

The Lord Around His People

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“They that trust in the Lord shall be as Mount Zion, which cannot be removed but abideth for ever. As the mountains are around Jerusalem so the Lord is round about His people from henceforth even for ever.” (Ps. 125:1-2).

Throughout the Bible we often find that the Holy Spirit uses natural figures to illustrate profound spiritual truths and realities. In the words of our text the Church of God, or individual believers, are, in their faith and constancy, compared to Mount Zion, while God Himself in His nearness and protecting power, is compared to the mountains which shelter and surround Jerusalem. Let us look at these words for a moment. Let us consider:

I. The People of God in their Faith and Steadfastness

These are a people who trust in the Lord and who cannot, therefore, be moved. They are a people who trust not in themselves or in any other creature. Their faith does not rest on what they are or on what they do. In this respect they are “a peculiar people”, for men in a state of nature are often proud and self-sufficient. They think that by their own imagined goodness they are capable of paving a way into the favour of God. Such men were in the world in the days of our Lord — “men who trusted in themselves that they were righteous.” And such men are in the world still. They are men who would place the crown of their salvation on their own head. They would be independent of all help. Although man is in a state of condemnation, without holiness or spiritual ability, he is, left to himself, self-righteous. But “cursed is he that trusteth in an arm of flesh, for he shall be as the heath in the desert which knoweth not when good cometh.” And there is no power on earth that can remove this sinful pride and deception within man’s heart but the power of God. Only in a day of His power are we made willing to renounce all trust in ourselves and to trust wholly in the Lord for salvation.

Those mentioned in our text are a people who, in relation to their destiny and acceptance with God, have no trust in themselves. There is, of course, so much that we can do in our moral conduct and in our social relationships; but spiritually we are

helpless “without God and without hope in the world.” There was a day, for example, in the life of Paul when, fixed in his own self-righteousness and deriving all his hope for eternity from his false zeal and from his own correct religious formality, he saw not his need of a Saviour. But Christ brought him into the dust of self-abasement and gave him the sentence of death in his own breast. In that day all trust in himself was for ever slain. He learned that without Christ he had nothing that was pleasing to God, and that he could do nothing to procure his own salvation. From that day he knew that God justified him not by his own works of righteousness but by His sovereign grace and by faith in Christ. He saw that what pleased him was, before God, “as filthy rags”, and that weighed in the balances of the sanctuary he infinitely came short of God’s glory. Only by faith in the righteousness of Another was he delivered from the bondage and condemnation of sin. From that day Christ alone was the subject of his trust and hope.

This trust in the Lord on the part of His people is all-inclusive. If we are of this number we commit into God’s hand not only our persons, but also our times and destiny, and all our cares within the sphere of providence. “Into thine hand I commit my spirit.” “Casting all your care upon Him for He careth for you.” “My times are in Thy hand.” “I have set the Lord always before me.” “I know whom I have believed, and am persuaded that He is able to keep that which I have committed unto Him against that day.” Such words as these show that they commit themselves wholly and for ever into His hand, “as into the hands of a faithful Creator.”

The trust of God’s people is pre-eminently in His Word or promise, for the Lord Himself is present in the Word in which they trust. God and His Word are identical. There can be no trust in the one without trust in the other. Those who are His are given “exceeding great and precious promises”, and it is of the nature of the true Christian life that God often seals His promises, both in relation to His providence and grace, on their hearts and minds. Although all the promises are the heritage of God’s elect, God often makes a personal application of His Word to their souls. And it may often happen that circumstances emerge in their life which seem to nullify His promise. David, in fear and trembling, once asked the question: “Lord, where is Thy former loving kindness which Thou swarest unto David in Thy truth?” “Hath the Lord forgotten to be gracious?” But whatever clouds may overshadow our lives, God’s covenant bow of promise is never absent from our sky. How often do we tremble in our nights of trial, but “hitherto hath the Lord helped us.” And the God of yesterday is the God of today and of the future. “This God is our God for ever and ever: He will be our guide even unto death.” Or, as the words may be translated, “He will be our guide unto death, beyond and over death,” and till we reach the place where death is unknown. Such a blessed assurance as this should strengthen our faith and provide us with a song in the night.

Whatever contrary storms, therefore, may break in upon their lives, God’s people “cannot be moved”. “Their heart is fixed trusting in the Lord.” Christ, their Rock and Stay, is the foundation of all their hope. And “the foundation of the Lord standeth sure, having this seal, the Lord knoweth them that are His.” Paul, in one place, sits as it were, on the very pinnacle of the universe and surveys all the powers on earth and in hell, which, if they could, would separate the Church from the love of Christ. But how does

he end his glorious theme in praise of that love which is stronger than death? "For I am persuaded that neither death nor life, nor angels nor principalities, nor powers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor height, nor depth, nor any other creature shall be able to separate us from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus our Lord." The enemies of the Church never tire of trying to separate her from Christ, but a good hope through grace, which is the anchor of the soul, is both sure and steadfast since it is fixed in Christ the Rock of Ages. Their faith may be small, but in the words of another, "their little faith is in a great God." His love is bound to almighty power and it is by His power they are kept through faith unto salvation. "None perish that trust in Him." "Trust ye in the Lord for ever, for in the Lord Jehovah is everlasting strength." Let us consider also:

II. Their Privilege and Safety

The Lord is about them as the mountains surround Jerusalem. His Israel, in every age, are a people near to Him. They are the subjects of His care. The figure here used is very significant. Let us dwell on it for a moment. What are those mountain ranges, spiritually speaking, which surround the people of God?

