

THE CONTRAST

A SERMON

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“They stood upon their feet.” Revelation 11:11

WE see that the imagery used in this chapter, and indeed in this book generally, is very sublime and withal, very intense; and there certainly must be a great depth and solemnity of meaning throughout this book; for the two themes of the book are judgment and mercy; and with these views we shall proceed this morning. And in so doing I notice first *the contrastive position in which they stand to their enemies*; and then, secondly, *the death that they undergo*, and then, thirdly, *the resurrection that they shall realize*; that brings us to that which this morning is our text; “They stood upon their feet.”

First then *their CONTRASTIVE POSITION to that of their enemies*. It is said, “If any man will hurt them, fire proceeds out of their mouth, and devours their enemies; and if any man will hurt them, he must in this manner be killed.” Last Lord’s day morning we showed that these witnesses were the ministers of the gospel; and that these ministers of the gospel represent the people of God, and so include all the people of God; so that if anyone will hurt these people of God, these who are God’s witnesses, fire proceeded out of their mouth which devours their adversaries. Let us try to understand this and the following clauses upon the same subject. Under a variety of imagery the people of God are spoken of as doing that which they only testify of; therefore being one with God in the testimony of this truth, they are spoken of as doing that which they only testify of; and it is in this sense of testimony that we must understand such language as this; that if any will hurt them, fire proceeds out of their mouth. And there is not, that I am aware of, a clause anywhere here that has not reference to the Old Testament. We see for instance in 16th of Numbers, when Korah, Dathan, and Abiram rose against the priesthood, that fire came out from the Lord, and devoured these enemies to the priesthood. This I think will give us a little clue to the meaning here.

So, these witnesses are united especially to the Lord Jesus Christ, they stand with him especially in his priesthood, they make very, very much of his sacrificial character, because they see that everything is settled there, everything is done there; there it is that God the Father is well pleased: there is the Savior’s honor, his resurrection, his ascension, his intercession, his reign, as well as the eternal glorification of Christ and of the people; all founded upon this perfection of his

priesthood. And it is here, on this ground, that the Holy Spirit begins his work in the heart of a sinner; it is on this ground and in this way that the Holy Spirit carries his work on. And thus, those who are witnesses of God and for God, can, experimentally, bear testimony that none but Jesus can do helpless sinners good; and here they stand upon their feet, by that perfection which Christ has wrought, called by the apostle, the liberty wherewith Christ has made us free; "Stand fast in the liberty wherewith Christ has made us free." Now if anyone will oppose this atonement, oppose this liberty that we thus have in Christ, oppose this acceptance we have in Christ, and on the ground of this secret enmity of the heart try to injure the Lord's people; then the Lord's people bear testimony against their enemies, and that is the sense in which the fire proceeds out of their mouth, and devours their adversaries: because their testimony will stand good. But I will, not give you my words, but give you the word of the Lord upon it. Take for instance, such a scripture as this, which I think is very clear upon this point; where John says, "He that believes on the Son of God, has everlasting life, but he that believes not, shall not see life, but the wrath of God abides on him." That is the testimony borne, by the witnesses, that is the testimony borne by all the people of God, that the wrath of God abides on him. So, my hearers, let me say to you this morning, those of you that have not a saving knowledge of the Lord, if you are not brought to see and feel that you are such a lost sinner that your salvation must stand entirely in the perfect work of Christ, that electing grace must give the sinner to Christ, and that by virtue of that previous oneness with Christ, Christ died for that sinner, loved him and gave himself for him; and none but those who were given to him in eternity, was, or could by any other means be; included in his atonement, for those who are not at the last found written in the book of life shall be cast into the lake of fire; now if you are not brought to feel your need of this, and to receive this testimony of what Christ has done, then I tell you where you are; I tell you that without that knowledge you are under the fiery law of God, you are under the wrath of God, you are under all the threatening's of the Bible from Genesis to Revelation; there is not a threatening in the Bible that you are not under, so that die when you may, if you die in the state you are now in, ignorant of your lost condition, having no feeling of it, having no intense living desire after Christ, and no illumination of mind as to what he has done; if you die in that state; then wrath is your portion. This is the sense in which I understand that fire proceeds out of the mouth of these witnesses; and devours testimonially their adversaries, and you will find it true that he that thus believes in Christ shall be saved. The idea is this: he that is united to Christ's perfect work is identified with that work and becomes judged by it. But if you, and this is a very solemn point, friends, and it makes me careful upon it; supposing you make a profession; and your soul by the spirit of error be united to a false Christ, that is, to an unscriptural Christ, to an unscriptural representation of Christ, so that you are not taught his real perfection and what he has really done; then you, being identified with a false Christ, when you die you will be lost; for you will find that this false Christ is a mere fable, that there is no such thing in reality as a false Christ; it is a mere fable, and you will be lost. But if on the other hand your soul be identified with Christ's atonement in its spotless purity, in its eternal certainty, then you will be judged by it: that that cleansing you from all sin, you will be judged as a sinless man: that that bringing in his everlasting righteousness to you, you will be treated as a righteous man; that that bringing into your soul a life that is Divine, a light that is Divine, a love that is Divine, a testimony that is Divine; you are by that oneness with Christ united to him, united to God, united to eternal glorification; and you can no more come short than Christ himself can come short. But if you do not thus believe, if you are not thus convinced, then the wrath of God abides on you. And all the saints of God, being thus convinced, bear testimony that all that are not thus convinced, and that die without vital union to this sacrifice, this work of Christ, shall come into condemnation, but there is no condemnation to

