think, young Disciple, that you shall never fall! You do not know what traps there are—what gins, what pitfalls—what slippery places! How soon you may be taken in them! She who lies in your bosom may lead you into sin. He who has been your instructor from your youth up may be your

Ahithophel and entrap you by his subtlety. You cannot tell where you shall meet your foe—but conclude that behind every bush there is an enemy and underneath every tuft of grass a viper! It is very easy for us, at first conversion, to think that we have overcome our sins and to imagine that they are dead and buried. But how soon we find that they are yet alive to be our pest and plague, and to keep up a constant warfare in our soul.

Brothers and Sisters, tens of thousands of fair vessels have floated from the docks and have passed down the river with every color flying—receiving every man's good word, freighted with hope, and manned with resolution—and yet they have been wrecked most hopelessly! A shifting quicksand or a hidden rock has been their destroyer, and they have been heard of no more in the regions of the good. So may it be with you, young Professor! Tempted in the one point which you have left unguarded, the enemy may attack you at the post at which you have set no watchman—and you may fall a prey, even you who thought yourself so sure! The daily temptations of the shop, the house, the field, the street, yes, even of the Church of God, are the discoverers of sincerity, the detectives of delusion, the exposers of hypocrisy and the beacons of wisdom.

Next to these come the trials of life. Believe me, these are severe enough for any of us—to some they are crushing! But to all, sufficient for the day is the evil thereof. There are temptations in prosperity—that is a sieve which few men can pass. As the refining pot for silver and the furnace for gold, so is a man to his praise—many men can bear to be censured who cannot endure to be praised. Where one man has been ruined by adversity, 10,000 men have been destroyed by prosperity. Do we not see it? When men get into that sieve and become rich, they cannot attend the little Meeting House they once attended. They are too big for their former Brothers and Sisters—they go off to some other religion that shall be more fashionable—and they forsake the simple faith of their fathers and the Truth of God.

The men, who in their prosperity ought to be pillars in God's Church, become the fiercest of her foes. Who are those most bitter against the Truth of God but the sons of men who held it, but, having grown rich, have despised their fathers' faith and their fathers' God, and have gone over to the adversary! Few men can endure long-continued, undisturbed prosperity! Capuan holidays ruined Hannibal's troops! And in the luxurious ease of the valleys men degenerate—but among the mountains we find a brave and hardy race—for there the dangers of the crags and the cold of winter brace nerve and muscle till each becomes vigorous and men are fit for acts of valor and deeds of heroism. It is in battle and service that veteran soldiers are bred!

There is a sieve, then, in prosperity. And adversity acts in the same sifting manner. I know it has acted so in this Church—some who were fervent among us are gone forth from us because they have not prospered in the world as they wished and have been unable to endure the pinches of need. Therefore they have drifted into wrong courses and doubtful dealings, and they are ashamed to show their faces among the people of God. Lord, deliver us from being filled with riches or stinted by poverty—from either extreme, save us! The prayer of Agur is a most wise one—"Give me neither poverty nor riches."

Whether rich or poor, we must look upon our condition as being a test by which God would make known to us and to His Church whether we are solidly in Christ by the work of the Holy Spirit, or only superficial professors—having a name to live, but we are dead. Farther tests, dear Brothers and Sisters, that the Lord uses are inward conflicts. Of these I have no doubt many of you are well aware. Ah, there are times with us when everything in us is salted with fire and weighed in the balances. We speak pretty boldly sometimes, but there are seasons when we cannot speak at all for very trembling of heart.

Were it not for the infinite mercy of God, we should then give up all—sealing our own doom with the black seal of despair! The Lord sets a testing time for everything in the Christian. He does not let any part of him escape the proof-house. His faith is tested—he thought he did believe in God, but when wave upon wave rolls over him, till all God's billows have passed over his head, he half suspects that he never knew what faith was! And if, at such an hour, he had not living and real faith, he would utterly perish as wax melts in the fire. Our experience! Why it often happens to me that every experience I have ever enjoyed of Divine love and faithfulness is veiled in a cloud—and I fear lest it should have been all a delusion!

I look back upon it all, and tremble lest I should have deceived myself. I ask whether such Divine Grace could have been shown to such a sinner! Most men's experience, when it is put into the sieve, comes out very much less showy than when it went in. We thought—we thought that we had experienced the deep things of the Spirit. But we found when we came to search, that we had heaped up much borrowed experience, many stolen plumes, and feathers plucked from others' wings. Our good resolutions—how they shrivel when they are put into the sieve! "Lord, I will never deny You," said Peter, but when the cock had crowed, where was Peter's steadfastness?

