

# The Promise of God to His Afflicted Church

by J.C. Philpot

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*The Lord promises comfort, hope, and restoration to his afflicted church, addressing her as a suffering church and promising to lay her stones with fair colors and her foundations with sapphires.*

**Topics:** "Church Suffering", "Gods Promises"

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## Description

J.C. Philpot preaches about the suffering church of God, described as afflicted, tossed with tempest, and not comforted, being identified as the church of the living God through internal evidence and New Testament references. The sermon delves into the promises made to the church, symbolized by the building of Zion with precious materials like fair-colored stones, sapphires, agates for windows, carbuncles for gates, and pleasant stones for borders, signifying the beauty and glory God bestows upon His people amidst afflictions and trials.

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## Transcript

Preached at Zion Baptist Chapel, Bedworth, April 30, 1850, by J. C. Philpot.

"O you afflicted, tossed with tempest, and not comforted, behold, I will lay your stones with fair colors, and lay your foundations with sapphires. And I will make your windows of agates, and your gates of carbuncles, and all your borders of pleasant stones." Isaiah 54:11-12

Before is a promise made in the text to a certain personage, it will be desirable to ascertain who this is. We will look first at the internal evidence--to the things that are said about her, and the character given her--and if we look at the internal evidence of this chapter, we must come to the conclusion that the person addressed is the church of the living God, for of no other personage is either the description or the promise true, except of the church of the living God.

But besides this internal evidence, which is indisputable, we have also the advantage of having certain texts in this chapter quoted in the New Testament, with express reference to the church of the living God, so as not only to give us internal evidence, but also additional proof. For instance, we find the apostle Paul quoting the first verse in this chapter in the fourth chapter of his Epistle to the Galatians, where he says, at the 27th verse, "For it is written, Rejoice, you barren that bear not; break forth and cry, you that travail not--for the desolate has many more children than she which has an husband." Now to what does the apostle apply this quotation? He applies it to the heavenly Jerusalem. He says in the preceding verses, "For this Agar is mount Sinai in Arabia, and answers to Jerusalem which now is, and is in bondage with

her children. But Jerusalem which is above is free, which is the mother of us all." Then this clause of the verse evidently connects "Jerusalem which is above" with the personage to whom the promises are made in Isaiah, "For it is written, Rejoice, you barren that bear not;" and so on.

Thus it is evident this Jerusalem which is above is the church of the living God, from an expression of the apostle Paul in his Epistle to the Hebrews, in the twelfth chapter, where he says, "For you are not come unto the mount that might be touched .... but you are come unto mount Zion, and unto the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, and to an innumerable company of angels, to the general assembly and church of the first-born, who are written in heaven." There we have the connection, the general assembly and church of the first-born, who are written in heaven, with the heavenly Jerusalem, implying that it is one and the same.

But in another verse, we find this prophecy also quoted by the Lord Jesus Christ, where he says, "It is written in the prophets, And they shall all be taught of God. Every man therefore that has heard, and has learned of the Father, comes unto me." Here our Lord quotes this very verse, "All your children shall be taught of the Lord." Who are the children, but the children of Zion, the children, the church of the living God? Thus we not only from internal evidence, but also from expressions quoted in the New Testament, have fixed in a positive and definite manner, that the church of God is addressed in this chapter. All that is said of her, is said to the church of the living God. All the promises in this chapter are made to the church of God.

If we look at our text, we may observe two leading features therein-

I. First, the description which God here himself gives of his suffering church. He addresses her as a sufferer. He says to her, "O you afflicted, tossed with tempest, and not comforted." This seems to be the first leading feature of the words before us, namely, the description of the church of God as a suffering church.

II. The second leading feature is the promise that God makes to her, that he will lay her stones with fair colors, and her foundations with sapphires--"Behold, I will make your windows of agates, and your gates of carbuncles, and all your borders of pleasant stones."

In this way, I hope, with God's blessing, to consider the words this evening, attempting, as the Lord shall enables me, first to point out the character of the church of God here described by the pen of inspiration, as afflicted, tossed with the tempest, and not comforted. Then pass on to consider the promises, the sweet and glorious promises made to her by the mouth of God.

I. The description of the suffering church of God. "O you afflicted, tossed with tempest, and not comforted."

See how our Lord addresses his church here below, how he describes her in her true character, how he tells her from his personal knowledge of her, what she is--how this corresponds for the most part with the feelings of God's people concerning themselves--with the state, case, character and condition in which they find themselves to be. "O you afflicted, tossed with tempest, and not comforted." Let us look at these three distinct epithets, these three descriptions of the suffering church of God.

