

# THE ABIDING CITY

## A SERMON

Preached on Sunday Morning March 24th, 1867

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AT THE NEW SURREY TABERNACLE, WANSEY STREET

Volume 9 Number 436

“And the residue of the people shall not be cut off from the city.” Zechariah 14:2

THIS refers to the destruction of Jerusalem by the Roman armies. And had we been there, and exposed to that destruction, we should then have valued and appreciated such a promise as this, that we should not be involved in the general ruin but should escape. Nor must we be surprised that there is so much said in the Old Testament, as well as in the New, of the destruction of Jerusalem and the dispersion of the Jewish nation. That one nation concerned the world more than all the nations of the earth put together besides, because the Jews, as a nation, were the repository of the oracles of God; they were the nation that embodied those glowing and wonderful predictions to be fulfilled in their land by an incarnate God, by the descent of the Holy Spirit, by the gospel being first preached at Jerusalem, to take up in its very beginning many who had joined in the dreadful crime of crucifying the Lord of life and glory. And those predictions also that pointed to the Gentile world declared how the gospel, like the four Edenic rivers, should extend east, west, north, and south, and that millions should, in fulfilment of those predictions, be brought to know the Lord savingly, and possess eternal life. Then, again, you must remember that the change that was then wrought was the greatest event that this world ever saw. The Redeemer came, and his sacrifice is the end pointed to by all preceding sacrifices. Now we possess that one atonement that runs up through time and to eternity; now we possess that one righteousness in contrast to Jewish righteousness. The Jew might be righteous or unrighteous fifty times in his life, but the Lord Jesus Christ has brought in everlasting righteousness, and his people once righteous are righteous forever. Then, again, we have all that abolished that was temporary, and we have that dispensation established by the Savior, that covenant confirmed that shall last for ever and ever. What a great change was this! It was a change in which was embodied the eternal salvation of men; it was a change in which were embodied all the promises of the Gospel, the grace, and the glory of God. And I question whether we ourselves are so much instructed as to the greatness of that change as would be for our advantage. I may just remark, too, before I enter into the immediate subject of the text, that not one of the Old Testament ordinances is brought into the New Testament dispensation. We have but two ordinances in the New Testament dispensation, unless you call preaching an ordinance; if we call that an ordinance, or an institution, then we have three, the preaching of the gospel, the ordinance of baptism, and the Lords Supper. But these two ordinances

are entirely new, so that we as New Testament believers, are to go to the Old Testament for instruction; but we are not to take any of its laws pertaining to the Levitical dispensation for our rule as Christians. We must come to the New Testament and to the New Testament only; and there it is not in this mount, nor at Jerusalem, but they that worship the Father must worship him in spirit and in truth. Hence, as we have now no earthly locality, we have no earthly center of unity. You read of “unity of the faith,” and Jesus Christ is the center of unity. It matters not, therefore, where the Christian is, whether at the center of the globe; it matters not where he is. His faith is in Christ, his soul is wrapped in Christ. He is the center of unity, of safe unity, of sure unity. Such a center of unity is the Savior that no one soul ever was yet, either in the Old Testament or the New Testament age, or ever will be vitally united to him and afterwards severed from him, for he himself is the strength and the representative of the unity. As the two natures in Christ cannot be severed, so they that are brought to renounce all confidence in the flesh, and to receive him as their all in all, they never can again be severed from him. So, then, there is a people, called in our text “the residue,” that shall not be cut off from the city.

Now, I will take a twofold view of our text. First, the destruction of Jerusalem, taking that Jerusalem to represent the world at large. Jerusalem had now fallen; Jerusalem was now heathenized; Jerusalem was now in bondage with her children, was under the law, and under its curse. There are but two positions in which any man or woman can be, under the law or under the gospel; and if you are not brought into the unity of the faith, then, whether you know it or not, you are under God’s law, where the penalties are; and those penalties, sooner or later, must overtake such. We may, therefore, take this Jerusalem in its heathenized state to represent the world, and then come to the promise that the people of God shall not be cut off; that is, they shall not be condemned with the world. This is our first proposition. Secondly, I shall take the city here to mean the city of God, and then show the reasons why the people of God are not to be cut off from that city

