

SURREY TABERNACLE PULPIT.

THE TRUE WITNESSES.

A Sermon

PREACHED ON LORD'S-DAY MORNING, MARCH 17TH, 1861, BY

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AT THE SURREY TABERNACLE, BOROUGH ROAD.

'And they heard a great voice from heaven saying unto them, Come up hither. And they ascended up to heaven in a cloud, and their enemies beheld them.' Revelations xi. 12.

MINISTERS of the gospel are called witnesses, because they are made experimentally acquainted with the things of which they have to testify, and become thus the representatives of the people of God in general. And hence these same persons, ministers, are in this same chapter called 'two witnesses.' Hence when the disciples asked the Saviour whether he would at that time restore the kingdom to Israel, he immediately answered that there were seasons which the Father had kept in his own power, and not yet revealed; but nevertheless that they should be his witnesses in Jerusalem, just where the greatest sinners were, who had committed the most awful of all deeds, that was just where the gospel should begin to show its almighty power in saving some out of such sinners; and also in Judea and in Samaria, and to the uttermost parts of the earth. Taking it then for granted, which I think we safely may, that the two witnesses spoken of in this chapter are intended to set forth the ministers of the gospel; and that these ministers in their character are representatives of the people of God; that is, that the people of God must be what they are; hence said the apostle to those to whom he was writing, 'Ye are all partakers of my grace;' he did not say that they all partook in the manifestation of grace to the same extent that he did; he was favoured above any other in that respect; but still they were all partakers of the same kind of grace; it was free grace, saving grace, all sufficient grace. Under this consideration, that the subject this morning will enable me to describe the people of God under the various positions in which they appear in the verses that precede our text, I shall therefore dwell chiefly upon that description of character this morning which the Lord hath set before us; so that I shall not reach this morning the actual language of our text; seeing all my time will be occupied in describing the persons referred to. 'They heard a great voice from heaven.'

Now these witnesses appear unto us first as having *Power from God*; 'I will give power unto my two witnesses.' So all of us, in order to be saved, must have power from God.

I. First, then, I notice them as having **POWER FROM ON HIGH**: 'I will give power unto my two witnesses.' So the apostle says, 'I will know, not the speech of them which are puffed up, but the power.' You will see at once that the first thing we have to attend to this morning is the power of vital godliness; whether we know anything of being born of God; whether we know anything of power from on high; for the Lord does call all his people witnesses. Hence, in Isaiah xliii., the Lord, speaking to his people, saith, 'Ye are my witnesses, that I am God, that there is none else; that I am thy

Saviour, and that there is none beside me.' They must be brought to bear witness of this, there is none but the Lord himself can save. But then we must be definite upon this matter, and we will take the Word of the Lord for our guide. Now the apostle looks at this, and, at the same time, is careful to explain that experience of Divine power which distinguishes the true people of God from all other people. He says, 'Our sufficiency is of God, who hath made us able ministers of the New Testament; not of the letter, but of the spirit; for the letter killeth, but the spirit giveth life.' The apostle does in that same chapter explain what he means by being able servants of the New Testament; the New Testament there, of course, means the new covenant; and in order to be an able servant of God in that order of things, you must understand that covenant, so that you may know what you have to contend for, and after what order you are to serve the Lord; for if we do not serve him after the order that he himself in the gospel has prescribed, then we are assured that our worship is in vain. Let us look then closely into this matter: the apostle says, 'The letter killeth;' so it appears there that we must know something about being killed; for if we know nothing about being killed, there is something to be killed to, or else, I am sure, if we have not experienced that side of the power, or if we are strangers to the power of God in the killing sense there intended, I am sure we are not on the way to that eternal glory that awaiteth the people of God. And the apostle in another place describes this killing power very beautifully, when speaking of the troubles with which he and his fellow labourers were surrounded, he says, 'We had the sentence of death in ourselves, that we should not trust to ourselves, but in God which raiseth the dead; who delivered us from so great a death, and doth deliver; in whom we trust that he will yet deliver us.' The sentence of death in ourselves; what does this mean? It means this, that there is brought into the soul, by the power of the Holy Ghost, a conviction of the evil of sin; that the wages of sin is death; that you are brought to see and to feel that, as a sinner, you are as good as dead—that, as a sinner, there is a second death awaiting you, and that that second death consisteth not in a cessation of being, but in a death unto all the favour and consolation which God could give, and consisteth in everlasting banishment from his presence, and from the glory of his power; consisteth in being cast into a lake of fire that burneth for ever and for ever.

