

# FREEDOM OF THE CITY

## A SERMON

Preached on Sunday Morning, November 18<sup>th</sup>, 1860

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At the Surrey Tabernacle, Borough Road

Volume 2 Number 99

“They of the city shall flourish like grass of the earth.” Psalm 77:16

OUR text is very simple and divides itself into two parts. Here is first, *the heavenly citizen*, “they of the city;” and here is secondly, *his prosperity*, “shall flourish like grass of the earth.”

First. First, *the heavenly citizen*, citizenship in the Bible, whether we take it in relation to the Israelites, or the Roman Empire, in either case citizenship in the Bible is that that stands in contrast to slavery. And hence, the Israelites all of them were reckoned citizens of the most High; it is expressive of their freedom in contrast to slavery. So that the citizen means a free man; a man that is free, in contrast to the man that is a slave. Let us then look at this in the first place spiritually; then we will after we have found out the citizen, trace out some few of his privileges, that of his flourishing like grass on the earth. First then let us see if we can find who this heavenly citizen is; who is the man that is made free; and how does he become a free man? The word of God upon the subject is very clear, especially the epistle to the Ephesians. We find there the apostle describes what they were by nature; that they were under sin and were “children of wrath even as others.” But God, who is rich in mercy; let us follow very carefully here his description; “God, who is rich in mercy;” that is the first clause here he introduces, after describing their state, and what could be more suitable? After describing their state of degradation in slavery as sinners then he says, “But God, who is rich in mercy.” So, when a sinner is made sensible of what he has been, and of what he is, then the very first thing is that God meets him with his mercy; “God who is rich in mercy.” Here is a sinner, but then that sinner is but a creature; but he who meets him in mercy is the Creator, the everything God; and he meets with him in and by that mercy, as the apostle goes on very beautifully to show, by the Lord Jesus Christ. Now, my hearer, can you this morning say in the sight of God that you see and feel yourself to be that poor, lost sinner that there is nothing under heaven so desirable in your estimation as the mercy of God; that there is nothing you are so concerned to obtain as the mercy of God? That there is nothing that you are so concerned to be interested in as the mercy of God? And that you are brought to see and feel that without the mercy of God you must be lost? This is one step towards citizenship; this is the one way into the city of God. And then the apostle immediately brings in the motive of this mercy; and the motive of this mercy is most notable; “God who is rich in mercy, for his great love wherewith he loved us.” This is the motive of the mercy. Can you imagine a higher motive? Can you imagine a purer motive, a

