

# **THE RIGHT CAMP AND THE BEST CITY**

## **A SERMON**

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**“The camp of the saints about, and the beloved city.” Revelation 20:9**

The camp and the beloved city; these two parts will be as much as our time will allow us to touch upon this morning; and I cannot pass lightly over these two parts, because it will set forth the more clearly that which the adversary shall, with his almost innumerable agents, encompass about and make his last attempt upon, when you and I have been in heaven perhaps hundreds, perhaps thousands, of years; for of the end of time knows no man, God has kept that to himself, and let us bless him for what he has revealed, and rejoice that what is not yet revealed, and what is to be revealed essential to our welfare, will be revealed, so that we shall want to know nothing that shall not be ultimately unfolded to our satisfaction and to God's glory.

Now the camp, then, we must understand, of course, not literally but spiritually, not locally but mystically; and so, the city we must understand not literally, but of course spiritually and mystically, that Jerusalem that is from above, which is free, as says the apostle. Now then, taking it in this light, we may notice that all, at least, so it will prove as we go along, that all the parts of our text are taken from the Old Testament, and indeed the book of Revelation altogether, in the substance of it, is taken from the Old Testament. Do you not find it in various references to the prophets? “As he has declared to his servants the prophets.” instance, in the 10th chapter of this book, where it is said, “But in the days of the voice of the seventh angel, when he shall begin to sound, the mystery of God should be finished, as he has declared to his servants the prophets.” Some say Daniel has more than any others; but other prophets have dwelt upon them as much. So that we have been so led by carnal learned men that we seem to have lost sight of the spirituality of the book, and it might as well have been out of our Bibles for the use that it has been in general unto us; and I cannot believe that God would give us a book, and call it Revelation, and we are to take it at the same time as though, instead of being revelation, it was obscurity. Let us then, look at our text this morning, the two parts, the camp in the city, as descriptive of the Church of God. You will perceive that there is an allusion to the encampment of Israelites in the wilderness, and that shall be our guide to the spiritual interpretation of this matter; and then, secondly, there is an allusion to the literal Jerusalem, the one being a type of the other.

Now first, then, the encampment of the Israelites in the wilderness, and I enter upon it with a very

great deal of pleasure; there is something in it that well harmonizes with my feelings, with my hope, and with the gospel, and with everything that is dear to me, it brings before me that concerning which, when I realized a little of it, as I have done in private, I could say with the poet,

“My willing soul would stay  
in such a frame as this,  
and sit, and sing herself away,  
to the everlasting bliss.”

Let us then take a four-fold view of the camp; first, *it's form*; second, *it's order*; third, *it's unity*; and forth, *it's glory*. I notice them first, *the form of the camp*. You can see for yourself, in the 2nd of Numbers that the camp was foursquare in form. The people were not left to encamp in a form devised by man; the Lord himself ordered the form of the camp, and the camp is fourscore. Oh, what a heavenly truth does this present to us. It is only to bring before us, and to impress upon our minds, the delightful truth that we are square with God, that everything is made square with justice, square with holiness, square with righteousness, square with mercy. Mercy and truth are met together; righteousness and peace embrace each other. The typical camp, I admit, soon got out of square; but the spiritual camp can never get out of square; no, they all stand in sweet harmony with justice, yes, with all the perfections of God. You will see here that the Israelites had three things to impress upon them the great matter of justification before God, the great matter of reconciliation to God, the great matter of everything being made square between us and God; never, no, never, to get out of square again. There was the form of the encampment, that was square; I will come back to that point presently. Secondly, there was the altar of burnt offering; that altar was square, to denote that everything was by sacrifice made square. Third, that the breastplate of the high priest, containing the twelve precious stones, representing the twelve tribes, was square. And now, take the three; first, here is the encampment square; second, here is the altar square; and third, the breastplate square, so that the high priest went into the holy of holies with this square breastplate, to denote that everything was made square by the sacrifice, and that the people should stand square with God-stand in harmony with God. Now come down to experience upon this matter. We are as yet encamping in the wilderness; we are going from strength to strength, as the Lord leads us along. How are we encamping in the wilderness? Are we in harmony with God? Are we reconciled to him? There is only one way, and that is by faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. If I am a lover of Jesus Christ in what he has done, then in this way my sins are gone. Sin put everything out of square, and sin put us out of square, and put our circumstances out of square, and put everything into a wrong position; but Jesus Christ has wrought deliverance from all that, and put us into sweet harmony, as I have said, with holiness, for Christ is our sanctification; with justice, for Christ is our justification; and with dignity, for Christ is the pattern of everything to which we are to be conformed, and with the love of God, standing in sweet harmony with his love, for Christ is the expression of God's love; there it is we have the love of God. So that we have nothing else, in a word, in this form of the camp, but that of reconciliation to God, standing square with him. What a sweet life is this to live. The very sin that you feel and are the subject of cannot throw you out of square in your faith in Christ, cannot throw you out of harmony with the perfections of God but rather be the means of making you cling the closer to that only way in which we can be justified, and which God can be just and yet the justifier of him that believes in Jesus. This is one thing that Satan envies. No wonder he should bring his legions against this camp. He does not like such light to shine into their minds as to give them to see that Jesus Christ is such a wonderful mediator that

