

# A GOOD HELPER

## A SERMON

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By Mister JAMES WELLS

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“Without me you can do nothing.” John 15:5

THE Savior is represented in a variety of ways for our instruction. Hence he is spoken of as a rod; “There shall come a rod out of the stem of Jesse;” the rod indicating his power, as the 110th Psalm explains, bringing his people into submission to his eternal priesthood and to the sworn covenant of the great God concerning that priesthood. And then he is called a branch, “A branch shall come out of his roots.” And I think that which is said of Joseph by Jacob will explain in some measure what is meant by the Savior being called a branch, where it is said, “Joseph is a fruitful bough, even a fruitful bough by a well; whose branches run over the wall;” alluding perhaps to that extensive diffusion of corn and provision which the seven years of plenty gave into the hands of Joseph, by which he met the seven, years famine, and saved much people alive. And so, the Lord foresaw the state into which his people would be brought, and made provision accordingly, and entrusted all the grace, and mercy, and blessing, in the hands of his dear Son. And the bough, the branch running over the wall seems to allude to its rising above the ceremonial dispensation, and not confining the blessing to the Jews, but ministering the same to the Gentiles. In another place we read of Christ’s breaking down this wall, that Jew and Gentile might be both one in him. Then he is also called a root, because of his sustaining power. “There shall be a root of Jesse, which shall stand for an ensign of the people; to it shall the Gentiles seek, and his rest shall be glorious.” So there you have the rod, to bring you down into submission to his eternal priesthood, that God there may live with you, and you forever live with God; then you have him in his fruitful character, to sustain you and meet all your necessities; and then you have him as the immortal root by which you are forever to live, giving you everlasting life, as he himself has said, “Because I live you shall live also.” And all three of these appear to be included in the beautiful metaphor under which the Savior in this chapter sets himself forth; “I am the true vine, and my Father is the husbandman;” but the main design of the representation here given will come in, in the latter part of our discourse. I at once therefore proceed to notice our text, not including everything that the text implies, for that would be impossible, our text is a text of vast import, and it comes down to that work of the Holy Spirit by which the people of God are distinguished from all other people. I notice then the truth of our text, firstly, *in relation to adverse powers*; secondly, *in relation to the Lord's enabling*; and then thirdly, and lastly, *that final order of things in which the Savior here appears*.

First: I notice then, first, the truth of our text *relative to ADVERSE POWERS*. “Without me you can do nothing.” I take, in the first place, sin. What can we do without Jesus Christ with sin? Sin entered the world, and death by sin, and all are corrupt and loathsome in the sight of the great God. What an awful truth that is, that there is in God’s holy law an infinite burning of infinite and eternal indignation against every man and woman under the heavens; the wrath of God revealed from heaven against all unrighteousness and ungodliness of men. And what can we do with this our state? Without Jesus Christ we can do nothing. And then as to our heart sins, of which we have been the subjects, as well as life sins, since we have existed, what can we do with them? “Without him we can do nothing.” There stands our original sin written as with an iron pen; there stands every heart sin, ten thousand heart sins that we have not been at all cognizant of, but which have not escaped the omniscient eye of the great Judge of all; there are our life sins; we put these together, and “without Christ we can do nothing” with them; here is nothing for us but damnation, nothing but condemnation. As to human doings, and human supposed holiness or righteousness, or any creature doing whatever, it is all of no avail; there is nothing that the law regards that the creature can do. We are carnal, sold under sin, and there stands the declaration that they that are in the flesh cannot please God. Without him in relation to sin we can do nothing. But let Jesus come in, and then let us see what we can do, the Holy Spirit enabling us to believe in him, and to take hold of him. Hence the Lord says to the poor trembling, enquiring sinner, ‘Let him take hold of my strength, that he may make peace with me, and he shall make peace with me.’ And how delightful the thought that by him we can get rid of our original sin; he was the Lamb slain from the foundation of the world; by him we have a transition from the first Adam to the Second, and that in Christ we are as holy as we are in the first Adam unholy, in Christ we are as righteous as in the first Adam unrighteous, in Christ as pleasing to God as in the first Adam loathsome in the sight of God, in Christ accepted of God with as much pleasure as Christ himself is accepted; there is no difference; hence the people are loved with the same love. Ah then, my hearer, whatever trembling’s of soul, whatever fearful apprehensions, if the Blessed Spirit is pleased to give you to see what Jesus Christ is, and to enable you to lay hold of his atonement, the doctrine, the testimony, and the truth of his atonement; and then stand there, stop there, and wait there, and look to God, and in the Lord’s own time he will by that atonement make your peace as a river, your righteousness as the waves of the sea; you will be brought into sweet reconciliation to God, and understand the meaning of the apostle when he says, “I can do all things through Christ which strengthens me.” Here the sinner gets rid of his original sin, his heart sin, I mean by faith; not but these corruptions and this depraved nature will be with us as long as we live; but still in Christ there we stand free, original sin, heart sin, life sin gone, and whatever he was, that we are reckoned. As he had no original sin, he put away our original sin; as he had no heart sin, he put away our heart sin, as he had no life sin he put away our life sin; and so says John, that we may have boldness in the day of judgment, for as he is, so are we; even, says John, while we are in this world; that is, reckoned, it is reckoned unto Abraham; Abraham was no more a righteous man after the flesh than any other man; but there was a righteousness reckoned to him; and how was it reckoned to him? It was reckoned to him by faith, it was given to him by promise: and to whom, says the apostle, relative to those to whom he was writing, it shall be imputed if we believe on him that thus justifies the ungodly. So then, my hearer, without Christ you can do nothing with your sins, but with Christ you can get rid of them all: he is the Alpha that gets rid of your first sin, and he is the Omega that gets rid of your last sin. So that I like those words you some-times sing of Mister Hart’s, and there

