

THE WOMAN HELPED BY THE EARTH

A SERMON

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“And the earth helped the woman.” Revelation 12:16

WE cannot have in our minds any doubt but that the woman here spoken of is a spiritual, a mystic woman; that it is the Lamb's bride, the church of the blessed Lord, concerning which he says that it shall be in his hand a royal diadem and a crown of glory. And we cannot doubt but that the array of this woman, as represented in the beginning of this chapter, must be understood spiritually, in the gospel sense of the word: that the sunlight with which she is arrayed is nothing else but the Lord Jesus Christ; and that the stars upon her head are nothing else but the culminating light of prophets and apostles, all shining upon her, for they all bear testimony in her favor; and the moon under her feet, if we take the latter part of the 60th chapter of Isaiah, where we read, “Your moon shall not withdraw its brightness,” I should think this moon must mean the gospel as the light in which she walks. And we cannot, I think, doubt but that the Lord Jesus Christ is the child that she labored to bring forth; for in all ages of the world the church of the blessed God has labored to bring forth the Lord Jesus Christ: and no wonder, therefore, that the dragon should stand before this woman to devour this child, as represented by the gospel; that is, to destroy the gospel, set the gospel aside; for if you set the gospel aside, you set the Lord Jesus Christ aside. And then this child being caught up unto God, and to his throne, is of course an expression highly figurative, expressive of that care which the Lord takes of that gospel which represents to man the Lord Jesus Christ. “And the woman fled into the wilderness, where she has a place prepared of God;” which means the dealings of the Lord with his people, the care he takes of them. And you will observe that she is to be in the wilderness a limited time; but you never find, all through the Scriptures, a single hint of her being with the Lord a limited time; when she is spoken of in that fashion, there she has before her a blest eternity. Though in the wilderness, it is a limited time. Nor can we doubt but that the war spoken of in this chapter is spiritual; for “we wrestle not against flesh and blood;” it is not a flesh and blood war, “but against principalities and against powers,” that is, corporate, organized systems of hostility against the gospel; these I take to be the principalities and powers that are brought against the gospel. “And against spiritual wickedness in high places;” and that is a very high place when spiritual wickedness ascends so high as to put down Divine sovereignty and put human sovereignty into the place of it; when spiritual wickedness ascends so high as to usurp the consciences of men, and put the Almighty away from that quarter, and put the creature to take the place of the blessed God, to reign over the consciences of men. Those are very high places for spiritual wickedness's to occupy when they lay hold of the lofty, the sublime, and infallible truths of the gospel, and would put them down, and put something of man's device into the place thereof. Against this spiritual

wickedness in these high places Christ and his ministers have ever fought, and they have ever prevailed, and they will prevail, and shall prevail; and Satan must be cast down, or else we are cast down, because it is impossible for both to be up; but, bless the Lord, he does still so prevail as to raise up the poor out of the dust and the beggar from the dunghill, that he may set them among princes, even the princes of his people. Nor can we be much at a loss to understand what is meant by the flood that the serpent cast out of his mouth, in order that the woman, the church, might be carried away with that flood; but the Lord is ever watchful over his people, and so our text shows us that so far from Satan gaining his end, the earth helped the woman; the earth opened her mouth, and swallowed up the flood which the dragon, or rather the serpent, cast out of his mouth.

Now we have two chief objects to aim at this morning. The first is to define *what the object of this mystic woman is*; that is, to define what the particular object of the church of God is; for unless we understand clearly the particular object that the woman has in view, we cannot understand what is meant by her being helped, unless we understand first what she is aiming at. This, therefore, shall be our first part. And then the second will be to show *the several respects in which the earth, not indeed willingly or intentionally, helped the woman*. And then, if time permitted, we might draw some exceedingly encouraging inferences from these premises.