stronger motive, a more lasting motive, a motive of more assurance? Because the Lord loves you, therefore he shows you mercy; and because he has loved you greatly, he shows you great mercy; and because he has loved you everlastingly, he shows you everlasting mercy; and because he has loved you immutably, he deals with you in immutable mercy. You find in the old and New Testament very much is said of God's mercy; and you will find in your experience very much need of God's mercy, and you will find in all your circumstances very much need of God's mercy. The true citizen, then, the heavenly citizen; the man that the Lord is delivering from the slavery of sin, and from the slavery of the law, and from the slavery of the world, and from the slavery of error, and about making you free, it makes that man feel his need of that freedom; and makes him cry spiritually as the Israelites did under the oppression in which they labored, when the Lord said, "I have seen their affliction, I know their sorrows, I have heard their cry, and I am come down to deliver them." Here then is mercy; "the great love wherewith he loved us even when we were dead in sins." Look at this, my hearer, that he loved you when dead in sin; loved you when you hated him, loved you when you cared nothing about him, loved you when you had no desire after him, loved you when you were the willing drudge of hell, loved you when you were in league with hell, and in league with death, he loved you then; and now that you are brought to confess what you are, he loves you; and in that time you did not confess what you were, because you did not know it; in that time of times past the mercy of God was not your desire, because you sought after the way of happiness without that mercy; well, if he loved you then, he loves you now. Perhaps you will say, how do I know he loved me then? If he had not loved you then, you would not have a praying heart now; if he had not loved you then, you would not be a seeker after his mercy now; the very circumstance of your being a seeker after his mercy now is a proof that he loved you then; and if he loved you then, will he hate you now? "His great love wherewith he loved us, even when we were dead in sins." Now how does he manifest this? "He has quickened us together with Christ and has raised us up together with Christ Jesus." The idea is this, that you are sunken so low that nothing but the blood of Christ can rise you up; you were sunken so under sin, and under the curse, and under death, that nothing but the atonement of Jesus Christ can raise you up. "As for you," says the Father to the Son, "by the blood of your covenant have I sent forth your prisoners out of the pit, wherein there is no water." Here is mercy, the motive of that mercy, and the order of that mercy; raised up with Christ Jesus. All, poor sinner, however low you are, Christ went lower in sufferings than you ever did in sinning; he went deeper than all your sins put together; he went down to the bottom of the penalty. And the lower you are the better; if you say, I seem degraded to the very gates of hell, all the better; I am glad of it with my very soul; and God grant that no delusion may raise you one inch from where you are until the blood of the everlasting covenant shall come in and raise you up from the dunghill, from the pit, and from the dust; and you will inherit the throne of glory; and then you will bear testimony with the Psalmist, "You are my glory, and the lifter up of my head." These are the citizens that are raised up out of the country spiritually called Egypt, raised up by the blood of the everlasting covenant, quickened with Christ Jesus, raised up together with him. No getting up without him. In which you get up into justification; which you get up into such a high position that your feet shall stand even with the demands of the law; that your feet shall stand as the Psalmist says in an even place, even with all the demands of the law, even with all the honors of truth, even with all the perfection of holiness, with all the perfections of God, with everything and you should stand in an equitable position; and you should say with David, "O God, look upon the things that are equal," for when you are become a justified man, you are clothed in a righteousness that is equal to all the law's demands, to all you can need; would you stand so high as this? It must be by the righteousness of the Lord Jesus Christ. "Blessed

are the people that know the joyful sound; they that walk in the light of your countenance;" by that joyful sound, the gospel; "in your name shall they rejoice; and in your righteousness," glad to leave their own behind them; "in your righteousness they shall be exalted." "For you are the glory of their strength; and in your favor our horn shall be exalted. For the Lord is our defense." And so, then, raised up together with Christ. Here then is mercy; here is the motive of that mercy; here is the order of that mercy; the atonement of Jesus Christ. Now notice, after the apostle has got the citizens so far on, he fixes them there; he brings these words in, "By grace you are saved." But does he stop there? No; he goes on again to show that we are made to sit together in heavenly places; that is, in heavenly relations. I have often said that locality with the Jews, is spirituality with us; and they had their heavenly places; their city, when everything was in order, would be reckoned a heavenly place; and the temple, the first part of the temple, would be reckoned a heavenly place; the holy of holies a heavenly place; and these were a type of that relation where there is the relation in which we sit together with Christ Jesus the Lord. "That in the ages to come he might show the exceeding riches of his grace in kindness towards us through Christ Jesus." "In the ages to come;" there are some old Christians, I mean old professors, I must leave whether they are Christians or not, and some old ministers, that seem to reverse this order of things, "that in the ages to come he might show forth the exceeding riches of his grace;" oh, no, they say, we have done with this; we used to be very much attached to these high doctrines, these free grace doctrines; but we are more practical now; not that they are more practical in their lives, but only upon their tongue, that is all; it is all talk, and nothing but talk. According to their account the Lord does not intend in ages to come to show forth the riches of his grace; but to lay those riches aside and take up the doings of the creature instead. But the truth is, friends, so far from our declining in grace, and declining, and declining, and so grace becomes nothing, and the creature everything, the order of it is to grow in grace, grace more and more; the top stone shall make more noise than all the rest put together; and if you ask what the noise is to be, it is to be the grace of God, that the grace of God has held out so long, and has proved so sufficient in every case; "the top stone shall be brought home with shouting's of grace, grace unto it." "That in the ages to come he might show the exceeding riches of his grace." Shall the grace that first found us ever be forgotten? Never. Shall the grace that found the ransomed, the grace that raised, and the grace that keeps us up be ever forgotten? Never. The apostles then repeats the same words again; "By grace you are saved." Well but you said that just now, Paul. Ah, but the meaning then was that it was by grace you are called from being what you were before; and now I repeat it in order to show that you will continue to be through all eternity what you are; that is the idea which the apostle evidently intends. "By grace you are saved through faith; and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God." Thus, then these are the citizens. If you can truly say that you are a seeker after mercy, as I have already said this morning in the chapter, if the testimony of mercy has a place in your affection, you may depend upon it you will find that the testimony of the mercy and the mercy itself are inseparable; mercy will come by-and-by; plenty of scriptures to prove this. "The poor of the flock that waited upon me knew that it was the word of the Lord." And if my word continues in you; but, Lord, we want mercy. You keep the testimony first; let us see if you are sincere first upon that; and if you abide firmly by that, then by-and-by mercy will come in, and you will find you will not wait in vain. "The Lord never said to the seeking seed of Jacob, seek you my face in vain;" and if you are a believer of his truth, a lover of his truth, you are in the seed of Jacob; and you know Jacob was a free grace man; you who are thus brought to receive this testimony of mercy, to seek this mercy and to know something of the motive of this mercy, the love of God; and to fall in with the order of this mercy, Christ Jesus; and to fall in with the great truth that he might in eternal ages to come