First, then, the destruction of Jerusalem, and in connection with it the promise here made. There are thousands, I say it with trembling; it always grieves me to say it; I wish I was not obliged to say it; but I am obliged to say it, there are thousands that profess to be citizens of heaven, to belong to that heavenly city, that will by and by find out, when God writes up the people, that they are not citizens of heaven, but they are citizens, alas! alas! only of the territories of Satan. Hence you read solemnly “many shall seek to enter in and shall not be able.” With what force and solemnity and weight do such considerations sink down into one’s mind. “Strait is the gate and narrow is the way that leads unto life and there be few that find it.” While therefore, I shall be as concise as possible, I shall also this morning be very particular in pointing out the character of the persons of whom our text says, they “shall not be cut off from the city.” They are described in the closing verse of the preceding chapter where the Lord says, “I will bring the third part through the fire.” Where they are distinguished from others. First conviction of sin. With all his supposed holiness, and goodness, and strength, and such a one says, This fire of my sin burns demeritively into the lowest hell. This fire of my sin has the strength of the wrath of almighty God. This fire of my sin has in it the strength of the eternal and infallible law of God. What a fearful fire is this! Now, when under this conviction, what solemnity is then felt! Such a one can then understand it is all but literally true, where David says, “My strength fails because of my iniquity, and my bones are consumed.” Sin has mortalized us, corrupted us, shall I say dissolved us? In what a few years the beautiful human structure, for beautiful it is; man is a wonderful being, fearfully and wonderfully made, in

what a few years must this beautiful structure molder into the dust. Satan had a savage joy in ruining this wonderful creature man. Such, then, I say, is sin, that has thus ruined us and brought us down. Now, if brought under this conviction, then there is the promise, I will bring you through this fire. And how does the Lord do it? By revealing to you the Lord Jesus Christ as the end of sin. And you begin to say, If I could lay hold of his atonement, of his righteousness, of the sure promise that is by him, that would bring me through it all. His blood only can quench the fire; he only could meet the sword and survive the same. What know you of this seeing your sin as a fire, and seeing it burn to the lowest hell; and that if the Lord bring you out of this fire it must be by precious faith in the Lord Jesus Christ? There are some that have had conviction; and they have run to the ale-bench, they have run to the theatre, they have run to carnal company and ungodly pursuits; and some have succeeded in quenching those convictions, in getting rid of them, and making themselves again at home in the territories of Satan; just showing that their convictions were not the work of the Holy Spirit, for when he comes into the soul he casts Satan out, and Satan cannot come back again. But when Satan goes out, the letter of the word will work certain convictions, and then Satan re-enters, stifles those convictions, and the man settles down in an ungodly world, and the last state of that man is worse than the first. Those of you that are brought to know the Lord, and dread the thought of your convictions being stifled, the Lord give you thankful hearts for this feeling and for this experience, and enable you, though you cannot as yet get any comfort from the gospel, yet to pray, as Mr. Hart says, and I like his words, they are the language of the heaven-born soul:

“Convince us of our sin,  
Then lead to Jesu’s blood.”

Lord, let not the work wear off; let me not go back to what, or where I was before. Lord, you know that I have my fears as to whether my conviction be right; do you teach me and guide me. There will be an earnestness about you, and the consequence will be that you shall wait for the vision; the vision is for an appointed time; by and by the dear Savior shall be manifested, and he will bring you out of the fire of hell; he will bring you out of the fire of guilt; bring you out into a wealthy place, and then you will bless his dear name, that ever he made it matter with you of personal experience. Then, again, there is the fire of tribulation. You must not expect your religion, I am speaking now to the little one, the young one, you must not expect your religion to exempt you from the common cares, labors, responsibilities, and troubles of the world; but you may expect your religion to help you, and guide you, and to support you therein. Therefore, if you have many tribulations, what are they for? Why, to bring to light the hidden evils of your heart, and to shut your mouth to that eternal boasting you hear among professors almost everywhere. Ah, yes; dear meek creature! He had such a trouble sir, never murmured; such an affliction, never murmured. I do not suppose that man or that woman ever murmured. No; he is a deal better than Job. Job did not murmur at the first, because the Lord was with him. And if I were asked which did Job the most good, his submission to God, or his murmuring, I should almost be ready to say his rebellion; because his rebellion led him to that conclusion you have at the end of his book; “I have heard of you by the hearing of the ear; but now my eye sees you. Wherefore I abhor myself and repent in dust and ashes.” So, then these troubles throw you into such a state of commotion, rebellion, and make you think, and make you speak, and make you act the fool too sometimes, and you will turn around and say, What a fool I am! Well of course you are. Yes, but I didn’t see it before. Thank God, you see it now. Well, I am ashamed to go to chapel now. What for? You have no occasion to