them that are in Christ Jesus. See then, the infinity of contrast: these witnesses are standing upon the Rock of Ages; these witnesses are standing in, and harmony with, all the attributes of God; in sweet harmony with Jehovah's sworn covenant; and standing here, they are eternally saved. And if you are not brought thus to stand, then the wrath of God abides on you, and the fire, that is the testimony, that proceeds out of my mouth this morning will devour you if you die where you are; but if the Lord convince you, and brings you over to this, and this is the object we have in setting forth the terrors of the law as well as preaching the glories of Christ; we want them both, the Lord sometimes makes his ministers sons of thunder, at other times sons of consolation: and our object is the real, conviction and vital conversion of the soul, as well as the building up and comforting, of the saints. Now he that believes thus, and is baptized, or publicly owns Christ, not ashamed to own him, shall be saved; but he that does not thus believe, does not receive this sacrifice; then you will be judged according to your position: yours is a law position: the law has never wrought anything against you yet, not that you are conscious of, and you have nothing against that, perhaps, and because you have nothing against that you infer, that has nothing against you.

That was my inference, when in a state of nature; I said, I have nothing against God that I know of; and I inferred from that he had nothing against me: I said, I have nothing against God's law; I think it is a very good and proper law; and I inferred that that had nothing against me. But by-and-bye, when the law came, as Paul says, or when conviction came, with, "Pay what you owe;" I felt then that though I had been dreaming I had nothing against that, and inferring therefore that had nothing against me, I found, it, to be a tremendous, inexorable creditor, that would not let me off one mite; you shall bet cast into the prison of hell, and you shall not come put until you have paid the last mite; which the sinner can never do. "He that believes not shall be damned," or judged; the original word there translated *damned* would have been translated, with equals propriety if it had been translated *judged*; that is, shall, be judged according to his position. So the sinner being, under the law and under wrath, he must be judged according to that position., Thus then, these witnesses, if you will be their enemy, if you will hate the truth, if you still go on in that blindness and that ignorance which I know you will if grace prevent not; that nevertheless does not hinder me from telling you of it; but if you thus go on, the saints of God will bear witness that he that believes not, the wrath of God abides on him. That I understand to be one of the senses, indeed the essential sense, the main sense, in which fire proceeds out of their mouth, devouring their adversaries. See the difference then; here is the one standing with the dear Savior in the sweet freedom of .the gospel; here is the other standing under his sin, under God's wrath, and does not know it, quite unaware of those reservoirs and magazine of Almighty vengeance ready to break forth upon his guilty head; unconscious of it; a little more sleep and a little more slumber, and you will lift up your eyes in hell, is the voice of God in his holy word. But those that are awakened, and brought to know the Lord, those that are brought to know that they have escaped this wrath, and escaped this death, is it not a matter, I am sure it is with me increasingly so, of lamentation while I read these intense and solemn things in God's word, and compare them with my experience; I find how short I come in earnest daily and solemn devotion to God in comparison of what I here read? Here are persons that have escaped this devouring fire, that have escaped this everlasting burning, and standing fast in the liberty wherewith Christ has made them free; so that the matter is weighty both ways; there is no frivolity with the Most High, there is no levity with him; but alas, alas for us, sin has made us lighter than vanity; and our most earnest prayers are but poor weak whispers; our deepest solemnity seems somehow or another but as it were temporary, and our highest affection seems to last but a little time. But bless the Lord, we look not so much,