1. The first mark that God gives of her, is, that she is afflicted. "O you afflicted." Now this is her promised lot here below; her Lord was afflicted before her, and the promise is, that we are to be glorified with him, IF we suffer with him. The promise is, that we are to be conformed to his likeness, his image; and if we are to

be conformed to his likeness, his image in glory above, we must be conformed to his suffering image on earth below. As the Head, so the members; as the Bridegroom, so the bride; as the Shepherd, so the sheep. He was a man of sufferings--a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief; and his people, in their measure, must have the same. The Lord has appointed it should be so. He has chosen his Zion in the furnace of affliction. There is no escape. And if a man thinks he has escaped, his lot is that of an illegitimate child at least. There is nothing manifest of his being in the bond of the covenant.

But the afflictions the Lord sends on Zion are of varied kinds. The Lord sees necessary to send afflictions suitable to the case, state and condition of each. What might be an affliction to one might not be so to another. Each must carry his own affliction. Each must bear his own load, and each endure his own appointed lot. So a wise God sees exactly what affliction to lay on each and all, when it shall come, where it shall come, whence it shall come, and how it shall come; how it shall work, and what it shall work; how long it shall endure; when it shall be put on and when taken off.

In these matters the Lord acts as a sovereign. As we did not choose of what parents we should be born, nor our situation in life, neither had we any choice of our stature, complexion, and so no choice as into what family we should come. The Lord appointed all our afflictions for us, and when he puts them on, no human arm can take them off. He knows our constitution and troubles, our characteristics and the minutest things relating to our situation in life. The Lord knows all our concerns; he sees exactly what we are by nature and by grace; therefore he lays on each individual the very affliction he sees that individual needs; no greater, no less--exactly the very affliction which shall bring about the very appointed purpose intended by God to be brought about, which shall be for the soul's good and God's own glory.

In just glancing at these afflictions of the Lord's people, perhaps we may divide them into two great branches-- temporal or providential afflictions--and spiritual afflictions. Now all the Lord's people have more or less a share of these afflictions. For instance, BODILY afflictions; very few of the Lord's people seems to escape these. How profitable they are often made. A sickly body; a poor weak, nervous, debilitating fame; the Lord sees fit to send on many of his people. Very few that I am acquainted with, enjoy what may be called a sound state of health. There may be some that do, but for the most part, the best are those who are most tried. The most savory are those who feel most the infirmities of this poor diseased tabernacle we carry about with us.

Others of the Lord's people, the Lord sees fit to exercise with PROVIDENTIAL afflictions. Many of the Lord's people have to wade as it were up to the very neck in poverty, and find it a hard matter even to get the bread that perishes.

Others of the Lord's people are tried with FAMILY afflictions, sickness in their families, children taken away, the husband taken, or the wife taken from the fond affectionate embrace of the husband. Or if children grow up, they grow up only to be a plague and a torment to their parents. How many of the Lord's people have waded through these family afflictions and troubles.

But if there are any exempt from providential afflictions, none are from spiritual trouble. We may safely say, if any of the Lord's people go through any long period of their lives without temporal troubles, they shall never go any long period without spiritual trouble. "O you afflicted." They are afflicted when the Lord begins a work of grace in the heart; afflicted when convictions begin; the burden of guilt on the conscience; many doubts and fears as to their state before God; many painful trials and exercise as to what the result will be; how it will prove on a death bed? Whether they will prove to be vessels of honor or

vessels of wrath. These afflictions none are exempt from, though some may wade in these troubles more deeply than others.

Afflicted most of the Lord's people are, sooner or later, Satan laying some trap or snare for their feet, with which they get entangled, to their shame and sorrow. Again, the working of the corrupt passions of their fallen nature, Satan shooting his arrows of obscenity, blasphemy or infidelity into their carnal mind, stirring up the rebellion of their heart against God and godliness.

These are FELT to be afflictions, because where the conscience is tender in the fear of God; where there is a holy reverence of his great name; where there is a desire to please him, and a fear to offend him; where there is a solemn impression of his dread majesty; where there is an inward knowledge that he is a heart searching God; that he sees into every corner of the heart--then to be the possessor of these hateful, filthy, obscene, infidel, rebellious, blasphemous thoughts, without any power to control or remove them--that they seem to run into the heart, as troops into cities where there are neither gates nor walls--this is indeed an affliction.

