

ZION'S PROTECTION

A SERMON

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“For I, say the Lord, will be unto her a wall of fire round, about, and will be the glory in the midst of her.” Zechariah 2:5

I WILL first notice, *the people that shall be thus defended*; and then second, *the defense*; and third, *the glory that is in the midst of them*.

First, I notice THE PEOPLE THAT SHALL BE THUS DEFENDED. And I do not know that I can do better than take the indications that are given. It is Jerusalem that is to be defended; and that will include three things; the temple, the habitations of the people, and the people themselves. First, it will mean the temple. Now the people of God are spoken of as the temple of God; and we read, “Except the Lord build the house, they labor in vain that build it.” Do we then, that shall be our question this morning, do we belong to the temple of the Lord? Are we a part of that building, or of that church which in the Scriptures is spoken of as a building? We may, I think, trace, out some encouraging revelations the Lord has made upon this subject. In the first place, if we belong to the temple of the Lord, the Lord Jesus Christ will be our only foundation; for “other foundation can no man lay save that which is laid, Christ Jesus the Lord.” He therefore, will be the foundation; that is to say, we shall be brought to see how he is the foundation. And it is right and proper we should understand this. There are two things that make the Lord Jesus Christ the foundation; and if you get a clear apprehension and feel your need of these two things, and are brought to hope in him in that way, then not only is he your foundation, but you are rightly built upon him. He is the foundation first by being the end of the law; for if he be not the entire end of the law for righteousness, then the law, having some demand upon us, would detain us in bondage. But Jesus Christ is the end of the law, and thus brings in everlasting righteousness. And therefore he would say to the law that would attempt, as it were, to detain any of us, he would authoritatively, and righteously, and effectually say, “Loose him and let him go;” not that there is any contest or hostility between Christ and God's law; I am now speaking after the manner of men. Now, my hearer, if you are brought to see that by the law of God you have no more hope of access to God, you have no more hope of obtaining mercy at the hand of the Lord, or of seeing God's face with joy, than those who are now in hell; for “he that offends in one point is guilty of all;” ah, the man

that knows his own heart will say, great God, my heart offends in ten thousand points every day of my life; ah, what a damnation the sinner must be subjected to that is found under the law; and if you know this, you wilt prize the dear Redeemer, the end of the law, wherein he offended in no one point. He is the foundation; and this will be what the apostle calls the hope of righteousness. And then he is the foundation also by his being the end of sin. He is spiritually, legally, properly, and entirely the end of sin; his blood cleanses from all sin. You cannot be too confident of this; I had almost said presumption here seems almost impossible. Presumption to stand out for the delightful truth that the blood of Jesus Christ is the end of all sin, past, present, and to come; that he is the entire destruction of every heart, lip, and life sin of those who are brought to know his name. Let a sinner be brought to see this, here his hope rests; ah, he says, here I see I can hope in a holy God, here I can hope in a righteous God; here is a sure foundation, a tried stone, an everlasting foundation; a foundation that cannot be moved. Now as is the foundation in character, so the building must accord in character with the foundation. You see that the foundation is a free-grace foundation; for "we are justified freely by his grace;" and you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that while he was rich he took our poverty, that we through his poverty might be rich;" he underwent the privation of life that we may come into the possession of life. And therefore, we are saved by grace; not only justified by grace, but saved by grace. And hence the building must accord in character with the foundation. And the first feature given to this building is that which entirely accords with it; mercy "I have said, mercy shall be built up forever." If the Lord, therefore, come and ask you as a sinner, how can such a sinner as you expect to be made a living stone in Salem's streets above; how can such a sinner as you expect to see my face with joy? how can such a sinner as you expect to have a foundation that is everlasting, and to be a part of this building to be inhabited by Father, Word, and Holy Ghost to eternity? Ah, the poor sinner would whisper and would answer in one word, and he would say, mercy Lord, mercy. Mercy! how can you expect mercy? By your dear Son, Lord; he is the end of the law, the end of sin; and his glorious righteousness and his precious blood harmonize your perfections. Ah, but then your sin is great. Yes, Lord, but your mercy is greater. Your sins are strong. Yes, Lord, but your mercy is stronger. Your sins are devilish. Yes, Lord but your mercies are divine; and your mercies are in every way infinitely superior to my sins; and I can't go away, Lord, and I won't go away, Lord, until you shall give me in your book some instance wherein you have turned a sinner away because he was so bad, and so miserable, and because his sins were so numerous, and he cried unto you, and you did turn him away; give me an instance of that, and then I will despair, but not before. The Lord always delighted in mercy; "I have said, mercy shall be built up forever." This is the foundation; and these are the persons round about whom the Lord will be as a wall of fire. Then the next feature given to the building is that it is a free-grace building. "The top stone shall be brought home with shouting's of grace, grace unto it." There is something in that so pleasing, and so encouraging, and so establishing. It shall be brought home with shouting's. How little delight, how little pleasure, we have at present in being saved in comparison of the pleasure the Lord has in saving us. How little pleasure we have in looking to him in comparison of the delight with which he looks to us. He contrasts us, as it were, with his grace; he looks to us, and sees our unworthiness, our sunken, our helpless condition; and then he looks at the unsearchable riches of his grace; and then he laughs, as it were, at our necessities; he that sits in the heavens shall laugh; as though the Lord should say, that poor sinner thinks he is greater as a sinner than I am as a Savior; that he is so unworthy, and so poor, and so loathsome that my grace cannot manage him; the Lord as it were laughs at this, rolls in oceans of mercy and grace, overwhelms and swallows up the whole; and such an one becomes conformed to this building as a free-grace building; it becomes the very