nor does the Lord, at the quantity as at the quality; if we have but a grain of life in the soul, and a right wish towards the truth and towards God, it is accepted according to what a man has, and not according to what he has not, for though we come so short now, the time will come when we shall be like Jesus in body and in mind, and enter into all the intensities, solemnities, and delights of these eternal things. See then the contrast between a man that is under wrath and a man that is identified with Christ's sacrifice, and will be ultimately judged according to that sacrifice; you see it is a fearful thing to be an enemy to the truth of God, and consequently an enemy to the people of God. Or if you have a mere theoretical knowledge of the truth, and make a profession of it, and yet love not the brethren, he that loveth not his brother abides in darkness; he that professes to love God whom he has not seen, and yet hates his brother, and would injure him whom he has seen, he is a liar, that man is deceiving his own soul; he professes to have received mercy from God, but has no mercy for others; he is not recognized by the apostle as a friend, he is an enemy.

They came and said that to Elijah of old, that the world has said to the ministers of God in all ages: and I hope I shall not be deemed egotistical when I say it has been said to me many times; "Come down, you man of God, come down." We believe you are a good man, but you are too high; you go too high for us, we want you to come down into the plain of Dura, and see how we get on with our golden images; we want you to come down from that height; come down, you man of God. "If I be a man of God (said Elijah) let fire come down from heaven and consume you and your fifty;" and so it did two successive fifties. And so, they want to get the ministers of God and the people of God down to kill them to the truth. Ah, if I can get these high doctrine men down, and kill them to their doctrines. If I be a man of God, let fire come down from heaven and consume you, rather than I should come down from my position. Well; it taught the third fifty a little more sense; the third captain came with, "O man of God, I pray you, let my life, and the life of these fifty your servants, be precious in your sight." Very well, I will come as low as you like to pick up a poor sinner, but I will not leave my dignity, I will bring that with me. And so, the Lord said, "Go down with him, be not afraid of him;" he is a friend, he is rather low, but he is a friend. And so, he confessed that fire had come from heaven and devoured the others. Thus, then those who are on the Lord's side, you may trust the Lord, leave your affairs with the Lord, leave yourselves with the Lord. The fire proceeds from your mouth only in a way of testimony; you are to bear testimony that the enemies of the Lord shall be as the fat of rams. And this is in entire keeping with the Old Testament. What a deal of political and ecclesiastical discussion have I met with upon the 149th Psalm! There are some verses in that Psalm which bear upon our subject this morning, and with very little care, taking it spiritually, we can understand it. It is there said of the saints of God, "Let the high praises of God be in their mouth;" and there are no praises so high as the praises of eternal salvation; there are no hallelujahs so loud, eloquent, and majestic as the hallelujahs of the saints upon the victories achieved for them by an incarnate God; these are the high, undying praises of the living God.

