

THE WALLS OF JERUSALEM FINISHED

A SERMON

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“So the wall was finished in the twenty and fifth day of the month Elul, in fifty and two days.” Nehemiah 6:15

IF there be any service rendered to God in conformity with his truth, and in conformity with his worthiness to be honored and glorified, then no thanks unto the creature, but unto that grace which alone can take our hearts away from the things with which they are by nature one, and set them upon the honor of the blessed God, and our eternal welfare thereby. Hence at this time the main body of the people cared but little for the house of the Lord or for the walls of Jerusalem; but there were some that did care. And when Nehemiah learned that the walls were broken down and the gates burned, and that the people were in affliction and trouble, he was raised up by the Lord to intercede, and favored to take practically those steps that brought about the happy issue described in our text, that “the wall was finished.” Now without those walls the people were in an exposed state, and that exposed state represents the exposed state to death and to eternal condemnation that we are all in by nature. These walls were the Lord’s way of protecting the people, and therefore their building the walls was his way of their seeking him. Hence frequently this imagery is used in the Christian sense: “Building up yourselves in your most holy faith;” and again, “Rooted, and grounded, and built up in him.” So that their literal labors were a figure of what the apostle means when he said, “Working out your own salvation.” That is, they were in bondage and in dangers, some of which will come before us as we go along, and they worked, being led by the Lord, and worked out their own deliverance by the Lord being with them, and thus worked out with fear and trembling, with great wariness, caution, and care, their own salvation.

Now there are four things. The four things are these: First, *the proper and mystic meaning of the wall*. Secondly, *the completeness of the wall*: “The wall was finished in the twenty and fifth day of the month Elul, in fifty and two days.” Thirdly, *the doctrine of limitations, indicated by the time in which the wall was finished*. Fourth and lastly, *the dedication of the wall*. These are the four things, taking what is expressed and what is implied, which our text sets before us.

First, then, *the proper Christian and spiritual meaning of the wall*, this wall representing God's salvation, and representing God's truth, and God's Christ, and God's ministers. Hence Jeremiah is called "a brazen wall," because he stood in defense of the real people of God, in defense of the truth, the honor, and the glory of God. But let us trace this matter out. First, then, it signifies God's salvation. And if we would enjoy the Lord as being on our side, it must be by the walls of salvation. "In that day shall this song be sung in the land of Judah; We have a strong city; salvation will God appoint for walls and bulwarks." Here you see Christ's salvation; and my heart goes out with love to God while I say it, that Christ as God's salvation is the way in which we are to be defended. For you to be defended by the salvation Christ has wrought; for you to be defended by his atonement; for you to be defended by his righteousness; well may it be said to be a strong city, salvation for walls and bulwarks; and well may it be said, "You will keep him in perfect peace" though I think the word there translated "peace" would have been more consistently rendered "safety," "you will keep him in perfect safety whose mind," in a way of hope, "is stayed on you." And then to show that this salvation continues forever, "Trust you" that enter in at the gates of truth, and have faith in God by the salvation of Christ, "trust you in the Lord forever: for in the Lord Jehovah is everlasting strength." If the Lord had made your works the means of defending you, oh, how many breaches there would have been in such a wall through which the enemy could come in! If the Lord had made our goodness the wall of defense, what a tottering wall it would have been! alas! alas! so much un-tempered mortar that it would not take a very heavy storm to throw the whole down. But if God will be my defense by the walls of salvation, then I will sing, "Salvation will God appoint for walls and bulwarks." That is the way the Lord defends his people.

