

# WHO WILL GIVE EAR TO THIS?

## A SERMON

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“Be strong and of a good courage, fear not, nor be afraid of them: for the Lord your God, he it is that does go with you; he will not fail you, nor forsake you.”

Deuteronomy 31:6

IT is very easy to be strong when there is nothing to weaken us, very easy to be of good courage when there is nothing to discourage us, and very easy to rise above our fears when there seems nothing to be afraid of, and very easy to defy our foes when we feel that we are altogether out of their reach. And some tell us that we ought always to live in such a state as that; and no doubt the Christian would from day to day rise with wings as eagles, and run in the Lord's ways, and leave all those things that do perplex him, and look at them as so many passing clouds that will soon go off, while the Sun of righteousness shining upon him will never go down; and while God, the blessed God, who has undertaken his cause, as our text said, will never leave nor forsake him. But then the Lord intends that his people shall be made to feel the discouragements of the way; they shall be brought into such circumstances as shall make their poor frames tremble at times, and make their hearts tremble at times, and make them afraid of everything, and make them in the midst of this surrounding fear cry out unto the Lord. The Lord certainly would not hear so much from us as he does if he did not so lead us as to make us feel our need of his mercy and of his interposing hand. Hence the scriptures say this: “Out of the low dungeon called I unto the Lord.” “Out,” said another, “of the depths have I cried unto the Lord.” “From the ends of the earth, when my heart is overwhelmed,” said another, “I will cry unto the Lord. Lead me to the rock that is higher than I.” It is, therefore, when Satan comes in like a flood, by whatever agency, it is these experiences that make way for the language of our text, “Be strong and of a good courage, fear not, nor be afraid of them for the Lord your God, he it is that does go with you; he will not fail you, nor forsake you.”

I will divide our text into two parts. First, *the implied discouragement*. Secondly, *the expressed encouragement*.

First, I will notice *the implied discouragement*. And though I have left the encouragement for the second and last part of our text, yet, as I describe the discouragement, I shall of course as I go along set the encouragement over against the discouragement; and in so doing I hope to hold a little fellowship with you in holy and in eternal things. For what, after all, is the gospel to us, if it does not come to us, if it does not take hold of us, if we do not feel a oneness with it, if we do not

feel that it is our gospel, and thereby acquire a hope that this God is our God? This is what from day to day we want. And what will heaven be but a realization in our souls in perfection of the love, and salvation, and glory of the blessed God? I will, then, first notice *the implied discouragement*. Now, I think, looking a little closely at the subject, that there were four things that discourage the people. First, what they were in themselves. Now this is a source of very great discouragement to the real Christian. The real Christian, feeling hardness instead of softness of heart, unbelief instead of faith, enmity against many of the Lord's dealings instead of entire acquiescence with him in those dealings; rebellious where he would be submissive; feeling all this, and then sometimes, perhaps, stumbling here, and stumbling there; if he come into a difficulty, instead of managing it with patience, and standing fast, he staggers at this and that and the other, and his daily experience proves unto him what a poor creature he is; so that he has all his journey through causes to loathe himself in his own sight. The man, therefore, that knows what he is in his own heart finds this is a source of very great discouragement, as described in the 7th of the Romans, and in many other parts of the word of the Lord. Now what is the encouragement, then, we are to set over against this? Well, we are to set over against this, faith in what the Lord Jesus Christ has done. You see, we can feel no real encouragement before God all the time there is a sin, whether in heart or life, between us and God. It is sin inwardly, as well as sin outwardly, that discourages the people of God, and until that matter is settled and removed, there is no real encouragement before God, because we see what a hell sin has lighted up, and we see what a hell it must bring us to if we are left to its demerit. Feeling this, and unable by anything we can do to lay hold of the promises, and call them ours, we thus become discouraged, cast down, shut up, and afraid of life, and afraid of death, and afraid of everything; we eat ashes like bread; that is an expression to denote that we have nothing but griefs, and doubts, and fears, and trials, to live upon. That is very humble fare, and very trying fare. Of course, we are not to take the ashes literally; we must take them, of course, in a figurative sense. And so many a Christian has hardly anything but gall, bitterness, and sorrow, sometimes, to live upon for days, and weeks, and months, yes, and sometimes for years; so that "the heart" indeed, as the wise man said, "knows its own bitterness." And it is a mercy we are not obliged in detail always to state our bitter experiences to others; but we can generally tell where it exists, and it exists everywhere more or less where the Lord himself is the teacher. Now, then, where in this matter is the encouragement? The encouragement stands here. What did Jesus Christ come into the world for? Did he come into the world to save good people? Did he come into the world to save righteous people? Did he come into the world to save deserving people? Did he come into the world to save excellent people? Why, all this would be a contradiction in terms; because if they were good, and righteous, and holy, we could not then talk about their being saved, because in that case they would not be lost. What then did he come into the world to save? I do not believe that he came into the world to save anything but sinners; and, I say it with reverence, if he had he could not have saved anything else; for, according to the blessed God's own testimony, there is nothing else in the world. "The Lord looked down from heaven upon the children of men, to see if there were any that did understand, and seek God. They are all gone aside, they are all together become filthy; there is none that does good, no, not one." Now the apostle sums up the encouragement that is set over against the discouragement in this great matter when he says, "This is a faithful saying;" ah, it is a faithful saying, a truthful saying; as though the apostle should say, It may well be so said, it may well be so spoken; as though he should say, There is not a greater truth in the Bible, there is not a greater truth recognized by the people of God; there is not a greater truth that you can name, than "that Jesus Christ came into the world to save sinners, and that the blood of Jesus Christ, God's own Son, cleanses from all sin." Here, then,