tell anybody of it; tell the Lord of it. And just watch the Lord, now, towards you; just watch the minister; and see, under your state and condition, whether that scripture is true in the 68th Psalm: "You have led captivity captive; you have received gifts for men; yea, for the rebellious also, that the Lord God might dwell among them." Now see if some word does not come to just where you are, melt down your heart, endear the Savior. You say, I see how it is now; now I see the reason of his letting me feel the hidden evils of my heart; now I see the reason of this tribulation; it is to strip me of self, that I may step out of self into Christ, out of the law into the gospel, out of self altogether into that completeness of standing I have in Christ Jesus as the Mediator of the better covenant. That is the meaning of your troubles. Hence good men have always come out of their troubles better men than they were when they went in; better, because they have more appreciated the boundless grace and mercy of the blessed God. Then, thirdly, there will also come persecution, slander, and reproach. It always was a reproach, ever since the world was, to belong to that sect that stand complete in Christ; to belong to that sect that are determined that not anything shall form a thread or a shoe-latchet of their religion out of the everlasting covenant. They cleave to that; they stand by and are decided for it. But those who are not thus convinced of their state, it always was with them a reproach to belong to such a sect, and is now, and will be down to the end of time. One of Satan's maneuvers is to fill us with false charity. Now we have no unkind feeling towards any person, and we should have no kind feeling whatever towards any false principle but stand out against its very first approach. "A little leaven leavens the whole lump." Just receive one false doctrine, whether it be duty-faith, or free-will, or any other error, just receive it, and it eats like a canker. And such a gospel will produce shoals of fleshly professors, that know neither their own hearts, the majesty of God's law, the fulness of the work of Christ, nor the order of that yea and amen promise sealed with a Mediator's blood. Now, "I will bring them through the fire;" all by faith in Jesus Christ; that is the way it is done. The three worthies got through the fire by faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. No harm came to Daniel amidst the fiery fierceness of the lions, for he believed in his God. "And I will refine them as silver is refined." How will the Lord refine them? Why, by bringing the dross to light and as the Lord lives, they have nothing but dross of their own. The apostle Peter says, "Think it not strange concerning the fiery trial which is to try you, as though some strange thing happened unto you." And again, he says, "If need be, you are in heaviness through manifold temptations;" for the trial of your faith is more precious than of gold, and that your flesh, your creature-ship, may be found unto praise, and honor, and glory at the appearing of Jesus Christ." How so? Your faith holds fast the truth through trials until he in whom your faith is, is re-manifested to you, and then you are glad when you see the Lord. So, it is faith that is found unto the praise and honor and glory of God at the appearing of Jesus Christ. Thus, they are refined as silver. Christ is their holiness, their righteousness, their life, their everything; so that their religion is pure as heaven, faultless as Christ himself, for he is their religion; their religion is as pure as silver purified seven times. None but themselves can understand this. And I will try them as gold is tried; they shall call on my name, and I will hear them; I will say, It is my people; and they shall say, The Lord is my God." That will be the end of it. Now these are the people that shall not be cut off from the city.

Now, how is it they shall not be cut off from this city that is to be cut off? I will assign only one more reason, one I have assigned, namely, that they are thus united to the Lord. Just as Noah came out from the world into the ark, so it is these come into the faith of Christ; so, they are not cut off, because they are already gone off. Just as the Israelites come out of Egypt by the power and

presence of Lord, so these come out of the world; they are not of the world, even as Christ is not of the world; they have, in the spiritual sense,

“Left the world's deceitful shore,  
Left it to return no more.”