Second, it means also freedom; 49th of Isaiah: "Your walls are continually before me." "A mother may forget her infant, yet will I not forget you. Behold, I have graven you upon the palms of my hands." "Your walls," by which I defend you, "are continually before me." I never forget your defense; if I were to forget that by which I defend you, I should forget you. If I forgot my dear Son as your shield, and the way in which I am on your side, I should forget you. Now mark, "Your children shall make haste; your destroyers, and they that made you waste, shall go forth of you." See how this was fulfilled. "Your children shall make haste." Whole families, husband and wife, sons and daughters, all of them worked at this wall. The wives and daughters of the men, good people, they all set to work; they were not afraid to work; they all put their shoulders to the wheel, those that were right-minded, to build this wall. "Your children shall make haste," and so they did; "everyone with one of his hands wrought in the work, and with the other hand held a weapon." "So the wall was finished in the twenty and fifth day of the month Elul, in fifty and two days;" whereas if it had been left to the drones it would not have been finished to this day. "Your children shall make haste." And what a blessing it is when the Lord causes his ministers to make haste in his service, and when he causes his people to make haste in his service, and quick in their prayers and praises, and alive to God, and makes them feel that there is nothing worth living for, for one moment in comparison of the great end that God has in view by this salvation! "Your destroyers, and they that made you waste, shall go forth of you." So, our sins, that laid us waste and would have destroyed us, they go away, and our enemies must go away, and our troubles must go away, and by-and-bye death itself must go away. What a blessed God is our God, then!

Thirdly, this wall of defense brings also superiority and perpetuity. "Thus says the Lord; Unto those that keep my sabbaths" and Christ is the sabbath, the antitypical sabbath, and so we must keep Christ as the end of the law, the end of the working days, "and choose the things that please

me,” that is, the Lord Jesus Christ; for if you choose Jesus Christ, then you choose in that one choice all the things that please God, “and take hold of my covenant” that is a remarkable scripture, “and take hold of my covenant.” There is a man, he says, Well, I do believe Jesus Christ is my only sabbath, my only rest, and I do believe that in choosing him I choose that that pleases God, and that all the things that please God are in Christ, so I have them all in one. But the Lord says, Here is something else, “my covenant.” What! a sworn covenant, a yea and amen covenant? That is high Calvinism. It is Bibleism, sir; it is gospelism, sir; it is the word of God, sir. Mark this; the persons who shall be so favored, who shall be citizens of Zion, that thus regard Christ as the true sabbath, and that choose him, and in choosing him choose all the things that please God, mark what follows; “and take hold of my covenant,” and in a way of belief, in a way of approbation, and setting your seal to that covenant that is ordered in all things and sure, “even unto them will I give in mine house and within my walls a place and a name better than of sons and of daughters.” That is, they were anxious that their name should descend to posterity; they had a great feeling for posthumous fame. Now the Lord, in contrast to that, said, I will give you a name better than sons and daughters could give you, better than an earthly genealogy; I will give you “an everlasting name, that shall not be cut off;” and that name is Jehovah; “This is the name wherewith she shall be called, Jehovah our righteousness:” that name is the name of the Heir of all things; the whole family in heaven are named after Jesus Christ.

Fourthly, it is also the way of tranquility. See how beautifully it all sounds out. “Violence,” where these walls of salvation are, where God thus dwells, for God dwells in this city; he is in the midst of her; he will help her, and that right early, “violence shall no more be heard in your land.” Violence was heard in heaven when angels fell; violence was heard in Eden when the human race fell; for the fall of Adam was not the fall of Adam merely, it was a crash that no doubt gratified all hell, and astounded all heaven, when the whole human race at that awful moment fell down, down, to the very gates of everlasting woe. The Jews apostatized, and violence was heard there; the Jews did violence to Jesus Christ, and to his holy apostles, and his people. But here is a new scene of things, “Violence shall no more be heard in your land;” you shall never fall as you stand in Christ, and you shall never turn enemy, to do any violence to any part of God’s truth or Zion, for “they shall not hurt nor destroy in all my holy mountain;” for this new earth, the promised land, shall be full of the knowledge of the Lord, as the waters cover the sea. “Violence shall no more be heard in your land, wasting nor destruction within your borders; but you shall call your walls Salvation, and your gates Praise.” And here the Lord dwells forever. “The Lord shall be your everlasting light.” Has the Lord said too much in saying that? If we take light to mean comfort, how many things have been our light for a time! but alas! some of us know what it is for many of our stars to have fallen into the grave, and can rise no more till the last great day. Human life, upon the whole, does not improve as we grow in age; no, it makes a wound here, a wound there, and you look back and say, Well, I have been preserved, but it makes me gloomy to look back and see the many things that I have gone through. This hope has been taken away, that prospect has been darkened; I have been thwarted here, and thwarted there; is there any higher clime where miserable man may get rid of this? Yes, there is. “You shall call your walls Salvation, and your gates Praise.” The sun shall be no more your light by day; neither for brightness shall the moon give light unto you; but the Lord shall be unto you an everlasting light, and your God your glory. Your sun shall no more go down; neither shall your moon withdraw itself; for the Lord shall be your everlasting light, and the days of your mourning shall be ended.” And there will be this difference between your retrospect then and your retrospect now; you look back upon many things with grief now; but you