is our encouragement. So that we are constrained, being thus discouraged from self, we are constrained thus to step, as it were, out of self into the faith of Jesus Christ; to live a life of faith in what Jesus Christ has done, and while on the one hand we are discouraged that discouragement is a season of indescribable refreshing to the soul. When the Lord comes in with "I have blotted out, as a thick cloud, your transgressions; and as a cloud, your sins; return unto me; for I have redeemed you;" when he is pleased to step in in this way by his dear Son, and by him say, "Be strong;" when he brings home the word with power, it does make you strong, it makes you strong in confidence, it makes you strong in love to the blessed God, strong in your attachment to an eternal world, and in decision for God. All the flames of fire men could light, or all the tortures they could inflict, could not have quenched the love that the woman we read of had in her soul when she washed the Savior's feet with tears, wiped them with the hairs of her head, anointed, them with costly ointment; for she was strong in faith, and strong in love, giving glory to God, and of good courage.

It matters not who the adversaries are, how numerous, or whatever their position; when the Lord steps in, the daughter of Zion can then shake her head at her mightiest foes, and rejoice that this God is her God for ever and forever. I must just stop here for a moment, because it is possible, I may be speaking to some perhaps somewhat thoughtless about this; go to a place of worship, it is right that you should do to, but perhaps have never had any real sight and sense of what you are. Now I must say in this part, then, to those who are unconcerned, I would state it to you in all affection and solemnity, that if we are not acquainted with our sinful state now while we live, so as to be able to seek the Lord and to cry to him for mercy, we may thus live unacquainted with our sinful state, so as not to seek the Lord, nor to cry to him, I would just say to such, The time with you it not very far when your eyes will be opened to your sad condition, when you will lift up your eyes in hell; and then it is indeed too late, for that is a place where hope or mercy never came. How happy, then, you that are unconcerned, if the Lord should be pleased, for he alone can wake the dead, he alone can give life to the dry bones, he alone can pour the spirit of grace and supplication into your sin-benumbed soul, what a mercy for you if while you are living you should become conscious of what you are, made miserable through your condition as a sinner, driven asunder from the world, and constrained to seek the Lord, and the words should follow you up, "Let the wicked forsake his way, and the unrighteous man his thoughts"! And what shall he then do? work out a righteousness of his own? No. Try to save himself? No. Do something, and then come before the Lord and plead that? No. "Let him turn unto the Lord, and he will have mercy." Ah, mercy! Then you will join with us who are saved, and we will join with you, to sing of his mercy. "He will have mercy; and our God," as some of us most happily know from our own soul's experience, as well as from the testimony of others, as well as from the Holy Scriptures, that "our God will abundantly pardon." And your thorn and briar character will be taken away, and you will be, instead of that, at a fir tree, and as a myrtle tree; "and it shall be unto the Lord for a name, for an everlasting sign, that shall not be cut off." So, then it is a mercy to know what discouragement is from what we are; so far to as to see there is no way of escape but by faith in the precious blood of the Lamb. This, then, is one part of the discouragement; over against that is set the work of Jesus Christ and the mercy of the blessed God by him. Here, then, all is clear; here God it just, and saves by grace; here there is no condemnation; here is infinite welcome to all God has, to all that heaven contains. And hence the great Mediator of the new covenant said, and he that can hear that voice, and understand that voice, and has a correspondent feeling responding to that voice, "Him that comes to me I will in no way cast out." Ah, poor sinner, where else would you go? Ungodly nature that you have, where else would you go? Condemned as you are, where else would you go?

