

DO NOT NEGLECT THE HOUSE OF GOD

A SERMON

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“Not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as the manner of some is; but exhorting one another: and so much the more, as you see the day approaching.”

Hebrews 10:25

IT is the Lord's own order of things to be worshipped by that which he himself has commanded; any deviation therefrom is dangerous to the soul. “Now if under the law of Moses, they died that despised the law,” what sorer punishment is there than death? “How much sorer punishment” what punishment is there sorer than death? This; that if I live and die making light of the Son of God; if I live and die without a solemn recognition of the death of Christ; if I live and die in the spirit of the flesh, and do not possess the Spirit of God, then the sorer punishment is the eternal damnation of the soul; that is the sorer punishment. The apostle well knew that neglecting the house of God was one of the first steps towards apostasy; he would, therefore, have the people of God go on from time to time, and to make any reasonable and any proper sacrifice to keep up the privilege of attending the house of God. “Not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as the manner of some is; but exhorting one another.” The original word here translated “exhort” is sometimes rendered “comfort,” comfort or help one another; “and so much the more, as you see the day approaching.” However, we have not, through the Lord's mercy, here, at the Surrey Tabernacle, much complaint to make upon this ground; not much, I say: we have some complaint. There are some of our friends that do not appear to me to attend so much as they ought. I can make considerable allowance, that unhappily circumstances are such that many of the friends whose business keeps them up perhaps till twelve, or one, or perhaps two o'clock of a Sunday morning; they are so placed, and I can make every allowance for that. But still, at the same time, we may give way, and give way, and give way, till by-and-by once a week, and then once a fortnight, and then once a month, and then not at all. And I have seen some go from this neglect of the house of God into most awful circumstances. I have known the wine-cup take them up, and I have known them carried away, and carried away, and then for years buried in sottishness and profligacy, and I have lost all hope of their being Christians. Ah! it is a fearful thing, friends, to be an apostate; it is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God. May the Lord, then, still keep us persevering; and, if we do not from time to time realize all the advantage we could wish, let us

remember the vision is for an appointed time, and the Lord has never yet said to the seed of Jacob, "Seek you my face in vain." If we have in our souls but a grain of faith in the dear Savior, with that grain of confidence in him let us from time to time seek his face in his own way, and thus help each other, by thus practically showing that we can say, "I love the habitation of your house, and the place where your honor dwells."

Let us, then, in going through our text, notice, in the first place, *for what we assemble*. Secondly, *the mutual encouragement*, "exhorting one another. And third and lastly, *the weighty reason for persevering here in*, "so much the more, as you see the day approaching."

First then, *for what do we assemble?* And we may understand the end for which we assemble by taking the assemblies of old as a type of our present assemblies; not only a type of the one great assembly, the souls of the people being gathered together to Christ, but as a type of the purpose for which we assemble in the house of God. There were, as you are aware, under the Old Testament dispensation, three annual assemblies: that of the Passover, that of the firstfruits, and that of the feast of tabernacles. I think these will help us to understand the end for which we assemble. I take, in the first place, the Passover, though in so doing I would take that rather in its sacrificial character. And so, we have, in this same chapter, the ends for which we assemble very beautifully set before us. And the first end for which we assemble is to learn what Jesus Christ has done, and to enjoy what he has done, and to go on serving God by what Jesus Christ has done. To give you some little idea of this, I may just remind you here of what the apostle in connection with our text sets before us. There are four things he names which the ceremonial law could not do, but which four things Jesus Christ has done. And it is worth our while to assemble from time to time to hear of the same, and to enjoy the same; because, though the promise of God belongs, I know, to the Lord's people individually, and the Lord is not confined to means, yet it is in this order of things that the promise runs.