Oh, when the soul really has the fear of God, and knows how hateful these things are in his holy and pure eyes, that he would not have a single thought dishonoring to his glorious majesty, yet feels how these things come and go, that he has no control over them; how his poor soul is afflicted, tortured, grieved, harassed and distressed.

And added to all this, the Lord's people are afflicted with a body of sin and death, a vile heart, a corrupt nature, with a mind that is always, except kept by the mighty power of God, prone to backsliding, going out after the evils of this life--a heart going out after wickedness. When the conscience is made tender, the fear of God really at work, the soul having a sense of God's holiness, purity, majesty, and greatness, when there has been some sweet touches of his love, some manifestations of his mercy, loving-kindness and tender favor--then to feel we have such a wicked heart, that still looks at and cleaves to earthly things, things that are too base to mention, for this heart to go out after evil, a heart that goes out after things that are God-dishonoring, to have a heart prone to indulge in these things--is heart breaking and soul-afflicting.

It is indeed grievous when the poor soul has to grapple with this vile heart, continually backsliding from God, departing from him, going after the things conscience condemns, and which the soul knows God hates with absolute hatred--this is indeed affliction. What is bodily affliction to this? We may have bodily affliction, and yet be sweetly blessed in soul. Bodily affliction is nothing, when the Lord's presence is enjoyed. When the Lord is pleased to bless us in our soul, if in sickness, what is it? The sickness is made endurable. I would rather be sick and afflicted--with the Lord's presence and blessing--than be well and in a state of health--without it. I remember on my birthday, many years ago, being ill and on a sick bed, but so filled with the Lord's presence and blessing, that it was the happiest birthday of my life. So as to sickness and bodily affliction they are nothing, when we have the Lord's blessing on the soul.

Again, temporal trials, what are all the afflictions of the world compared with the favor of God? A man may have only a crust of bread and a drop of water, yet with the blessing of God in his soul, enjoy a feast indeed. A man may have the deepest family trials, may lose his wife, or the wife a husband, a mother her child, and a child her parent; yet the Lord may make up this trouble by his presence and blessing--as some good man once said upon losing a child, that he could lose a child every day of his life, if the Lord so blessed his soul under it, as he had under the loss of that one. Thus temporal afflictions become light when supported by the blessing of God.

Not so with spiritual afflictions--when the soul is filled with temptations, the assaults of the devil, the fiery darts of Satan, or his innate wickedness--Oh, the sorrow and grief produced thereby seems to shut out the sweet presence of God, and set the soul far from his blessing. Thus put all temporal afflictions together, they are but as a drop in a bucket, compared with spiritual afflictions, spiritual sorrows, spiritual exercises and spiritual griefs. What are all the afflictions of body, of circumstances and of the family, put them all together, compared with spiritual afflictions; they seem as a drop in a bucket, or as the dust in a balance.

Now the Lord knows his people are afflicted, "O you afflicted." Thus he addresses his Zion, he sympathizes with her, in all her affliction he was afflicted; he knows every pang of her heart, and feels every groan of her soul; he has passed through all these things before; there can be no temptation with which she may be tempted, that he was not tempted with before; she can have no sorrow, suffering or trial, that he has not experienced to the utmost. We only drink a few drops of the bitter cup of suffering, he drank it to the very dregs; he says, "O you afflicted." He tells her she is afflicted--he sympathizes with her. That she may be conformed to his image, he lays his everlasting arms closer, underneath and round about her.

2. But he also adds, "Tossed with tempest." This is an illusion to the figure of a ship at sea--there is something suitable in the comparison. If we look at a ship at sea, we know she has left one port, and is on her way to another; but before she reaches the destined harbor, a great tempest often lies upon her. Is not this very descriptive of the state of a quickened soul? The soul made alive to God has left one harbor, the harbor of the world, the dead sea, the harbor in which gallant ships ride; she has left that dead sea, that dead harbor, and is bound for another, the haven of eternal rest, the harbor of eternal peace and joy. But before she gets there, a great tempest lies on her--contrary winds stop her passage, she is unable to make headway against them, therefore she is tossed with tempest; not only does the wind blow right in her teeth, but winds and waves start up, and toss her to and fro, so that she reels and staggers like a drunken man, and is at her wits' end.

Does not this describe the state and case of a poor soul tossed with tempest? The heavenly country is often not in sight, mists and fogs are raised over the heavenly harbor, which lies across the dead sea. While on their passage, tempests fall on them, contrary winds blow, waves rise, and they are tossed up and down on the stormy billows. They cannot turn the ship back; they have no wish to go back, knowing death and condemnation are there. Their desire is to go forward but still the wind is so contrary, the tempest so strong, the waves and billows so boisterous, it would seem as though they made no way at all.