They have a better country, a better city, a better world in view. And just as the Jews came out of Babylon, so the saints of God come out of the profane and out of the empty professing world; and they are brought spiritually to Zion, where God is their Judge, where Jesus is the Mediator of the better covenant, established upon better promises. Just as the disciples came out from Jerusalem, and not an evil befell them, so the people of God are thus delivered from the world, that they should not be condemned with the world. I look back at the time when I was of the world; and I think it is a pretty good proof of our being by nature totally blind and totally dead in trespasses and in sins, for a man to live in unconcerned when he does not know from one moment to another whether his soul may not be in hell. Some of you, perhaps, care nothing about your souls, though you know not one moment from another whether your souls may not be in hell. Look at the many sudden deaths we are having, not only in the country at large, but in this metropolis; and we are no more immortal or certain of life than were those who are cut off. And yet you are quite content to go on from time to time, and care nothing for your souls. Ah, what a proof is this that you are blind, that you are dead in sin, that the enemy has blinded your minds, lest the light of the glorious gospel of Christ, who is the image of God, should shine in unto you. May the Lord convince you; may the Lord give you a concern; for after all, what is there so concerns us as our eternal welfare?

Now, after these few remarks, I will take the city to mean the city of the blessed God; for that is the city to which the people of God belong. Let us look at them, then, as citizens of that city. How does a man become a citizen of that heavenly city that has foundations, that city the name of which shall never cease to be, “The Lord is there”? If you take the second chapter of Ephesians, you will see how those who are true citizens of heaven become such. You will see there that they were quickened by the sovereign power of the Holy Spirit; and you will see that in the background of their being so dealt with there was a previous love to them. “God, who is rich in mercy, for his great love wherewith he loved us, even when we were dead in sins, has quickened us together, and made us sit together in heavenly places in Christ Jesus.” Being thus quickened in consequence of God being rich in mercy, and for his great love wherewith he loved us, this representation, and the notion that it is man’s duty savingly to believe in Christ, that doctrine appears to be to be awfully deceptive. And if you have no better faith than that; if you are come to Christ without his coming to you; if you have taken hold of him professionally without his taking hold of you, if you are brought to him morally and mentally, without being brought by his quickening Spirit, “If any man have not the Spirit of Christ, he is none of his,” your faith will prove to be but fancy, and you will find at last they your profession is only profession. Oh, then, how is it with you that make a profession? Are you brought to know anything of your poverty, ruin, and wretchedness, so as to fall in with what the apostle there says, “God who is rich in mercy for his great love wherewith he loved us, even when we were dead in sins”? Now he says in that same chapter, “We are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus.” And what shape, what form were they put into? Why, they were put entirely into a free-grace form; “By grace are you saved through faith; and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God.” Now after thus representing them, he then goes on to represent what Christ has done, and how Jesus Christ is the end of the ceremonial law and has become the

center of unity to Jew and to Gentile. The apostle sums up this work of God like this: "Now therefore you are no more strangers and foreigners, but fellow-citizens with the saints, and of the household of God." This is the way they became citizens of Zion.

But I will now hasten to notice *the reasons why the people of God are not to be cut off from this city*. First, because of their faith. The apostle, when he saw the rising Pharisaism of nature among the Gentiles, said, "You will say, then, The branches were broken off, that I might be grafted in." "Well," he says, "because of unbelief they were broken off." They did not believe in the completeness that is in Christ; they did not believe in God's new covenant. They knew Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, after the flesh; but they did not know Abraham after the Spirit, in his spiritual religion; they did not know Isaac and Jacob in their spiritual religion; they knew them only after the flesh. And therefore, they stood aghast when the Savior said, "Abraham rejoiced to see my day, and he saw it, and was glad." They were cut off because of unbelief. But shall you be cut off for not believing in Christ, and in the completeness that is in Christ? Do you not feel, I speak now to the real Christian, that if you could cease to believe in the completeness that is in Christ, why, what else is there to believe in? As to all the noise that is made in our day about doings, they are all very well in their place, but we are not to place our faith upon anything done by the creature. Your faith must be in the completeness of Christ; and if you cease to believe in that, you cease to be a true branch of the true vine. Also, your faith must be in the immutability of God's counsel as confirmed and established by the Savior.