When the soul is bruised and broken under a sense of past sins—when it is crushed and beaten small under a consciousness of present departure from God by unbelief, or the neglect of private prayer, or other spiritual mischiefs—then Satan will come in and tell us that God has forsaken us, and He will be gracious no more. And he will shoot his fiery darts with such pertinacity and skill, that he will stick us all over in every part of our spiritual man with his fiery suggestions! Ah, then you will find out whether Grace within is real, or whether your love and faith are false and feigned! At such times, much tinsel and gilt are crumpled up by the heat, and we find that much of our spiritual beauty was but skin deep.

Beloved, the most real thing about us is our sinnership, and I trust, also, our simple child-like dependence upon Jesus—

Let me sing that from my heart, and there is no sham in the song. You will have to be emptied of every particle and portion of self-righteousness, and come to Jesus just as empty and vile as you did at the first—to throw yourself at His dear, bleeding feet—and find that His fullness and your emptiness are the two most real things in all the world—

All experience beyond this is but a flower and may wither, but this is the root that abides—all else is but as grass that springs up in its season, fair and verdant—but is soon scorched in the summer's drought.

This is the eternal foundation which cannot be moved or shaken, world without end—"Jesus Christ came into the world to save sinners," and, "whoever believes in Him shall never perish, but shall have eternal life." How often, when sifted do we come to this as our ultimate resource? And, indeed, it is a blessed thing to come here and to remain here, and never to go beyond it but abide ever in that precious Truth, that Jesus Christ came to save sinners, of whom I am chief! Then can we bless the sifting and admire the love which ordained it.

There will come other siftings beside these. The hour of death has often served as a touchstone by which formality has been revealed. Men have felt the mask rudely plucked off when lying at death's gate. They have been compelled to see the leprosy in their brow which they had feared to think upon before. They have discovered, then, the foul and reeking pollution concealed within their hearts which before they had filmed over with religious duties and virtues and professions. Sepulcher light is brighter than we think—the dying bed is a great revealer of secrets.

And what a test the Day of Judgment will be! Ah, speak of this with bated breath, and speak of it with a broken heart—those scales in which we must all be placed! Shall it be said, "Mene, Mene, Tekel," "You are weighed in the balances and found wanting"? Or shall we be accepted in the Beloved? There will be no escaping that last dread ordeal, nor will there be any deceiving the Infallible Judge! How will it go with you, Professor? Soaring Professor, if your wings are not your own, the sun will melt the wax and you will fall to your destruction! Gifted Professor, think not your gifts can help you, for only Divine Grace, not gifts, shall stand you in that last sifting when Jesus shall divide the righteous from the wicked!

We may have preached in the pulpit, or taught in the Sunday school! We may have been deacons or elders! We may have sat at the Lord's Table and eaten and drunk with His people! We may have been baptized and received into the Church. We may have been the loudest and busiest talkers in the courts of the Lord, but we shall be cast away forever unless we have a new heart and a right spirit—unless an effectual work of the Holy Spirit shall have been worked in us—bringing us away from ourselves and all other dependences, to the Lamb slain from before the foundation of the world!

God grant that you and I may stand this test at the last. But in order to do so, we must stand these present tests—we must be steadfast and unmovable—and having done all, we must still stand steadfast in the Truth of Christ. Thus have I, very feebly, brought before you the fact of the sifting.

II. Let us now turn to THE SAVING—a few comforting words. Sifting is very far from being a pleasant experience for the wheat. Look into the sieve for a minute—the grain lies still and begins to make acquaintance with the chaff and the wheat around it. But lo, it is tossed aloft and all its associations broken! It mounts for awhile, but falls again to the bottom, not to rest, but to be continually tossed about. In the sieve the corn has no peace. And so may Believers sing—

"We've no abiding city here."

This is not your rest! You must not expect continuance on this revolving orb. You had, at one time, a delightful family circle round about you. It is broken up now—husband gone, friends gone—old associates gone. You who have your families around you now must look upon them as only loaned to you for a time—you are in the sieve, remember, and nothing is stable. Never whisper, "My mountain stands firm, I shall never be moved." No one talks like that but a mistaken one! You will be moved soon, for you are in the sieve.

Yes, and you may have had many trials and changes, and been tossed from America to Australia, and from Australia to England and back again to the Continent! You may have been tossed from house to house, from riches to poverty, from "pillar to post," as we say—but the tossing is not over yet—there is more to come. Here is the matter that makes calamity of so long a life that we get not to the end of the sifting till we come to our graves. We are still tossed up and down, still being forever molested and disturbed in our earthly circumstances.

But here arises the comfort—we are assured that no anger occasions our being put into the sieve. The farmer does not sift his wheat because he dislikes it, but just the opposite—he sifts it because it is precious. And you, child of God, your trials and changes, and constant catastrophes and afflictions are no proofs of lack of affection on the part of the Most High, but the very contrary. "As many as I love, I rebuke and chasten." It is because you are gold that you are in the crucible! And it is because you are wheat you are put into the sieve.