language of his heart. And then the third feature of this building is that of certainty. "Upon this rock will I build my church, and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it." Now this is the temple of the Lord; these are the people that constitute the temple of the Lord; that are brought off from every other foundation to rest upon the one true foundation. But then, as I have said before, and I must linger upon that for a moment, that the building accords with the foundation; there must not only be our being built upon the foundation, but we must be rightly built thereon. I have often had occasion to say, and I suppose I shall have occasion to say so again, that we may be upon the right foundation, but at the same time not rightly built. You observe then these three features of this building; first mercy; and I must therefore be conformed, to the order of mercy; I must be brought to feel that it is not by works of righteousness that I have done, but that according to his mercy has he saved me. Then it is a free-grace building; and so, I must be brought to know that I am saved not by works, but by grace, and through faith, and that not of myself, but it is the gift of God. And then also I must be conformed to the certainty of God's truth. "Upon this rock will I build my church, and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it. You must be brought into the certainty of the testimony of the Holy Spirit; and be as sure as you are of your existence that he that has begun the good work will carry it on unto the day of Jesus Christ, you must be brought into a full assurance, as sure as you are of your existence, that the Lord Jesus Christ has perfected forever them that are given to him. You must be brought into a full assurance that God's oath is immutable; that there is eternal certainty in his truth. And if you are conformed thus to the foundation, conformed thus to his mercy, to his grace, and to the full assurance of the certainty of his truth, then you are the temple of the Lord. Now while you are thus far, you will perhaps lack something else. You say, If I could but be as sure of my interest in it as I am of the certainty of it, what a happy man I should be. Well, if you know your need of it, and are brought to receive the truth of it, and are conformed to the order of it, that is something which you once were not; you were not always sensible of your need of it; you were not always enabled to understand the order of it, you were not always conformed to the order of it; you were not always where you are now. Who has brought you thus far? Who has convinced you of your state, and given you that desire after the Lord? Who conformed you to his mercy and his grace, and to the certainty of his truth? Ah, you say, I am afraid it is not the Lord. But then if you are honest in the matter, it is the Lord; you must know whether you are making a mere theoretical profession of these things, or whether as a poor sinner you are seeking this mercy, and seeking this grace, and seeking the certainty of his truth; you must know this. And if therefore, you are honest, it is the Lord that has done this. This then is the temple of the Lord; these are the people; and he will be a wall of fire round about them. So, "except the Lord build the house, they labor in vain that build it. Do we not find it so? Ministers may preach and pray too; people may pray and they may hear; but unless the Lord is with the minister in preaching, and just as much with the people in hearing, there is no good done; for there is sin, enough, there is carnality enough, there is mortality enough, there is blindness enough, there is hardness enough, shall I say there is hell enough in our fallen nature to shut every particle of truth out from the heart, if God himself does not prepare the heart, and enable the soul in spite of all this opposition to receive honestly the truth, set your seal to the truth, and know it is the truth, and glory in the God of truth. Again, they are spoken of as a city. "Except the Lord keep the city, the watchman wakes but in vain." Here these people that are to be defended are spoken of as having habitations; the watchman guarding the city will mean the habitations of the people. And so, the Lord will take care of these habitations of the people. "My people," the Lord says, "shall dwell in peaceable habitations, and in sure dwellings." And if you ask what these habitations are, I would say, they are the truths of the Gospel. If we speak of our habitation in the singular,