Now there will be this conviction, this sentence of death in you, and you will get rid of this sentence, of this fear, in no way but by Jesus Christ; Jesus Christ hath met that death, he was made a curse, and if you know something of this conviction, I am as sure that that to you is a faithful saying, and that to you it is worthy of all acceptance, that Jesus Christ came into the world to save sinners, and you, if you have this conviction, will cry to God in your soul in a way you never did before, and you will secretly say, Lord, save me; I am that lost sinner; there is the sentence of death upon what I am. And thus you will see that you are as good as dead. Then the sentence of death in you will mean not only this, your conviction of your need of Christ, but it will also mean something else, it will mean that the law puts a negative upon all your supposed holiness and all your doings. Oh how many have laboured and toiled not only for months, but for years, they have been set to work, and moving in as the common phrase goes, a sphere of great supposed usefulness, but by and bye God's law comes in, the ministration of death is brought in, and all that which they thought to be acceptable to God they find to be as nothing; for it runs thus, 'Cursed is he that continueth not in all things written in the book of the law to do them,' and again, 'The law worketh wrath,' the law will stir up in your heart all manner of concupiscences; and there will be a negative put upon all your holiness, your righteousness, your strength, your wisdom, your goodness, and upon

everything excellent you think you are ; and you will become altogether as an unclean thing, and you will say, Ah, I had not the sentence of death in myself until I was convinced thus of my utter depravity, until, like Saul of Tarsus, the commandment entered, and put a negative upon all my supposed goodness, I was until that comfortable, and trusted that because I was so good the Lord would have mercy upon me, and all would be well at last ; in fact, you were trusting in yourself, and did not know it, you professed to be trusting in him whilst in reality you were trusting in yourself. But now if there be a negative put thereon, if you have this conviction ; a negative put by the law of God, as the apostle says, ' I had not known sin but by the law ; ' when the heart is tested by that law spiritually and truly, it will be found what the apostle declares it is, and this will bring into your supposed goodness the sentence of death ; and thus sin will revive, and you will die, and begin to look about for some better anchorage ground of hope ; how, you will say, can I hope in God ? how now can I hope in his mercy ? Oh, better than ever, my hearer. Is thine own holiness gone, is thy righteousness gone ; are thy strength, thy goodness, thy good works gone ? I will tell thee what the remedy is, that Jesus Christ will become thine holiness, thy righteousness thy goodness, thine excellency, thy strength, thy wisdom, and now thou wilt work, not as thou didst before, in order to make thyself good before God, but thou wilt work now simply from gratitude to God, and thou wilt think nothing of thy works when thou hast done them ; thou wilt say, I am but an unprofitable servant : do as much as I may, I do but that which it is my duty to do : the word duty means debt ; and the Christian feels he owes a debt of love to God he can never pay, and therefore he does not work in order to get life or to get favour, but he works expressive of gratitude to that God that hath done such great things for him.

' I will give power.' Now you have power to testify of your sinnership in a way you never could before ; when you were in a state of nature you could not exalt God in judgment as you can now, now that you are convinced of sin, and now that you are stripped of self, and now that you are humbled, you can bear testimony of the majesty of God's law—you can thus exalt him in judgment. My hearer, without this change, without this conviction, without this sentence of death in us, then alas, alas, our religion is a thing of nought, if we have any at all. So the apostle has well said, ' We had the sentence of death in ourselves, that we should not trust in ourselves, but in God which raiseth the dead.' Now, my hearer, dost thou know anything of this ? Perhaps I am speaking to one that is saying, Well, I am afraid I do not ; I simply see I am a lost sinner, but I do not feel so much of it as I could wish ; I do see that Jesus Christ is suited to me, but I am afraid I have not this downward experience. Well, I believe the work is begun in your heart : you are come in at the south gate, you will go out at the north gate, and by-and-bye you will come into a wilderness scene of things that will teach you all that I am describing. There is a variety of ways in which the soul is brought at first unto the Lord, I will not therefore lay down any one particular rule in this respect, because in so doing I should be wrong ; there is a variety of ways ; I care but little in what form the work develops itself at first ; but as you go on, as the Israelites learnt the majesty of God's law after they had come out of Egypt, so some of you more advanced Christians know more of your own heart now than you did at the first—so that you are able to bear testimony in God's sight that human nature is what he says it is, and that his law is what he says it is, and that by it shall no flesh living be justified ; so then let me not say a word of discouragement even to the weakest, that is only just beginning to peep out of obscurity, and just beginning to look towards Jesus, and to desire his mercy. Oh, my hearer, if thy prayer be but