Wretched and outcast as you are as a sinner considered, where else would you go? Standing in life's uncertain path where else would you go? Death will presently without mercy cut you down, where else would you go but to Jesus Christ? Having in your body a soul that is immortal, destined to live through endless ages, where else would you go but unto Him that said, "Him that comes to me I will in no way cast out"? Thanks to his dear name that he still receives sinners and eats with them!

The second source of discouragement that I name would be the power of the enemies. The enemies of these Israelites, the Amorites, and Amalekites, and Canaanites, were deadly enemies; they had no feelings towards the Israelites but those of the deadliest kind. And they had great power on their side, and the Israelites, when they lost sight of the Lord, were afraid of these mighty enemies; looked at them in their stature, and in their number, and in their warlike character, and trembled before them. And sometimes the Lord does suffer enemies to give his people a great deal of trouble; but we see in all cases where they are enabled to leave themselves with the Lord, we always see where the victory terminates. Hence it is that Moses was driven out for a time; Pharaoh gave him a great deal of trouble. Ah, say you, that was the fault of Moses; he killed the Egyptian. Well, he did, he did wrong; but it is our mercy the Lord does not forsake his people on that or on any other ground whatever. His act was wrong; his motive, perhaps, was right. Now Pharaoh gave the Israelites a very great deal of trouble, subjected them to hard work; but you see that Pharaoh's power was limited, and so the sorrows of the Israelites were limited. The witnesses are to prophesy in sackcloth three days and a half; but at the end of these mystic three days and a half the Spirit of the Lord enters into them, they revive, down go their enemies, and all is right with them. And so, when we come, for instance, to individual cases, we see that Potiphar's wife gave Joseph a great deal of trouble, and got him into prison for two years. But Potiphar's wife sank into silence, and is now most likely in hell; while Joseph was taken care of, and rose to all that God designed he should rise to. And so old Jezebel, she gave Elijah a great deal of trouble, and Elijah thought it was best to make his escape. But you know the end to which Jezebel came, and you know the end to which Elijah came. There is considerable difference between the ends of the two; the one painted hypocrite was thrown out of window and eaten by dogs; the other was translated, and went to heaven in a chariot of fire. And so, it was king Saul gave David a great deal of trouble; but king Saul fell in battle, while David died full of honors, riches, and days, and died in the Lord. Shimei gave David a great deal of trouble, cursed David, and said all sorts of things of him; but we see the end to which Shimei came. And I need not multiply instances; I need not remind you of how the saints of old, not only in the Old Testament, but also in the New Testament time, how their adversaries have been suffered to have for a little time partial dominion over them, and they have been afraid of them. Hence Jacob honestly confesses, he says, "I am afraid of my brother Esau." Well, but Jacob, he is your brother. Yes, he is; but then he is an enemy, he has been, and I am afraid of him. But the Lord put it to rights. So, then, it is the people of God are so placed sometimes they are obliged to make that fear which they have of some of their adversaries a matter of prayer before God.