is no poet like him, there is no writer of hymns that goes into the very secret recesses of the inmost experiences of the Lord's people like Mister Hart,

“We'll tell the Father in that day,  
We're clean, just God, we're clean.”

Ah, that eternal song of praise that must redound to a sin pardoning God, to a dear Redeemer, who, by his precious blood, cleanses us from all sin. And thus, my hearer, you might as well, if I am speaking to any that are so deluded, if you think you are going to make yourself good and holy before God by your own doings, it will be like trying to make the Ethiopian white, or to extract the spots of the leopard; their labor is all in vain. But brought to believe in Jesus, the dying thief, and thousands besides, have found the great remedy. “The blood of Jesus Christ cleanses from all sin.” Secondly, without him we can do nothing with God's law. The law speaks like this: “You shall not come out thence till you have paid the last mite;” that is what the law says to them that are under the law. Jesus Christ was under the law, and therefore the law said that to him, “You shall not come but thence till you have paid the last mite.” And, said Christ, “I have a baptism,” same thing under another figure or form, “to be baptized with, and how am I straitened until it be accomplished.” And when Jesus had finished his life of active obedience in magnifying the precept, he then entered upon the atoning department, and paid the very last mite; and when he paid the last mite, the lowest caverns of hell resounded with his testimony, the highest arches of heaven rang with his testimony, millions shall rise from the dead by virtue of that testimony, millions of saints shall glory in that testimony. “It Is finished;” the last mite is paid. Without him we can do nothing with the law, but with him we can settle everything, arrange everything, pay everything, and that in an honorable way, wherein God is just, and yet the justifier of him that believes in Jesus. I do like that religion that makes room for Christ. You may depend upon it, my hearer, if your religion be not of that cast and kind that makes room for Christ, there is something essentially lacking; but if, on the other hand, you think you are such a great sinner that Jesus Christ will not have you, I tell you that your calculations are as unscriptural and as un-gospel as possible; nor can you find, from Genesis to Revelation, one instance of a poor sinner coming and falling down at the Savior's feet as a lost sinner, and yet Christ rejecting him. I know one that fell at his feet (I know something of it, I trust, in my own soul), and seemed to think he was too far gone. Peter fell down at Jesus' feet, and he said, “O, Lord, depart from me, for I am a sinful man,” that is, “I am a full of sin man.” Lord, I have sin originally, sin within, and sin without; I am a full of sin man; I am nothing but sin; I am a poor sinner. Depart from me, O Lord, and save some man that is savable, pardon some man that is pardonable, justify some one that is justifiable; but Lord, I am a full of sin man, it is no use, I am gone too far. But was Peter rejected; was Peter cast out; and did Peter remain away from Jesus, and ignorant of Jesus, and was Peter removed from the company of the Lord, was Peter kept from the Mount of Transfiguration, from the Garden of Gethsemane, was he rejected from the great commission to preach the Pentecostal sermon, and open the kingdom of heaven in one day, or rather one minute, almost to thousands of souls? We all know he was not. So, my hearer, that religion that makes way for Christ is the religion of the Son of God; for it is the work of the blessed Spirit to make way for Christ, to make a straight way in the desert of the soul for the coming in of Christ. “Without me you can do nothing.” You can do nothing with the law; it is a fiery law. What can you do with Sinai, with its thunders, its lightnings, its voice of words, its trumpet that grows louder and louder, its trembling? If you go near, death is the reward of that advance. “Without me you can do nothing.” But with me all is