show the exceeding riches of his grace in that he will glorify his name; “Now therefore, you are no more strangers and foreigners but fellow citizens with the saints, and the household of God; and are built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ being the chief cornerstone.” There is a great deal said in the word of God concerning the city of God; and you will find that everything accords with this idea of mercy and love, and mediatorial order. I will give you one sample, 26<sup>th</sup> of Isaiah; what is to be the song of the people? Now I ask the question this morning, if we are brought to the truths I have stated, is it not the very language of our hearts that “In that day shall this song be sung;” not the truth thereof held in a cold sort of way, as something that ought to have no noise made about it, to be kept quiet, and not to be extravagant about it; but “In that day shall this song be *sung*;” it shall be a matter of delight to the people, a matter of joy, the rejoicing of their souls; “We have a strong city; salvation will God appoint for walls and bulwarks. Open you the gates, that the righteous nation;” that I have already named; the persons that are raised up with the Lord Jesus Christ; “which keeps the truth;” our translators have given us the word *truth*; but the Hebrew word translated truth is Amenim, *im* is the termination that denotes in the Hebrew the plural; and the literal rendering should be, “Open you the gates, that the nation that keeps the Amens should enter in.” The truths of the gospel are amen truths; they are concluded trues; the Savior concluded them at Calvary’s cross; in him all the promises are yea and amen. And you will see how all this refers to what I have just now said; and I say it for my own encouragement as well as yours. You observe that the people know the amen truths, and receive them, and keep them; now the gates of the city are to be open to them; notice that; the truths have come out and found them, and they have found the truth; and now that command is given, “Open you the gates.” Unto whom are the gates to be opened? Unto them that keep the amens; Mark that; these people know the truth but they have not yet been able to read their names as registered citizens; not been able to rejoice that their names are written in heaven; but, my hearer, if you are brought to receive the truth of God, if you are brought to be reconciled to this order of things; if you have not yet experienced a particle of the mercy from on high, yet if you can say that all other refuges are swept away, you have no hope no other hope, and cannot bear any other gospel; as sure as the Lord has thus planted the truth in your heart, he will in his own time moderate, and cause it to bud, and blossom, and bear fruit; and he shall come unto you not as a consuming fire, but he shall come unto you as the rain, as the early and the latter rain; and you shall rejoice in that God that has brought you to receive his truth, and wait the great command, “Open you the gates, that the righteous nation that keeps the amens may enter in.” You cannot tell when that command may come; some minister perhaps may be honored with that command, unknown to himself; the Lord leads a minister into certain paths, and by him he opens the gates of the city, and you go in and see your security, feel your security, find you are welcome, begin to sing the song; after thus going around about Zion, marking well her bulwarks, telling her towers, considering her palaces, and catching a little of the song, “This God is our God forever and ever; he will be our guide even unto death;” then, I say you will know that you are citizens of heaven made eternally free. “You will keep him in perfect peace,” might be rendered “You will keep him in perfect security, whose mind is stayed on you.” And then the citizens are counselled to trust in the Lord, and they know there is nothing else to trust in; they have tried other trusts, and all have failed; they are brought to feel that if they have any confidence that will stand the test, and endure the storm, and serve them in the day of trial, that confidence must be in the Lord. “Trust you in the Lord forever, for in the Lord Jehovah is everlasting strength.” These then are the citizens. “They of the city shall flourish like grass of the earth.” I might just remind you of some of the privileges that the Israelites had as free men considered, as God’s citizens considered; and in making a few