Another man might have been much happier and more peaceful than you as far as outward circumstances—I say not that he could have had a real peace like yours, which you possess within your heart, that is a different matter. But another man might have had eyes standing out with fatness—possessing more than heart could wish. He might have spread himself like a green bay tree, being prosperous in life and having no bands in death. Whereas, you as one of God's people are often chastened, afflicted, tried, and troubled. Well, so it must be, but you must reflect that there is great wrath in God's apparent mercy to the wicked—God is but fattening them like bullocks for the slaughter! But as for you, there is no Divine wrath in your tribulation. It is all sent in love. Love is in every loss, every bereavement, every bodily pain. Love, love, love—nothing but love, even when the cup is bitterest.

There is another thought, also, that may cheer you—it cannot be the purpose of the farmer to destroy the grain when he puts it into the sieve. I never heard of any farmer doing so. If he meant to burn it or let it rot, he would not take the trouble to sift it—it cannot be his intention to destroy it if he sifts it. And so, you poor, timid Believer, the Lord does not intend to destroy you by these trials. He has said, "I will not break the bruised reed." He may bruise it, but not break it. "I will not quench the smoking flax." He will chasten, but not destroy. He will bring you low, but He will yet appear for your deliverance and lift you up.

If the Lord had meant to destroy you, He would have left you in your prosperity to run deeper into sin. He would have suffered you to become rotten with pride, or polluted with base passion to your destruction. No, it is because there is a need for it that He prunes the tree that He loves so well—purging it that it may bring forth more fruit—and that He may have the glory of it. I think I see you, poor Believer, tossed about like that wheat, up and down, right and left, in the sieve, and in the air never resting. Perhaps it is suggested to you, "God is very angry with me." No, the farmer is not angry with his wheat when he casts it up and down in the sieve—and neither is God angry with you! This you shall see, one day, when the light shall show that love ruled in all your griefs.

Then comes the promise, "There shall not the least grain fall to the ground." And why is this? It is a great wonder that, when sifted so much, not one grain falls. I suppose he who usually handles the sieve, now and then, lets a little corn fall under foot—but God says that not even yonder small shriveled corn shall perish! He says that half-developed grain shall not fall—the very least shall be preserved and kept from falling with the chaff. And why? It may be replied that the Lord's people are preserved in some degree by their intrinsic weight—because the Holy Spirit gives them substance and solidity. The Holy Spirit has put into every Believer a life that cannot die, making him a living and incorruptible seed that abides forever! The wind which sweeps away another man like chaff cannot remove the Believer because he is solid wheat.

Where the Lord God, Himself, dwells, there is a power to resist temptation—even such temptations, as, apart from that power—would be our destruction. But the great defense of God's people lies in this—that He who holds the sieve watches with an observant eye and acts with unlimited power. He sees that little grain as it moves up and down in the sieve. The least corn of wheat He keeps His eye upon. He never sleeps, never for a moment forgets—and when it seems likely that a grain may fall, He knows how to catch it just at the falling moment and to preserve it still.

"He gives more Grace." "Many are the afflictions of the righteous, but the Lord delivers him out of them all. He keeps all his bones—not one of them is broken." "It is not the will of your heavenly Father that one of these little ones should perish." "And this is the Father's will which has sent Me, that of all which He has given Me I should lose nothing, but should raise it up again at the last day." "I give unto My sheep eternal

life; and they shall never perish, neither shall any man pluck them out of My hand." Much sifted, but not lost! Much tempest tossed but never shipwrecked! Much put into the fire, but never consumed! Blessed be God for all that!

Now observe, the very least of God's people is safe because the love of Christ is as much set upon the least as the greatest. Because Jesus has as much bought with blood the least as the greatest. Because Christ is as much the Surety of the little saints as of the strong saints. Because the least in the family is as dear to the heavenly Father as the elder sons. Because the absence of the feeblest saint would make a gap in Heaven quite as much as the loss of the greatest. Because if Jesus should suffer one of His people to perish, He would as much break His suretyship engagements by losing the least as the greatest. Because it would be as much dishonor to Christ to suffer the meanest as the best to fall, for Satan would say, "He kept the strong, but could not keep the weak."

The very least of God's people is safe because Christ's love encompasses the lambs as much as the sheep, and eternal Grace makes as sure their salvation as that of Apostles and martyrs. God will not be thwarted and Christ will not be robbed! The Holy Spirit will not be defeated! The Covenant shall not be broken! The oath shall not fall to the ground! The blood shall not have been spilt in vain and intercession shall not go up to Heaven unheeded for any one of these little ones—they must—they shall be kept!

Though earth's old columns bow, not one of these shall be cast away! Heaven and earth shall pass away, but no word of Christ shall perish, and His word is, "He that believes and is baptized shall be saved." And therefore whoever believes must and shall be saved, be he little or be he great! God bless this present assembly and bring us all to trust in Jesus, and then give us this blessed salvation. Amen and Amen!

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