How descriptive this of a poor soul tossed with tempest. Are not you sometimes tossed up and down on these waves and billows, scarcely knowing where you are, or what you are? You are not in the world, you have no rest there. You are not satisfied in your former state, you have left your dead, lifeless, careless, godless profession, and are endeavoring to pass on. Yet the future seems obscured in mist, the heavenly harbor is not in sight; you are tossed up and down in your soul with doubts, fears, misgivings, exercises and temptations. Everything seems opposed to you; everything is done with such struggling, such opposition, such continual struggling of soul against everything you desire to have. If you seek the Lord in secret prayer, opposition; if you try to read the Word of God, opposition; if you try to groan out the distress you feel in your soul, opposition; if you try to hear the Word, opposition. Some storms, some gusts, contrary winds, some waves, some billows, always tossing you up and down. If you try to do something you really ought to do, or which you know is desirable should be done, opposition.

Now this is being tossed with tempest; you think you will never reach the shore; that your poor soul will never be saved--such opposition, such conflict, so many struggles, such hard work, such a rough passage, such contrary breezes, such roaring waves and billows, your own heart harassing you--there you lie, tossed up and down in a sea of doubts, corruptions, temptations and oppositions. Why, is not this Zion's case? "O Zion, afflicted with wave upon wave, Whom no man can comfort, whom no man can save." Was not this the case of old? One said "all your waves and your billows are gone over me." (Psalm.42:7) Was not the case and complaint of Jonah in the whale's belly? When he said, "Out of the belly of hell I cried--The waters compassed me about, even to the soul--the depth closed me round about, the weeds were wrapped about my head. I went down to the bottoms of the mountains; the earth with her bars was about me forever." (Chap.2:2-6) The saints of old have traveled this path before you.

If you are tossed with tempest like Paul's ship, which was tossed up and down the Adriatic, so that "neither sun nor stars appeared for many days," (Acts 27:20) you are only where Zion is; you are only pursuing the voyage in which Zion is embarked; you are only partakers of the afflictions that belong to the suffering church of Jesus Christ; only having fellowship with the saints of old, the noble army of martyrs. Were you not tossed with the tempest, it would be against you. If all was calm, nothing but fair winds for the soul, the wind always in one direction, no tides against you, no billows and waves tossing you up and down, then your case would be doubtful. But if tossed with the tempest, exercised and afflicted, this is not against you; this work belongs to Zion; you are sailing with her on board of that ship which is bound for the heavenly country.

When the disciples were tossed at sea, the Lord was with them in the boat. The saints who have gone to heaven crossed this rough sea. Do you think that the saints with Jesus in glory always had a smooth sea? Always fair winds? Always calm sailing? No, they had their trials; many of them had to wade through seas of trouble, through the crimson waves of martyrdom, before they reached the heavenly country. Are we to be fair weather mariners? Stay at home voyagers? Chimney-side sailors? Like people who go upon pleasure excursions sailing in a yacht? Or are we to be embarked with Zion? If so, we shall be tossed with tempest, and only brought by the Lord's power and wisdom safe to land.

3. "And not comforted." Here is the third mark. People say what a comfortable thing their religion is- "I feel so comfortable; I have been so comfortable ever since I embraced religion." This is not God's religion. "We are troubled on every side, yet not distressed" (2 Cor.4:8). There are comforts in God's religion. We are perplexed with difficulties, as the apostle Paul says, "Who comforts us in all our tribulation, that we may be able to comfort those who are in any trouble, by the comfort with which we ourselves are comforted of God. For as the sufferings of Christ abound in us, so our consolation also abounds by Christ." (2 Cor.1:4-5). God's religion is not an easy slipshod, fair-weather comfortable religion. The religion that is always easy and comfortable is wrong; it is Satan's religion.

To be always comfortable, always pleased, always easy, and always pleasant; finding no inward struggles, no opposition from the devil and the world, is when the heart is like the house of a strong man, whose goods are in peace. This is not the warfare of a Christian; he has to fight. The Christian has a race to run. The Word of God speaking of the course of a Christian employs various figures, such as a struggle, a warfare, a conflict and opposition.