Now my text says "Be strong and of a good courage, fear not, nor be afraid of them," God's eye is upon them. They may shoot at you, but they will miss their mark; God will shoot at them, and he will not miss his mark. Haman may be in a great hurry to get the gallows up for Mordecai; but if Haman had known who was to be hanged on that gallows, of course he would not have got the gallows up at all. And who would have thought it? Why, if anyone had whispered to Haman, "You

will come to the gallows.” “I come to the gallows? Why, I am worth millions in money. I am the favorite of king Ahasuerus. Why, the king never does anything without me. Why, I have got a decree passed against these abominable high-doctrine people, against these singular people, against these Jewish people. I come to the gallows? You talk like a fool; why, it is impossible, such a man as I am! I come to the gallows? Why, even queen Esther, why, she has made a feast, and nobody invited to it but myself and the king. I come to the gallows!” But see, in a moment the Lord steps in, down goes Haman; there he is, gibbeted, just as he ought to be; and there is Mordecai, clothed with royal apparel, on the royal steed. “Thus, shall be done unto the man whom the king delights to honor.” Have you, therefore, enemies? “Be strong and of a good courage, fear not, nor be afraid of them: for the Lord your God, he it is that does go with you; he will not fail you, nor forsake you.” And if there is a child of God in this realm, if there is a child of God in all the world, that can go upon his knees, and in a spirit of prayer and faith pour out his soul to God against me, I would say, Better for me that I never should have been born, than that I should be that wretch, that enemy to the people of God, that any one child of God should have it in his power to pour out his soul in secret before God against me. I am a damned man if a child of God can do it, you may depend upon it, for the prayer of faith is sure to be heard. Why, my hearer, in olden time, when mighty armies came in upon the people of God, when the Ethiopian came in with ten hundred thousand, a million of people, they cried to God, and the Lord smote the million people, and they fled. When the Edomites, and Moabites, and Amalekites came up against them, let Jehoshaphat cry to God, and that prayer is heard, and the enemy is defeated. Ah, what a precious privilege it is to entreat the Lord our God! I suppose some of you are not altogether strangers to a path of this kind. This is a matter that belongs specially to ministers. If you wish to be cursed by the world, if you wish to be belied and slandered, preach the gospel successfully, abide firmly by the truth, and if the devil does not stir up all the agents he can to lower you in the estimation of others, then my name is not what it is. But, nevertheless, “Alexander the coppersmith did me much evil;” it was an awful prayer, but it was dictated by the eternal Spirit of God, “the Lord reward him according to his works.” Oh, my hearer, let me wash the saints feet, rather than hurt one hair of their heads; let me be a doorkeeper in the house of my God, rather than dwell among the wicked that would injure the saints, the servants, the people, the church, the cause of the Lord Jesus Christ. “He that touches you touches the apple of his eye.” So then, you tried ones, be strong in faith in the Lord Jesus Christ, and of good courage; fear not, nor be afraid of your adversaries, because greater is He that is with you than all that can be against you. Well, but say some, do you wish your enemies evil? No, I do not; I would pray, if it were the Lord's will, that he would open their eyes and turn their hearts. But if God is pleased, to send my prayer back again into my own bosom, and rain fire and brimstone upon them, I must be silent, and say “How deep are your judgments, O Lord God Almighty you have judged righteously after all.” For the saints must, however solemn his judgments finally acquiesce with those judgments, as well as sing of his eternal mercies. There are plenty of professors in our day to whom these solemn things apply. There are persons, men and women too, in town and country, that get into the churches, that are brought there by the devil. There always were tares among the wheat, and always will be.

The third source of discouragement to the Israelites would be that that befell others by the way. Oh, what numbers fell in the wilderness, never reached the promised land! Ah, says the true Israelite, I am afraid I shall turn out some day like that; I am afraid my wicked heart will harden, harden, harden, and I shall first go to chapel once on the Lord's day, then I shall go once a fortnight, then I shall go once a month, then once in about three months, and so by slow degrees forsake the

assembly of the saints. Then I am offended when I am told of it; I kick at the minister, I kick at the people, I kick at the place; the next thing is I kick at the truth. Ah, but if you are a trembler you will not turn out like this. Those who thus go away never were tremblers, they were mere formal professors; and if you just touch them in their pockets, touch them in a way that will call upon them to make their profession somewhat costly, they will fly off like chaff from the wheat, or like chips when the axe is put to the block. David said, "Shall I offer unto the Lord that which costs nothing?" Yes, say they, to be sure I will, and I will take care it shall cost me nothing. And thus, the real child of God, then, sometimes when, he looks at what befalls others, fears that he shall turn out the same. Ah, but you will not if you are thus trembling, if you are thus humbled. And the Lord knows what your heart is; he knows whether you want to follow him or not, or whether you are trembling lest you should forsake his ways; whether you are halting inwardly between two opinions; whether you shall be religious or not, or whether it shall be free will or free grace; he knows whether you are wavering or not. And he knows, on the other hand, that there are times when your soul is so taken up with eternal things, that you cannot, with an unpresumptuous eye, as the poet expresses it, look up to the throne of God, and cannot say,

"You have my heart, it shall be yours;  
Yours it shall ever be."