calm. Leave the wind that rends the mountains and rocks, leave that stormy wind to me, leave the consuming fire to me; leave the earthquakes to me, and I will stay the winds, I will overcome the earthquake, I will quench the fire, and speak to you in a still small voice; the, bruised reed I will not break, and the smoking flax I will not quench, but will speak to you with a still small voice, so that you shall come into such association with me as was typified by Joseph, when he said, "Come near unto me, for I am your brother." Thirdly, without him we can do nothing with our enemies. We don't know what enemies we may have to meet with, whether Jezebels, or Haman's, that aimed to hang Mordecai: or Nebuchadnezzar's, or Pharaohs, or Judases, we don't know, for these are characters that the devil employs, and he is very busy, he is at the head of it all. But without Christ we can do nothing in that matter. Why not? On what ground, if you have enemies, can you entreat God against them? Against them, say you? I have prayed for calamities on people sometimes in private, and those calamities have come, but worse than I meant to come, but not worse than God meant them. Why, say you, you don't say. that; we are to pray for our enemies when we can, but sometimes God turns the current the other way. "Alexander, the coppersmith, did me much evil; the Lord reward him according to his works." I have felt a heart to pray, against some, and God has answered those prayers, and will again too, yes, I find my soul is not at my own command in that, for my desire is ever to pray for my enemies, but I cannot always do it, no. But without Jesus Christ I cannot pray against them, or for them, because on what ground can I expect the Lord will appear for me? I am sure not on the ground of any creature goodness; so if I expect him to appear for me, it is on this ground; a two-fold ground; first, that the work of Christ is perfect; and, secondly, that I love God, Father, Word, and Holy Ghost, by that perfection with all my heart, with all my strength, with all my soul, with all my mind, and my neighbor, as myself, when I can see who my neighbor is. "In that day," when the iniquity of that land shall be removed, "shall you call every man his neighbor under the vine, and. under the fig tree." But who is my neighbor? Ah, the man that has no hope but in that which Christ has done; and when that stands manifest to me, then I love him as part of myself, as one of the members of the mystic body of Christ.

So then, we can have no hope against our adversaries, only by the Lord. You that are Christians, have not you your adversaries in the world, connected with your business, persons who have a secret enmity to you for the truth's sake, would do all sorts of harm if they could, and it would not be prudent for you to talk to them about your religion, or to any of your enemies. You go to your Father which is in secret, and pray to him, "O Lord I pray you, turn the counsel of Ahithopel into foolishness;" let the pit that they dig for others, swallow up themselves. If you have no other spirit, pray in that spirit. God is a God of judgment as well as of mercy; and he will make you pray sometimes for judgment as well as for mercy. Ah, say some, this is very unchristian! No, it is not unchristian, it is a solemn truth. You read the Book of Psalms and see the language there. Ah, people wonder how David could pray against his enemies. David could not help it, it was not David in a passion, or in a revengeful spirit; it was the eternal Spirit of God that determined the calamity of those enemies, and constrained the Psalmist to pray for the judgments that God designed to bring upon them. Away with your hypocritical pretended universal charity, it is all, to use the words of a late great public man, a mockery, a snare, a delusion, let us stand out for the real truth of God. Beware then, how you touch the cause of God, or the truth of God, or the people of God, or the ministers of God; for they have a secret power, the people of God have against their adversaries, God is their shield and their sun, and there they are safe. "Stand still and see the salvation of God." "Stand still, for the Lord shall fight for you," "Be still and know that I am God." Ah, it is a great thing, friends, to go right on enjoying the truth, and leave the Lord to work out his