I notice, then, in the first place, *the church of the blessed God*. I need not stay to remind you that it is a mode of speech very common in the Scriptures to represent the church as a woman, to represent her as the wife of the Lamb, as his bride. I need not remind you of those beautiful scriptures that make use of this human relationship to represent that sublime and eternal relationship subsisting between the Lord Jesus Christ and those for whom he died. Let us now come to a definition, then, of what the object of the true church of God is. The first I will name, and that, indeed, may be said to include everyone, her object is to gain possession of eternal glory. That, I think, is a very simple and a clear definition, that the object is to obtain eternal glory. And whatever can be said of the church corporately or generally can be said of the Christian individually. When the Christian comes home to his own soul's experience, and asks himself, What am I aiming at? if he gives to himself this definition he will find that that includes everything: I am pressing forward towards the mark for the prize of my high calling, lofty calling; called into the highest relationship, called into the highest privileges, called into the highest possessions, called to inherit the highest heavens and the highest glory. I press towards the mark for the prize of my high calling, God in Christ Jesus. Even Jesus, for the joy that was set before him, endured the cross, despised the shame, and has now reached possession, and holds that possession for all that are favored to know him, and to lay aside every weight, and that special sin of being like the Pharisees, or legality, or unbelief, that besets every Christian, and to run with patience the race set before them, looking unto Jesus; for there is no getting on without him. But let us be careful in this matter. Now, then, the church of the blessed God is in the wilderness, and her object is to get through that wilderness into the promised land; that is, into heaven. How is she to do this? We will go, in the first place, to Solomon's Song, and see if we can get a little help there; and there we shall find the Lord Jesus Christ travelling to the same end; and then, if we go a little farther on in this book, we shall find the church travelling with him to the very same end. Now in the 3rd chapter of Solomon's Song it says, "Who is this that comes out of the wilderness?" That clearly shows that he was or had been in the wilderness. This I need not enlarge upon, for I am sure our state by nature is a wilderness; indeed, and yet Christ came into the wilderness of all our responsibilities, and of all the penalties which our sins had entailed; and our sins would have held us to eternity. But the church was delighted when she saw there was One that could not be held by death; when she saw there was One that could not be held by Satan;

when she saw there was One that could not be held by tribulations, nor by the heavy burdens that laid upon him, but was stronger than all, and she therefore said, "Who is this that comes out of the wilderness?" She began to see that if ever she got out of her wilderness state, her awful state, it must be by him. And then notice the beautiful description, "Comes out of the wilderness like pillars of smoke." Now there were three pillars of smoke in the wilderness of old literally, and all these have, I think, I need not try to prove it, but I wish to preach in a self-evident way as clearly as I can, all these three pillars, cloudy pillars in the wilderness, had a spiritual meaning. First, there was the fiery cloudy pillar, that guided them all their journey through; and this pillar I will here venture, as I have done before, to take as a figure of the gospel, for what is it that guides us through the wilderness but the gospel? But then, say you, that cloud had a dark side to it. So has the gospel. "He that believes not shall be damned;" and the unbeliever is on the dark side, as it were, of the cloud. And as this cloud separated the Israelites from the Egyptians, so the gospel now spiritually separates men. If you meet with a man of true gospel spirit, immersed, as we have lately said, into the light of the gospel, and you bring that man into connection with a man that is of an un-gospel spirit, that does not love the gospel, that does not know his need of the gospel, and therefore, does not receive it, now you cannot bring those two men together in their spirit. You may bring them into the same room, the same chapel, or the same pew, and perhaps into the same membership of the same church; you might do this through oversight, but you cannot bring their spirits together. The one is of an un-gospel spirit, and the other is of a gospel spirit; the one is of a free-grace spirit, the other is somewhat antagonistic to that. So that this cloud thus then severed the one from the other, guided them through the wilderness, and never left them till it saw them safe into the promised land. And so, the blessed gospel will never leave you, if you are lovers of it, until it sees you safe, clean passed over Jordan. Another pillar of cloud was that of the sacrificial smoke. While the cloud was to guide them, that sacrificial altar was to clear the way between them and the blessed God. Their sins were a cloud, or rather our sins; some of us know it, daily know it, that our sins are a cloud between us and God, a cloud we cannot get through, and we see not the bright light that is behind it. But when the sacrifice of Jesus rises to view; when we have a fresh revelation of his sacrifice having put away sin by the sacrifice of himself, and hear the Lord saying unto us, "I, even I, am he that blots out your transgressions as a cloud, and your sins as a thick cloud," then the clouds pass off, the way is clear, and there appears a smiling God; there appear smiling angels; there appears a smiling eternity; there appears a smiling heaven, and everything invites us to God. The third cloud in the wilderness was that of the intercessory, the cloud of incense that ascended before the mercy-seat. So, in this book, "There was given unto the angel much incense, that he should offer it with the prayers of all saints." Here you have the intercession of the Lord Jesus Christ, our great High Priest, that has said, "I go to prepare a place for you: I will come again and receive you to myself." Now, "Who is this that comes out of the wilderness like pillars of smoke?" Is there not, then, something analogous between the typical and the antitypical? If we take the fiery cloudy pillar to mean the gospel, is there not something very expressive? a great deal more than I have said? And this same Person, Christ Jesus, this Person that comes out of the wilderness, is said to be perfumed with myrrh. Myrrh is noted for bitterness, as you are aware. And can anything be simpler, can anything, I was going to say, be more instructive and more endearing? Oh, my hearer, does not the fragrance of his bitter sufferings, does not the fragrance of his bitter agonies, does not the fragrance of his bitter death sometimes soften our hearts, solemnize our minds, endear our God? And when we realize a little of this perfume, of this heavenly fragrance, Ah, said such a sinner, hitherto self-despairing, I thought the bitterness of death was mine; I had so much bitterness in my soul; for peace I had great bitterness; I thought bitterness eternal would be my portion; but now I realize a little of the fragrance of the bitter sufferings of the blest Redeemer; now I hope I can say, "You have in love to my soul