Then take courage. If you are a trembler like this, if you are sincere like this, if you love the truth, if you cannot truly say that there is nothing, no, nothing, you can think of so welcome to your inmost soul as the tidings of the gospel, if that be the case, these tidings represent the Holy Three; and if these tidings be so welcome to your inmost soul, what is that but the welcome of the Holy Spirit, of the Savior, and of God the Father? "There are three that bear record in heaven, Father, Word, and Holy Ghost; these three are one." And the truths of the gospel represent these three in covenant relationship, and to make the truths of the gospel welcome to your inmost soul is to make God welcome to your soul. If, then, this be your feeling, you will never go back; your religion has a root in it, an immortal root, a living root, and bears fruit, and so you shall endure unto the end.

The fourth source of discouragement would be the weakness of the people. Hence the people were right enough in one respect; they said, "We are not able to take the land." That is true; but then they reckoned apart from the Lord then. But that is a source of great discouragement, to ministers especially. I suppose there is no class of Christians feel so much weakness as ministers. You think they have a very nice time of it, I suppose. Why, it seems hardly half a dozen hours sometimes from one time to the other between the times I am in the pulpit. I go out of the pulpit, and write a few letters, read a few chapters, sleep a few hours, why, it is time to go into the pulpit again. Here am I, I don't know what to do. I have preached from this and this. I have preached from every chapter and every text almost. I don't think I can go on any more. Poor, foolish mortal; just as though I had drawn all the water from the wells of salvation; just as though I had explained all the mysteries of the Bible; just as though I had eaten up all the green pastures; just as though I had emptied the storehouse; just as though Jesus Christ, whose fulness is infinite, had got nothing more, and I must give it up. Now, I say, ministers do in their work feel a great deal of this weakness; so that the apostle Paul even said yes, I think that where there is the most grace there is the deepest sense of weakness, even he says, "We are not sufficient of ourselves to think anything as of ourselves. Who is sufficient for these things? Our sufficiency is of the Lord." And if it were not, I am sure we should fail, and we should not keep our chapels so full even as we are favored to do;

none of us keep them as full as we could wish, but even as full as they are we should not keep them if the Lord himself was not our sufficiency. Now the people of God, all of them, feel much discouraged from this sense of weakness. Have you not sometimes listened to a gospel sermon, and said, There is a beautiful sermon; it passed before me like a paradisiacal scene: the fig tree, the vine, the pomegranate, all sorts of trees and beautiful fields and everything; and there was I vexed like Tantalus; it seemed to come near to me, but I could get nothing? These weaknesses, then, discourage us. Where, then, is our encouragement? Our encouragement is in the Lord. "Be strong in the grace that is in Christ Jesus." And there are times when he strengthens us: why, we can gather the ears of corn, and eat, and rejoice most merrily, though the Pharisees may be offended at our so doing; there are times when we can drink all the wine, and ask the Master for some more; to turn the water into wine, and give us some more, and as merry and as happy as we can wish to be. There are times when we can climb up, shall I say, the fig tree, as it were, and get some of the ripe fruit, and rejoice and be as happy; yes, our souls, before we are aware, make us like the chariots of Ammi-nadib; that is when the Lord is pleased to strengthen us. These, then, are the four sources of discouragement. First, our sins; over against them is set the work of Jesus Christ. Second, our enemies; over against them is set the Lord God Almighty. Third, that which has befallen others; over against that is set the testimony of our consciences, that in simplicity and sincerity we make a profession of the name of Jesus Christ. And the last discouragement is our weakness; over against that is set this delightful truth, "Trust you in the Lord forever: for in the Lord Jehovah is everlasting strength."