has made everything square, made everything harmonized with the perfections of God, has brought everything into such a position as never again to be disturbed. And here lies the city, foursquare; there it is, and there it will remain forever. Why, your life, your good life or bad life, your good temper or bad temper, has nothing whatsoever to do with your acceptance with Christ, or in your dying in the Lord. When you come to die and him, you die in the perfection of his sacrifice, you die in his righteousness, he died in oneness with him, you die in perfect liberty, and safety, and glory, that nothing whatsoever has anything to do with your getting to heaven but the grace of God and the salvation of God; it is independent of the good and independent of the bad; it is God himself that has thus brought things into square; in the more you know of this, the dearer a Covenant God will be to you, in the more hateful will all those gospels be to you that I would throw that out of square that the Lord has thus brought into square.

Then, second, notice *the order of the camp*. They were to encamp every man by his own standard, with the ensign of his father's house, and far off from the tabernacle. They were to the camp every man by his own standard. What those standards were is a matter of mere opinion and we have nothing certain concerning them. Some have thought that the four faces of the four living creatures were taken from the four standards that the Israelites had in the wilderness. I say, some have thought this, and a very good thought it is, and perhaps it was so; but still, we have no positive proof of the kind. As you are aware, the faces were four; there was the face of a lion, and the face of the man, and the face of an ox, and the face of an eagle; and all these, no doubt have a reference to the Lord Jesus Christ, as well as to the qualities of the real Christian. The lion, Jesus Christ is called The Lion of the tribe of Judah; in Jesus Christ is the man, the Man of God's right hand, the pattern to which we are to be conformed; and Jesus Christ is the sacrificial ox, he has put away sin by the sacrifice of himself; and Jesus Christ, shall I say, became the ascending eagle as it were, he ascends up on high. But then, these four are also a figure of the qualities of the Christian. The Christian is bold as a lion. What is it that makes the Christian bold? Why, the Lord being on his side. You look and see that by Jesus Christ the everlasting God is on your side and what have you to fear? And suppose you should come into Job's troubles, the Lord will support you; or into Jonah's trouble, the Lord will support you; or like Lazarus at the rich man's gate, full of sores and dogs licking your sores and you wish for the crumbs that fall from the table, that will be a trying position, but the Lord can support you. There is no position into which we can come; there is no good position temporarily, into which we can come, in which he cannot make us truly miserable; and there is no tribulatory position into which we can come in which he cannot make us truly comfortable. And hence it is so sometimes, the rich man is truly miserable, and the poor man truly happy. People have a notion, even Christian's sometimes, they somehow or other think there is a wonderful deal of happiness in silver and gold, in rank and dignity, and finery, and the fashion of human life; they think there is a great deal of happiness in all this, and that if they could only get into association with the great, and the noble, and the wealthy of the land, they would be much happier than they are now. Why, it is all vanity from first to last. The word of God says that man at his best estate is vanity; he appears to be something but after all he has nothing. So, I say, you may go into the best position possible, temporarily, and the Lord may make you in that best position truly miserable; and you may go into the worst position possible, and the Lord may make you and that worse position truly happy. I make no hesitation in saying that Paul was infinitely more happy in the maritime prison in Rome than Solomon was with all the thick clay of his carnal and earthly glory; for himself after having borne that glory, declared it to be vanity and vexation of spirit; but the apostle Paul, when he was in prison said, "we are exceedingly joyful in all our

