

A GOOD PURPOSE

A SERMON

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“We will go with you; for we have heard that God is with you.” Zechariah 8:23

IN addition to what we advanced last Lord’s day morning upon the preceding parts of this verse; we have two more departments to notice from these words. First, *the resolution*, “We will go with you;” second, *the reason*, “for we have heard that God is with you.”

Let us look then, first, at what it is to be brought to Jesus Christ. “We will go with you; for we have heard that God is with you.” You will at once perceive here, friends, what an accordance there is between these words and the words of the Savior, when he said, “No man can come unto me except my Father, which has sent me, draws him.” What a sacred thing soul-trouble is, and also what a secret thing it is! What a difference there is between the adopting intellectually a set of opinions, and after we have done so we call that set of opinions our creed, and we abide by that set of opinions until we meet with another set that perhaps will upset our present set, and then we adopt another set of opinions; and so we may go on, and hold doctrines as matters of opinion, and such are empty professors. What a difference there is between this, a heady, high minded professor, and that man that is brought to Jesus Christ under a sight and sense of what he is as a sinner! Now everyone that is in distress, when God lays home the conviction of what we are; the solemn ties of death, and death is a solemn thing, the hour of death is a solemn hour, and the hour of judgment is a still more solemn hour; and when we come to reflect upon eternity, what it is, we feel overwhelmed when we think of hell and its unabated and un-abatable terrors and horrors: on the other hand, we feel overwhelmed when we think of the glories of heaven. Eternity thus brought into the soul, the sinner is in distress, and his question is, Who can bring me out of this distress? And he will read in the Bible of one that can deliver him from all distress, and that one is the Lord Jesus Christ. Now everyone that is in this spiritual distress, then, Jesus Christ is the remedy; he is the end of all distress and all trouble. When brought to receive and to enjoy what he has done, we then begin to see there is nothing in reality to be distressed about; as says the apostle, that “we are persecuted (or perplexed), but not distressed.” Nothing really to be distressed about; Jesus Christ has put away sin by the sacrifice of himself. And every one that was in debt. Here, you see, sin is compared to a debt. Sin has made a kind of twofold debt. We owe a perfect obedience to God’s law; and we owe, as the demerit of sin, an eternity of suffering. Now Jesus Christ has paid these two debts,

“Paid is the mighty debt they owe;
Salvation is of grace.”

And every one that was discontented. Take these three together. Here is a sinner in distress about his state; he sees that, by sin, he has incurred a debt, that he owes an eternity of suffering, and that Jesus Christ has embodied all that the sinner has demerited, and has paid this debt, and sets the prisoner free: “Deliver him from going down into the pit, for I have found a ransom;” that Jesus Christ, as the Surety, came into our responsibility, and that he did not go out of that until he had paid the uttermost farthing; so that the dear Savior is perfectly right, glorious, and gracious in his words, when he says, “If the Son make you free, you shall be free indeed.” Here, then, is an end to distress, an end to the debt. And discontented. And so, it is; such a poor sinner is discontented with himself, and therefore renounces all confidence in self; he is discontented with his own holiness and righteousness, and discontented with the world, and is brought into a restless state, and he wants something that will make him contented. And then, when such has received Christ Jesus the Lord, he will become, as we read of David, a captain over them. And the doctrine that David preached to Abiathar, when he came, belongs to all that are brought to Christ. He said to Abiathar, “Abide with me.” And is not this the language of Jesus Christ? What, shall we thus come to him, and feel that we have no hope anywhere else, feel that he alone can redeem, that he alone can present us faultless before God, and that he alone can deliver us from death, and that it is by faith in him alone we have everlasting life, and he cast us out? There never was such a thing, and there never will be. He has said,, “Him that comes to me I will in no way cast out.” So said David to Abiathar, “Abide with me; fear not.” And so, Job said, “Though he slays me, yet will I trust in him.” Happy the man that knows something of that distress for which Christ alone is the remedy. Happy that man that is brought to feel himself a debtor as a sinner, that he owes a debt of eternal suffering, for which debt Jesus alone can be the remedy. Happy the man that is discontented and dissatisfied with everything short of an experimental acquaintance with the Lord Jesus Christ, that is dissatisfied with everything short of the blessedness of the man whose transgression is forgiven, whose sin is covered, the blessedness of the man to whom the Lord will not impute sin, the blessedness of the man to whom the Lord will impute righteousness without works. These are some of the endearments of that blessed Redeemer by which we are constrained to say we will go with him.