then our habitation is God himself. "Be you my strong habitation whereunto I may continually resort." But then the habitations of the saints are sometimes spoken of in the plural; and then I take the habitations to be the truths of the Gospel. And there is not one of these houses that is not well furnished; there is not one of these houses in which there is not plenty of all good things. Do you speak of the love of God? Is not that a very pleasant house to dwell in; is there any want of anything there? Electing grace is a habitation; predestination is an habitation; the truth of Christ's righteousness, the truth of his atonement, the promises of his word, these are the kind of habitations. And how hard Satan labors to draw men away and drive them away from these habitations. Why were the prophets in olden time put to death? Because Satan wanted to drive them away from these habitations, to deprive them of these houses, these heavenly houses, in which they lived. And why was the Savior cast out of the world? Because he was opening these heavenly mansions; for "in my Father's house are many mansions;" and every truth of the Gospel is a mansion, and he opened these mansions, and that was offensive to the devil. And the apostles went forth preaching, opening these heavenly, these everlasting mansions, to bring poor sinners out of the territories of death, of sin, of hell, and of the curse, and to bring them into these peaceful habitations, into these sure dwellings, where they are forever to dwell. Why were the martyrs put to death? Because the adversary wished to deprive them of these habitations, to draw them out of the habitations of eternal truth, to bring them to dwell in the cursed dens of Popery and of error, where Satan reigns rampant. But the Lord will bring his own people out of all that into the sure habitations. There is no earthly habitation that is sure; but these heavenly habitations are sure, not only for a time but forever. Then again, these people are spoken as being in the hand of the Lord. "As arrows are in the hand of a mighty man, so are children of the youth." That is a beautiful idea it conveys to us; it is that the father is yet young, while the children are grown up to youth; so that there is no weakness found in the family either in the father or in the children. And that becomes a beautiful figure of the blessed truth that the Lord God our Father, his years cannot fail; he is eternally the same; and therefore, no weakness can ever be found in him; and his children are in his hands, and shall do all that, and be all that use for which he intends them. But passing by this, then, these are the people that constitute, shall I say, the people of Jerusalem that the Lord will defend. "I will be unto her a wall of fire round about." And it is, I was going to say, very natural that the Lord should speak in this solemn, determined way; I do not wonder at all at finding such a text as this in the Bible. Think, in the first place, of God's love; how he loves his people. I am sure when I look at people with their ideas that there are some in hell that God loved; some in hell for whom Christ died; why, such people know not the Scriptures, nor the love of God, nor the power of God. The Lord's love, what is it? Why, it is the love of all his heart, of all his mind, of all his soul; there is no drawback, there is no hindrance; God has not loved partially; he has not loved amidst drawbacks; he has thrown his whole being as it were into the eternal welfare of the people; he loves with all his heart; .and if we knew a little more of this we should have more confidence in him; we should think less of our bits of doings, and should think more of him, we should be less charmed with the wonderful doings of men, and more charmed with the wondrous attributes of the blessed God. I wonder when that Psalm will come more into practice, I wonder if the day will ever arrive when that Psalm will come more into practice, it does not appear to me to be much in practice in the day in which we live. When I compare the Psalm to which I refer with the language of the present day, they appear to me to have turned things completely upside down. It says there that they shall abundantly utter the memory of his great goodness, that they shall speak of his mighty acts; that they shall talk of his doings. Why, out of the thousands of ministers we have, perhaps you would get scarcely a thousand that know enough of the Lord Jesus Christ to

talk about him for an hour; they are obliged to have something else, because they know not enough about him to speak of him even for one hour; except they go to Paternoster Row, or some other place, and buy their sixpenny sermons, written by somebody or another; they may do that way; they may manage to keep up a little conversation about something. That minister who does not know enough of Christ to speak about him for an hour on earth, I do not think he gives much evidence of being prepared to spend eternity with Christ, or of possessing the spirit of Christ or the mind of Christ. I say therefore, if we were led more and more into the knowledge of God's love to us, we should scorn the thought of his ever turning from us. Then again, look at the gift of that love: look at his dear Son. Remember the Lord Jesus Christ thought it not robbery to be equal to God; that which God gave us is like himself; Christ, Immanuel, God man, Mediator. Then again, look at the great end; not a temporal end, but an eternal end; the objective end is eternal. Think for a moment of eternity; millions of ages, countless ages, endless ages. What a poor little dying life is this in comparison of that life that we have by the everlasting God. I do not therefore, wonder at his saying, seeing I have thus loved them, seeing I have thus given to them my dear Son, seeing he has given his life for them; seeing I have an interminable glory for them; seeing that innumerable ages may roll round which shall bring them no nearer to the end than when they set out, for there is no end to his kingdom, there is no end to that world; I therefore, will not trust them in the hands even of angels, much less in the hands of man arrogating to himself the character of the vicar of Christ; an old blasphemer, that's what every Pope is; and blasphemy is what Popery is, in the very essence of it. What says the apostle, led in all the solemnities of the Blessed Spirit, on the matter; "Even unto the angels, has he not put in subjection the world to come, whereof we speak." I do not therefore, wonder that the Lord should say, "I will be unto her a wall of fire round about, and will be the glory in the midst of her.