own purposes. I could give you instances in the conduct of the apostles proving what I have said. I need not remind you of Simon Magus, I need not remind you of Elymas, the sorcerer. I need not remind you of Ananias and Sapphira. In none of these cases were the apostles left at liberty, to deal with those characters in any other way than that of solemn judgment. "Without me you can do nothing." Your adversaries would gain every advantage over you, you would have no reason to assign before God why he should appear for you. I am the reason why he will appear for you; and as you love me with all your heart, that love distinguishes the real child of God from all others: "Eye has not seen, neither have entered into the heart of man, the things which God has prepared for them that love him." Some of you hardly know what to make of this, you will find it out by and by if you live long enough. But fourthly and lastly upon this part, without him we can do nothing with death. What did the Old Testament saints do with death? Nothing at all; they all died and left death just as they found it. But did Jesus Christ do this? No! he swallowed up death in victory. And David saw that the sting was gone, that the power was gone, that the penalty was gone, and so, "When I pass through the valley of the shadow of death," he knew the Good Shepherd would lay down his life, and in laying down his life, would swallow up death in victory, and bring life and immortality to light, and so "When I pass through the Valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil." We have instances of this, one of our members I buried yesterday, though taken off almost suddenly, yet that life, that liberty, that peace, and that joy so prevailed, that anything in the shape of fear of death or eternity or anything else was at an infinite distance. Religion, my hearer, is a vital and is glorious reality. We can do nothing with death, without Christ, but when we are enabled to take Christ into the account, he is our life in the midst of death, he has swallowed up death in victory, and through him we shall be more than conquerors, yes:

"Through him we shall conquer our mightiest foes,  
Our Captain is stronger than all that oppose."

But "without me you can do nothing." Now I will not enlarge upon these parts, I think I have said enough to show our need of the Lord Jesus Christ, first, in the solemn truth that without him we can do nothing with sin, without him we can do nothing with the law, without him we can do nothing with our adversaries; and of course I include the devil in those adversaries. I do not like to talk about dreams but I was very happy on Friday night at Holborn, and I went home and went to bed, and I dreamt the devil was at me in some shape or another, and these words came to me in my dream, "They overcame him by the blood of the Lamb;" and I thought I saw the devil fall down, and I burst right out laughing in my dream, and awoke laughing; and the words left a sweetness in my mind, "They overcame him by the blood of the Lamb;" could not get to sleep again for ever so long, and did not want to. Really, I thought, it does not matter whether the Lord speaks to us when we are asleep or when we are awake. And I have had this text also in my mind, "Without me you can do nothing." I wish I could always have such pleasant dreams as that. The first part was very unpleasant, when I thought the devil had got hold me, but when I saw him tumble, and that testimony came into my soul, I was so delighted, for there I was spiritually in my dream sitting in the very heavens, and he that "sits in the heavens shall laugh." Ah, say some, that was lightness, if it were lightness, God grant me more of it. I glory in the downfall of the devil, I glory in the uprising of Christ, and especially when the testimony comes with power into my soul, and I feel I have the victory in my soul, and that it is there that I shall do valiantly. "If God be for us, who can be against us." It is this acceptance with God that makes a poor soul bold as a lion. "Without me you can do nothing;" with me you can do everything.

But I come to the second proposition of our text, and that is, *we can do nothing without his enabling*. When Jesus Christ is not with us in the manifestation thereof, and we do not enjoy his presence, straws become insurmountable impediments, mole hills become mountains, twilight becomes midnight, and little troubles become great troubles. “We brought him to your disciples, and they could not cast him out.” No, I was not there; they had no faith in me; they were trying to cast the devil out. without me. The Master is up in the mount, we will do something while he is gone, and when he comes back, we will boast of what we have done. They could not get on at all, the devil did not care for them. Just so it is now, my hearer; you shall have a besetment, you shall have a temptation, tempted to think that God is against you, that you are deceived after all, that your religion is all delusion; and at every little thing that appears going against you, Ah, you say, that is God, he is giving me up to the devil, to the world, to delusion, and things that are going against me, and his judgments will fall upon me, and I shall be cut off; as a lion and as a bear so will he break all my bones; everything going against me; here I am tossed about, toiling and rowing, first watch, and second watch, and third watch of the night, and I can do nothing; ah, wretched me, miserable me, helpless me. Job compared himself, and I am sure his simile is none too strong, it is just what every real Christian feels: he compared himself to a broken leaf driven to and fro, and to stubble; “Will you break a leaf driven to and fro? and will you pursue the dry stubble?” I like those expressions; they describe just what poor feeble creatures we are. And so, you read in Daniel that the thrones were cast down until the Ancient of days came. These thrones I take to be the truths of the gospel, by which the saints of God are raised up and made to sit together in heavenly places in Christ Jesus; but ah, those thrones seem cast down, no rising up, no getting up above that that troubles us, without him. So you read there of the beast, that fought against the saints and prevailed, until the Ancient of days stepped in, and then the devil was glad to go out, even into a herd of swine, and from there into the sea.