will look back then upon all that now grieves you with gladness, and see that there was a need-be, and that the Lord made use of some of the worst of things to the best of purposes; that he brought good out of evil, straightness out of crookedness, light out of darkness, life out of death, and mercy out of misery. When you thus look back you will say, He has brought me by a right way to this city of everlasting habitation; and now that the days of my mourning are ended, and every tear is dried, my visual powers are clear; I can look back now through the sea of glass mingled with fire, with many fiery trials, can tune my harp anew, and feel that the victory is mine, heaven my home, the blissful city my abode, eternity before me, and I triumphantly happy for ever. The walls are finished.

“Tis finished, said his dying breath,
And shook the gates of hell.”

You will thus see that in these temporal circumstances there is a vast amount of meaning. Would you be safe forever? It must be by the walls of salvation. And would you be free? It must be by the walls of salvation. Would you be delivered from wasters and destroyers? It must be by the walls of salvation. And would you have the best of names? It must be in the same way, God’s salvation. And would you be where there is no violence, where there is no wasting of body or soul, substance or circumstance, no wasting of love or friendship, no wasting of consolation of any kind? It must be in the same way. Thus, the Lord himself shall be unto you your everlasting light, and your God your glory. Thus, then, I have pointed out the meaning of the wall, and a most delightful meaning it is. It makes my very soul cling to God with all my might, because it gives me hope. Sink a man into despair, and you spoil the man directly; away he goes. He says, I am out of hell for a little time; I may as well go on and enjoy all those sins that I enjoy the most; I can but be damned at last, and that will be my lot. But no; the gospel forbids the worst to despair. If I am speaking to one this morning that has been tempted to take the steps, the awful steps, I have just now hinted at; oh, think of no such thing all the time God is almighty, all the time his grace is unbounded, all the time he delights in mercy, all the time there is a ransom of infinite value, a righteousness of everlasting worth, promises yea and amen. And if the Lord should be pleased to give you a sight and sense of your need, and bring you to himself, then you will feel that while you are a great sinner, God’s salvation is great, God’s glory is great, and you will feel that you ought to sing, as Erskine says, “the loudest of them all.” “That we, through patience and comfort of the Scriptures, might have hope.”

We will now come down to the people. They had much discouragement, but before I speak of their discouragement, we will have a word upon their encouragement. Their encouragement lay, first, in prophecy; secondly, in the faithfulness of the blessed God to his word. Daniel, who lived about seventy years before Nehemiah, said in his 9th chapter, after setting before us, by the Holy Ghost, that beautiful representation of our glorious Messiah, he says, “The street shall be built again.” I apprehend that is Union Street. If anyone asks me which is the first street in the city of Zion, I always say, Union Street, that unites us to God the Father, unites us to Christ, unites us to the Holy Ghost, unites us to the everlasting God. “The street shall be built again:” that is a street the devil cannot get into. “Ah,” says Satan, “if I could but get that Union Street down, I don’t care for the side streets; I should soon get them. I never liked the doctrine of indissoluble union to Christ.” And yet God will teach his people that there is no salvation without it. “The street shall be built again, and the wall, even in troublous times.” Come, said Nehemiah, we have much