I will now hasten to the other part, and I may say to the conclusion. "For the Lord your God, he it is that does go with you." Now I want your attention rather strictly here for a moment or two. You will observe that the Old Testament dispensation was a mixture of the unconditional and of the conditional. Their coming out of Egypt was unconditional, therefore certain, it did not fail; but the individual persons getting through the wilderness was conditional, depending upon their continuing in the covenant: they failed in the condition, and because of unbelief could not enter in. Nevertheless, there were some left, and their entering into the land of Canaan also was unconditional. The Lord did not divide the Jordan, or throw down the walls of Jericho, conditionally, but absolutely and unconditionally. And there is another point here which I wish you to notice, that undoubtedly what gave unconditionality to some parts of that dispensation was this one thing, that their coming out of Egypt, and the nation as a nation getting possession of Canaan, and keeping possession of it, with the exception of the Babylonish captivity, down to the coming of Christ; the secret of all the unconditional part of it was that Christ Jesus was to descend from the tribe of Judah, from the house of David, and was to be born in the land of Canaan, at Bethlehem. Therefore, the idea was that just so far as Jesus Christ was there, so far everything was unconditional; but in those departments where he was not, except in type, those departments were conditional. In the first place, the priesthood was conditional; hence it passed from house to house, you see the several branches of Aaron's family. The royalty was conditional; hence it passed from Saul to David, and so on. And of course, the ultimate possession of the land and temple were also conditional. By-and-bye that which made their possession of the land unconditional was taken away, namely, Christ Jesus; he was born, he lived, he died, he rose from the dead. Now, said the Savior, now I have had a worldly kingdom for hundreds of years; for that was a worldly sanctuary and a worldly kingdom, though a typical kingdom; but "now my kingdom is not from hence." Now, then, you see from that that it was a mixed dispensation; that the things that were conditional failed, passed away; but those things that were unconditional, their coming out of Egypt because

Christ was there, possessing the land because Christ was there, remaining there till Christ came, lived, and died, all this was unconditional, and therefore fulfilled. But when Christ was gone, then there is nothing unconditional; all then remains conditional; the condition failed, the people are scattered to this day. Now let us take our text on new covenant ground. What a mercy for us that in eternal things there is no conditionality! Here, then, let us take our text away from that dispensation, and let us view it by Christ Jesus. "The Lord your God, he it is that does go with you." There is no conditionality here. Does he love us freely or conditionally? Has he chosen us of works, or is election of grace? And has Jesus Christ wrought salvation conditionally, or did he get all his mission from God, or part of it from God, and part of it from man? All of it from God, finished the work the Father gave him to do. Does the Holy Spirit do his work conditionally? does he do his work on the ground of something good in you? Certainly not. Does he carry it on the ground of something good in you? Certainly not.

"Not of our duties or deserts,  
But of his own abiding grace."

Here, then, there was an unconditionality in some things in that dispensation; but here, in the new covenant, everything is unconditional. The Son of God is not yes and no, but yea and amen; the word is not yes and no, but yea and amen; the promise is not yes and no, but yea and amen. Now, then, in conclusion, let us see how the Lord goes with us. "The Lord your God, he it is that does go with you." First, by the perfection of his dear Son. He will not behold a fault in you. "He will not behold iniquity in Jacob, nor see perverseness in Israel;" consequently, "the Lord his God is with him, and the shout of a king is among them." That is how he goes with you. Secondly, he so goes with you as to keep you close to himself. All his dealings with us in providence, all our trials, everything that befalls us, all is to keep us close to Jesus Christ; running with patience the race set before us, looking unto Jesus. If you want any providential favor, ask it in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ; pleading, on the ground of the promise in Christ, that your heavenly Father knows you have need of these things; plead his name; his name always has been, is, and ever will be, all-prevailing. That is the way the Lord goes with us. But I am not myself satisfied with a one-sided religion. If the Lord go with us, I think it naturally follows that we shall go with him. Now how would you wish to walk with God? I cannot walk with God; I never attempt it, I never think of it, I never dream of it, and have not for years, of walking with the blessed God in any way but by the perfection of his dear Son. "You who were afar off are now in Christ Jesus made nigh by the blood of Christ." There God is with me, and I with him, and grace and love for ever reign. He will go with you. And my text says, "He will not fail you." Our dearest friends sometimes fail us; not from any fault on their part, but from circumstances, their want of power. But then the Lord cannot be subjected to any of those casualties or circumstances.