He is, to begin with, round about them **in His eternal purpose of grace**. The Holy Spirit in the Word dwells on this. Where does He begin? "For whom he did foreknow, he also did predestinate . . . and whom he did predestinate them he also called, and whom he called them he also justified and whom he justified them he also glorified." And although these divine acts and decrees have their beginning and their end in the Eternal mind and world, they stand related to the salvation and security of the Church in this world. This purpose has, and shall have, its revelation, fulfilment and consummation, both in the finished work of Christ and in the full redemption of His people. The salvation of the Church, in its origin and consummation, is embraced in that covenant "which is ordered in all things and sure." It was to ratify and procure its promises and provisions that Christ came into the world. The pleasure, or purpose, of the Lord prospered in His hand.

Again, **the infinite merits and righteousness of Christ** stand between the people of God and the perils to which, in a state of sin, they were once exposed. Their sins exposed them to His just wrath, and to the curse of a broken law. But in all His merits as the substitute and surety of His people, He shelters them from those fearful storms which once threatened their destruction. "A man shall be as an hiding place from the wind, and a covert from the tempest, and . . . as the shadow of a great rock in a weary land," There is no shelter for His Church but in the clefts of the rock. "Our life is hid with Christ in God." It was when the shed blood was sprinkled before the mercy seat that God became a refuge to His people. It was when the blood of the Paschal lamb was sprinkled on their doorposts on the night that the destroying angel was to pass over Egypt, that the safety of Israel was assured. Mount Calvary is pre-eminently the spiritual mountain that gives shelter to the soul. In heaven, "the Lamb in the midst of the throne" shall engage the eyes and affections of all the redeemed for ever and ever; for they know that their eternal happiness and safety have their source in His love in dying for them that He might bring them to God.

This figure also speaks, we believe, of **all the attributes of God which surround His people for ever**. For those who are reconciled to God there is not an attribute in the Godhead but is exercised in their favour. In the words of the Psalm, these are the lofty mountains which bring forth peace unto his people. "We have peace with God, through our Lord Jesus Christ." Through the death of His Son, "mercy and truth are met together, righteousness and peace kiss each other." The righteousness of God which, in the words of another Psalm, is "like the great mountains" is now covered with the golden cloud of God's peace, proclaiming its blessing upon all who kiss the Son. Its frown is changed into a smile. His mercy also encompasses them as a shield. One could speak of His eternity and His unchangeableness as these stand related to our everlasting salvation. "I am Jehovah, I change not, therefore ye sons of Jacob are not consumed." The "I AM" is He in whose hand are all the saints. "The eternal God is thy refuge and underneath are the everlasting arms." This is a vast subject, but those who know the teaching of Scripture know that the Triune God, in all His perfections, surrounds His own night and day.

**"I of the Lord my God will say
He is my refuge still,
He is my fortress and my God
And in Him trust I will."**

Think also of the all-availing intercession of our great High Priest which surrounds His people always. In heaven He is making continual intercession for us. The glory and virtue of His priestly office and acts are derived from Who He is, what He did, and from the authority which belongs to Him as the exalted Son of God. God the Father has sealed His office with an oath. "Thou art a priest for ever after the order of Melchizedek." This ensures that His prayers are always heard, and that all who are within the circle of His priestly advocacy shall never perish. God hears Him always. On earth He prayed, "Father, I will that they also whom thou hast given me be with me where I am, that they may behold my glory which thou hast given me, for thou lovedst me before the foundation of the world." These words shall continue to rise, like incense before God until the last of His people arrives in His presence. His intercession is the secret of their preservation. This is what we discover in His words to Peter. "Simon, Simon, Satan hath desired to have you that he may sift you as wheat, but I have prayed for thee that thy faith fail not." That prayer Peter never heard, but he knew from that hour where his safety lay. It is good to pray for one another, and to have a place in the prayers of God's people; but the true believer rises higher than the help of mere man. He trusts in the Lord. "I have prayed for thee." When a godly woman was once asked by her friends if they would remember her in their prayers she simply said: "Prayer is being made for me above." She valued their prayers but her hope had risen beyond them to the very throne of God.