a whisper out of the dust, so that you yourself are utterly at a loss to know whether you do pray or not, still,

‘Those feeble desires, those wishes so weak,
‘Tis Jesus inspires, and bids you still seek.’

And you will come in the Lord's own time into the experience of which I have spoken. The apostle, contrasting life with death, speaketh thus, he says, ‘If the ministration of death be glorious;’ and is it not awfully glorious, majestically glorious, terrifically glorious, it strikes a sinner with a sight and sense of the majesty of God; ‘shall not the ministration of the Spirit much more be glorious?’ when the Lord shall pass by, and say unto thee, Live! when the Lord shall spread his skirt over thee, and it shall be the time of love; and take thee under his protection, and under the shadow of his wings. And the apostle says in that same chapter, ‘If the ministration of condemnation be glorious, much more doth the ministration of righteousness exceed in glory.’ Just mark that, friends, the ministration of righteousness. Everything is wrong between you and your Judge, between you and God; but here is a ministry of reconciliation, here is a justification ministry—here is a settlement ministry—the ministration of righteousness. How is this done? Why, sin is forgiven, he does not impute our sins to us, he imputes them to his dear Son, and this makes us love God, reconciles us to himself. This is one part of the ministration of righteousness. And then, secondly, he ministers to us the righteousness of his dear Son—reveals that righteousness, and we believe in it; and when we realize the power of God in this matter, we then say with the apostle, ‘Being justified by faith, we have peace with God, through our Lord Jesus Christ.’ And then mark something else; when you are under the law everything goes against you; ‘Say ye to the wicked, it shall be ill with him;’ everything is a curse to you, living and dying under the law, because everything is bringing you nearer to perdition—but here in the gospel those very attributes and circumstances, which under the law, tends to your destruction, here under the gospel are made subservient to your eternal welfare, and those afflictions, which under the law must have been like so many mill stones around your neck, to drown you in perdition, but under the gospel, the curse being taken by Jesus Christ out of those afflictions, they shall ultimately become light afflictions, working out for you a far more exceeding, even an eternal weight of glory. If thou art brought thus into this reconciliation, then thou art an able servant of the new covenant, then you can believe in God, you can contend for his truth, you can seek the advantages of that covenant. For what is the object of ministers and of people in serving God in the New Testament, the new covenant? Their object is two-fold; first we seek the advantages of this covenant; in this new covenant there are exceeding great precious promises, such as there shall be no more conscience of sin, there shall be no more remembrance of sin; there needs no more offering for sin—and that he hath obtained eternal redemption—and that we might receive the promise of eternal inheritance; we therefore in serving God here seek the advantages of this covenant, that we might realize the advantages of this covenant in our own souls, and glorify God.

This is one end we have in view; and we are able to seek them because we understand them, because we see them; though we see them at times afar off, we are able to serve God thereby, because our enmity is slain. Now the natural man cannot, he is not able, he cannot understand it, nor love it; and if he do not serve God by love, that faith that worketh by love, his service is not acceptable. The natural man says, I hate that election, so that you are not able to serve God in that, you are not able to bless God for that; well now, I am. As for that predestination, I hate it; well now, I do not; I rejoice that he hath not appointed me to wrath, but to obtain salvation by