Now there are four things here represented which the ceremonial sacrifice could not do. First, it could not make the comer thereunto perfect. Nothing imperfect can enter heaven; everything that enters heaven must be perfect in holiness, and perfect in righteousness, and perfect in immortality, in incorruption; there can be no death, no unholiness, no unrighteousness, enter heaven. Now then, by faith in the atonement of Jesus Christ, we have a life that accords with the life of God; for God himself is our life, Christ himself is our life. "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. In him was life; and the life was the light of men." He is our light. And also, by his atonement we are perfect in holiness. And, oh! is not this something worth assembling for? While we daily feel what an unholy nature we possess, and from sabbath to sabbath, and from time to time, as the Lord in his providence shall favor us, is it not well worth our while to assemble, to be hereby renewed in holiness? And what is it renews us in holiness? The answer is the atonement of Jesus Christ. The Holy Spirit never renews us in holiness but by the atonement of Jesus Christ. And here is the righteousness of Jesus Christ; is it not well worth our while to assemble from time to time, to be renewed in the righteousness of Jesus Christ, and to be renewed in that perfection we have in Jesus Christ? This, then, is one thing for which we assemble. And the minister that does not make this his prominent theme does not understand the position of a gospel minister; the people that do not assemble to hear of this, to learn their interest, and enjoy their interest in, and bless God for, that eternal perfection that is in Christ Jesus; the people who have not that end in view do not meet with the right spirit, they do not come together

scripturally, in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ. Again, those sacrifices could not clear the conscience of sin; there was still a consciousness of sin. But the sacrifice of Jesus Christ does clear the conscience of sin. You come to the house of God from time to time, conscious that between the time you were here last, and the present time, you have been the subject of sin, you have been the subject of many rebellions, of much hardness of heart, of many infidelities, of many murmurings against God, and that you are still a poor and needy creature. And this experience, from that time to this, of your leanness, and of your want of spirituality, makes your conscience somewhat tremble, and the result is, your faith is weakened, and your hope is lessened; so that you are ready to say, "My hope and strength are perished from the Lord." But by and by there is a declaration of the delightful truth over again, that "the blood of Jesus Christ cleanses from all sin;" and while hearing the word, the endearments of the Savior are brought into the soul, and you feel that you do love him. And if you love him a sense of love to him is a sense of pardoning mercy; a sense of love to him is sense of the truth that your sins are blotted out; a sense of feeling love to him is nothing else but his love drawing you, even that love that covers the multitude of sins. And you feel that though in some respects your conscience accuses you, yet, as it relates to your love to his name, conscience can say nothing against you; and thus, once more you get a little ease for your conscience, and your faith is strengthened, and your hope is confirmed, and you say, I am glad I have come; for I have heard of Jesus; I have heard a little more of that perfection that is in him; and now I find that his precious blood can still purge my conscience from dead works, and deadly works, those things that would be eternal banishment to me from the presence of the Lord, and from the glory of his power; but his precious blood still keeps up peace in my conscience with God, purging me from dead works to serve the living and the true God. And those sacrifices could not take away the remembrance of sin; but that the sacrifice of the Lord Jesus Christ has taken away the very remembrance of sin: "I, even I, am he that blots out your transgressions, and will not remember your sins." Precious atonement! thus to take away the very remembrance of sin. And another suggestion is the putting of sin away. The apostle says those sacrifices could not take away sin. And so, Jesus Christ not only perfects us thus, not only gives us peace with God, not only blots our sins out of remembrance, but has put them away. "As far as the east is from the west, so far has he removed our transgressions from us." And now notice, that this fourfold representation is nothing else but the good will of God. It was God's will that we should be perfect in Christ, and Christ delighted to carry out that will. It was God's will that we should enjoy pardon and have peace with him, and that Christ should be that peace, and that God should be unto us a God of peace; and Christ carried out that will. It was God's will to forget our sins, not to remember our iniquities, but that they should be forgotten forever, and Christ carried out that good will. It was God's will that our sins should be so put away as never again to return, and Jesus Christ has carried out that good will. Now then, this is one object for which we assemble; "Preach the gospel unto every creature." "Not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together." Now this is, then, friends, one end we have in view, to hear from time to time this glorious gospel; and that the minister is to know nothing but Christ, and him crucified, and the people need not seek anything but Jesus Christ. You do not need anything that is not in Christ. If you need God the Father, in his mercy, and love, and care, and power for you, and his counsels, why then all this is in Christ. And if you desire more grace, more freedom, more heaven, more fellowship with God; well then, all is in Christ; for all the fullness of the Godhead bodily dwells in the Lord Jesus Christ. Now is this worth assembling for. If it be not, then I know not what is. As to the trumpety gospels of the day, duty-faith, free-will, other gospels; for myself, I should feel justified in staying at home, and reading the Bible by myself, and not assembling with any at all, if there were no assemblies to go