"And a two-edged sword in their hand;" and what is that two-edged sword? Not a literal sword; their warfare is not with flesh and blood in the political sense of the word; their warfare is spiritual; with a two-edged sword in their hand. And they may well have confidence in the sword to use it; for they themselves have been subjected to it. Thus "the word of God is quick and powerful, sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing even to the dividing asunder, of soul and spirit, and of the joints and marrow." Why, such a thing as that literally would kill a man, and thus disable him from taking another step. And that is just what it does spiritually: the word enters; the man is

dead; he can no more fight against God; there he lies, a poor helpless creature. "Your arrows," to use another phrase, "are sharp in the hearts of the king's enemies." And what comes next? Why, the next thing impressed upon that man's mind is that all things are naked and open unto the eyes of Him with whom we have to do. We may hide things from ourselves and hide things from others; but we cannot hide them from God. A sense of God's omniscient eye the sinner will tremble at; he sees my thoughts, sees my words, marks all my ways. What is to be done? Why, says the apostle, "we have a great High Priest;" there is the remedy, there is the reconciliation; the sword first conquers you; "we have a great High Priest passed into the heavens, Jesus, the Son of God; let us then hold fast;" if we have been thus brought down, and unable to fight any longer against God; our enmity slain and we are brought into submission to the order of his grace; "let us hold fast our profession for we have not an high priest that cannot be touched with the feeling of our infirmities;" no, "let us come boldly unto the throne," what? of judgment? no, we have been there, the sword met us there; pierced us there, cut us up there, disabled us there; "let us come boldly to the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy, and find grace to help us in the time of need." Now notice, a two-edged sword in their hand. If you have been brought under the sword of God's word, from what you yourself have suffered from it you will have confidence in it; cannot have too much confidence in the Lord's word; the sword cannot be broken, the scriptures cannot be broken; its point cannot be blunted, its edge cannot be turned. But this two-edged sword refers also to the testimony of the saints concerning the destiny of their enemies, "a two-edged sword in their hand, to execute vengeance upon the heathen;" They do it testimonially, and will by-and-bye be assessors with Christ when he shall do it executively. "And punishments upon the people," that is, the enemy. "To bind their kings with chains;" ah, what does that mean? Why, to do it testimonially. The saints in the days of king Herod could bind him with chains. Why, say you, I never read of it. This way, Ah, Herod, you are bound with a chain, and your chain has so many links in it; and your malice will carry you to the utmost extent of your chain, and when you have gone as far as the chain of God's decree will let you go, you can go no farther. Said he, I mean to slay Jesus; ah, but your chain will not let you reach that far; oh no. So, Nebuchadnezzar, so other persecutors and tyrants; "Hitherto shall you come, and no farther." Have you an enemy, my hearer, you seeker after Jesus, have you an enemy, and does he threaten you like a tyrannical king; or if it be a she king, and they are the worst when they set on; why, he is or she is bound with a chain; yes, do not forget that hitherto shall they come, and no farther. Ah, says Shimei, I will slay that David. Will you? Yes. You would if you were not bound with a chain; but David knows you are bound, and so when one said, "Shall I go over, and take off the head of that dead dog?" Oh no, said David, let him curse, he cannot go further than that; the Lord has bound him; and he will go like every other dog the full length of his chain, and there he will stop, I will leave it, and we see what end Shimei came to. Therefore, to bind their kings with chains means testimonially so. Your enemies are all bound by the decrees of God. The Lord sent Moses to Pharaoh; Moses knew that Pharaoh was bound with a chain; he could go the full length of that chain, but no further. "And their nobles with fetters of iron." Their nobles mean their agents, their ministers, monks, and priests, and free willers and Puseyites, and all the agents of the devil, that would rob us of the liberty of the gospel, but they are all bound with fetters of iron; they can go so far and no farther. And so, says the word of God, "they would, if it were possible," but bless God it is not possible, "deceive the very elect." And thus then the saints of God have the high praises of the Most High in their mouth; a sharp two-edged sword in their hands; to execute testimonially vengeance upon the heathen, punishments upon the people; to bind the kings with chains, the nobles with fetters of iron. "This honor," to give judgment thus testimonially; "this honor has all his saints." Praise you the Lord. What think

you then of the saints of God, of their dignity? Know you not, brethren, that the saints shall judge the world? Know you not, brethren; that the saints shall judge all things? but they themselves are judged of no man, because there is no man capable of judging them. The saint knows the sinner, but the sinner does not know the saint; and the saint can judge the sinner, but the sinner cannot judge the saint, because he knows him not.