brought it up from the pit of corruption; you have cast all my sins behind your back.” Perhaps you will say, What has this to do with your text? You will see presently. Now, not only perfumed with myrrh but with frankincense. There, again, you get his intercession. You know his intercession is often spoken of as incense, meaning the incense, the fragrance of his blessed name. And indeed I might as well say that the blessed Redeemer is fragrant everywhere, whether the babe in the manger, or whether, when twelve years old, asking the wise men questions and answering them, or whether in his private life, whether in his public baptism, whether in his public ministry, miracles, or work; and while he was lying in the grave, there he left a divine perfume; or when he ascended up on high; when he appears in the assembly of the saints; yes, he is all fragrance, all his garments smell of myrrh, aloes, and cassia; wherever his presence is it takes the bitterness away, makes everything sweeter than honey and the honeycomb. And “perfumed with all powders of the merchant.” These powders I understand to be, or spices it may be rendered, I understand to be the truths of the gospel; and was he not perfumed with all these spices? Read, for example, our favorite chapter; not that which is the favorite to the exclusion of others, but still the dear Savior seems to embody, in that 17th of John, the gospel in such lovely forms; see how he was perfumed with these blessed truths. Now that is the Christian that I necessarily, and we all do, feel the most union of soul to, that is nicely perfumed with these blessed truths of the gospel; the man that has a good downward experience, and stands out decided for the truth, and feels that he knows something of the gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ. Now then, how is the church to get out of the wilderness? to come to personal experience, how am I to come out of the wilderness? Now comes the answer that will bring me to our text. I have referred to the 3rd chapter of Solomon's Song; come to the 8th chapter, “Who is this”, before it was “Who is this?” the question might well be asked, for you may go on learning to all eternity, and you will never fully fathom what he is; it is our very glory that our religion is too deep to be fathomed, too high to be surmounted, too broad to be measured, and too wondrous in its qualities ever thoroughly to be comprehended. So, of the church. “Who is this that comes up from the wilderness leaning?” you do not read that he was leaning upon anything, you see, friends, “who is this that comes out of the wilderness like pillars of smoke?” The glorious gospel, sacrificial perfection, intercessory prevalence; no leaning upon anyone; travels in the greatness of his strength. Ah, if his bride saw him leaning upon another, she would be afraid to lean upon him; she would say, If he cannot hold himself up, I am sure he cannot hold me up and himself too. Therefore, she saw him travelling in the greatness of his strength. But when we come to the church, “Who is this that comes up from the wilderness, leaning upon her beloved?” There is the beloved, then; he who thus appears in the gospel, he who thus appears in sacrificial perfection, he who thus appears in intercessory prevalence, he is the beloved. And so, she gets up out of her Adam state, out of her sinful state, out of her low state, out of her mortal state, out of her deathly state, out of her tribulation state, leaning upon her beloved. That implies, you see, friends, that she had nearness of access to him, that she was brought to believe in him, brought to trust in him; and she knew it was an arm that never would betray her trust. And the answer, also, concerning the church is very beautiful; for the Lord answers the question. “I raised you up;” did not raise herself up. Should you and I have ever got up into the perfection of Christ as we are now if the Lord had not raised us up into it? No, we should have been too blind for that; and too much inclined to a downward religion, if we had been inclined to any religion at all. Should we have got up into the lofty settlements of eternity? No. The Pharisees had lost sight of these, and the professing world, they lose sight of them, or rather they have never seen them. So that the Lord says, “I raised you up.” When I first began to seek the Lord, I had no idea then of ever becoming what they call a *hyper*, and high in doctrine, high and higher. I had no idea which was high, and which was low. I felt my low condition, I felt my degraded condition; I felt that at hell's dark door I lay; I felt that the lowest hell was my desert, and I trembled