to but the assemblies of such mock gospels; their yea and nay gospels. My language concerning all such assemblies would be, "O my soul, come not you into their secret, and into their assembly" of yea and nay gospels; my honor, be not you united." But when I come to Zion's assembly, where the Lamb is: when I come to that assembly where Jesus is the Alpha and the Omega, not in one part of the sermon only, but in every part; not set up in his pre-eminence and excellency in one sermon, and then thrust aside in another sermon, and something else put in his place. No, such are dissemblers, and therefore from such assemblies I shall ever flee. But to meet the assemblies of the true saints of God has been my delight for years and will be down to the end of my little day on earth. So then, when we insist upon assembling ourselves together, I want to know what for? And if they answer, Why, it is to hear of that perfection that is in Christ; then I will come. It is to hear of sin being put eternally away, as far as the east is from the west; and that in the mighty space between God and sin that there is plenty of room for poor sinners to rush in and seek mercy. "His feet shall stand upon the mount of Olives," the mount of Olives there represents sin, "and the mount of Olives shall cleave in the midst thereof toward the east and toward the west, and there shall be a very great valley;" plenty of room for sinners to rush in; living waters shall rush out and meet them. "And in that day, it shall neither be clear nor dark;" it is not yet the clear day of glory, and it is not now nature's darkness, but between the two; but at evening tide, when a dying hour comes, it shall then be light. Ah, then I will come; then I will come. Give this definition of it, and then I will say with the Psalmist, "I was glad when they said unto me, Let us go up into the house of Jehovah;" not the house of Baal, nor the house of Chemosh, not the house of a false gospel. Let it be a false gospel, and then you are universally deceived. It is the only respect in which we are not deceived; the true gospel is the only hope that cannot be blasted; it is the only order of things that cannot break down; it is the only foundation that will never give way; it is the only friendship that is always the same.

The love of God in this matter is the love of his nature, and in that nature, there is no evil, and therefore he loves with all the purity of his nature, and that purity of his nature being always the same, he loves the same. So, Jesus Christ as man. Jesus Christ as man loved in all the purity of his nature. If Jesus Christ as man, though he was God as well as man, had come in the ordinary course of nature, he would have loved partly with nature and partly with evil passions. But as his human nature had nothing but purity in its origin, being of the Holy Ghost, it had nothing but purity in it, and he loved purely, with his pure nature, in all the purity of divine and human nature's perfection. He never had a sexual feeling; the most charming, beautiful woman under the sun would make no more impression upon his pure nature than a tree would. He had not such a thing in him; he had not a sexual element in him; he was free, entirely free, and was utterly incapable of an evil thought, an evil look, or being for a moment attracted in any possible way whatever. Pure, so that he loved God, he was free; his nature was not in bondage to anything and therefore his nature was free to love God with all his heart and all his soul, to love those whom the Father had given him with all his heart and all his soul. His nature was free; free from passion, free from infirmity, free from anything of the sort. Just as you will be when you reach those happy plains, and your body raised from the dead; then you will be pure, then you will not love and deceive yourself, nor others deceive you; you will then love in perfect purity. No passion then, no fury then, no wrath then, no heart burnings then, no jealousies then, all calm, all universal. And one saint in heaven to you will be just the same as another: not the slightest difference whatsoever. So, with God, all his people, one is just the same as the rest, there is no difference. Ah! What a scene we have before us. Oh! happy hour will that be when mortality shall be swallowed up of life, and we shall spring forth out

