

A GOOD PLACE TO DWELL IN

A SERMON

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“And I will bring them, and they shall dwell in the midst of Jerusalem; and they shall be my people, and I will be their God, in truth and in righteousness.” Zechariah 8:8

THIS chapter refers to the restoration of the Jews from Babylonish captivity, and their reinstatement in their own land. As the Lord Jesus Christ was to descend from the tribe of Judah, and as he was to be born in Bethlehem, these two made it needful that they should be restored to their own land, and be in that land at the time the Savior was born, and so the prediction become thus exactly fulfilled. You observe how careful the Lord is over the promises of his word; that while we have so many things to try us, we may have in his word something upon which we may rely with some confidence of its infallibility. Also it was needful they should be there, for they were the people who in prediction were pointed out as crucifying Jesus Christ; and so Jesus Christ there lived, and there died, and there rose from the dead, as predicted. But then, Jesus Christ is at Bethlehem no more; he is on the cross no more; he will be in the tomb no more; he dies no more: death has no more dominion over him. Jesus Christ is in heaven. And Jews are now one with the Gentiles, both in sinner-ship, and those who are called are one with those among the Gentiles who are called also in saint-ship; so that there is no necessity now to bring people to Bethlehem, or to the literal Jerusalem. The great necessity now is for souls to be brought to where Jesus Christ is, and that is, he is in heaven. And as he is there, the great business of the gospel is to bring souls to God, to bring souls to heaven, to bring souls to the Lord Jesus Christ. So, then, while the former part of this chapter has that historical reference to the restoration of the Jews to their own land, where it is said, “There shall yet old men and old women dwell in the streets of Jerusalem, and every man with his staff in his hand for very age; and the streets of the city shall be full of boys and girls playing in the streets thereof.” This had a literal fulfilment; and we should not err if we were to take it spiritually also; for young Christians are called, as you are aware, newborn babes and little children; and young Christians, when they are brought to enjoy the things of eternity, there is a spiritual playfulness about them, there is a cheerfulness about them; and well there may be, for pardoning grace and mercy, and the manifestation of everlasting love to a soul, will make it, in the holy sense of the word, playful and happy, and playing about, as it were, spiritually in the

streets of the New Jerusalem, while the elders are represented as being more staid and steady, and, as it were, leaning upon the staff for very age. And so, it is. The old Christian dwells more in the confidence of faith than he does, perhaps, in the enjoyment of faith; so, the old Christian steadily rests upon the staff of promise, and feels that that promise does support him; that it has supported him, and will support him. So that while these things have a literal meaning in relation to the restoration of the Jews to Jerusalem, that is not all the meaning; but it has a spiritual meaning, pointing to that essential restoration which we shall have to attend to this morning.

We notice, then, in our text, first, *the ingathering* "I will bring them." Secondly, *the settlement* "They shall dwell in the midst of Jerusalem." Third and last, *the order after which they shall there dwell* "They shall be my people, and I will be their God, in truth and in righteousness."