Jesus Christ. And as to that particular redemption, Christ dying for his sheep, and the certainty of their being saved, I hate that, say you; now I like it; I love it very much; it offends some very much indeed. You are not able to like it. Ah, say you, I could come to it if I liked; no, you cannot, you think you can, but you cannot; no, you are enmity against it; and Satan has got such a hold of you that he would not have the glory of the gospel of Christ shine into your heart for the world, because he would lose you directly. And then those that are brought to know this covenant are able to love God; the enmity of their hearts cannot make them hate him in these things, and all the blindness of their minds cannot hide from them the glory of Christ in this great matter of salvation, 'for God, who commanded the light to shine out of darkness, hath shined in our hearts, to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ.' Now the Lord says, I will give power to my witnesses, and that they shall be true witnesses. And thus we become witnesses for God as to what we are as sinners, and as to what his holy law is; we become witnesses for God as to what salvation is; we can from personal experience testify that salvation is of grace. Now if you know nothing of this attraction, nothing of this feeling after Christ, nothing at all of this downward work, nothing at all of this reconciliation work; then I say you are not able servants, you are not able to serve God at all: you cannot love him, cannot receive him; you are enmity against him. But if this enmity be slain, and thou art brought to see and to know that there can be no reconciliation with offended justice, no reconciliation with a violated law, no reconciliation with infinite purity; that there can be no salvation to thy precious soul, but by the blood of Jesus; I mean the blood of the dear Redeemer in its infinite efficacy, in its eternal certainty, in its power to cleanse from all sin, and present us triumphantly complete at the last; if thou art brought thus far, thou art able to serve the Lord.

Now these witnesses prophesied in sackcloth twelve hundred and sixty days. They had to prophesy in sackcloth. The word prophesy does not always mean to predict; it means sometimes merely to testify. Hence the Lord hath promised in the new dispensation to pour out his Spirit upon all flesh, and your sons and your daughters shall prophesy; that is, they shall testify, they shall speak of what God has done for their souls. Well now, these persons are to prophesy in sackcloth 1260 days. How descriptive this is, is it not? After they have received power from on high. Just look at it; I make no hesitation in saying that the description answers exactly to the experience of the Christian. 'I will give power to my two witnesses.' Have power from on high; experience forgiving love and mercy; hear, as our text expresses it, the great sound, the joyful sound from heaven saying, 'Come up hither;' and let it bring you up above your sins, above your fears, above the law, above Satan, above the world, above death, above your troubles, and enable you to take your stand upon the lofty height of Mount Zion, for they shall come and sing on the height of Zion; then, after the Lord has thus girded you with gladness, you will have to put off that gladness, and to go into mourning; sackcloth will come next, clouds will intervene, darkness will come in, this comfort will die, that comfort will die, the other comfort will die, and you will go into mourning for the death of all these comforts, and your language now will be,

'Where is the blessedness I knew,
When first I saw the Lord,
Where is the soul-refreshing view
Of Jesus and his word!'

Or with one of old, 'Where are thy former loving kindnesses, which thou swarest unto David in thy truth?' Lord, how is it that there was a time when the dew rested all night upon the branch, and when in thy light I could walk through darkness, when the candle of the Lord shined upon my head,

when I could rejoice in the strength of celestial youth, and rise with wings as eagles' ? but, alas ! now my wings seem to be gone, and I am brought into the house of mourning. What is this for ? This is to put you to the test, and teach you many things.

When the joy of the stony-ground hearer is gone, his religion is gone : how is that ? because that stony-ground hearer never felt his lost condition, and never felt the weight and solemnity of the great matter of eternal salvation. As long as his religion pleased him he was pleased with God—as long as it made him gladsome, and beguiled his weary hours, and as long as the minister could be as one that playeth well upon an instrument, and could amuse him, so far his religion would last ; but as soon as this goes off, his religion is gone. Not so with the man who is brought in as a real witness for God, when your joys are gone your religion is not gone : your conviction of your state still remains—your reconciliation to God still remains—the living sentiments of your heart remain unchanged, notwithstanding this change of feeling and change of state. You are clothed with sackcloth, no access to holy things, no holy fellowship, no holy feasting ; the ministry does not reach you, the comforter that should apparently relieve your soul seems far from you, the Lord hides his face, you are longing to see one of the days of the Son of man, but cannot see it : and while ministers are telling you this is your own fault, the Lord is your witness you can no more prevent these mourning times than you can merit the feasting times ; for you are made from experience to know that all your times are in the Lord's hands. So they shall prophesy, that is, testify. Mark this : there is something very nice about it. They shall prophesy in sackcloth. What, says the devil, now you are walking in sackcloth, do you speak well of Jesus Christ now—speak well of his grace now—speak well of his name now ? what, preach now, go to chapel now ? Well then, you must love him if you do all this. Of course you do. Well, really you must be determined to stick to your religion amidst all this. Of course we are determined ; not all this mourning, not all this fasting, not all this sackcloth, can make us desire to return whence we came out ; we came out, as John Bunyan well expresses it, from the city of destruction, and we have no desire to return : we desire a better country, that is, a heavenly, wherefore our God, mourners as we are, fasters as we are, poor creatures as we are, cast down as we are, yet not destroyed, our God is not ashamed to be called our God ; he hath prepared for us a city, we have no continuing city here, he hath prepared for us a city ; and while we may have no joy now, we shall have no sorrow there, for neither sorrow, nor death, nor pain can enter into the ultimate destiny of those who thus mourn after the Lord in sackcloth.