of all this horrible misery into which we are brought by the fall of man, out of which we are brought by the blood of the Lamb, when we leap into that freedom and immortality which is in a brighter and in a better world. Now then, we assemble to hear of this Jesus Christ, the perfection we have in him, the peace we have in him, the blotting out of the very remembrance of sin we have by him, the putting away of sin and all pertaining thereto we have in him, and to rejoice that he was perfection, perfection of purity. Adam and Eve before the fall knew nothing of human passion. There they were, free to enjoy their Maker's smile; and nothing else did they want, until the cursed serpent threw his elements in, defiled and overturned human nature, and infuriated the whole brute creation, threw the physical elements of the world into confusion; and that curse of heaven has marched on from that day to this, and will do so until it shall break forth in tremendous conflagration at the last, and burn this cursed earth, and all the works therein. "What manner of persons, then," says the apostle, "ought we to be in all holy conversation and godliness, seeing that all these things", that a filthy nature so prizes, "are to be dissolved?" What should be our great object, but that we may be found of Him in peace, without spot and blameless, that we may come under, at the last, the granulation, "Well done, you good and faithful servant; you have been faithful over a few things, I will make you ruler over many things; enter you into the joy of your Lord."

I would that I had ability, which I have not, just to set forth the contrast between the Savior and other men. We talk of his purity, we talk of his holiness, we talk of his perfection, we talk of his innocence; but have we ever entered really into it in a way that would profit us very much if we could do so? I am sure, if we were favored to do so, it would make us prize him more, and worship him more, and adore him more, and cleave to him more, and rejoice in him more. Thus, then, we assemble to hear these things, to hear what our God has done for us in saving us from so great a death, and that he does still save and will save us.

The second occasion of assembling under the Old Testament dispensation was not less interesting than the first. In the first you get the abolition of sin, and:

"If sin be pardoned, we're secure."

In the second assembly of the firstfruits, you get two things. When they were about to ingather the harvest, not one sheaf was to be gathered in until a sheaf was first gathered into the Lord, presented to the Lord; so that the harvest must not be gathered in until the firstfruits be gathered in. Oh, you sweet, dear, and blest Redeemer, here am I, out in the field of sin, in the field of wrath, in the field of death, and upon the very precipice of hell, and from this exposed condition I can never be gathered in unless there be someone first gathered in as a representative of me, and as the way by which I can be gathered in. And Jesus is that firstfruits; he was gathered in, and we are gathered in by him:

"Why should I fear death?
My Jesus has gone that way,
And taken the sting of the monster away."

Why should I fear eternity? Jesus is there, and it is by his blood, by his righteousness, by his perfection, we are to be gathered into God. And in assembling to hear these things, are we not sometimes gathered in a fresh? Does not a word sometimes come to you, and you very commonly

express it thus: Well, that sentence picked me up nicely; that part of the sermon picked me up nicely; that encouraged me nicely. Now what is this but a renewal of your ingathering? And as sure as the gospel picks you up now, as sure as the gospel suits you now, lays hold of you now, and seems to lift you up from your forebodings and despair now so sure will the great gatherer, Christ Jesus, gather you at last into the garner, gather you at last from this wilderness of thorns into that paradisiacal glory where he himself forever dwells. Oh, then, that is the assembly of the saints, where Jesus thus appears in all his sacrificial adaptation, and where he appears as the firstfruits, the way in which we are gathered into God. The hand of mercy never reaches out after the sinner but by Jesus Christ, and the faith of God's elect never aims to lay hold of eternal life, nor to gain access to God, but by Jesus Christ.