discouragement (and I will presently enumerate some of those discouragements, because they will apply to us); now, then, the Lord has said the wall shall be built. He has not said he hoped the people would build it, but it shall be done, shall be done. Yes, and he said something else, that it shall be built in troublous times. Ah, says one, I could hear the word very much better if it were not for so-and-so; but I am so perplexed and so troubled. I could pray better if I were not so perplexed and so troubled; and I could read the Bible oftener if I were not so troubled, and opposed, and annoyed. That is what you think. Well, but I could. Stop, let me give you a word upon that. If those outward troubles ceased, then would come on hardness, coldness, deadness, and indifference; and then, when the devil could not oppose you without, he would stir up your infidelity and carnality within, and you would say, When I was full of trouble, I had a great thirst to enjoy the things of God ; but now all is calm I seem very miserable.

“More the treacherous calm I dread
Than Tempests bursting o’er my head.”

But then, said one, you don't know; I come to chapel sometimes as full of rebellion as ever I can hold; and if I had not the trouble I should not. Well, I am not going to say anything in favor of rebellion, but I am glad you are so served; because I am sure when you are in trouble of mind you will feel that you have nothing to boast of. You come then just as you ought to come. And though I will not say a word, if I know it, in favor of anything that is wrong, yet I do say this, if I were asked the question, in which state of mind I would rather you should go and hear the word, the Pharisaic or the rebellious, give me the rebellious, if you must have the one or the other; because if you come saying, What a good creature I have been all the week! I think the Lord will bless me; I have been so very good, so very kind, so very pious, and so very nice, surely the Lord will bless me now; surely he just will not; you don't need his blessing; you have blessed yourself, and the Lord never blesses those that bless themselves; he never justifies those that justify themselves; he never sanctifies them that sanctify themselves; he never gratulates those that gratulate themselves. Do you see that? “What are my troubles for then? Why, to keep you from this, and to make you feel what a poor creature you are. “The wall shall be built in troublous times.” That scripture has been a wonderful help to me I do not know how many times since I have been a minister. I have been sorely tempted to run away from the work. When things have seemed crooked without and within, one thing and the other, I have felt, Well, I will just write and say I have nothing more to say, and I will not preach again, many times. The words have come, “The street shall be built again, and the wall, even in troublous times.” Then I will go on; I will not give up now; and I have found in going on that the Lord has proved true to his word. Now, then, Nehemiah prayed, as you are aware, to the Lord, he had scriptural authority to pray to the Lord, because the Lord had said, “The wall shall be built.” That has a literal as well as a mystical meaning; it not only means that the Savior should establish the union that God formed between him and his people, and that he should thus accomplish salvation, but it has an historical meaning as well, and we would take it as such, and be hereby encouraged. See how he prayed to the Lord to turn the king of Persia's heart in his favor. “Prosper, I pray you, your servant this day, and grant him mercy in the sight of this man.” And so, the king became so humbled and so docile, that Nehemiah said, “And I set”, Nehemiah had so got the king down, turned him into such a humble man, that “I set him a time.” Why, you do not know what you may do by prayer, when there is a real concern for the object. So, it was with Nehemiah; he was sincere before the Lord, and the Lord heard him and answered him; and so, they went to work, and the wall was finished. But then let us look at their discouragement.