at God's blessed word. But when the Lord revealed to me the wonders of his mercy, these lofty settlements of eternity, my soul woke up to that munition of rocks, and I thought, What a happy people that dwell there! the bread of eternal life is given them, the water of eternal life is sure; and there that same God is their God, he is the Most High, they dwell on high. I never thought of getting there; but the Lord lifted me up; I could not find any remedy anywhere else. Therefore, the Lord says, "I raised you up under the apple tree." Now I take the apple tree there spiritually; cannot take that literally, friends, it would be ridiculous to take it literally, must be taken spiritually; you would not take it literally, of course not; any more than you would take that literally in the 2nd chapter, that "As the apple tree among the trees of the wood, so is my beloved among the sons. I sat down under his shadow with great delight, and his fruit was sweet to my taste." "Under his shadow;" if you go to the last chapter of Hosea, you have these beautiful words, which, I think, will explain what is meant by being raised up under the apple tree. It says in that chapter, "They that dwell under his shadow shall return." Who put us under the shadow of the paradisiacal mediator, Christ? Election put us there; election; chosen in him before the foundation of the world; we were then under his shadow, under his protection, under his care; placed there then. By-and-bye the time arrives, and this soul that is put under the paradisiacal, I use the word "paradisiacal" because he is there represented as the peaceful tree, as the fruitful tree, as the evergreen tree; for though apple trees in general are not evergreen, yet this heavenly apple tree is, as you are aware; "his leaf shall not wither." And so, when the time came, because you were placed there by election, because you were one of his brethren, because the Father placed you there, he raised you up under the protection of the dear Savior, and as Joseph knew his brethren when his brethren knew not him, so Jesus knew you, and saw you under this apple tree before you knew you were there; when you were wandering in sin's dark maze, and wending your way to hell, and laboring to damn your own soul, even then relatively you were under this paradisiacal, peaceful Mediator's protection; and when the time came, he raised you up, and now you are so acquainted with the blessedness of such a position, that you would not exchange it for that of the highest archangel of heaven; no position can be so good as this paradisiacal position under this immortal tree, where we have the shining's of God's presence, where, as Watts nicely sings,

"Everlasting spring abides,
And never-withering flowers."

"There your mother brought you forth; there she brought you forth that bare you." I am inclined to think the mother there is not the church; I am inclined to think the mother there is the covenant of grace. The apostle Paul, as you recollect, in his Epistle to the Galatians makes Hagar a figure of the covenant of works; and all men who look to the works of the law for salvation are the offspring of Hagar, are bond children, that are to be cast out if they die in that state; Sarah representing the covenant of grace, this is the new covenant; and so there is a vital sympathy, and to my mind the idea is beautiful beyond description, there is a vital sympathy between the mother and the child. First, Jesus Christ was a child of the new covenant, he was the Mediator of the same; though made under the law, that was to be his place only for a little while, till he had magnified it; though made under the curse, that was to be his place only for a little time, until he had ended the curse; but he was in reality a child of the new covenant, the Mediator of the new covenant; and there is a vital sympathy between the Savior and the new covenant. And so, if we are new covenant people, brought into this life, there will be a vital sympathy between our souls and the new covenant. I can say that it is so with me, and I am satisfied it is so with hundreds of you, and I am satisfied it was so with our dear friend the Lord took from us last Thursday, Mr. Lee. His soul was as happy as his body

was miserable; and his soul was as strong as his body was weak; it was indeed a triumphant death. I know that there was a vital sympathy between his soul and the new covenant. Twenty-two years ago now, I was preaching one Sunday afternoon in town, and the Lord in providence led him to hear me; and the Lord did by that sermon make him concerned about his state, and indeed began a work of grace in his heart, and he lived well from that day to the day of his death; so that I may reckon him one of my sons, and I am glad to see my sons die happy, like to see them live well, and die well. I take encouragement sometimes when I see in a dying hour this poor old nature torn all to pieces, but at the same time the words of the poet fulfilled,