First, then, for a few moments I glance here at *the ingathering*. Observe that it is the Lord himself that undertakes to ingather them, "I will bring them." Now this fairly implies that there is something which the Lord alone could overcome in order to bring them; and we must point out what those hindrances are and show how the Lord in mercy removes those hindrances. "I will bring them." What is there to hinder them from coming to God? What is there to hinder them from coming to Christ? And it is essential that they should come, because, when a dying hour shall come, and come it must, if we are not then with God, we must be lost; if we are not then with Christ, we must be lost; if we are not then in oneness with God, we must sink to rise no more, except to receive the dreadful sentence of the lost, "Depart from me, you cursed." Therefore, it is essential that we should be brought, for we can be saved in no other way. Now what were the hindrances? The first hindrance was that of death. There they were as dry bones in the open valley, and they were very many and very dry. Now this represents our state by nature. There is a spiritual death in every man that hinders him from coming to God, that hinders him from coming to Christ; and though there may be moral conversions brought about, which no doubt there are, mere mental and moral conversions, and people come into a profession, yet that and being brought out of death are two different things. Let us, then, look at it. Now we have to distinguish, and perhaps it is not always easy to distinguish, but it is important we should distinguish between a mere natural concern for our eternal welfare, and a real, vital, spiritual, and living concern for our eternal welfare. A man may have for years a natural concern about his state, and that concern is only the working of his natural conscience and the letter of the word, and what he may hear, but it does not amount to any spiritual or vital concern; and his repentance is not a repentance unto life; his repentance is not a repentance unto salvation; his coming to God is more natural and formal than it is vital and real. How, then, shall we distinguish between the two? We can by the light of the Lord's holy word, and by the examples given distinguish between the two. In the first place, we have said, there is a death; and what does that death, that spiritual death, do? Why, friends, it hides from us everything essential for us to know; it hides from us the real depravity of nature. This spiritual death hides from us the real wickedness and deceitfulness of our hearts; so that we know not by nature what depths of wickedness and deceit dwell in our hearts. And this spiritual deadness hides from us how we stand in the eye of God's law; it hides from us the kind of Savior we need to deliver us from this state. This is what spiritual death does. So that if your concern be a mere natural concern, then you have no real sight and sense of the infidelities and abominations of your heart, and the consequence is, you are not so humbled down as to loathe yourself in your own sight, and to make you feel that your salvation, from first to last, lies entirely with the Lord. And the next thing that this spiritual death hides from such persons is what the Lord Jesus Christ really

has done. Now, friends, he has really done everything; and all you need in order to be saved, is to be dealt with by the Lord, as described in many parts of the Scriptures; but take the following: "Giving thanks unto the Father, who has made us meet to be partakers of the inheritance of the saints in light, having delivered us from the power of darkness," darkness, spiritual darkness; hid our real condition, and hid what Jesus Christ has really done "delivered us from the power of darkness, and translated us into the kingdom of his dear Son, in whom we have redemption" and that means a redemption from everything, from every sin, from hell, from Satan, from death, from the law, from its curse, from adversity, from adversaries, from the grave, from everything. It means entire redemption. "In whom we have redemption, even the forgiveness of sins;" and that forgiveness of sins is according to the transfer of our sins to Christ, which was a gracious transaction; it was not a conditional transaction. God did not transfer conditionally the sins of men to Christ, but he transferred them there as an act of infinite love to us, an act of infinite grace to us, as an act of infinite mercy to us. Seeing those sins must have sunk us forever, he laid them upon One that was able to bear them. Also, this forgiveness is not only according to the free and entire transfer of sin to Christ but is also in entire accordance with his sacrifice for sin. And if there be one thing in the Scriptures clearer than another, it is that of the perfection of Christ's sacrifice. All this was typified very beautifully by the typical sacrifices, all being spotless, all to point, not only to the sinlessness, but to the perfection in extent as well as in kind of the sacrificial work of the dear Savior. Now then, in order to be brought to God, if our concern be spiritual, if our concern to be saved be of the Holy Ghost, there will be that downward conviction of our state, and we shall see that all we want is simply to be planted into Christ's death, all we want is simply to be made one with Christ. Let me illustrate it thus, that when the flood came all that Noah needed was two things, first, to be put into the ark; and second, for the Lord to shut him in, so that he could not get out. And that is what we need now, to be placed into living faith in Christ, to have no refuge but Christ, to have no hope but Christ, and so placed there that there is no going out again. And I am sure such persons are born of an incorruptible seed, that lives and abides forever. God has made a way for his people to come into his kingdom, but he has not made any way for them to get out; he has made a way for them to be his people, but he has made no way, and will never suffer any way to be made, by which they shall cease to be his people. No, the Lord says, "If you can break my covenant of day and night, that there should not be day and night in their season, then will I cast off the seed of Israel for all that they have done." Now then, this spiritual death that we are under by nature hides from us thus our real condition, hides from us what the Lord Jesus Christ has really done; and the consequence is, there is no real coming to God. But when the Lord removes that death, then the soul begins to sigh, and to mourn, and to fear, and will never be satisfied; take this for granted, that if you are satisfied with anything short of that eternal completeness that is in Christ, if you are satisfied with anything short of that, you may justly call in question the reality of your religion; if you can find anything good in yourself, or in your doings, that you can bring before God as a reason why he should love you, and bless you, and save you, you may justly call in question the reality of your religion. But if you sum up before God the whole of your character as the publican did, "God be merciful to me a sinner" he felt that he was a sinner within and a sinner without, like the leper of old, not a free place, he was a leper altogether, had no part sound; and so, when a sinner is thus convinced of his state, then it is a whole sinner and a whole Christ; it is then a great sinner, and a great salvation meets that great sinner; it is then the sinner that is nothing, and is just prepared to receive that Christ who is all and in all. Thus, then, where this spiritual death is removed, there will be this feeling of our state, there will be this apprehension of what Christ has done. This is the way the Lord brings his people, for "every one that has heard and