Now we have, in this chapter, another very beautiful representation, shall I say, of the attractions of Jesus Christ. Here are four fasts spoken of, forming a part of the same paragraph in this chapter with our text, and the Lord promises to turn these fasts into gladness, into joyful feasts; that these fasts “shall be to the house of Judah joy, and gladness, and cheerful feasts; therefore love the truth and peace.” Now what fasts are these? Let us just look at the fulfilment of the Lord’s promise concerning them, and then I think that we shall see that this also is another attraction to draw our souls to the Lord. Now, when Nebuchadnezzar laid siege to the city of Jerusalem, he reduced it to famine; secondly, the city was broken up; third, the temple was burned; fourth, Gedaliah, who was left to govern the land after this destruction was wrought, was slain. Now, to commemorate these four circumstances, the city besieged and reduced to famine, the city broken up, the temple burnt to the ground, and Gedaliah slain; to commemorate these four circumstances, the Jews kept a fast; these fasts were thus expressive of the calamities, the judgments, that came upon them. Nowhere, in connection with our text, is a promise that these fasts should be joy, and gladness, and cheerful

feasts. The first thing was, the city was so besieged as to be reduced to famine. How does the Lord turn this fast into joy, and gladness, and a cheerful feast? The answer is, that in the true Zion, the Zion above, the eternal Zion, the new Jerusalem, after the order of the gospel, where Christ is, there stands the promise, "I will satisfy her poor with bread," that the saints of God can never be so besieged as to be reduced to want; for they live by that bread of life which never can be destroyed, they are refreshed from that river of life that can never be dried up, and they from time to time are delighted with the fruit of the tree of life; that fruit, that tree, that can never be reached by the adversary. Here, then, it is that the Lord turns the fast into a feast; that while the old-covenant city was reduced to famine, the new-covenant city possesses, and always will possess, eternal plenty; so that the people shall eat in plenty, and shall praise the name of the Lord their God. The city also was broken up; but here is a city whose walls are salvation; God is in the midst of her. Though the earth be removed, and the mountains carried into the midst of the sea, yet, says the Psalmist, we will not fear; here is a city that never can be broken up; her foundations immovable, and her walls impregnable. Here, then, the Lord turns this fast also into joy, and gladness, and a cheerful feast. And then the temple was also burned down; but here, by the gospel, we have a house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens, that no calamity can ever reach. And then Gedaliah, as a ruler, became the hope of the few that were left in the land; but presently he is slain; so that the hope of the afflicted few was taken from them. But can the hope of the Lord's little few be taken from them? No. It is true Jesus died; but he dies no more; death has no more dominion over him. And the word Gedaliah signifies, "God is my greatness;" and Gedaliah certainly was thus in his name like many of the kings of Israel. All the kings of Israel were types of Christ; but the majority of those kings were types of Christ not in their practice, nor in their spirit, but simply in their names, and in the office they bore. So, Gedaliah here was a type of Christ in his name. And so, it is that "You, which have showed me great and sore troubles, shall bring me up again from the depths of the earth; you shall increase my greatness, and comfort me on every side." Thus, then, here is being brought to Christ savingly; heart work, experimental work; and the soul, brought into spiritual fasting, can appreciate the delightful contrast there is between the old covenant and its judgments; between the law and its judgments, and the blessings of the everlasting gospel that comes unto us in all our necessities, and supply's all our needs.