It is a great thing, when our sincerity is put to the test, for that sincerity to prove to be real. 'I will show Paul how great things,' saith the Lord, he shall suffer for 'my name.' What do you say to them, Paul ? why, 'we are exceeding joyful in our tribulations ;' rejoice to think that we are counted worthy to suffer, neither count I my life dear unto me, so that I might finish my course with joy, and the ministry, which I have received of the Lord Jesus, to testify the gospel of the grace of God.' But then mark these days of sackcloth are limited ; 1260 days, only three years and a half. I by no means take this to be a definite and literal time. What large volumes we have written to prove when these 1260 days began ; and, say they, if we can find out when they began, we shall get an idea of their ending. Well, when the Lord again comes in, and puts off the sackcloth, girds the soul with gladness, and again fulfils that promise—for he fulfils it many times in the progress of the Christian towards heaven, 'For the Lord will comfort Zion : he will comfort all her waste places ; he will give beauty for ashes, the oil of joy for mourning, and the garment of praise for the spirit of heaviness,' And

thus the 1260 days begin when our mourning begins; and end when our mourning ends. And if you take it literally, three years and a half that, is not long, so you may go on for years without much sense of enjoyment of the Lord's presence; but 'Blessed are they that mourn, for they shall be comforted,' your 1260 days will come to an end by-and-bye, and at the appointed moment the Lord will come in; take off your sackcloth, and though many may try to take it off before that, they shall not be able, but as soon as Mordecai's 1260 days are ended, the King shall send, there shall be the royal steed he shall be freed from his sackcloth and mourning, and shall rejoice in the freedom which the Lord shall work, his adversary Haman himself shall enjoy the bad eminence that he intended for Mordecai; Mordecai shall be exalted, and Haman shall be justly degraded; the Jews delivered, their sackcloth put off, and their joy shall begin. Now these witnesses, we are told, shall prophesy during all this time; that is, they shall continue to abide by the truth; they shall bear the same testimony of God's truth through all the days of their mourning that they bore when they first enjoyed the truth, and that they shall bear when their sorrows shall be no more.

But notice, then, friends, the next idea, 'These are the two olive trees.' Three are five reasons why the people of God are called olive trees; first, because of the peace they can testify of; the peace they have with God. There is a faithful little creature we read of in the Bible would not tell lies; and there is an unfaithful one that slipped off, glad to get away. Noah sent the raven out of the ark; now just go and see if the flood is abated. Trouble take that old free grace Noah; I am got away from him, I will not go back again. Trouble take that narrow minded ark, with only one door and one window, I will not go there again. And, said the raven, they have made me a vegetarian for some twelve months; I have not enjoyed myself all the time; I am a carnivorous bird; and so off went the raven, and fed upon the carrion, the dead bodies; and felt quite at home among the congregation of the dead. That raven typifies Judas, that went out, and came in no more; and apostatizing professors that get weary of the ark of God's truth, that long after the flesh-pots of Egypt; and they go back again to their pot companions like the sow to her wallowing in the mire, like the dog to his vomit; they are weary of God's truth, calling it light bread; we have nothing but this manna, this light bread. The truth of God is a very light thing to the mere natural man, but to the real Christian it is a weighty thing, a solid thing; it is his delight, the joy of his heart. The raven was an unclean bird, though he got into a clean place, but he was glad to get away from it. But the dove was quite at home in vegetarianism; it was a granivorous, herbivorous creature; the little dove was glad to get away from the dead carcass; it would fly away from the dead carcass back again to the ark. So the Christian cannot feed at the devil's table, or upon false gospels.