"And not comforted." This is Zion's peculiar spot, Zion's peculiar mark, to take comfort only from God himself. Other people can take comfort anywhere. "Surely," they say, "all is right as the minister thinks well of me." The minister thinks well of the people; and the people are quite satisfied and think well of the

minister, without any of these inward struggles. Then I can say, they are only double-dyed hypocrites; nothing but Pharisees. Though they think very high of what their minister says; that he is very much in their favor; he is not so severe as some. Therefore in this sort of comfortable religion they take things for granted; because they think well of themselves, they think God does.

But this is not the God of Zion, Zion's king. None but God can make Zion feel her guilt; and none but he can take away Zion's sins. None but God can deliver from temptation; none but God can deliver Zion out of her trials; and none but the Spirit of God can bring her out of the trouble under which she labors; therefore, she is not comforted. Zion's religion is not this comfortable, easy, slipshod religion. Her religion is in exercises, trials, sorrows and conflicts. This is Zion's peculiar mark--except when the Lord comforts her, she will not be comforted. But when God comforts her, then she is comforted indeed.

Now, how do matters stand with your soul? Can you take comfort from anything? Are you very easy, or very difficult to be comforted? Are you very nice, very choice in your food? That in eating it must be Zion's dainties? That you cannot but feed only upon nice things? Every thing you have must be applied by God himself? Brought into your soul? Made over to you as a special gift? Brought warm into your heart from the very mouth of God himself? And if you take comfort in anything short of what God brings, if you belong to him, depend upon it, you will be brought off all this comfortable religion; because God brings all his people off this luke-warm, slipshod, every-day comfortable religion. He unsettles them, that he himself may establish them; he brings them off this easy religion, that he himself may comfort them with his own consolations and when he does this it will be to some purpose.

Now do your trials correspond to this description? Looking at your daily walk, at what you have passed through, do you find these three things descriptive of the state of your soul? Do you say, "I am afflicted; if not in body as some, nor in my family as others, nor in circumstances as many--yet I have a daily cross, a daily burden, a daily affliction. It is my dreadful heart, my carnal mind, my corrupt nature; sin dwells in me; my unbelief, my infidelity, my worldly mindedness, my backsliding, my deceptive, adulterous, idolatrous heart--the lust of the eye, the lust of the flesh, and the pride of life. My inward diabolism, with which I am filled, daily makes me deeply groan, draws forth many a sigh, and makes me mourn before God, that I have such a wicked hard heart. My sins, my backslidings afflict me, and deeply grieve me."

Then this is a mark in your favor; it is some blessed testimony that you belong to Zion. If the fear of God is in your heart; if your conscience is tender; the Lord himself is at work in your soul; your case is that of a child of God generally; and each one may take it home to himself, if his case answers to the description I have given. For if you can say, "I am tossed with tempest; what a tempest there is in my heart, what doubts, what fears, what misgivings, what exercises and temptations, what tossings up and down I feel going on;"--if this is your case, then you are tossed with tempest.

Do you say, "I do not know how it is; I find other people get their comfort so easy; I cannot. They seem so satisfied with their religion; I am not satisfied with mine. They can hear well so often; I cannot. It makes me sigh and mourn, when I think how some seem filled with Christ, that everything they say is from God. If a text of Scripture occurs to their mind, they take it for granted it is applied by God to their soul. I cannot do this. I want something strong and powerful something that God himself must speak to my soul. If it is not in that way, I have nothing, all my religion for a time seems to be gone; I cannot find a grain; it seems all swept away; sin, the devil and self seem not to have left a grain. Here I am, sometimes standing before the God of heaven and earth, before a holy heart-searching God, and can scarcely feel a single grain of religion in me, so crossed, empty, needy and naked, as though I had never felt anything spiritual, never

seen Jesus, never felt his presence, never known his love, never tasted his blood and righteousness. I seem so empty and destitute, as though I had never heard of him, as though my soul never had any desire towards God. I seem nothing less than a hypocrite and a deceiver."

This is indeed not being comforted. So these three marks seem to be found some way or other. I seem as if I could say with an honest conscience, whatever my religion is, I can say this of myself, that I feel these things. I can say from my soul, I feel and know whatever I be, whatever I have, or am, I know something of this inward work you have been describing in my soul. Then if the Lord speaks to you, never mind what other people think, or what you think about yourself. Whatever other people think about your disease will not alter God's thoughts; his thoughts are not man's. If God thinks well of you, it is no matter how bad you think of yourself, or what others think of you; depend upon it, neither they nor you, think as bad as you may, will ever think half so bad of you as you really are.