And their discouragement was, first, because some among their own people said, "The strength of the bearers of burdens is decayed, and there is much rubbish" to get away; "so that we are not able to build the wall." Now that would discourage Nehemiah, because he saw some discouraged by it. In almost every church you will find some croakers, in almost every society; I was going to say in pretty many families. "We are not able to build the walls." Well, suppose you are not able to build the walls, what of that? Who thought you were able to build them? Nehemiah did not; but Nehemiah thinks God is able, and Nehemiah thinks that just as the time comes, he will give you all the wisdom and strength that is needed; that is what Nehemiah thinks. Well, it is true his strength is not decayed, but ours is. All the better, I am very glad your strength is decayed; for the apostle says, "When I am weak, then am I strong;" because, if I have no strength of my own, then that is done must be done by the strength of the Lord. They were not able to build the wall, then, but the Lord was able, stirred them up, and on they went. Never mind, you go on and try; there is something in that; you do not know what you can do till you try. Ah, but I have some very heavy burdens to bear. Well, forget them if you can; that is the best way; ask the Lord to enable you to bear them. Well, but I am so vexed by them. Well, do not be if you can help it. I have learned a few lessons in my time to take things comparatively easy. A thousand things, that would have broken my heart pretty well years ago, they cannot make any impression now. I am but a poor scholar in this; the apostle Paul was a great scholar in this department of the school of Christ: "I have learned," he says, "in whatsoever state I am" mind, he was not quivering or shaking when he said this, he knew what suffering's were as well as any man that ever existed, the Savior himself excepted, "in whatsoever state I am, therewith to be content," because I know it is the state that God intends for me; I will go on in his service with all the diligence, and zeal, and strength, and care he blesses me with. I will seek his kingdom, and his righteousness, even his only. The second thing that discouraged them was the bad name people gave them. That is a wonderful discouragement, and creates Nicodemuses that go by night, ashamed to show themselves in daylight. "What is this thing that you do? will you rebel against the king?" So they reproached them, and said they intended to rebel against the king of Persia, which was exactly false, because their object was to glory in the Lord, and make use of the king's authority and power to their advantage; and the king knew that, and so the king says, "Pray for the life of the king and his sons." Christians are the best subjects that Queen Victoria has, because they beseech the Lord on behalf of the land, and they are the salt of the land, the pillars of the world. "What do these feeble Jews? will they fortify themselves?" Yes, of course they will. "Will they sacrifice?" Of course, they will. "Will they make an end in a day?" No, sir; fifty-two days. "Will they revive the stones out of the heaps of the rubbish which are burned?" Of course, they will; they will not receive the rubbish, but they will receive the realities. So, the people of God are to raise up the truth out of the rubbish. In how much rubbish was the truth of God buried when Christ appeared in the world! John the Baptist, and Christ, and the apostles, raised up the precious stones of truth out of the heaps of traditional rubbish, set forth the foundations of the new Jerusalem. Now they had a mind then to work, and they did work, and gave themselves wholly to the work. So, the Christian should himself wholly to God. If you had but a heart to do that, and to look for the fulfilment of that scripture, I do not know a scripture in all the Bible more beautiful than that in the 37th Psalm. When my mind was much troubled, when I was under a great deal of perplexity, casting down, and wretchedness, and as I was walking along I almost wished the earth would swallow me up altogether, that was my rebellious heart, suddenly these words came into my mind, and away went the whole of it: "Delight yourself in the Lord, and he shall give you the desires of your heart." And so, he did. May the Lord give us grace to delight in him. Then, if we desire him to appear for us, and if we have a

delight in him, he will appear for us; and he will appear not because we delight in him, but our delight in him is an evidence of being on his side. I cannot myself be content with a religion that leaves me short of this. I want not only to walk, but to run; not only to believe, but to be filled with joy and peace in believing; not only to hope, but to abound in hope by the power of the Holy Ghost; not only to be pleased in God, but to delight myself in him, and that I may so delight in him as to see and feel that there is nothing will bear a moment's comparison with the delights of his interposition in appearing for his people. We see here in this case of building the wall, what power stood against them. And they adopted all sorts of plans; first to despise them, then they organized an army against them, and then when they found they could not stop them, they adopted the flattering plan, and after entering their protest against Nehemiah, they then secretly sent for him. Let us have a little secret interview, and settle matters. Too late, sir, now; the wall is built, the work is done, you should have spoken before. Why should such a man as I come down to you? You should have spoken when you were up and I was down; but now I am up as well as you. And so, Nehemiah would not go down; but he stood upon his guard, and arranged matters in such a way as brought him to what our text declares, "The wall was finished."