tribulation.” how discouraging that must be to the enemy! Why, the world would say, whatever can the man get his joy from? Wherever can he get his comfort from? Wherever can he get his daring and his boldness from? Why, from God. All his springs were in God, and he realized the truth of the Savior’s words, “Lo, I am with you always, even unto the end of the world.” It is this that shall make the righteous bold as a lion. And the face of a man, to represent the wisdom and discretion with which the Christian shall be blessed; and the face of an ox, to denote the patient endurance of the Christian that he shall bear the cross and bear the heat and burden of the day with all the patience that grace shall enable him. And then, the eagle. Now, the eagle may be noted for four things. First, it’s love of light and so the Christian loves the light of the mysteries of the kingdom of heaven; he loves the light of God’s presence; he loves the light of the Sun of Righteousness. The eagle is also noted for its love of liberty, it cannot endure bondage. And I have a strong sympathy with the eagle too; for that gospel that ties me hand and foot, a gospel that ties me down with *if’s*, and *but’s*, and *maybe’s*, such a gospel as that I hate with all my heart; and hitherto, when men have tried to bind me with them I have been enabled to snap them asunder; I hope I shall never lose my Nazarene locks; I hope I shall never fall asleep upon the lap of Delilah; I hope I shall never lose my power; but still enjoy my freedom. The eagle is fond of liberty and the man that knows something of the range of mercy and the range of salvation, the range of grace and the range of the Gospel, that there is an infinity of freedom in it, why, he can stretch his wings there; his thoughts and affections may range and roam about there; and there he is happy. And then the eagle, again, is very fond of going very high; he is never giddy; he never looks down nervously, and says, I am rather too high; I think I had better go a little lower; not so. So, the real Christian, the man that knows the truth, the higher he gets, the better; the higher his soul, and thoughts, and affections can soar up into the lofty realities of eternity, the more he is at home. The fourth thing in the eagle is, it never pursues gnats, or flies, or anything unworthy of its dignity; it only pursues that which, when once obtained, is worth having. Not like some gnatcatchers, gnat-pursuers; I mean gossips; who would run ten miles almost for a bit of gossip, a gnat or a fly, or something of that sort; that is their ignorant, carnal, contemptible quality, shall I say instinct and disposition? But the eagle is of that noble kind, it never pursues prey which is, when obtained, not worth having. And so, the real Christian, at least when he is in his right mind, he pursues that which is worth having. “Wheresoever the carcass,” or the body, “is, there the eagles be gathered together.” The Christian will pursue after Jesus Christ, after the promises of God, and be content with nothing but that which is well worth having when attained. Take the hint. Now, every man was to encamp by his own standard, with the ensign of his father’s house. So, it is now; every Christian is to encamp by his own standard of experience Let it be your own; don’t attempt to get it out of your own position, and say, well, that man has a deep experience; that man has had a wonderful deliverance; that man can entertain you for an hour in describing how he was brought; that is just where I will pitch my camp. Now, don’t do that; that’s not your place; abide by your own standard; if you know but little, simply abide by that. If your eyes were opened very gradually, and you cannot point to any time when the first effectual convictions came into your mind, then don’t say you can if you cannot and if you cannot point to any time when you realized any conspicuous deliverance, then don’t say that you can if you cannot but if you have been by degrees brought along, you hardly know how, according to that scripture, “I will bring the blind by the way that they know not; I will lead them in paths that they have not known; I will make the darkness light before them, and crooked places straight. These things will I do unto them and not forsake them;” then, let that be your standard. And again, don’t suppose you are not a Christian because the life in your soul was not manifest in the same form as it is manifested in some others. Don’t conclude that you are not