remarks upon this part, I would take the poor among them. I think taking the poor will, perhaps, more clearly point out some of our privileges as citizens. We well know that the ancients mocked at the Sabbaths of the Lord; but the seventh day, the Sabbath, was one of the privileges of the Israelite after he was brought out of Egypt; only that Sabbath was the seventh day, it came in and went away again; nevertheless though that Sabbath lasted but a few hours, it lasted long enough to be a type, a shadow; but the Sabbath that we have in the gospel, is one of our privileges as citizens, is an everlasting Sabbath; "There remains the keeping of the Sabbath;" for when it is said, "there remains his rest," the original is, "there remains a keeping of the Sabbath unto the people of God." So that our Sabbath is, first that of eternal release which we have by Jesus Christ; and secondly, that eternal repose which we have by him. You observe that their release from the six days labor was only for 24 hours, and then they had to begin again; but the release we have in Christ is an eternal release; we have not to begin again; our six days work is done, and done forever; our law work is done, and done forever; our hard work is done and done forever, here is everlasting release, the release is eternal; the Father has released us eternally, Christ has released us eternally, the Holy Spirit has released us eternally. "Be not entangled in the yoke of bondage;" your release is eternal; because everything is done; you know when you were trying to do things in the way that God's law required, you could not do it; well now you are brought to know everything is done, stand fast where you are, in the release which you have by Jesus Christ. And then the word rest conveys not only release, but also repose. If a man is released but has not somewhere to go to when he is released suited to make him happy, then he is not at rest. But the people of God have where to go. When the Israelites were released, they had a promised land to enter into, though that was earthly and conditional and temporary; so, we have the land to enter into, a land of promise, yes, God himself is our dwelling; we dwell in God, rejoice in God, he is our house; and so our language in our prayer is with the Psalmist, "Be my strong habitation, whereunto I may continually resort." This is one of the privileges, then, this eternal Sabbath. Yet men are so fond of works, or rather fond of talking about it, that no man can give greater offense that I know of then to insist upon that release in its perfection, and that rest which is by Jesus Christ the Lord. And yet he himself has used, as you are aware, the word *rest* in this twofold sense in which I now present it, "Come unto me all you that labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn of me, for I am meek and lowly in heart, and you shall have rest." The rest there, in the first place, means release, and then it means that sweet repose in which the soul shall be satisfied forever. And their privileges of citizenship was that of annual gleaming; he was to have a free range of the fields to glean annually; but that was only annual it was only a type, whereas our gleaming lasts all year around. You came here gleaming this morning, I hope. Well say you, but I don't glean anything. Well, you must try again, the same as I do, and the same as all must. Still it is no small privilege to range over the fields of truth, if we can but claim a little; we can't always expect a lap full, you know, if we get a little just to keep us from starvation, and sometimes to comfort our hearts, just a little to keep us from black despair, just a little drop of dew, an ear of corn; that the Pharisees may murmur at it, as if we get a free grace one, and nothing else will do, they will say, it is not lawful to eat on the Sabbath day; why it is the very day to eat; we have nothing else to do; how wrong they were, you see; man was not made to be a slave to the Sabbath, but the Sabbath was made to be a servant to man; and when the Lord gives us grace to claim a little of free grace consolation, our souls eat it, and praise him that has provided it. Another privilege was the spontaneous growth of the seventh year; only that seventh year passed away. But our seventh year is an everlasting year; it is all spontaneous grace; we have neither to plow, nor till, nor work, in one sense, though in another sense we do; so that all we have is spontaneous