Now the wall was finished in "the month Elul." Before I come to a word upon the doctrine of limitations, just a word upon this. Cruden, in his "Concordance," says that the word Elul means "a cry," or "an outcry." And if it means a cry, or a proclamation, then it is very significant; for the very word "finished" is worn in the bosom of every Christian. It is the best golden locket in the world. Where could we meet with a better word pertaining to gospel truth? It always has something good for us. Are the heavens and the earth finished, and all the host of them? What follows? Rest. God blessed the seventh day, and rested. And so, the walls are finished; now there is the rest, the sabbath. Is it said that Moses finished the tabernacle? What is the consequence? Filled with the glory of the Lord. So, in consequence of the finished work of Christ, the church shall be filled with God's glory; and here, in consequence of the wall being finished, the city is filled with the goodness and glory of the Lord. Is it said that the priests stood still in Jordan until all things were finished? What is the consequence? The Israelites had possession of the promised land. Jesus Christ stood fast till all things were finished. What is the consequence? We shall enter and take possession of the inheritance incorruptible, undefiled, and that fades not away. And is it said of Zerubbabel that his hands laid the foundation, and his hands should finish it? What is the consequence? The universal shout throughout the church. So, then, if the word Elul means "a shout" or "a cry," how suited it is! The top-stone, finished, shall be brought with shouting's of Grace, grace unto it. Hence said the Lord, "Comfort you, comfort you my people; speak comfortably to Jerusalem, and cry unto her that her warfare is accomplished, that her iniquity is pardoned; for she has received of the Lord's hand," in her covenant Head, "double for all her sins." You will say, perhaps, the enemy made an outcry. I do not think they did; for in the next verse to our text it says that when the adversary saw all that was done, "they were much cast down in their own eyes." So that the enemy did not make an outcry; they were put to silence. Now I want you to notice that, because it applies with such force and importance to ulterior things. Does not the salvation of Jesus Christ put our sins to everlasting silence, and put everything that is against us to everlasting silence?

We have, in the next place, *the doctrine of limitations*, which I have no time to enlarge upon, but merely observe that the work was done within a given time. The enemy may go on to a certain extent, so long, but he is limited. The man of sin will have his mystic 1,260 days; then he must

stop. The witnesses may prophesy in sackcloth their forty and two months; then their sorrows must cease. The doctrine of limitations, therefore, means the limitation of the troubles of the people of God, and the limitation of the power of the enemy. Let us rejoice, then, that while our God is unlimited, we will not limit the Holy One, he limits all things. "Hitherto shall you come, and no farther," is his language on behalf of his people, from which language he will never depart.

But lastly, the dedication of the wall. At this dedication there was a fourfold greatness. In the 43rd verse of the 12th chapter of this book you will find the whole of it summed up. We see there how they rejoiced in this, as a type of the great truth of our rejoicing forever in what the Savior has done. "Also that day they offered great sacrifices." That is one thing. So, Jesus Christ, he made a great atonement; his sacrifice was a great sacrifice, so great as to put away the sins of the people, and perfect for ever all that were given to him. That is one thing. Second, the greatness of their joy. "They offered great sacrifices, and rejoiced; for God had made them rejoice with great joy." That is the consequence of the great sacrifice. So, our joy is to be proportioned to what the sacrifice is, great joy. Third, there was the great God. Fourth, and last, the greatness of the extent of that joy. "The wives also and the children rejoiced; so that the joy of Jerusalem was heard even afar off." How easily could I here run through the several items to show what the joy of Jerusalem is, and how that was heard afar off in the apostolic days! Go you, and tell of the joy of Jerusalem to all the world, to every creature, that thousands and millions may thus come from east, west, north, and south, into the joy of Jerusalem; to rejoice with Jerusalem, and to glory in that Jerusalem which has foundations, where our God does dwell for ever and ever.