born of God because you cannot remember your birthday; don't conclude that you are not tired of God because you have not realized salvation in that conspicuous way that some have. We must not forget that some, their eyes are open, and they are drawn along gradually, and the evils of their heart are opened up by degrees; but they all come to the same point. The man that has been arrested suddenly, and brought into great agonies of soul, and under great terrors, he realizes conspicuous deliverance; he can, perhaps point out to you the place, and the means, when the arrow first pierced his guilty conscience, and charged home upon him that he was as a sinner; he, perhaps, has the very scripture, and the very day, and the very place, where the Lord brought home the word with power and delivered him. Bring these two together, the one that has been brought gradually, and the other that has been brought in this conspicuous way, and you will find no difference between them as to substance; there is a difference as to form; the one that has been brought gradually says, I have been brought to feel that I am a poor, depraved, helpless, lost sinner; I have never been under that terror that some others have, but I feel that in my flesh dwells no good thing; I feel I must say with the poet,

“Oh, to grace how great a debtor,  
Daily I'm constrained to be!”

And the other will say, Well that's just me; that's just what my experience has brought me to; I have been brought to feel that all flesh and all fleshly doings are as grass, and I am nothing, and less than nothing. So that the brother of low degree will rejoice that he is exalted; and the brother of high degree, the Pharisaic caste, will rejoice that he is brought low; and both will renounce all confidence in the flesh, and crown the dear Redeemer Lord of all. Thus, then, we are to encamp in harmony with God's perfections, that is, by faith in Christ; and secondly in the order, that is our own personal testimony and experience. Every Christian must have a testimony of his own; and then Lord knows whether it be our own or not; he knows, when I come into the pulpit to preach the gospel, whether I am preaching by guess or not; whether I am merely preaching out of my head or not; whether I have studied with my brain, and I've got up something to say, like a school boy; he knows whether I am thus deceiving myself and the people or not; he knows whether I myself daily groan and sigh before him; he knows whether in private, my soul and affections are given up to him, and that I love him there so much as I do anywhere, if not more, because I have not so many interruptions there; he knows whether out of what my own soul has realized when no one sees me but himself, he knows whether I, out of this good treasure of my heart, preach unto others that gospel by which I myself am saved; he knows we could not deceive him. Let every man therefore drink water's out of his own cistern; let them be your own, and not another with you. Every man encamped by his own standard. Be yourself, never feign yourself to be another man or another woman. I think there is something very expressive in this, he camped by his own standard. What a variety of experience there is as to form, but then it all comes to the same thing, namely, that it brings them to nothing in their own eyes, and Christ becomes they're all in all. These are the true pilgrims these are they that are seeking a better country, and to that better country they shall come.

But they are also to encamp afar off from the tabernacle. There is a meaning in that, I suppose, and that meaning, the spiritual meaning, has been discovered many centuries ago; and the apostles, though they have never given, for they could not undertake the spiritualize everything, as the apostle says, “I cannot now speak particularly;” they could have written volumes upon volumes if

they had told us all there was in the glory of the Old Testament. Now, then, they were to encamp afar off from the tabernacle. What for? There was some reason for that. Old divines centuries ago, understood the meaning; John Bunyan caught up the idea; he does not tell us that he derived it from others; but he did, and I derived it from others and from him too, so that I am indebted to the instrumentality of others for the idea. John Bunyan applies it in this way; that the Pharisee in the temple went so near he left no room for the mediator; but the publican stood afar off, and left room for a mediator. So, they were to encamp for enough off from the tabernacle to leave room for the priests, and to leave room for the sacrificial service; leave room for all that secret department by which they were to be represented before God. And what a gospel presentation is this! So, my hearer, we must stand in that position that will make room for Christ.