Second. Let us now look at THE DEFENCE, then. We will approach the language by degrees; noticing first the various forms under which the Lord represents himself as round about his people; all indicative of two things: first, of destruction to the adversary, and second, of safety to the friend; This text worked out would show clearly that it is a most dreadful thing to be an enemy to Christ, to God, to his people, in any way whatever. So, it says in this same chapter concerning them, "he that touches you touches the apple of his eye." Various are the forms in which the Lord speaks of himself, and in which he speaks of his being round about his people. It conveys a nice idea; as though the Lord should say, Other things may go, in comparison of my people; I must take care of them; I must be with them; I must watch over them, and I will dwell with them till I have wiped off every tear from all faces. Hence, you find Satan himself seemed to have some idea of the Lord himself being the protection of his people: "Have you considered my servant Job, that there is none like him in the earth?" Yes, no doubt; but "Have you not made a hedge about him, and about his house, and about all that he has on every side; you have blessed the work of his hands, and his substance is increased in the land. But put forth your hand now, and touch all that he has, and he will curse you to your face;" he will give up his religion directly, he will anathematize you to your face. Did the Lord take the hedge away? Not away from Job, no; Job was sustained; he was sustained in a way that should make him a blessing to the people of God, but not in a way that should make him a companion to the Pharisee. Hence, you will find in all the learned writers upon the Book of Job, Ah, they say, Job bare all this, and sinned not; O dear, dear, what a pity it is that Job did not continue so; here he cursed the day of his birth; if it had been said at the end of all his troubles, "In all this Job sinned not." why he would have been such a nice, pious man, we should have liked him so much better; we were quite grieved to see him curse the day of his birth. Ah, the

real taught child of God comes in and says, I am glad of it, for it makes him a companion for me. If he had gone through all, and ended without doing something to show he was a poor sinner, without some weakness being brought to light, he would have been no use to me; but as it is, I can feel him to be a companion, for there are times when I can bear troubles without any rebellion, or charging God foolishly, and can feel reconciled, and can say honestly with the poet,

“How harsh so ever the way,
Dear Savior, still lead on;
Nor leave us till we say,
‘Father, your will be done’”

But no sooner does the sun go down, no sooner does the light withdraw, no sooner do I grow cold in my heart, than like Job I curse the day of my birth, and wonder why a poor miserable creature like me was brought into the world at all. Now, wherein was Job’s sustentation? You have his own explanation of it, very puzzling to the flesh. He looked back at all, and said, “My foot has held his steps.” How do you know that? You have cursed the day of your birth. Ah, but I did not give up the way of salvation; I kept that. “His way have I kept and not declined.” What! when you cursed the day of your birth? Yes! yes! I believed as much in his truth then as I do now. “Neither have I gone back from the commandment of his lips.” What not when you cursed the day of your birth? No! for his commandment is everlasting life, and my faith held that then as tight as it does now. “I have esteemed the words of his mouth more than my necessary food,” You have? Yes, I have. And what do you infer from this? Why, the hedge is not taken away; he still protects me, and takes care of me. Well, but you have lost your property, your family, your friends, your health, all your dignities; you were once like a king, and now they spit in your face, care nothing about you. Well, what of that? I have not lost my Redeemer; I have not lost my God; I have not lost heaven; and I shall come forth from it all; he will turn my captivity by and bye; life will not be always as it is now; and while fires devour my earthly possessions, I have heavenly possessions that no fire can ever consume. The Lord will so sustain his people, then, that they shall not apostatize; that is the idea, not give up the truth. Again, the Lord is round about his people as mountains. “As the mountains are round about Jerusalem, so the Lord, is round about his people,” henceforth and forever. Insurmountable mountains; the enemy cannot come over these mountains; they are the mountains of his eternal perfections, his love, his power, his omniscience, his omnipresence; he surrounds them with his eternal perfections. Again, he is said to be round about them with 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.” And who then can move his people when they are thus defended? But, coming to our text, the learned suppose, and I suppose with them, I should think it is the idea intended, that our text has an allusion to a custom that has been practiced from time immemorial, that when persons encamp in foreign parts, when night comes on, and there is danger of wild beasts, lions, and bears, and wolves, and tigers, they make fires round their camp; and they tell us that the wild beasts, with all their ferociousness, are always alarmed at these fires, and will never come to them, will never face these fires; so that here, by these fires, they are safe from the wild beast. This verse, therefore, would be a figure of the threatening’s of the most high God. And the Lord is a wall of threatening’s round about Jerusalem; not threatening’s to Jerusalem; no but threatening’s to her adversaries. Let me give you some instances of this. Here is a fire; that fire is destruction to the one, but salvation or protection to the other. The strongest men that Nebuchadnezzar could find were chosen to cast these three worthies into the fire. But God was