Now the dove was a faithful little creature; it went out, but it would not say the flood was gone when it was not; and so it found no rest for the sole of its foot. Ah, little dove, where art thou seeking rest? Ah, in free grace; I can find rest nowhere else; and when the curse is entirely gone, when the flood is abated, I shall find rest for the soles of my feet, but not before. Is not this one of the names of the church, a dove? so called in Solomon's Song; and if thou art made conscious of the curse that is around thee, thou wilt never find rest to the soles of thy feet until thou knowest that on thy behalf the curse is gone, that the waters have receded, and that there is peace established. Stop seven days more; that brings us to the seventh day, when the Lord finished the heavens and the earth, and all the works therein; and on the seventh day the dove brings an olive leaf; the symbol of peace; an olive leaf plucked off. It was not a dead leaf, but a living leaf, one just

plucked off fresh. If I go to Paternoster Row, and buy a sixpenny sermon, that is an old, dead leaf. If I gather up scraps from novel writers in order to decorate my sermon, or take extracts from some eloquent works of old divines, it is a gilded leaf, but it is a dead one; it is a false token; the dove bringing a dead leaf would be no sign of the curse being gone, because the dead leaf might be floating about; but here is a young fresh leaf just burst forth from the olive; a certain sign that the flood is gone. I take this leaf to be a figure of the promise of God.

And so the man sent of God is a man of prayer, he gets his text from the Bible: a green leaf, a living leaf, to assure the people that there is peace by Jesus Christ; the Lord hath sworn that the waters shall no more go over the earth: there shall be no more curse, for the throne of God and of the Lamb, are in the midst of it. And now the little dove enjoyed the range of the whole world—go everywhere—for the curse was gone. Just so now, the soul when brought to know the curse is gone has the whole range of the new earth and the new heaven: there is no forbidden tree in the second Paradise; there is no transgressable law, freedom for ever. Second, they are called olive trees because they are evergreen. So 52nd Psalm, David was surrounded with scorching trials and troubles; and they sought to cut him off, why? 'I am like a green olive tree in the house of God; I trust in the mercy of God for ever and ever.' Let me dwell in the house of God, that is, Christ; and I shall be green all the year round, my leaf shall not wither, neither shall I cease from yielding fruit. Third, they are called olive trees because of their beauty. Of all trees perhaps that adorn the orchards, and vineyards, and plantations of the East, none is more beautiful in its foliage than the olive. Hence, 'I will be as the dew unto Israel,' instead of being a consuming fire, 'he shall grow as the lily, and cast forth his roots as Lebanon. His branches shall spread, and his beauty shall be as the olive tree, and his smell as Lebanon.' And what is more beautiful than a Christian, when he is brought into the prosperity of the gospel; when he savours of Jesus, when it is manifested that he is a living tree.

The most beautiful scenery under the sun is a company of real Christians, olive branches round about the Lord's table; the 128th Psalm is a promise to Christ that his wife shall be as a fruitful vine by the sides of his house, and his children like olive plants round about his table.

Fourth, they are called olive trees because of their association with those that are gone before them—eleventh of Romans; 'we are cut out of the tree that is wild by nature, wild enough; mercy knows; grafted into the good olive tree, and with them partakers of the root and fatness; so that Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, and the holy prophets enjoyed the same things as the apostles lived and died in: ten thousand times ten thousand that have gone before us were partakers of the same things, of the same grace by which we are saved; so that when we go home they will not have to ask us, 'After what order of things are you come?' we shall be at home in a minute; I am a sinner saved by grace: well, that will accord with our feeling here, for we ascribe salvation to him that sitteth upon the throne, and to the Lamb.' Fifth, they are called olive trees because of the golden oil which they yield.

Our collection this morning is for the Aged Pilgrims' Society; and I want you to give some golden oil this morning, or silver oil, or whatever you have. Taken spiritually it means that the ministers of the gospel; being living trees, minister instrumentally the golden oil of God's grace. All the people of God are not only recipients, but they are also ministers. You sometimes say, I do not know what use I am. Oh yes, you are. You do not know what you have done by your walk among the ungodly; perhaps in this world you may never know. I have met with some persons where the Lord has wrought convictions in their minds by simply seeing other persons going to the house of God.