I had intended, but we cannot say everything in one sermon, and that a short one, to have pointed out, from several circumstances in the Scriptures, examples where they had heard of the Lord being with Christ, how that hearing brought them to Christ; as the shepherds, and the wise men, and Simeon, and many others; but all these I must pass by, for the sake now of just noticing the order after which those who are thus brought to Christ are to live with him. It is important to know after what order and manner we are to go with him into everlasting glory; to walk with him here, and to go with him at last, when he shall come to receive us into that kingdom prepared for us from the foundation of the world. Now, as to the order of living with Christ here, our living with God here, we are not to aim, though we do till we know better, to live with God by being ourselves what Jesus Christ was; we are not to aim to live with God by being ourselves, apart from Christ, acceptable to God; for no man ever did, or ever could live as he did. Now then, the order of our living with God is by what Jesus Christ is unto us; and the only way in which we can be as Jesus Christ is, is by what he is unto us; not by what we are in our doings; we cannot be like him or equal him by any independent worth or goodness that we possess. If, therefore, we would be like him, it must be by his being that unto us which the Lord has made him. Let us, in the first place, take the Savior's life. Did ever any man under the heavens live such a life as he lived? No. His disciples,

like all his people, were upon the whole consistent in their conduct, and yet the Savior needed sometimes gently to reprove them, and sometimes to call them to order, just the same as he does us; never unkindly, always done in kindness, and always done in loving-kindness, and always done in that gentle way that rather softens than vexes the heart, that rather softens than grieves, and rather endears than irritates. You know sometimes creatures, if they have anything to say to you that they do not like, they do it generally in that provoking, irritating, miserable way, that so far from their manner of reproving or calling us to order having its effect, their manners make us hate their very company, and makes us hate their very presence, because they are such tormentors. This is very often the case among fellow-creatures; some have a very bad habit in this way, and think that other people, the more they annoy, provoke, and are cross with them, and rough with them, and find fault with them, the more they will like them; but it is a mistake, you may depend upon it. And so, the Savior never sought to provoke his disciples, always kind with them, and when he called them to order, it was always kindly. Why, when they were once striving among themselves, a little contention, as to which should be greatest, in what a kind way the Savior called them to order. Now, he says, "You know that the gentiles do exercise lordship one over the other; but it shall not be so with you." Well, then, to show he would not provoke them, he says, Now, or, at least, as though he had said, if this reproof at all hurts you, it would defeat my end; I want to put you to rights, and at the same time endear myself to you; and therefore, he says, just listen to me; and the matter stands like this: you are striving which shall be greatest; now let us have no lordship among you; you are all loved with the same love, chosen with the same choice; you belong to the same family, you are going to the same home; and therefore he says, "Behold, I appoint unto you a kingdom, as my Father has appointed unto me; will that suffice you? Yes, it did suffice them, and they were quite contented. And so then, my hearer, Jesus Christ lived such a life, that it was not possible for man, one man under the heavens, whether friend or foe, justly to find fault with him. "Which of you convinces me of sin?" He lived such a life that angels could not find fault with him; he lived such a life that even devils acknowledged that he was the Holy One of God; he lived such a life, that justice itself could find no deficiency, superfluity, or fault of any kind; yes, that God himself in the solemn majesty of his holiness, did from time to time testify, "This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased." Now then, this spotless life, this meritorious life, this perfect life, was not for himself. You must, as far as the Lord enables you, lose sight of your own life altogether, the good and the bad, and let his life be your life, let his righteousness be your righteousness, and then you will be very much like him. The more you receive his righteousness as that in which the Lord approves of you, as that by which you have peace with God, as that by which you have fellowship with God, then you will be like him. So that, to be like him, you must walk with him, out of your own righteousness, and out of your own name, in his own righteousness. No man ever lived such a life as he did; he lived that life that no man ever could live; and he lived that life for everyone that receives him and believes in him. Ah, says the tried believer, then why should I be discouraged? If I had to look to the Lord in my own name or my own righteousness, in whole or in part, then I might indeed be discouraged; but if I am to walk with God in the righteousness of Immanuel, in the righteousness of Jehovah, Jehovah my righteousness; ah, then, why should I be discouraged? Let me rather fall in with the Psalmist, and say, "I will go in the strength of the Lord God; I will make mention of your righteousness, even of yours only." So, "We will go with you." We go, then, with him by his own righteousness, and it is this that makes us like him. God has predestinated his people to be conformed to the image of Christ; and I am sure to be clothed in his righteousness is one essential of conformity to that image. Second, did any person ever die such a death as he died? You and I may die a penal death, but we do not, in dying