“Devils at your presence flee  
Blest is the man that trusts in you.”

And so, the saints of the Most High (when Jesus came) took the kingdom, and that for ever and ever. Vast amount of talk in our day, (just throw out a hint upon that;) they tell us to come to Christ, and come to Christ, and cast our burden upon Christ, and believe in Christ. I say this morning, friends, in the presence of this assembly, that such a doctrine as that is only mockery, to the souls even of saints, and much more is it a mockery to the soul that is dead in trespasses and in sins. If the salvation of the righteous be of the Lord, how much more must the salvation of the sinner dead in sin be of the Lord. And the Savior was not speaking to dead sinners when he used the language of our text, he was speaking to living sinners, or rather living saints, he was speaking to his own disciples; “Without me *you* can do nothing.” If therefore, the Christian be helpless, and cannot come to Christ only as the Father draws him, if the Christian be helpless, and cannot cast his burdens and his cares upon the Lord only as the Lord enables him, how much more is the man dead in trespasses and in sins helpless in the matter. Well but, say you, where is the harm of inviting men in that way? Why, the first harm is it misrepresents the state of man by nature, and so has a tendency to delude him and to set people down for Christians that are not Christians; they are drawn by these invitations into a letter profession, and with that they are content, quite satisfied. I met with a man some time ago, had he said I am a member of a certain church, Sir. Oh, are you? Yes Sir. And I said, what doctrines does your minister preach? Well, I do not know Sir. Did he

baptize you? Oh yes; I believe he is a very good man. Well, what is he? Well he likes everybody. But what doctrines does he preach? Well I do not know; I believe in Jesus Christ Sir. But what sort of a Jesus Christ? Why, dear me Sir, there is only one Jesus Christ, is there? oh yes, I said, a thousand, and more than that. Why, he says, I never heard but of one. Then you cannot read your Bible; you will read there of false Christs, and that those false Christs shall deceive many, and I think you are one of the deceived. I thought he was a curious member of a church, did not know what doctrines his own minister preached. That is your duty faith church, and that is your duty faith doing, and your duty faith delusion. Ah, it is an awful thing to be lost under any circumstances, but to be lost under a profession of religion, to be damned as a sinner and cursed as *an intruding professor*, doubles the damnation of the man, to take up a hypocritical fleshly profession of the Lord 'Jesus Christ.

The man that has not felt the necessity of coming to Christ in the way that the Lord alone can bring him, knows not what coming to Christ is. To come to Christ savingly is to come into an understanding of his truth, is to come into the experiences of pardoning mercy, is to come into the experiences of realization and justification, is to realize the liberty of the gospel, is for the love of God to be shed abroad in the heart, is to be brought into the spirit of adoption, and to read out your eternal election of God. No man is yet really come to Christ unless he has realized these things; and yet many will be saved who do not realize them in this world, if you are born of God, nothing short of what I have said will satisfy you; but you may be born of God, and seek these things, and look for these things, and be satisfied with nothing short of these things; and if so, you are as surely born of God as though you had realized them; still you are not yet come to Christ, not in that satisfactory way that you want to come. And hence, "Blessed are they that hunger and thirst after righteousness, and they shall be filled." It lies with the Lord as to the time when that shall be done. So without him, without his enabling, there is no getting away from our leprosy, there is no getting away from the legion, there is no getting away from the palsy of the hand; there is no getting away from the region of death; there is no getting away from our blindness, there is no getting away from our maladies, but by Jesus Christ; without him you can do/nothing. Ah, say some, then it's no use to try. Ah, if you were to give up your possession and run away, and go into the world, that would just show what you are; so you could not deceive yourself any longer: whereas, if you are born of God, you cannot give it up, it would be a literal impossibility. You may go away in a rage, as did Naaman, but the Lord will take care your leprosy shall go with you, and you must come to God's plan at last; can't give it up, not if you are born of God. And if you can give it up, the sooner you do it the better. Throw off the mask, throw off your disguise, leave Christians, go to your own company, and be at home in your own den; you have nothing to do with Zion, no business there, you hate her bulwarks; you don't know your weakness, your lost condition, don't know your need of that provision which God has made; and therefore, you are not poor in spirit, you are not a trembler at his word, you are not one that can bear testimony with our text, that without Christ you can do nothing.