Thus then, these witnesses that stand upon their feet in the liberty of the gospel, testimonially devour, their enemies. If I have enemies here this morning, God in infinite mercy turn you into friends, for we were once all of us enemies: we are not speaking reproachfully of you; it would be very unbecoming of us to do so: we know who and what has made us to differ; we were once even where you are. May the mercy that found us find you; may the blood that reconciled us reconcile you; may the righteousness that justifies us justify you; and may that Spirit of God that quickened us quicken you; and may that eternal mercy which reached us in our low estate, and raised us up into the knowledge of Jesus, deal the same with you, is our united and solemn prayer to the God of all mercy. It is said also that these witnesses “have power to shut heaven, that it rains not in the days of their prophecy.” There are several circumstances under which they have power to do this. I will tell you when I shut heaven against some of you; that it rains not. What, say you, you shut heaven against some of us; what, against some of the children of God? Yes, sir; When do you do that? Why, when you are running about from time to time after the refined amusements and pleasures of the world and making yourselves at home among the ungodly. I pray then to God that when you come not a word may fall into your soul; I pray that the word may be powerless; and I pray to God in secret that your soul may become as dry and barren as the ground became when the dearth was, when Elijah prayed that there should be no rain; and there was none for three years and six months; the mystic three days and a half; and I pray that you may become so dry, so hard, that you do not know what to do with yourself; and by-and-bye the famine is so great, the drought is so great, and your soul in such a wretched state, that you are then glad of any one drop of comfort; and I pray that when you are thoroughly worn out with your pleasure goings, when your soul is scorched up, and you are become downright miserable, then I pray that the heavens may be opened and rain upon you, and soften your heart; and then you will say, Dear me, my minister preaches much better than he did; I hear him much better now. Ah, that is only a part of the truth; he does not preach better now than he did before; you were too full of something else before to have any room for the word; that is the English of it. We live in a day of such commingling of the world with the church, a ticket to go here and a ticket to go there; and they say, that’s the ticket, it’s the devil’s ticket in nine cases out of ten. They have power to shut heaven. Lord, starve the man out; create a famine in the land; do not let him have a bit of anything to eat; let him live upon husks, till he finds they are husks, and then he will turn away with much loathing, and will come so low that he will feel himself to be a very dog as it were in the sight of the Lord: “I am as a beast before you;” and he will say, “The dogs eat of the crumbs that fall from their master’s table.” And then they have power to open heaven. They ascend the mount of prayer, they see nothing; they ascend it again, they see nothing; they ascend it seven times, and presently a cloud arises, there is a sound of abundance of rain, and that poor, stupid sheep is once more led to Jesus: his soul becomes once more as the watered garden replenished made sick of its vain pursuits, and brought now to pray with the apostle, “God forbid that I should glory, save in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ.” They have power to shut heaven, then, not authoritatively and sovereignly but prayerfully, as did Elijah. Elijah’s object in praying for the drought was to bring the people away from Baal to the true God.

The other sense in which they have power to shut heaven is against all their enemies. They testify that the Lord has mercy upon whom he will, and whom he will he hardens. And if there be a man this morning within sound of my voice, that God does not intend to save, I must testimonially shut heaven against such. You will go on from hardness to hardness, and you will never have any real concern about your soul; you may hover about a chapel, you may go to hear sermons as a matter of speculation, but there will be no real godliness in you before God: shut heaven against all those that God has not opened heaven for. See how the Savior shut heaven against the Jewish nation: they had shut up the kingdom against the people of God, and God shut the kingdom against them. And so the enemy that would shut the kingdom against us by denying the truth, we return the compliment, and shut the kingdom against them only they can do it in word only: we do it actually, testimonially, by the power of God. And they can smite the waters and turn them to blood. What are the waters? Why the waters of worldly consolation, and false religious consolations, and the witnesses, true witnesses declare that these consolations must die; blood means death: they must all, like the Egyptian waters, turn to blood. All your worldly consolations must die, the waters of Egypt became such that the people could not drink them; and so all your carnal consolations must turn to blood, and you will not be able to drink them, they must all die. And to smite the earth with plagues, testimonially as often as they will. So, the minister and the child of God any time can testimonially declare the curses of the Most High, the judgments of the living God.