II. The PROMISES made to these people. The Lord comes down to Zion; he is very tender of her; he loved her from eternity; he knows all her sorrows, her sufferings, and her exercises; he does not cut her off. He neither casts her down, nor tramples her as mire in the streets; he is very pitiful; his heart is full of compassion; he stoops to hear her whom men reject. What does he say to her? He makes very sweet promises. What are they? "Behold, I will lay your stones with fair colors, and lay your foundations with sapphires. And I will make your windows of agates, and your gates of carbuncles, and all your borders of pleasant stones."

Now the Lord seems here to compare Zion to a building, which we know is a frequent figure in the word of God. Zion is compared to a building, "The Lord shall build up Zion" (Psalm.102:16). Zion is compared to a temple; she is also called a spiritual house, a palace for the King of kings. Thus the Lord speaks of her here under the figure of a building, saying what he will do for her under this figure. He says he will build her up of the choicest materials; there shall be nothing common about her; and what he does for her will be of a most precious character. Here you see the emptiness of the creature, and the fullness of God. What the Lord does, he does in a manner worthy of himself. Though he brings his Zion down, it is for the purpose of raising her up; though he fills her with affliction, confusion and sorrow, it is for the express purpose of establishing her in beauty and glory. It is wonderful to see how the Lord depresses Zion, then raises her up; how he brings her to the lowest ebb, that he may have all the glory in establishing her in peace and righteousness, proving the truth of what one says, "God is in the midst of her" (Psalm.46:5). She shall never have common fare; no, says the Lord, she shall have the choicest dainties; she shall not be built with common stones; no, says the Lord, there shall not be a common thing about her, but all uncommon; nothing contemptible or vile, but all precious and rare. "I will lay your stones with fair colors, and your foundations with sapphires. And I will make your windows of agates, and your gates of carbuncles, and all your borders of pleasant stones." Let us look at these promises each in its order, and see whether there is not in them something spiritual, heavenly and suitable.

The first promise is, "I will lay your STONES with fair colors." This may be a general description, preceding a particular one. The Lord may say generally, "I will lay your stones with fair colors," before he goes on to specify the way. These words allude to a custom in ancient buildings, and in some of which whose ruins have been uncovered in this country, old Roman pavements have been found. The ancients used to have tessellated pavement, which were in mosaic, that is, a number of beautiful stones of different colors set in mortar, so beautifully contrasted, as to form a picture. Thus when the Lord speaks of laying her stones with fair colors, there may be an allusion to this kind of pavement. Lately, in the ruins of Nineveh, some of these beautiful bits of granite have been found. At least, this was known in the time of the Jews, who used

this granite for pavement; it was very beautiful. Thus Zion is not to be built with common materials, but inlaid with beautiful tessellated work.

"And lay your FOUNDATIONS with sapphires." Now the very foundation shall not be of common materials. You know usually the worst and roughest stones are put into the foundation. But not so in Zion, her very foundation is sapphires, precious stones. What is Zion's foundation? Is it not Christ? "For other foundation can no man lay than that is laid, which is Jesus Christ" (1 Cor.3:11). When Christ is made known to the soul, when he is brought with divine power in the heart; is this not laying the foundation with sapphires? What a beautiful representation is this of Christ, a sapphire, a precious stone of a blue color.

Laying the foundation with sapphires--what is it spiritually? Laying the foundation of Christ to the soul. Every visit from Christ, every manifestation of Christ, every promise from Christ, every opening up of his glory and beauty, every solemn visit from him is laying the foundation with sapphires, laying Christ in the heart, inlaying Christ in the soul. God is in this way continually laying the foundation in a sinner's heart. Christ is the foundation. Every view of Jesus, every testimony of saving interest in his atonement, every sweet smile of his blessed countenance, every laying of the foundation in the soul for eternal glory--this is laying the foundation with sapphires; because in Jesus everything is precious.

As in this precious stone we see everything desirable; in this precious sapphire is everything beautiful. And as this precious stone is very bright, so in this precious stone we see these three distinct characteristics of the Person of God's Son. Who so beautiful as Jesus? Who so adorable as Jesus? And who so precious as the Lord of life and glory? What a precious temple. Who so precious, or what so precious, as a precious Christ! Every time we have a view of Christ; every time we have a manifestation of Christ; every time we have a visit or a word from Christ, is laying the foundation with sapphires, sparkling, bright and brilliant, standing up and shining forth as a precious stone in the heart.