that penal death, atone for one of our sins, we do not bring to justice, or law any honor; that penal death will leave us just where it found us. But the Savior's death was a death that embodied all the curses of the law, all the sins of the people; and by that death he destroyed the sting of death, namely, sin; he destroyed death because he destroyed the cause of death, sin, and brought life and immortality to light. So then, we are to walk with God, not by the kind of death that we are to die; but we are to walk with God by the death of Jesus Christ; and the best feature of our death will be that we shall die in the faith of what Christ has done. Do you not see, then, that everything that has a tendency to separate us from God is put away? Why, it would not be consistent with Christ's righteousness, or oneness with that righteousness; it would not be consistent with what Christ has done in his death; it would not be consistent with the Holy Spirit's work in thus uniting us to God by the life and death of Christ; it would not be consistent with the life and death of Christ to be separated from the love of God. No wonder, therefore, the apostle well understood the order of his mediation, no wonder that he should say that "there is no separation from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus." Then, third, whoever rose such a resurrection as Christ did? He rose the resurrection of others. When you rise from the dead, it will be by his life, not your own, for Christ took up his life for us; you will rise in his image, by virtue of oneness with him. So that he rose the resurrection of others. None ever rose such a resurrection as his was. His was a resurrection so well pleasing to God that God himself raised him from the dead; his resurrection was so pleasing to God that the Holy Spirit quickened him from the dead; quickened by the Eternal Spirit: his resurrection was so pleasing to God that God surrounded that resurrection with the presence of angels, and followed that resurrection by the descent of the Eternal Spirit, and the ingathering of thousands of souls, for "with great power gave they testimony of the resurrection of Jesus Christ, for great grace was upon them all." Here, then, we will go with you in your own righteousness; we will go with you in the achievement of your death; we will go with you in the triumphs of your resurrection; your resurrection is our resurrection; "When Christ, who is our life, shall appear, then shall we also appear in glory with him." Then, fourth, whoever ascended to heaven as Christ did? Wherein is the difference between Enoch, who was translated to heaven, and Christ ascending, where is the difference between the two? You that know the Lord would not, of course, be at a loss for a moment to point out the difference between the two. And the difference is this, Jesus Christ, ascended to heaven by his own personal worth, by virtue of the victory he had wrought; that he had led captivity captive, had spoiled principalities and powers; and, therefore, in his own right, in his own worth, in his own worthiness, he ascended to heaven. But how was Enoch translated? By his own worth or doing, in whole or in part? Does not the word of God declare that by faith Enoch was translated? So that Enoch ascended by the ascension, of Jesus Christ. Christ ascended on the ground of his own worth, and your rising into heaven will be by the ascension of the dear Savior. You will go as he went; he went in his own personal right and worth; and you will ascend on high by his righteousness, by his death, by his achievement, by his resurrection. And then, fifth, who ever sat at the right hand of God as Christ does? See the solemnity of that question in Jeremiah, "Who is this that has engaged his heart to approach unto me?" What wonderful person is this that he could reach the right hand of God, the presence of God, and that after the highest order of things that existed, for he has ascended far above all heavens? What other person ever reached that? And why could no other person reach that? For two reasons; first, because no other person was what he was, God and man in one person; and second, because no other person had done or could do what he has done. So then, if we are found in the presence of God, where there is fulness of joy, and at the right hand of God, where there are pleasures for evermore, it must be by Jesus Christ being there. Stephen well understood this when he saw the Son of man standing