“A mortal paleness on my cheek,
But glory in my soul.”

Ah, when there are these vital sympathies established between the new covenant and your soul, why, then that new covenant speaks kindly to you. The language of this mother is, “I lead in the way of righteousness,” that is, the righteousness of faith; “in the midst of the paths of judgment,” that is, gospel judgment, giving judgment in your favor; “that I may cause those that love me to inherit substance; and I will fill their treasures.”

Now here, then, is the church of God brought to Jesus Christ, and her object is to get home to glory by the gospel, by his sacrifice, by his intercession, by his bitter agonies, and by the fragrance of his name, and that in all this paradisiacal order; it is a beautiful representation; all nations have instinctively taken a tree, especially a fruit tree, as the symbol of peace; and so Jesus Christ is our peace, and hence then the blessed promise that he will never leave nor forsake us. Now that is the woman, the church, thus travelling on towards a better world; that is one end she has in view.

Another end, which is included in this, is to escape the wrath to come. You see the wrath of God is invisible. When a building takes fire, as we have had recently in this neighborhood, there is nothing left neglected by which to escape the overwhelming and present conflagration. But then the wrath of God is invisible, you see; and so, in order for us to be affected by it, and to wish to escape from it, we need special grace from God. “Noah, being warned of God of things not seen as yet.” Oh, for our eyes to be opened to see that wrath is as sure as mercy, that the threatening's of the great God are not idle words, but all must be fulfilled; and to view the dear Redeemer as the way of escape, and to feel that of all advantages none can equal that of being by the Savior delivered from the wrath to come, to stand accepted before him at the last.

Another object the church has in view is to be the mother of a large family. There is a promise to that effect; many promises; let me notice one. “Your wife,” 128th Psalm; I think the wife is the church; I think the husband is Jesus Christ; “Your wife shall be as a fruitful vine by the sides of your house; your children like olive plants round about your table. Behold, thus shall the man,” the God-man Mediator, “be blessed that,” in perfection, “fears the Lord. You shall eat the labor of your hands,” which he does; “happy shall you be,” which he is “and it shall be well with you,” which it is. “You shall see the good of Jerusalem,” which he does; “all the days of your life,” and those days are eternal days. “Yes, you shall see your children's children your children, the apostles; your children's children, their offspring; “and peace upon Israel,” and that forever. Bless the Lord, then, the church is made to aim at this; and we rejoice at it. I am sure it is a comfortable thought in the prospect of our new chapel. I do hope and pray for more grace, and more wisdom, and more everything that I can need; and I do pray for more life, and light, and prayer among you. And I do