growth. And there was the year of Jubilee, in which all debts were canceled, and every man in full possession of his inheritance. Then another privilege of the citizen was the humbleness of the offering brought; some of them could not get a lamb to bring, perhaps a turtledove, or a young pigeon, or little handful of anything, a handful of corn, anything, however humble; when it was brought as a kind of thank offering to the Lord, the Lord accepted it. And just so it is with our service; we serve the Lord very humbly indeed; our prayers seem poor, our praises poor, our affections poor, our souls poor in comparison with that honor which is due to his name; yet there they are, as I sometimes say, but as whispers out of the dust, if they are sincere, the Lord accepts them; and this is a very sweet privilege; bless his holy name he looks on the heart, and it is well for us that he does, and he knows what we cannot do as well as what we can do.

Second. I now pass on to notice the next part of our text, *that these citizens shall flourish*, “like grass of the earth:” and in so doing I shall notice the nature of this prosperity, and the order of it, and the extent of it. “They shall flourish like grass.” The original word translated “grass” is a word of much wider meaning than the English word *grass*; the original word signifies vegetable creation, in which I believe we have recognized about 75,000 kinds, so that it would make a long sermon if I were to take up each, and try to spiritualize it; that would be as ridiculous in attempt as it would be tedious in execution, but I shall make a little free with the word. First, then, take it as it is here given, grass, then the idea is very simple, “they shall flourish like grass.” Now the word of God shows how this is to be done. And is not weakness one of the reigning ideas here? How easily is grass trodden down; what a poor, defenseless thing grass is. When we see in the summer an oriental sun, a sun that we know but little of here; but there the sun with his mighty power scorching the grass, that there is no sign of life; not the least blade of grass with the appearance of green, it looks perfectly dead; and looking across one of the extended plains in the east, it seems a complete waste; there is not a blade of grass to be seen, not the least sign of life, nothing but sand and drought. And is it not so with the Christian? Are you not in such a state sometimes, as though every vestige and sign of godliness were gone from you, as though you were all sand, and drought, and barrenness, and worthlessness, as though it was an act of the highest presumption possible for you to conclude you are a Christian? Even conscience will say: you a Christian? You born of God? Why, never was a more barren, destitute, poor creature than you are; you had better get into the world and give it up altogether. But there is a promise that the Lord will pour water upon him that is thirsty; there is a little secret thirst somewhere; and floods upon the dry ground. “My doctrine shall drop as the rain and distill as the dew.” Let some refreshing shower of truth come down; the soul springs up, the scene is changed, the heart is softened, everything is covered with green; withered affections are strengthened, and apparently weak faith is increased; hope is confirmed; love is shed abroad; hope flows in, and now it is the spring tide, so fresh so sweet, so beautiful. And what did this? Or rather, what shall do this? “My doctrine,” the Lord says, “shall drop as the rain, and distill as the dew.” What doctrine? Why he is a rock. Ah, says the poor soul, I forgot that; I was judging him by myself; such a poor thing as I am; and his work is perfect. When this blessed truth is made like dew and ranges on the soul; we spring up like grass, fresh and green, and lively, and as happy as can be. Again, the original term, as I have said, extends beyond grass; it will mean also flowers. Now the Lord’s people are called lilies. Christ is called the lily of the valley; and the church is called the lily because of her likeness to him. “I am the Rose of Sharon,” says Christ, and the lily of the valley.” “And as the lily among thorns, so is my love among the daughters;” that is her likeness to him; the others are called thorns because they are enemies to Christ in this matrimonial relation. Christ married the church in an indissoluble tie, it can never be dissolved; there is no