learned of the Father comes unto me.” Nothing without faith in him; without faith it is impossible to please God. And then, these same people that are thus brought to God, they are represented not only as under death, and therefore have need that this death should be removed, and that they should be brought into the life I have described, but in the same chapter to which I have referred, the 37th of Ezekiel, they are spoken of as being in their graves. I like that very much; I like it, because it is descriptive, and the Lord says, “I will open your graves, and cause you to come up out of your graves,” and when I have so done, “you shall know that I am the Lord.” Now, here is a convinced sinner; he says, My sin is like a grave; I did not once know that I was in the grave of sin; I did not once know that my soul was buried in sin; I did not once feel that I was in the congregation of the dead, that I was in the grave, as it were, of the curse of a violated law, that my soul was in the grave of hell, virtually shut up in the pit of hell. And there such persons lie; there is no getting out, there is no rising, there is no coming up out of this until the Lord himself shall bring us up. I will bring you up; and another scripture explains to us how the Lord brings us up, “By the blood of your covenant I have sent forth your prisoners out of the pit wherein there is no water.” Oh, happy the man that sees this, and says within himself, Well, if ever I get up out of this sin into the land of Israel; if ever I get up out of the curse of the law, and out of all adversity, and get into the land of Israel, it must be exclusively by the blood of the everlasting covenant. When persons see this, thus see the Lord Jesus Christ, all other hope being taken away, they cleave unto him, and there is not anything can drive them away from Jesus Christ, when they are brought thus to see that it is by him, and him alone, that they can thus rise. And then, again, the people are represented as being shut up as with brazen walls, and gates of brass, and bars of iron. Now, all this may seem to the natural man a great mystery, but there is a terrible reality in it, that the Lord’s people may know that there are powers to shut up their souls, and to hinder them from doing the things that they would, in order that they might know that he brings them into this state a great many times during this pilgrimage. Recollect the last verse of the psalm we just now read, “Bring my soul out of prison.” That was not the language of a young Christian; that was not the language of one who had never been into liberty; that was the language of one who had been into liberty, and afterwards brought into such bondage as to say with Job, and Job was one who had enjoyed perfection in Christ; Job was one that could fall back upon his conscience, and feel that he was upright in his profession; Job was one that could fall back upon motive, and say that he feared God, and eschewed evil; he could thus view himself, and yet, after this, Job was as though he was shut up as with brazen walls, gates of brass, and bars of iron, “Oh that I knew where I might find him!” as though he should say, If I could roll my burden upon him, if I could pour out my sorrows to him, if I could cast all these distresses at his feet, and he should impart from the treasures of his love all that life, and healing, and strength, and mercy that would make me feel happy, ah, how gladly would I enjoy this privilege! but it is not so with me. And says Job, “He is in one mind, and who can turn him?” and many “such things are with him; therefore, when I consider, I am afraid of him.” The Christian sometimes, as regards flesh and blood, trembles at some of the Lord’s dealings with him. “You have showed your people hard things: you have made them drink the wine of astonishment.” But oh, how profitable these experiences are! It enables us to distinguish between mere formal going to God and being brought to him really. If you are brought to him, then there is an exchange; he takes your hardness of heart, and you take his softness; he takes your evil, and you take his goodness; he takes your bondage, and you take, as it were, his freedom; he takes your darkness, and you take his light; he takes your ten thousand doubts and fears, and you take his sweet assurances: there is an exchange. So it is; those that have not these changes do not fear the living God, do not fear the God of the gospel; but those that undergo these changes hereby

feel the depths of creature weakness and helplessness, and hereby prize more and more the exceeding riches of his grace. And if some of you can go with me in what I have said in the first part of my discourse, and cannot go with me in this, well, while I would not wish to say anything to discourage you, you have it to come; for if you live long you will find the days of darkness many; if you live long you will find trial upon trial, and burden upon burden; and when you get rid, as it were, or when the door is shut against a trouble in one quarter, then another will rise in another; so that,

“The Christian is seldom long at ease;”

and a good thing too, that;

“When one trouble leaves him,
Another does him seize.”