Now I reverse the scene. There is a fire to devour their adversaries; but no fire can devour them, no fire can destroy them. Christ has taken the violence out of every furnace into which they can be brought; no fire can devour them; heaven cannot be shut against them. "I" said Christ, "have set before you an open door, and no man can shut it." Their living waters that rise from the deeps of eternity can never die; their consolations will spring eternally fresh: all our springs are in you the Lord. And who can smite the earth with plagues in which they dwell? They dwell in a new earth, and in that spiritual promised land no plague shall come near your dwelling, no evil shall befall you, "you shall not fear for the terror by night, nor for the pestilence that walks at noonday; a thousand may fall at your side, and ten thousand at your right hand, but no evil shall befall you."

Second. I notice the DEATH that these witnesses undergo. The death of the witnesses is supposed by one of the most learned men of this country, Dr Cumming (and a great many side with him in that idea) to refer simply to one circumstance, and only one. Hence he shows us very ingeniously that from 1514 to 1517, I think the Doctor gives us month and all (for he is a clever man, and a learned man, and an industrious man), that there was not then a public witness to preach the Gospel; and the good Doctor, and a great many with him, believe that is the time in which the witnesses were slain: and I hold with the Doctor that it was so. But I by no means hold with him that it means any one particular circumstance, and only that one circumstance. These witnesses are slain? I say, slain and risen again; slain and risen again, over and over again. Now, my hearer, we have a key in the first chapter of this book, we must not lose sight of that. This book of the Revelation bears a trine aspect, which a certain ancient science declared to be the most benign aspect in the whole range of the heavens, the trine aspect, and so this book bears a threefold aspect; "Write the things which you *have seen*;" that is the past, that is what John had seen in the Old Testament prophets, mark that; "the things which are," that is, in John's age, for John's time was a slaying time; "and the things which shall be hereafter." And so before I have done with the subject I will prove that there were slaying times and resurrection times preceding the time of John;

and the time of John was a slaying time and a resurrection time; and then succeeded other slaying times and resurrection times too; but time forbids me enlarging upon these matters this morning.

And thus, my hearer, would you believe it, here is a mine shall I call it, or a vein if you like, of deep Christian experience running in this matter. For instance, if you try yourself individually, are there not times when you are slain to everything spiritual? Are there not times when sin, the law of sin within you, slays you to everything spiritual, stops the mouth of prayer, weakens your faith, shakes your hope, cools your love, lessens your spirituality, and you seem more like a dead man than a living man, and you are down, but you cannot get up. "And after three days and a half," and these three days and a half must not be understood literally: you can make this mean any time you like, it is a ductile sort, of scripture, this three days and a half, that you can stretch out to any time you like. Take the three days and a half to mean three years and a half; then you take the three years and a half to mean 1260 days; then the 1260 days to mean 1260 years, and so you may stretch it to any extent you like, it is that sort of scripture that you can extend or contract to suit all the variety of circumstances under which the witnesses have been slain, and again revived; and I hope to show this before I have done with it. Now come, I say, to personal experience: is it not so? are there not times when you feel as though you were dead to everything spiritual; and if you again revive, you must revive, as is here said three days and a half; after you have been in that state as long as the Lord is pleased, to suffer you to be there.

"After three days and a half the Spirit of life from God entered into them, and they stood upon their feet." And the gospel is the ministration of the Spirit; and some of you, have you not come to the house of God sometimes when you have been bowed down, and cast down, and very much down; and has there not been a word by which the Spirit of the Lord, entered into your soul, and you have stood upon your feet, stood up in freedom, in strength; stood up in the Lord, and rejoiced that you were once more raised up, and were ready to say with the Psalmist concerning the Lord, "You are my glory, and the lifter up of my head." But my time is gone, my eight pages full, and I must say no more.