The third assembly, occasion of assembling, was that of the feast of tabernacles. I will make only one or two remarks here, that this feast of tabernacles had a kind of graduated or progressive sacrificial institution. It was to last so many days, and there were to be less sacrifices to-morrow than today, and there were to be less sacrifices after that; the sacrifices were to grow less and less. Do you not here see two delightful truths? First, the progress of the Savior's sacrificial suffering until he reached the end thereof; and he did reach the end, he did reach the end. The Old Testament saints saw he would reach the end. Moses and Elias, when on the Mount of Transfiguration, saw the Savior would reach the end. He himself saw he should reach the end, and rise the third day, And the apostles bare the delightful testimony that he did reach the end, and you and I have rejoiced therein times without number. Now that is one thing indicated by the feast of tabernacles. And I will name only one more thing out of the great many things of course indicated, and that is this, that the sacrifices were to come gradually to an end, to show the truth of the Savior's progression in suffering till he came to the end; secondly, the same thing points out this fact, that you shall go on suffering, that your troubles shall become less and less, less and less, less and less, till by-and-by they come to an end; sorrow and sighing shall flee away. Ah! says one, then I am not in that path, for my troubles are more and more. They may be thicker, friends, just now than usual; but you have not so many to endure now as you had a few years ago; no. You have had your afflictions, and adversities, and sorrows, conflicts, and trials, and just now they may be unusually weighty, unusually dark, and unusually trying; but that does not alter the fact that you have not so many troubles to endure now as you had. Surely you believe that if a sparrow cannot fall without the Lord's notice, you must believe that your afflictions do not come by chance. You must not believe that some afflictions come contrary to God's will, and that you have troubles, but he did not intend you should have them; and that you are sighing under burdens and trials, and that the Lord somehow or another is somewhat defeated in his designs concerning you; that he designed you quite another path, but the path he assigned you, you are got out of, and got into a tnbulatory one. That doctrine won't do, friends; no, no. "I am the Lord your God, that teaches you to profit, leads you in the way that you should go."

Thus, then, if you put these three together, they form a fair representation of the end for which we assemble. First, to understand what Jesus Christ has done. second, to enjoy the ingathering even now, by Jesus Christ, the firstfruits and, third, to enjoy the delightful truth that Jesus reached the end of his sufferings and of course his sufferings were ours; that is, his sufferings were the sorrows that our sins had demerited. He bare our sorrows, he bare our grief, and was wounded for our transgressions; reached the end. And then we meet also to be assured from time to time that there is an end to our troubles, and that "the righteous has hope in his death;" and that "I know the

thoughts I think towards you, thoughts of peace, and not of evil, to give you an expected end.” “Not,” then, “forsaking the assembling of ourselves together.” If we willfully neglect the house of God, we thereby slight Christ as the Passover; we slight the sacrifice of Christ; and to slight that is to slight him, and to slight that is to slight both the Father and the Holy Spirit. If we willfully neglect the house of God, then we slight the Savior as the firstfruits, as though we cared not whether we were left to the eternal blast of Almighty wrath, or whether we are gathered into the garner. To willfully neglect the house of God, then, is to slight the Savior in the completeness of his work, and to make light of the delightful truth that the redeemed of the Lord shall return and come with singing unto Zion that everlasting joy shall be unto them, sorrow and sighing shall flee away.

How have we been, for I ought to say so, now for more than thirty years on this ground, by the instrumentality of a poor, lame, stammering whispering servant of Jesus Christ, what hundreds of people on this ground have thus been kept together for thirty years! How many hundreds have been called by grace; how many hundreds removed into almost all parts of the civilized world, and how many hundreds gone to heaven and yet as numerous as ever; hundreds here this morning that as much belong to God as those that are now in heaven! I have therefore not taken my text this morning as a reproof to you as a people; I took the text because the text took me. I thought there was something in it encouraging. I looked at the ends for which we met; I thought, How glorious are the ends! We meet to see Jesus. I have given a sample only of the relations in which we see him; for I have said a mere nothing in comparison with what might be said upon so great a subject.