For we are such poor, sleepy things, that just give us a little rest, and down we go, and get dreaming that we are very comfortable, whereas in all our comfort there is nothing spiritual. I know not how far the real people of God, some of them, might be embodied in those that were “neither hot nor cold; and because you are lukewarm, I will spue you out of my mouth.” Whatever the meaning of that expression may be, as far as the people of God are concerned, of course it cannot mean that he would fatally or finally part with them; but still the Lord does, as Hezekiah said, keep us alive by these things. “By these things men live, and in all these things is the life of my spirit.” Thus, then, “I will bring them.” He overcomes the death, and brings us into life; he brings us up out of the grave into the freedom of the gospel; and how many times does he cut in sunder the bars of iron? how many times does he break in pieces the gates of brass? Now, the natural man knows not this; the man that preaches, if he is a natural man, he does not know this; he is quite content with his intellectual statement, and the people are content with an intellectual hearing; but this, and to hear vitally, are two entirely different things; the one is the gift of man, or gifts that man may acquire, and the other is by the living grace of the blessed God.

May the Lord, then, deliver us from delusion in this as well as in all other respects, and cause us to know that if we are come to God we are come not as the Pharisee, but as the publican; not as men who are a dreaming they have done their duty, and so God will bless them, but that we are brought as lost, helpless, ruined sinners, and our souls like a solitary desert, and that we do desire more and more to drink in the glorious gospel of the blessed God, that river that flows from the throne of God, the streams whereof shall make glad all the citizens of Zion.

But, secondly, these people are to dwell, that are thus brought, in the midst of Jerusalem. Let us see if we can have a scripture to explain this, taking, of course, as we do, Jerusalem here to mean not the literal, but the spiritual Jerusalem. And I shall give but one scripture, though that one scripture will suggest several more, as the explanation of what is meant by dwelling in the midst of Jerusalem. We are apt to conceive there is a city, and all the people are to dwell in the center. Now that would not be a nice view of it, nor would that give us properly the meaning. You will find, by searching the Holy Scriptures, that the meaning is that the people shall dwell with the Lord, You recollect it is said in the 2nd of Zechariah, “For I, say the Lord, will be unto her a wall of fire round about.” That shows that it is not the literal Jerusalem. “I will be unto her a wall of

fire round about and will be the glory in the midst of her.” And therefore, to dwell in the midst means they shall dwell near to the Lord, they shall dwell where the Lord is. Now let us trace this out. They shall settle down where the Lord is. “I will be a wall of fire;” there are his judgments roundabout against his adversaries; for, “after the glory,” that is, after the people, for they are God’s glory, “has he sent me unto the nations which spoiled you;” sent unto the nations to take these people from among the nations; “for he that touches you touches the apple of his eye.” So that these people are dear to God. Now there are his judgments round about to defend them, and he will be the glory in the midst. Now if the Lord is to be the glory in the midst, and they are to dwell in the midst, then they dwell in Jehovah, for he is to be the glory in the midst, and they are to dwell in that glory. And then the question arises what that glory is. Let us see if we can discover it, and analyze it, the glory that they dwell in. Now the salvation of God is called the glory of God. “The glory of the Lord shall be revealed,” said Isaiah; and “the salvation of God shall be revealed,” said Luke, when quoting those words. Thus, then, to dwell in the midst is to dwell in salvation; that is, Jesus Christ, being made perfect, became the author of eternal salvation to all them that obey him, and thus to dwell in the midst is to dwell in that perfection that is in Christ. Being made perfect, that perfection is their eternal salvation, and they are to dwell in that perfection. I would to God, it has been my prayer for years, ever since I have seen something of the wonderfulness and beauty of that perfection, would to God I could dwell there more, and think more of it, and make more of it, and have more confidence in it. I am eternally forgetting that by the perfection of Christ I am perfect before God; I am perpetually forgetting that not a single fault will the blessed God lay to my charge, for I am perfect in Christ; I am perpetually forgetting that he will not behold iniquity in his people, nor see perverseness in Jacob, and that they dwell in this perfection; that being made perfect, he became the author of eternal salvation; they are to dwell in that perfection. What place can equal it? It may well be called the munitions of rocks; it may well be said in this dwelling-place that “bread shall be given,” and that “waters shall be sure;” and Watts may well sing,

“Where is the power can reach them there,
Or what shall force them thence?”