bless the Lord for what he has done; but I do pray, and really solemnly trust we have our best days to come in that respect. We hope, when we enter there, that we shall open it on a Tuesday; we hope we shall have a goodly number to baptize on the Wednesday night, and we hope we shall have a good public meeting on the Thursday. Now that is my present theory about it; of course, I can't help thinking about it. And I am sure our departed brother, Mr. Lee, did cheer my heart wonderfully. I thought, when I went into the pulpit in Finsbury that Sunday afternoon, feeling so thankful to God that I should have witnessed such a life and such a death, and have heard him thus bear testimony of the grace of God. I say, then, we do trust to have not only an increase of hearers, but an increase of living souls; that the Lord will, in his providence, bring the dead there and minister life unto them. And it is a blessed thing to belong to this true church of God; it is a blessed thing to be one with this new covenant. Hear what the word of God says about it; it is a promise to the church; may the Lord help us to turn it into prayer; and that we may see the fulfilment thereof; namely, that "All your children shall be taught of the Lord;" and we would not receive one into our church, not knowingly, that was not taught of the Lord; we may be deceived, but to the best of our judgment; that of course is our test; "All your children shall be taught of the Lord, and great shall be the peace of your children;" because Jesus Christ is their peace, and because God the Father is a God of peace, and because that peace is that which shall ultimately overcome all trouble, shall soothe them down until not a wave of trouble shall roll across their peaceful breast. Ah, but say you, if we should be thus blessed, Satan would go to work, and we shall have a great deal of opposition. So, the Lord says; for he says, "They shall surely gather together, but not by me," not by my authority; "whosoever shall gather together against you shall fall for your sake." We do not wish it; we pray the Lord rather to open their eyes and to have mercy upon them; but still the Lord will go on his own way. And he says, "I have created the smith that blows the coals in the fire;" so that the enemy could not exist if the Lord had not decreed that he should exist; now to you, Christians, this is encouraging; "and that brings forth an instrument for his work; and I have created the waster to destroy. No weapon that is formed against you shall prosper," against the true church of the blessed God; "and every tongue that shall rise against you in judgment you shall condemn. This is the heritage of the servants of the Lord, and their righteousness is of me, says the Lord;" and if the righteousness be of him, then it is a righteousness worthy of God, a righteousness worthy of Christ, a righteousness worthy of the work of the Holy Spirit, a righteousness worthy of that high destiny that awaits all those that shall be found in him, not having their own righteousness, which is of the law, but that righteousness which is by faith, even the righteousness of God, which is by the faith of the Lord Jesus Christ.

Now your time is gone? and what am I to do with my text? That is not gone. I had intended to point out three ways in which the earth helps the woman; "The earth opened her mouth;" just suggest it, and perhaps may return to the neighborhood of our text, if not the text itself, some future time. "The earth helped the woman, and the earth opened her mouth, and swallowed up the flood which the dragon cast out of his mouth." By this flood I think we may understand three things. First, people; "Floods of ungodly men," said David, "made me afraid;" led on by some tyrant. But presently: the voice comes, the earth has opened her mouth, and swallowed Herod up; "they are dead that sought my life." Enemies cannot live forever, any more than other men. That is one part of the meaning, I think, that God lays tyrants in the dust. Here I am naming a thought that would lead me into a field of the history of martyrdom, to show how tyrants, tyrant after tyrant, has been cut off, and how the church of God thereby has been helped; and at the very time when it seemed as though it must be extinguished, tyrants have been cut off, up has sprung the church, has multiplied and grown; she has had breathing time; and the enemy has been made the means, first, of stirring her up to solemn

prayer; then, when the enemy is cut off, the church, after her sufferings, appreciates her mercies more than she ever would have done without those sufferings. Second, it means error: Satan cast error out of his mouth, floods. The object of Satan is to carry the woman away, that is, away from Jesus Christ, away from God, away from the truth. And the earth opened her mouth and swallowed up those floods; that is to say, mere professors open their mouths and receive those errors with greediness; wonderful! The dear Savior said that if anyone come in his own name the world will receive him. See how readily Mahometanism, and Popery, and various other floods that Satan has cast out of his mouth to carry the woman away from Christ; see how readily men have opened their mouths and swallowed up those errors to their destruction. But how, say you, does that help the woman? In the way the apostle explains; "There must be also heresies among you, that they which are approved may be made manifest among you." When the heresy comes in you drink it in, and go off; that will prove what you are: but if it stir you up to watchfulness and to prayer, if it stir you up to search the Scriptures, like the noble Bereans; if it stir you up to seek God with more earnestness, then this flood of error, the earth, by receiving it and advocating it, subserviently helps you; so that, so far from your losing by error you gain by it. Why, in many cases I should not have preached with near the force I have unless I had seen the inroads of error, and that has stirred me up, and helped me to understand the Scriptures, and helped me to pray and to rejoice in God, and to be the more earnest. Lastly, I am merely hinting at it now, not enlarging upon it, tribulation is another flood. Satan has a deal to do with our troubles; that you see in the case of Job. And thus, the earth swallowing up our troubles means that revolution which the Lord in his providence will bring about to swallow up those troubles, and to keep us still standing fast upon the Rock of Ages, where we are safe. But your time is gone, and I must say no more.