on the right hand of God, and said, "Lord Jesus, receive my spirit." Here then, we may well say with our text, "We will go with you." And then the Savior also abides by the right hand of God in a way that no other ever did, or ever could. How did Adam abide in Paradise? By a continued obedience; and when that obedience failed, Adam ceased to be at God's right hand; that is, he ceased to be in Paradise. Now then, the Lord Jesus Christ continues at the right hand of God by an obedience that is done, that is finished, that is complete. There is an eternity of righteousness that keeps him there, without another particle of obedience; there is a sacrificial perfection that keeps him there, without anything more done; it is done. If you can understand this, Adam stood righteous so long as he continued to obey; but Jesus Christ, being God as well as man, threw an eternity into his life and his death. He will not continue there some thousands of years, and then say, Well, now, I have continued as long as the work that I did in my humiliation will entitle me to continue, and so I must continue no longer, unless I go and die again. No, no such thing as that; his righteousness is eternal. Hence the life, the joy, and the glory we have are everlasting; the mercy we have is everlasting; the love wherewith we are loved everlasting; the kingdom we inherit is everlasting; the inheritance incorruptible, undefiled, and that fades not away. Now this is the order of God with man, and of man with God. Can anything be simpler? Here, by Christ Jesus, then, we walk with God. There is something to my mind very sweet in this, that Christ's continuation to eternity in his glory is founded upon that that is finished, that is completed; so that none of the sins of the people of God while in a state of nature makes the slightest difference whatever to Christ's work; his work remains the same; and whatever things may befall them after they are called by grace, it does not touch his work, they are just the same there; does not alter them as they stand there; does not alter that; and whatever diseases or afflictions may attend their last hours, does not affect them as they stand there. You see, the thing is done. That is where Satan is defeated. If there were a little something for the creature to do, and Satan could slip in a hint at your dying hour, he would say, Well, with all your profession I have got you at last. But it is done, it is finished; "You are complete in him."

I now notice, secondly, *the reason*: "God is with you." This is the best of all reasons that can be assigned. Here God is with us in every sense. When you can find out a respect in which God is against Christ, then you may find out a respect in which God is against the Christian. The Christian is one with Jesus. And the apostle beautifully argues upon this, "Who shall lay anything to the charge of God's elect? It is Christ that died; yes, rather, that is risen again at the right hand of God and therefore he sums up the whole in this way, "If God be for us, who then can be against us?" "We have heard that God is with you," in a way he never was with Adam, in a way he is not even with archangels, in a way he never was with the Jews, in a way he never was with any other. Are there any other people under the heavens with whom God is as he is with his own people? Has he not passed by the nature of angels, and taken upon him the seed of Abraham? Is he not flesh of our flesh, and bone of our bone? Is there such a oneness between God and the creature to be seen anywhere else as in this wondrous order of things, by Christ Jesus the Lord? We may well cleave to Jesus. Then you will perceive that here is a very solemn contrast implied in this last clause; "We will go with you, for God is with you." Oh, the depravity of human nature! Oh, the power of the prince of darkness! Oh, the benighted, lost condition of the souls of men! You cannot assign a more powerful reason why the natural man will either fly from you, or fly at you, than that God is with you. God with that man! The last man in the world that I would go with. That Noah, why he is a free-grace man; I would not go into his ark; I would not believe there is a flood coming; I would not believe his ark is the way of escape. I despise that high-doctrine man, with his little bit