separation; and those that love him in that are called lilies, and those that hate him in that are called thorns. The bride not only loves the husband, but the terms of the marriage; and the man that hates this great truth of eternal oneness between Christ and the church, though he be as pious as the devil may wish him to be, that man will be damned if he dies in enmity to the bridegroom, in enmity to the bride, and enmity to the eternal bond, that immutable oath and counsel, in which Christ and the church are united. Now, says the Savior of the literal lily, "Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of these." Why not? That is a puzzling scripture; it ought to give me something before I die, for I have had a deal of trouble with it; and I don't know that I have got the meaning yet; but I begin to see men as trees walking; and if I am in the right way, I shall see it plainly at last. The meaning seems to me to be this; Solomon's array was by the interposition of the wisdom of man; it was man that made Solomon's array; but the dress of the lily was by the immediate hand of God, without the interposition of human wisdom, invention, or the hand of man. Let these lilies be a type of the Christian; he is arrayed by the interposition of the hand of God, without the invention of man, the wisdom of men, the work of men. So that Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of the literal lilies, because his array was by the interposition of the defiling hand of man; the dress of the lily is by the pure hand of the blessed God. And so, the Lord's people, their dress is by his own pure hand; their souls are adorned by the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

"Strangely, my soul, are you arrayed,  
by the great sacred Three;  
in sweet harmony of praise  
let all your powers agree."

"They shall flourish like the lily." Heat and moisture are two essentials of vegetable prosperity; and so, let me have the love of God, the shining of the Lord's presence, and the sweetness of his truth; and I am sure to prosper. We make long stops sometimes; but when we do begin, we get on pretty fast, bless the Lord for that. I now notice the order of this prosperity by Jesus Christ; his name shall endure forever. Take away his name from our midst, Immanuel, God with us; down goes our prosperity; no flourishing then; it is his name that revives and refreshes us; his name is our life, our shield, our buckler, our all in all. And then the order of prosperity is also the service of the Lord. If I expect to prosper by the name of the Lord apart from the service of the Lord, depend upon it I shall be wrong. Lastly, the extent of this prosperity. The Psalm closes with the prayer. "That the whole earth be filled with his glory; amen and amen." I think this may have a twofold meaning; the whole earth filled with his glory seems to refer to the time of the seventh trumpet, which evidently has not yet begun to sound. The sixth trumpet called the present Turkish Empire into existence; and when the seventh trumpet shall sound, then shall the kingdoms of this world become the kingdoms of our God and of his Christ, that is all kingdoms shall be subjected to the Christian dispensation. I don't believe in individual universal conversion; but I do believe in universal subjugation; and that other nations will equal us in the privilege we enjoy in that respect. That time I believe will come. But then suppose I am wrong in this, as it is just possible I may be, I know one thing I am not wrong, if I take the earth to be filled with his glory, to mean the new earth; and especially as we are often at liberty to use the word land instead of the word earth; "that the land be filled with his glory," it will mean the promised land, the whole church of God, that new heavens and new earth in which they shall live, that will be filled with glory to all eternity; so that if I am wrong in one, I am sure to be right in the other. And here the prayers of David the son of Jesse are ended; this is the ultimate end; and this is the beautiful type of the dear Savior,

who thus looks to the great end of all things in which everything shall be perfected according to God's eternal counsel. Amen and amen.