You see Zion's foundation must be tumbled upside down, before laying the foundation with sapphires. God does not mix Christ with works, Christ with the creature, Christ with human piety and creature religion. This is all turned out to lay the foundation with sapphires, to inlay a precious Christ into the soul, to bring anything of Jesus' presence, love, blood and mercy into the heart. This is laying the foundation with sapphires. What a beautiful building it must be, when the very foundation which in common buildings is rubbish and rough stones, is in this foundation precious stones, sapphires, worth one, two, or thirty thousand pounds.

Besides, what a sapphire is laid in the foundation; it is as though the Lord would never give anything more, nor anything less, than Christ. He never does; he can give nothing but what is worthy of himself; he gives as God; he has given us his dear Son as a free gift; then when Christ is made known to the soul, it is laying the foundation with sapphires.

"And I will make your WINDOWS of agates." Zion then has windows. These are not made of glass; glass was not known at that time for windows; it was known for ornaments, but not for windows; God has his windows for his Zion made of agates. What is an agate? You that are acquainted with it, know it is a kind of precious stone; not exactly so; this agate is more of a semi-transparent, not quite transparent, but what is called a semi-transparent, clouded over, very beautiful, partly shining with a degree of cloudiness. What do these windows denote, or seem to set forth? They set forth the view for Zion. Is it not out of our windows we see the view? I live in a very pleasant situation when at home, and can see a pretty view before me. When I want to see the view I look out of the windows.

So these windows of Zion are said to be of agates; they seem to represent the view the soul has of Christ, which is indeed only a semi-transparent, only a cloudy view of Jesus, as the apostle says, "For now we see through a glass, darkly; but then face to face." Seen through agate, not perfectly clear, as the bride says, seen through the lattice (1 Cor.13:13, cf. Song of Sol.2:9); like a person passing by, seen through the lattice, see them for a moment and then they are gone. So Zion's windows made of agate; a sweet view of Jesus; a view of the heavenly country and eternal things; a view of the immortal glorious palace. Immortal beyond the skies, yet often cloudy; faith takes a look; sees as in a glass darkly, not quite a bright view; as the pilgrims on the delectable mountains, when the shepherds gave them the glass to have a view of the celestial city, their hands trembled, so that they only got a dim view.

So it is with Zion; she looks through the windows, they have a cloud over, not so bright or transparent as they will be, yet very sweet, raising up the feelings within, enough to set her affections on things above. Sometimes, when the soul has had a sweet visit from Jesus, or in reading his Word, his Word is made sweet and precious to your soul, both heart and affections cleaving to things above, what a view of the heavenly country, so that you are led to say, "Whom have I in heaven but you? and there is none on earth I desire beside you" (Psalm.73:25). Have you not had to lament how short this view was? How soon unbelief, and darkness of the mind, seem to raise a mist over this beautiful view, to hide it from your sight; how strange it is.

We say sometimes, we have seen things as plain and clear, as though we had seen them with our bodily eyes. Have we not seen the Godhead of Christ? I remember once on my bed, having such a view of the Person of Christ. How clearly I saw his Godhead, and his manhood; as a divine person, what a sweetness and blessing rested on my soul; how I received him into my heart as God, yet what infidelity lurked in the midst at the time as to his deity! What unbelief as to him altogether. How soon his Person, blood, and work, all seemed swept away and out of sight. I could see no Creator, no God-man, no atoning blood, nothing in him, and nothing in myself.

Contrast this with other times, when our faith has been raised up, our eyes anointed with eye-salve, we have had some sweet discoveries of the love of Jesus to the soul. Do we doubt them? No! Then how plain, then how clear; no more doubts; the day begins to break, the light shines forth, increasing from glory to glory; it reaches the soul, and warms the heart. There are no doubts then, they are all gone, and the soul feels as a temple sanctified, a dwelling for the King of kings; a principality for the Lord of Hosts to come down to dwell in, and take up his abode--and perhaps before half an hour has gone, all these views have departed--beclouded, dimmed, and out of sight. Little felt but the workings of unbelief and sin; yet what a mercy to have windows of agate, to give these views, now and then, to gaze on the heavenly country where Jesus is.

Zion has GATES also, and these gates are made of carbuncles. A carbuncle is a precious stone of a blood-color, as a bloody red. Now gates, we know, are for exit and entrance. It is by the doors we come into the chapel, and by the doors we leave it. Thus Zion has gates, and these gates are for Zion's exit and entrance; out of these gates Zion's prayers, Zion's tears, Zion's desires, and Zion's breathings flow. Through these gates Zion's mercies, Zion's favors, Zion's promises, and Zion's visits come. There may be something else, I do not say it positively, there may be something else, perhaps here it has a sweet allusion to Christ's blood. The carbuncle is of a red color, as red as blood. It was through these gates of carbuncle prayers went up. Through these gates answers came down. How do our prayers go up? Through the blood of Jesus. How do the answers come down? Through the blood of Jesus. Through these crimson gates the desires go up, and through these crimson gates the answers descend.