Do these words not mean also that **God's Presence is ever with His people?** Ah, yes. In this way He is around them night and day . . . "My presence," he said to Moses, "shall go with you and I will give you rest." "Lo, I am with you alway." We are not to conclude that the Lord is not with us when we mourn over a lack of His conscious presence. Our

sensible enjoyments of His presence ebb and flow like the tide. But His faithfulness is not dependent on our frames and feelings. We fear sometimes that the Beloved has withdrawn Himself. But what does He say? “Fear not, for I am with thee, I have called thee by thy name. Thou art mine.” “I will never” — and this includes every moment of time as well as eternity — “leave thee nor forsake thee.” This is what His people have discovered in all the great crises of their life. How real was His presence to Israel as they were passing through the Red Sea! He was a light and shield to them, but a darkness and a terror to their enemies. In the furnace which the king of Babylon prepared to consume the holy children, Christ’s presence preserved them from all harm. When the young man who accompanied the prophet trembled as he gazed on their enemies, the prophet of the Lord prayed that his inner eyes might be opened that he might see that He who was with them and for them was mightier and nearer than all their enemies. God and His ministering spirits surrounded the hill. Whatever trials we may have to endure here He will be with us. “Fear not, for I am with thee, be not dismayed, for I am thy God; yea, I will help thee, yea, I will strengthen thee, yea, I will uphold thee with the right hand of my righteousness.” How many of the Lord’s people in various parts of the world are lonely and for various causes, separated from the public means of grace and from fellowship with their brethren and sisters in Christ. But listen to what He says, “I will be to them as a little sanctuary.” He is with each as intimate and personal and loving as He is with all.

The Lord is round them also **in all His great and precious promises**. Many years ago I accompanied a friend in the way. He related to me how the Lord, in answer to prayer, and in the midst of many trials, had upheld him by His word of promise. It was a promise which touched his inward being in the power and comfort of the Holy Spirit. “For this is as the waters of Noah unto me: for as I have sworn that the waters of Noah should no more go over the earth, so have I sworn that I would not be wroth with thee nor rebuke thee. For the mountains shall depart and the hills be removed, but my kindness shall not depart from thee, neither shall the covenant of my peace be removed, saith the Lord that hath mercy on thee.” (Is. 54). Since that hour many a sweet drop of comfort have I also derived from these words. Like all the promises of God, it is not only personal to all His people, but it is also confirmed by His oath. Let us therefore keep our eyes fixed on those mountains and say with the Psalmist, “I will lift up mine eyes unto the hills from whence cometh my help. My help cometh from the Lord which made heaven and earth.”

Is He not around His people also **in the processes of His Providence?** How solemn and mysterious is this truth! One supreme end of God’s providence is to preserve His people. This is what the Psalmist meant when he said, “Thou gayest commandment to save me.” Nothing works contrary to the welfare of the Church of God. She may be tossed on many billows and doing “business in great waters” but all things work together for her good. And it is out of her greatest trials that her greatest blessings often come. We mentioned a moment ago how “the lofty mountains”, or God’s attributes, bring peace to His people; but the Psalm also speaks of “the little hills” which by righteousness — or by God’s wise ordering — shall do the same. All things, small and great, combine in securing the safety and welfare of those who are heirs of salvation. We are told, for example, that the stars in their courses fought against Sisera. The

forces of the universe were in array against him. Not only so, but God's people are "in league with the stones of the field." The great and the small! To give another example, the book of Esther is a solemn commentary on how the wheel of providence may turn both to nullify the designs of the wicked and to preserve the righteous. And it all began in such a small way. We read that the king could not sleep. And to beguile the time and compose his mind he asked that a book might be read to him. The book that was brought to his bedside was the right book. It was opened at the right page and at the right moment! On that simple incident the wheel of providence revolved till the enemies of the Church were brought low and God's remnant given a day of joy. "No weapon that is formed against thee shall prosper, and every tongue that shall rise against thee in judgment thou shalt condemn. This is the heritage of the servants of the Lord and their righteousness is of me, saith the Lord." The days in which we live are laden with peril for the world, but He, under Whose control are all things, is the Guardian and the Shepherd of Israel. Though earthly mountains may be cast into the depths of the sea, the God of Jacob shall remain the refuge of His own people for evermore.

Let me say one other thing. Throughout the Bible we read that **the Lord is round about His people not only personally, but through an angelic ministry.** This is something which we should always emphasise. "The chariots of God are twenty thousand, even thousands of angels. The Lord is among them as in Sinai, in the holy place." How sweet it is to sleep with the great promises of Psalm 91 as our pillow:

**"No plague shall near thy dwelling come
No ill shall thee befall,
For thee to keep in all thy ways
His angels charge He shall."**

But our safety is not, in the highest sense, dependent on any creature. Our hope and trust rest wholly on the Angel of the Covenant, the Lord Jesus Christ.

Let me conclude my remarks by reminding those who are strangers to God that in the presence of all the storms which are soon to rock our world there is no place to hide. And do you ever think of the day when we must all appear before the Judgment Seat of Christ, and when the Christless shall be driven by the wind of God's displeasure from His presence for ever? May God give you the wisdom to say, "I flee unto Thee to hide me." Christ is now on the Throne of Grace. He is waiting to be gracious. He is speaking to you personally — "How often would I gather you." And if you come, a song shall be born in your heart that shall never die.

**"In shadow of Thy wings I'll joy,
For Thou my help hast been."**

Then, and only then, shall you rejoice in this promise. "As the mountains are round about Jerusalem, so the Lord is round about his people from henceforth even for ever." Amen.

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