of religion; why, it is only three hundred cubits long, and fifty cubits wide, and thirty cubits high; who would be with him? They all fled from him, and we do not read that one wished to go into the ark. And oh, how few were saved; only eight souls! Here is the world, we have at this time about twelve hundred millions, the population of the globe; that is, of course, a comparative guess; but I should imagine the population of the globe was larger than then now; and the reason is, that suppose the average of man's life at that time was nine or ten hundred years, and if some of them lived twelve or thirteen hundred, for although Methuselah is the oldest we have an account of, it does not follow he was the oldest man, and therefore the average of human life being so long, the deaths so few, the population of the globe at the time the world was destroyed must have been tremendous; perhaps impossible even to give a rough guess. And yet only eight saved! "We will go with you, for God is with you;" the very reason men flee from you. And how few came out of Sodom with Lot! Nor should we have had a nation come out of Egypt with Moses if God himself had not forced them out; and they got back again as soon as they could; they went back in heart, and made themselves captains to go back again. And when Moses got into the wilderness, he found that he had brought but very few out with their hearts; they left their hearts behind. What! go with that Jeremiah, that high-doctrine Jeremiah; talking so much about an infallible covenant; that the sun, and moon, and stars may fall before God's covenant be broken! How few there were went with him! And so, of all the after prophets. But why do I speak like this? Why should I take the prophets, Elijah and the rest of them, that had to feel they were left comparatively alone? Let us come down to the person spoken of in our text. Here is Jesus Christ; why did men fly from him? Because God was with him; and men were blinded by the devil, inspired by Satan, and they fled from him; even his own disciples at last, not from wickedness, but from weakness, forsook him and fled. And men loaded him, as you are aware, with all the insults and the evil names they could, and represented him through their own representations of him. Everybody hated him; and the few that became his followers were a sect everywhere spoken against. "We will go with you, for God is with you," is not the language of nature, but the language of grace; not the language of the old Adam creature, but the language of the new creature; not the language of the man that is a sinner, and nothing but a sinner, but the language of the man that is a believing, a sensible sinner, feels his need of mercy. So, with the apostles. We go with those apostles! There was not a class of men upon the surface of the earth looked at in such an odious light as were the apostles. Why so? Because God was with them. No men who appeared so beautiful as did the apostles to Christians; but to those that were still in a state of nature, what were they? Why, the apostle says, "the offscouring of all things." I will just give you what the word there means, at the risk of being thought coarse. The original word, "the offscouring of all things," actually means the common sewage, everything that is filthy and loathsome to the very sight; and the apostle makes use of that degrading figure to show the light in which they were viewed by the world, how men hated and despised them. I cannot imagine anything that more awfully brings to light the depravity of human nature than for the truths of the gospel, for men of God, to be loathsome to the minds of men. "Crucify him, crucify him! away with him, away with him!" And the blaspheming Jews, to this day, blaspheme the Savior's name; and they do, in some of the synagogues, now meet once a year to repudiate, to curse, and to load the Savior's name with all the blasphemies they can rake up. They are not so eloquent at that in this country as they are in some other countries, because their love of money keeps them from going quite so far; they are obliged to keep within bounds. But the Jewish mind to this day is as bitter as it ever was; and if the Jews could be gathered together tomorrow, the six, or seven, or eight, or nine millions, or whatever their number may be, if they could be gathered together tomorrow, and go to their own land, and form themselves into a nation,

and have the military power, they would put down Christianity, and persecute it with as much madness as they crucified the Lord Jesus Christ. Such is the power of the prince of darkness over the minds of men. Then how sweet the contrast to that! 6th of John: "Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life." We may well beware of men; we may well have no confidence in men; we may well cease from man; we may well say with Micah, Therefore I will look unto the Lord; I will wait for the God of my salvation; my God will hear me." And while there is this contrast, the one hating the truth and the other loving the truth, there is yet an infinitely greater contrast to come. While to the one, dying in that state, shall be said, "Depart;" all your lifetime you have been saying to my truth, "Depart from me, I desire not the knowledge of your way;" and now, at the last, my language to you in return is, "Depart from me into everlasting fire, prepared for the devil and his angels." As for you; poor and needy ones, you have been thirsting for my truth; when you went to hear my servants preach, you went with this language, "Come, Lord Jesus, come quickly; show yourself in our midst; be with us; let us see your glory, let us hear your voice, let your word come with power, let your word come with sweetness; let me feel and know it is the word of God, the servant of God, and the house of God, and the presence of God. You who have been for years saying unto me, "Come, Lord Jesus," now in return I say to you, Come, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world. All, then, those whose language now is, "Come, Lord Jesus, come," he will respond by-and-bye with acclamations that no mortal voice can imitate, and bring you into possession of that glory that shall never be contracted, never fade, but roll on in full tide for ever and ever. Amen