there as a wall of fire; that fire consumed those that would cast them into the furnace. Do any of you intend by violence, or persecution, or by any means to throw a child of God into a fiery trouble? Perhaps you will succeed, very likely you will; but it will be to your own destruction, and to their deliverance; so that while you are lying there a stinking corpse, those persons you thought to destroy will be walking at large with the Son of God, and will lose nothing but the bands that bound them; their eyes shall now be at liberty to see, their feet to walk, their hands to work, their tongues to speak; and they shall dwell in safety; for the Lord shall be a wall of fire round about them, and the glory in their midst. It means then the Lord's determination to defend his own. I gave Egypt for you; people for you; men for your life; matters not what; everything must be subservient to the welfare of his people. I have often admired the observation of one of the most aged lawyers in the land; one of the greatest perhaps that England ever knew in some respects, still living; I was reading a work of his, and he is speaking of the duties of an advocate; he says, "The advocate has no right to know any person in the world but his client; and if in bringing his client off according to law he ruins a whole family, a whole kingdom, or the whole world, it is nevertheless his duty to bring off his client; he has nothing to do with anybody else." Now just so with the blessed God; he is the Advocate; his people are the clients; and you may depend upon it he will bring them off victorious; though it be needful to drown the world to do it; to burn the cities of the plain to do it; to overturn a Pharaoh to do it; to destroy the Amalekites, or the Amorites, or to hang old Hainan fifty cubits high; he will bring his people off, let the cost be what it may; whatever gets in the way; yes, if unfallen angels could do such a thing as to stand in the way of his people, they would be damned to the lowest hell before one of his people should ever be lost. Where is your scripture, say you sir, for such extravagance? Here it is, sir, "If an angel from heaven, preach any other gospel unto you than that we have preached, let him be accursed;" not an angel from hell, but an angel from heaven. A wall of fire round about. "The Lord encamps about them that fear him."

Third. But lastly, HE WILL BE THE GLORY IN THE MIDST. How is he the glory in the midst? He is in the midst, the living God, the life-giving God; he is the glory in the midst by being the temple in the midst; he is their meeting place and dwelling place; he is in the midst of Jerusalem, the temple of life, the light of life; he is the glory in the midst by the Book of life, and by the river of life, and by the tree of life, and by the blessing of life, and by the perpetuity of life. He is the living temple in which the people are forever to dwell; and he is the light of life; the Lord God Almighty and the Lamb;" there is the living temple for a living people; "the Lord God and the Lamb gives them light;" there is the light of life. "There shall in no wise enter into it anything that defiles;" showing you must enter by faith; faith is the only way of entering; you must enter in but that which is holy; by the atonement, and righteousness, and truth of Christ; "neither whatsoever works abomination, or makes a lie; but they which are written in the Lamb's book of life." There is the temple of life, the light of life, the book of eternal life. And then there is the river of life, clear as crystal, proceeding from the throne of God and of the Lamb. Then there is the tree of life, bearing fruit perennially; the very leaves of which are for the healing of the nations. Then there is the blessing of life; "there shall be no more curse; but the throne of God and of the Lamb shall be in it." And then there is the perpetuity of life; "they shall see his face; and they shall reign for ever and ever."

But I cannot say more; but there is something very great in the declaration, "I will be the glory in the midst of her."