“As the manner of some is,” and a wicked manner it is, a very bad manner, “but exhorting one another,” The wife should encourage the husband, and the husband the wife; the parents the children, and the children the parents. Encouraging one another all we can. I know very well that where the minds of children, or parents, or wife, or husband, are carnal, we can have very little, or perhaps no effect; but, at any rate, if we cannot prevail upon them, let us throw no impediment, let us give all the encouragement we can; for who can tell? And not only do we assemble for the purposes I have named; but there is one purpose that I have not named, that I ought to name, for which we thus assemble, and that is, to be the means of bringing in others also. I could tell you of a great many interesting instances, striking conversions that have taken place on this ground, where persons have come by the mere friendly invitation of a seat holder or member. Will you go and hear my minister? Well, they come in a friendly way, sit down, perhaps be very indignant, go away indignant sometimes; sometimes, of course, not always, but sometimes, when they go away thus indignant, their own indignation recoils upon them, and they say, What am I indignant about? I am very much offended with that minister this morning, or evening, as the time may be, perhaps after all he touched me where I did not like it; he has touched my importance and pride; it is just possible he is right, and I am wrong; I will go and hear him again. And we have had instances of this kind. Others have been delighted, fixed to the place, and they have stopped. So that we assemble not only thus for our own good, but for the good of others as well. You that subscribe to the cause, that are seat holders, and delight to subscribe in every other respect within your power; while you have your own interest in view, and it is right you should, you have not your own interest in view exclusive; for though it may not always strike you concerning others, yet when you pay for your sitting, or subscribe to the cause, you know not how instrumental in thus helping to be the means of the conversion of others. “Not,” then, “forsaking the assembling of ourselves together. If we wish our own souls well; if we wish well to our children, to our kindred; if we wish well to

the part of the country we inhabit; if we wish well to the country at large; if we wish well to our government, if we wish well to the world, let us not forsake the assembling of ourselves together. Bless the Lord! The gospel is that that can bear all weathers and is not ashamed to be seen at any time or at any place; the gospel is that this is never out of season; like Christ, the tree of life, bearing fruit all the year round, so the gospel is never out of season. Let us therefore encourage one another. I pray for grace to be enabled to encourage you, that when you come you may enjoy the season, that when you come it may be the word of God to you, and that while I preach it may be the gospel of God to you; and that encourages you to come, and then you're coming encourages me to come, and so we encourage one another.

And, says our text, "so much the more, as you see the day approaching." As though the apostle should say, Look upon all your temporal hopes, look upon all your temporal possessions, look upon all your temporal advantages, and remember that very soon you will not need any of them, very soon you will have done with the whole of them; very soon they will all pass off, like a dissolving view; very soon they will be all nothing to you. But you cannot say that of the gospel. Just as the temporal is receding, the eternal is approaching. And, therefore, as you see the day of death approaching, that day of death is not to overtake you as a thief; you are prepared for it. That solemn hour, when you shall pass from time to eternity, is not to overtake you as though you were in darkness. The day is approaching when you will need mediatorial perfection with you more than ever, when you will need the peace of God more than ever. "Mark the perfect man, and behold the upright" in his profession; "the end of that man is peace;" when you will need the non-remembrance of sin more than ever; when you will need the great truth that Christ has put away sin more than ever; when you will need Jesus as the firstfruits, the way of ingathering, you will need him in that hour more than ever; when you will need him in the completeness of his work, and to terminate your sorrows, and to wipe all tears from your face, more than ever.

Now I cannot close, though I am keeping you a little over your time, without one little appeal to you. Can you, how many of you can each lay his hand upon his heart, and say, This is a Jesus Christ that I have no desire ever to have done with; this is a God that I have no desire ever to be separated from; this is that Eternal Spirit that I have no desire to slight; yes, I can lay my hand upon my heart and say, "Whom have I in heaven but you; and there is none upon the earth I desire beside you." I know the day is approaching when I must part with all that is on earth; but I have no desire to part with these things. God be with me, increase my strength, increase me in light, increase me in godliness; for godliness, after all, has the promise of the life that now is, and of that which is to come. And what after all, can be a greater reason for assembling that this, that our God has promised to be there? And the name of every true assembly of saints is Jehovah-Shammah, the Lord is there.