People bring in, now in our day, so many of their own doings, that they don't leave room enough for Jesus Christ; but the man who is a sinner in his own eyes, and nothing but a sinner, he will stand far enough off to leave room for the great High Priest, to leave room for the altar of sacrifice, to leave room for the mediation of the blessed Redeemer. Why, this truth was indicated even at Sinai. The people there were to stand so far off, far enough off to leave room for a mediator, and Moses was the mediator, temporally so, for he says, "At that time", alluding to the very circumstance, "I stood between you and God." Now, what did Moses stand between the people and God with? Why, with the sacrificial institution, which was so established in the tabernacle; and with that, Moses, with divinely appointed sacrifice, stood between the people and God. as a type of Jesus Christ, who was verily foreordained before the foundation of the world, standing between us and God. See how much there is then here in the character of the church, in her encampment in the wilderness, in harmony with God's perfections, every man by his own standard, and that distance from the center to leave room for a mediator. I know those things can be understood, I am fully aware, by none but Christians; and the less delight you have in these things the less you will understand them. You may depend upon it, that the more delight you have in these things, the more you will understand them. This is one reason, certainly, why we do not understand the scriptures more, because we have so little delight in them. We read a chapter through so gloomily and so heavily and are half glad we have got through it; and with the feeling, sometimes that it is very mysterious and very difficult, and we leave it. Now, that is just my own character. What! Say some, is that you? Well, it really is that's me, very often; and I hate myself, and loathe myself for it. Well, I know that there are infinite and endless delights in the Bible, yet I have a nature that stands so opposed to it, that I can delight in these things only as the Lord enables me. Still, I find the more delight in them the more I understand them.

Again, *there is also unity*. They were all kept together by the Lord being with them. They could not mistake the way, God was with them; they had nothing to do but abide by the cloud; and the cloud, and the water from the rock, all went together. They simply abode by the cloud. And what is this cloud but a beautiful type of the gospel, and of the abiding by the gospel, by the truth as it is in Jesus? This is the mystic cloud; and by abiding by this cloud, we thereby abide by the sacrifice; we thereby abide by the mercy seat; we thereby abide by the mana; we thereby abide by the water that flows from the rock; we thereby abide by the living God. Since Moses said, and these words were very solemn to me yesterday when looking at them, I came to my own conscious, and I could truly say it had been my own happy, happy, experience, Moses in the 4th of Deuteronomy, in looking at this unity and abiding by the Lord, he says, "You that did cleave to the Lord your God." let us translate the two words *Lord* and *God*, "you that did cleave unto Jehovah your interposer,"

that is the proper translation of those words, “are alive every one of you this day.” whatever faults you had beside, if you had this one excellency, “you did cleave to Jehovah, your interposer, are alive every one of you this day.” Ah! then, the Lord keep us in harmony with his perfections, that is, by faith in the perfection of Christ: the Lord keep us each encamping by his own standard, his own experience, be yourself; and the Lord still keep us far enough off to leave room for a mediator; never attempt to take the Savior’s place, but bless God that Christ has taken our place; that he was made in the likeness of sinful flesh, and he has put away sin by the sacrifice of himself; came under the law and under our sin; he has taken our place; and may it be our glory increasingly, for this order of things the Lord has established. But the unity. You perceive, though there was a difference of tribe, as there is a difference of experience now, yet what unity there was. Now, how is the unity declared? I am going to give you now a thorough piece of hyper-Calvinism, of thorough high doctrine, a piece of downright yea and amen decisive truth, but not in my own words. When Moses would set before us the unity of the camp, he does it like this: “The eternal God,” or God in his eternity, for there he sums up all the tribes spiritually, and ultimately all the people of God; “is your refuge;” there is no exception, all the same there; and underneath one, as much as underneath another, “are the everlasting arms.” Here are two eternities; here is an eternity of refuge and an eternity of support; “and he shall thrust out the enemy.” Did not Jesus do so at Calvary’s cross? and did he not do so when he thrust death and hell out of your souls, and brought life and heaven? and will he not do so at the last day, when we shall personally realize the saying that is written, “O death, where is your sting? O grave, where is your victory? The sting of death is sin, and the strength of sin is the law; but thanks be to God which gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ.” Israel, then shall dwell in safety alone; the fountain of Jacob shall be upon a land of corn and wine; also, his heavens shall drop down dew.” That is what I call thorough high Calvinism. “Happy are you, O Israel who is like unto you, O people saved by the Lord, the shield of your help, and the sword of your excellency! And your enemies shall be found liars unto you; and you shall tread upon their high places.” The victory shall be final and complete.