Happy the man that is settled down in Christ’s eternal perfection! He says, “I am settled; my heart is fixed, O God, forever; your word is settled in heaven.” And the Lord says by Ezekiel, “I will settle you after your old estates;” and this perfection that is in Christ embodies the estates that were given to them before time was. God himself is settled down in that perfection; he will never ask for anything else. Nothing short will please him, and he wants nothing else but that to please him, and so he is determined that while he is settled down himself in that eternal perfection, his people shall settle down in the same perfection; there they shall dwell. Now that is dwelling in the midst of Jerusalem, dwelling where Christ is, in the perfection of his work. There is something in it blessed beyond all description. How many, many faults may the Lord justly lay to the most consistent Christian under the canopy of heaven! and the more consistent the man is, perhaps, the more he feels the evils of his own heart against God. How many, many, many faults the Lord may lay upon the most consistent Christian! so that the Christian most favored in that respect may say, “O Lord, if you should mark iniquity, who could stand?” As I have sometimes said, there was not one among the Israelites so good as not to need the paschal lamb as the way of escape, and there was not one so bad that the paschal lamb could not indemnify him from judgment; and so it is here. Then let the brother of low degree rejoice that he is exalted; let the brother of high degree rejoice

that he is made low; they both rejoice in the same perfection, in the same salvation, and glory not only in the perfection of this dwelling, but also in the eternity thereof. If this be one feature in the dwelling-place, is it any wonder it is written that “no plague shall come nigh your dwelling”? Is it any wonder it should be written that “you shall not fear for the arrow that flies by day, nor for the pestilence that walks in darkness”? Why, to touch them there, to reach them there, to injure them there, I had almost said is an infinite impossibility. This, then, is being brought to God in and by the substitutional perfection of the Lord Jesus Christ; but that is only one feature of this dwelling. The second is that of sacrificial adaptation; that, I am aware, is embodied in what I have said. Those who dwelt near to the Lord in the tabernacle, when he dwelt in the midst, there was every variety of sacrificial adaptation to their necessities; there was no access to the mercy-seat but by sacrifice; and you have not, all through the Old Testament, one instance of a person being refused that came scripturally by sacrifice. Those persons were refused that set God’s truth aside, I grant, and that put those sacrifices out of their place; but those who came as Abel did, Noah did, Abraham did, and others, not one was cast out. So, “him that comes unto me I will in no wise cast out.” That is where they shall dwell. And then it means, also, in the presence of God. What a wonderful mystery is the presence of God! We, perhaps, are at a loss for anything to illustrate what it really is. If we compare it to the salubrious spring, well, that may help us in the idea of what the presence of the Lord is, causing winter and storms to pass away, and bringing the soul into a summer, spring-like state; making the soul as a well of water, whose waters fail not. Or, if we compare it to the sun rising with healing in his wings, it may help us out in the matter. But in itself the truth of it is this, that when we have the presence of the Lord, sensibly so, and enjoy it, it does not signify a rush, as long as that lasts, what our circumstances may be, nor what our afflictions may be. There is something in God’s presence that so intensifies the vitalities of the soul, and that so strengthens and refreshes it, that a martyr could laugh at tortures enough to make an archangel groan, undergo tortures enough to make an archangel groan; yet, having the presence of God in the midst of them they could laugh at their tortures, could laugh at their own tortures, and could shout “Victory!” in the midst of the flames, as many have done; so wonderful is the presence of God. This made David rise above his fears in the prospect of death; “When I pass through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil, for you are with me.” And so, Moses was in this secret when he said, “If your presence goes not with me, carry us not up hence.” David was in this secret when he said, “In your presence is fulness of joy, and at your right hand are pleasures for evermore.” Dwelling, then, in God’s salvation, dwelling by his mercy-seat, dwelling in his presence; when once brought into the open sunshine of his presence there is all the happiness we can ever need or ever desire. And then, to dwell here means not only to dwell in Christ’s perfection, and in sacrificial adaptation, and in God’s presence, but also to dwell, and I will mention but two more, to dwell in his love. And it is very nice to dwell there. The Savior says, “Continue you in my love;” as though he should say, Just disbelieve that I love you freely; just disbelieve that I love you greatly; just disbelieve that I love you eternally; just disbelieve that I love you savingly; just disbelieve the infallible certainty of my love, and then down you sink into despair. And, therefore, “continue you in my love;” believe in the freedom of it, the greatness of it, the stability of it, the certainty of it, and that my Father has loved you, that I have loved you, that the love is everlasting; and so, “continue you in my love,” in the belief of that love. “We have,” said one, “believed the love that God has unto us.” But what hard work this is! Men may by their general exhortations tell me, You should believe in God’s love to you. Very easily said, very easily; but it is one of the hardest things in the world to appropriate God’s love to yourself, to feel that you are one of the individuals that he has loved with an everlasting love. None but the Holy Ghost shedding this love abroad in the heart, making