But lastly, *the ORDER of things to which the Savior here finally belongs*. There appear to be three or four ends in view in that representation he gives of himself here as the Vine. The first idea is that of life. Without me you cannot live. Cannot live without him, death everywhere else. "He that believes on me has everlasting life." Then that must not be the faith of the flesh merely, intellectual or natural faith, it must be the faith that results from regeneration; "You has he quickened;" and where that is not the root of it, the soul does not know its state of death, and therefore cannot prize

the Savior as the only way of escape from death, and the way and the substance of eternal life. Without me you cannot live. "I am the true Vine;" as the branch cannot live apart from me, Second, it means sustenance; without me you cannot be sustained. So it is; take Christ away, our hearts sink, our souls are bowed down to the ground, our hope is destroyed, our prospects all blighted and blasted. But while we have Jesus Christ, we are sure to be sustained; he is our sustenance. Then, third, fruitfulness; sure, to be fruitful if you abide in him; that is the way to be fruitful. So whatever fruit you bear, whether prayer, or love, or joy, or sentiment, if it does not savor of him, it is not pleasing to God. "Here is my Father glorified, that you bear much fruit." Here is my Father glorified, that you pray much in my name; herein is my Father glorified, that you love much; herein is glorified, that you rejoice much; and herein is my Father glorified, when you are conformed to this order of things; for "you have not chosen me, but I have chosen you, and ordained you, that you should go and bring forth fruit, and that your fruit should remain," that fruit which is sure to exist in the soul united to Christ Jesus. "Abide in me;" cannot abide too firmly in him, not in mere sentiment, but in prayer, and in love, and in joy.

But perhaps I shall make this matter clearer if in conclusion I just point out that order of things to which he does not belong, not finally, and then see how the contrast, comes in. He is the vine. Now the question is, as there are two kinds of vineyards spoken of, to which of those vineyards does Christ finally belong. Now the Old Testament dispensation was called a vineyard, but that vineyard was let out to husbandmen. But this vineyard where Christ is, the vine is not let out to husbandmen; mark the difference; look at the 5th of Isaiah, and look at this 15th of John, "I am the true vine, and my Father is the husbandman;" so that the Old Testament dispensation was let out to husbandmen, that covenant was conditional; and the Lord according to that covenant could not do more than he did, he did all he undertook to do; he did not undertake to do in that covenant that which he has undertaken to do in the new and final covenant.

"Wherefore when I looked that it should bring forth grapes, brought it forth wild grapes." These grapes are the grapes that grow in the valley of the Dead Sea, and the grapes that grow there are as bitter as gall, they savor not of treacle but of brimstone very, strong. Well, say you, what, of that? Why, they point out those professors whose minds are bitter against God's truth, and whose very religion savors more of the devil, than of Jesus Christ. Ah, says one, I hate that election. That's a grape of Sodom, Sir. I hate that predestination. That's another grape of Sodom, Sir. I hate that doctrine that tells man he can do nothing. That is another grape of Sodom, sir. And I hate that doctrine that tells us that a man is saved with eternal certainty without his own efforts. That's another grape of Sodom.

Now, the Lord tells us what he will do with that vineyard; "I will take away the hedge thereof, and it shall he eaten up." But, shall that projection that is thrown around the Savior ever be taken away, shall he ever be eaten up, and his people left destitute? Oh, no, not the least danger of that. "And I will break down the wall thereof;" but shall the wall of God's salvation ever be broken down? No! "And it shall be, trodden down." But, can Christ be trodden down, so that he shall not reign over his people? He is the Vine that reigns over his people, as Jotham's parable expresses it.