Fourth, *the glory* of this camp. A false prophet is led to give us the glory. He hated what he said while he was saying it. What he says, in his progressive, poetic, and particular description of it, may be taken, and supplied to individual experience. His language is figurative, but highly poetic, and at the same time, with all, very beautiful and very eloquent. It begins with the valley, and then goes on to the garden, then to the lign aloe, and then to the cedar; these four steps. “As the valleys are they spread forth.” So, God brings a sinner down into the valley of humiliation; that is the beginning. “As gardens by the riverside;” just so the Lord brings a poor sinner out of the wilderness state into a fair paradisaical state and plants him in the likeness of Christ's death beside the rivers of waters. “As the trees of the lign aloe,” which to learned tell us are remarkable for the beauty of their foliage and for the strength of their fragrance. And so, the Christian, when he becomes united to Christ, and arrayed in the beauty of Christ there is a spiritual beauty and fragrance about him that no other persons have; there is a savor in what he says. “As the cedar trees beside the water;” there is the Christian in his ultimate stateliness, majesty, and strength. There is the little shrub in the valley; and then there is the little myrtle tree in the garden; and he grows into a lign aloe; and then by and by into the stately cedar; there he stands in all the majesty of free grace, a king and a priest unto God, like the cedar; Christ is compared to the Cedar. And so, Balaam, when he saw the camp, and broke out into that poetic description, is there by unwittingly given a beautiful description of the beginning of the work of God with a poor sinner, and the ultimate blessedness which he arrives. This is that form, and order, and unity, and glory of things with Satan detests.

Now the church is represented not only as a camp, but also as a city, "The beloved city." This is the same thing in another form; it is a twofold representation of the same thing; the camp denoting what I have said and the city denoting the stability, fixedness, and glory. And the Scriptures sometimes mix these two together, the city and the tabernacle, and the camp, as you see in the 33rd of Isaiah: "Your eyes shall see Jerusalem," the city mentioned first, "a quiet habitation, a tabernacle;" there is the transition of simile, of metaphor, "that shall not be taken down; not one of the stakes thereof shall ever be removed, neither shall any of the cords thereof be broken. But there the glorious Lord will be unto us a place of broad rivers and streams;" no want of anything that is pleasant. Here you see is a kind of mixed simile, in entire accordance with our text. Now it is said to be "the beloved city," the beloved church, the Lamb's bride. "The Lord loves the gates of Zion more than all the dwellings of Jacob." And if it be a beloved city, if it be that city in which the saints are ultimately to dwell, then we need not wonder at some of the things that are said of it, as to its strength, said to be a strong city. Now violence, wasting, and destruction, took place very often in the literal Jerusalem; violence and wasting were often there; and destruction, Jerusalem was destroyed many times. But here, in this new Jerusalem, "Violence shall no more be heard in your land." Oh, happy land, Jesus endured violence, but now he is out of the reach of violence, and we, as we stand in him, are out of the reach of violence; "wasting nor destruction within your borders;" no, you cannot waste away the land of God, you cannot destroy the dear Redeemer's kingdom, his love, and his glory. "You shall call your walls Salvation;" Jerusalem's walls gave way, they were thrown down; but Salvation's walls can never give way; they are firm, impregnable, and invulnerable. "And your gates Praise." The poor sinner shall be brought in at the gates. "Open you the gates, that the righteous nation, that keeps the truth, may enter in." And so glorious is the city, that a created sun and moon are not good enough for it, and so, "The sun shall no more be 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", God is a sun and a shield, "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." Oh, what weak, timid, and silly mortals we are to be afraid to die, to be afraid to go home. Ah, it is only to understand the matter. And I feel very interested in your acquaintance, as well as my own, in this matter. I find some of our brethren, when they come to die, they have this least understanding; Satan gains the most mastery over such generally. Now the Lord give you an understanding, increase you in understanding; I do not mean merely theoretical understanding; but in that kind of understanding that endears the Savior; just as when you are brought into the light of the sun there is not light only, but heat as well; that is what I mean; I mean that understanding that warms the heart, sheds abroad God's love, and make sure you understand the mystery of the matter so clearly that you can defy the enemy on all hands.