Christ supremely precious, and enabling you from your soul's experience to say with Peter, "Lord, you know all things, you know that I love you;" nothing short of this can enable you to appropriate that love to yourself, and to feel that you are one. God is sovereign, has mercy upon whom he will have mercy, and that the heaven-taught sinner is made to know; therefore this question is,

"'Tis a point I long to know:
Oft it causes anxious thought,
Do I love the Lord or no?
Am I his, or am I not?"

Some have despised that hymn; that is a proof that they have not been in their right minds when they have done so. They may despise that hymn where they may, but those are words that every Christian is well familiar with. To dwell, then, in the midst of Jerusalem is to dwell in Christ's perfection, to dwell in sacrificial adaptation, to dwell in God's presence, and to dwell in his love. One more; they are to dwell, also, in his strength. I increasingly appreciate the almightiness of God's power, especially when I can say with Job, "Will he plead against me with his great power?" That scripture, and if it seems like sameness, I must repeat it, "Is anything too hard for the Lord?" He has but to speak the word, "Let there be light, and there was light;" he has but to speak the word to any department in creation, to any department in providence, whether it be to the Red Sea, the flinty rock, the space out of which manna shall be brought, the Jordan, the walls of Jericho, or whatever it may be, it is only for the Lord to speak the word, and it is done. "He commanded, and it was done; he speaks, and it stands fast forever." Almighty power. What poor weak creatures we are; I say, what poor weak creatures we are! yet, here is our comfort; "Trust you in the Lord forever, for in the Lord Jehovah is everlasting strength." Thus, then, they are brought vitally to God, brought to receive Christ Jesus, and brought to settle down to dwell in Christ's perfection forever, forever, and forever; settled down to dwell in sacrificial sufficiency for ever and ever; settled down to dwell in his presence, and never, like Cain, to go out from his presence. Cain went out from his presence; and what is it to go out of God's presence? Why, to go away from God's Christ; Christ is God's presence, Christ is the presence of God; he that has Christ has God; he that has seen Christ has seen God. Cain went out from Christ, went out from where the sacrifice was, wickedly slew his brother, because his brother would not leave the presence of God, but abode by the presence of God. To go out from the presence of God, therefore, is to go out from where Christ is; to abide in the presence of God is to abide where Christ is. Thus, they settle down and dwell in this love, and in the eternal strength, eternal power, of the blessed God. It is a good thing to be supported, to have strength of heart and strength of faith, strength of hope and strength of confidence, and still to plead the words, for I quote them again, same words, "Is anything too hard for the Lord?" Let that be our watchword in relation to our personal salvation, in relation to difficulties in providence, in relation to difficulties in the church, in relation to difficulties in the world, whatever they may be, let that be our watchword, "Is anything too hard for the Lord?" that we may not, like the people of old, be measuring the possibility of going on by our strength, and saying, "We are not able to take the land;" but to measure it by the strength of the Lord; "Is anything too hard for the Lord?"