Zion has gates then as well as windows; through these gates our desires ascend, and through these gates there is an entrance for the fulfillment of the longing, hungering soul. These gates are of carbuncles, the Lord would not leave us without them; she could not live without them. Zion is a praying city. Prayer is her breath; as long as she lives she prays, and so long as she prays she lives. What a sweet thing it is! Through the gates prayer ascends to God, perfumed with the incense of Christ's intercession; washed in his blood, redeemed with the merits of his priestly office. What a mercy it is that all favors, all blessings, and visits, come through these gates! That God can still be just, and the justifier of him who believes in Jesus.

"And all your BORDERS of pleasant stones." There is to be nothing common about her; her very borders and walls round about; her fences by which she is surrounded; her very courtyards that bound her length and breadth, all these are precious stones; they do not have any common materials about her borders. What then are her borders? Many of God's poor children, poor people, who cannot come into Zion's inclosure, but walk round about her and count her towers. They are not yet brought by the Spirit's application into Zion's pleasant things, they are borderers, they hang about Zion's gates, they look at her towers, admire her loveliness and beauty, which makes them long to be brought into the sweet enjoyment of Zion's provision, Zion's refreshments. Her very borders are pleasant stones, nothing vile, nothing common about her. She is a queen and all her apparel shall be queenly, all her clothing is queenly, her very gait is queenly, for her husband is the King of kings, and he has determined as a great king that his queen shall be clothed from head to foot, from top to toe, yes, appareled in queenly garments. The King of kings and Lord of lords has his Zion decked in queenly apparel.

Sometimes the borders of the palaces of earthly monarchs are not so very lovely, there are some animal stables near the palace of our queen--but it is not so with Zion. Her borders and courtyards, her bordering walls, everything belonging to her are all built of pleasant stones. The enemies may go about her, but they shall not, and are not able to put their finger on one bit of free-stone, one bit of granite, all her borders are precious stones. They may envy and hate her, but they shall never be able to say this is worthless, common or unbecoming and not fit for Zion. No, they shall not be able to say there is anything common, cheap, or worthless, about her borders. "All your borders of pleasant stones."

Whatever low place Zion may take as regards her feelings, the Lord does not think lightly of her. Though she says of herself, there is none so vile or black as she, yet the Lord will not say so, he says she is all fair, without spot or blemish; she says she is black but lovely; the Lord says she is the fairest among women. Why so fair, beautiful, and lovely? Not so in herself, but because she is washed in his blood, clothed in his righteousness, and decked with his ornaments. Thus he has prepared her as a queen for himself, adorned her as a bride for her husband, a building for himself, a chosen temple, where she shall be delighted with his presence and glory, wherein she shall shine to all eternity, brighter than the sun, fairer than the moon, and more beautiful than the stars, shall be forever a palace for the King of kings, a habitation for God. This is her comfort. This is God's glory, that she shall be a palace for the King of kings, a habitation worthy of himself.

Now, have you any hope, any seal that you belong to Zion? Remember this, you must sink before you rise; you must have the bitter before the sweet, as Christiana said to Mercy--affliction before joy, shame before honor, self-loathing before light and beauty, the spirit of heaviness before the garment of praise and robe of righteousness. Afflicted, tossed with tempest, and not comforted before he lays the foundation with sapphires, the windows of agate, the gates of carbuncles, and all the borders of pleasant stones. So sure as the Lord has done the one, so will he do the other.

If in the Lord's providence, and the Lord's grace, you correspond to Zion's character, as afflicted, tossed with tempest, and not comforted, as he has given the description, and has also given the promises in his Word, if that answers the description of the things at work in your soul, he will be sure to accomplish that promise. Thus there is every comfort for a poor child of God; everything to cause him to hope, everything to bring him to anchor in a precious Christ. At the same time there is no hope given for anybody else, while there is the sweetest hope of salvation for the self-condemned, self-abhorred, afflicted, tempest-tossed, and not comforted; there is no hope for the self-righteous in God's Word, no hope for those who are not exercised, who are not taught by the Spirit, who are not brought into self-condemnation, repentance, and faith, hope, and love. Whatever hope they may have in themselves, they have no solid ground in the Word of God, and by that Word we are to be justified, and by that Word we must be condemned.

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