Neither of these two things did the people of old believe; and therefore, disbelieving these, yet professing to hold God as their father, to be citizens of heaven, being in this state of disbelief, they were cut off. I cannot forbear making one remark here; the consideration of it always does me good, that they were cut off because of unbelief. You say, What good does that do to you? It does me this good, that let their sins have been whatever they may in other respects, if they had but had faith in Jesus Christ in his perfection, and in the immutability of God's promise and counsel by him, that grain of faith would have delivered them from all their sins, however multitudinous, however deep in dye. So, they were not cut off because they were such great sinners Christ could not save them; they were not cut off because they were gone so far that grace could not save them, and the case was so bad that God himself could not undertake it; no; but they were not Christ's sheep, so they did not so hear his voice as to believe, for "faith comes by hearing;" and therefore, having not faith, they were cut off. Oh, what a gift is this, a grain of faith in Jesus Christ! If you have a grain of faith in him, the sycamine tree must be uprooted, the mountain must be removed, victories must be obtained, and your soul shall triumphantly enter at the last, for "this is our victory, even our faith", into the everlasting kingdom of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Let us look at the admonition now. "Because of unbelief", that is, of disbelief in God's truth, "they were broken off; and you stand by faith. Be not high-minded, but fear. For if God spared not the natural branches", the people he had taken to be his nationally, "take heed lest he also spare not you." "Be not high minded." Where does the apostle use those words? Now you just take notice of me very narrowly here. The words I am now quoting are in the 11th of Romans. In the beginning of that chapter the apostle argues that eternal election is of grace and not of works. He saw among some of these professors a tendency to slight that eternal election; and if you get election out of the way, away go all the other truths of the gospel. I make no hesitation in saying that if you are wrong in eternal election, there is not one gospel truth that you can manage without distorting it; for, as we have lately said, there is not one blessing for time or to eternity that was not bestowed according

to eternal election. Now then, "Be not high minded." "Oh, but it is unjust in God to choose one and leave another." That is your pride. "Oh, but we ought to do our part." That is your secret enmity to God's doing everything. You are saying to Christ what the people of old said to Aaron and Moses: "You take too much upon you;" whereas they took nothing upon them; they only took what God put upon them. And Jesus Christ took nothing upon him; he only took that which God put upon him. "I am come not to do my own will, but the will of him that sent me." And therefore, as soon as you begin to slight these blessed testimonies, you begin to be high minded. "His soul which is lifted up", that is, above this order of things, "is not upright in him. But the just shall live by his faith;" and so he walks by faith, rejoices by faith, and will be filled with joy and peace in believing these blessed truths. "Behold therefore," says the apostle, "the goodness and severity of God: on them which fell, severity; but toward you, goodness, if you continue in his goodness;" but as soon as you have some of your own, woe be unto you. Fancied human goodness has been a greater enemy to the gospel of God, to the people of God, and to the Christ of God, and to the cause of God, than all the sins of the world besides. Why did they put Jesus Christ to death? Why, because they themselves were so holy he was not good enough for them; their own supposed goodness prompted them. Why did they put the apostles to death? Because these dreadful characters said, they did not say so, but the people said they did, and what everybody says must be true; they said, "Let us do evil, that good may come." And so, they were persecuted, and reckoned the offscouring of all things. Why were the martyrs put to death? Because they did not obey the *Holy Church*. And why are the people of God despised now? Why, from that principle of supposed superiority that these legal professors have in them. "Behold therefore the goodness and severity of God: on them which fell, severity; but toward you, goodness, if you continue in his goodness; otherwise, you shalt be cut off." So, if you have fallen from the truth of God, if you disbelieve that, you are a withered branch, damned with a double damnation, damned as a sinner, and damned as an apostate; a tree plucked up by the roots, destitute of grace. But those who continue in the faith shall not be cut off. "Be not high minded." No, the Lord will take care you shall not. You may have a fit now and then, but he will give you a little strong wine to bring you to. What wine will that be? Why, the wine of astonishment, the wine of tribulation. "You have shown your people hard things; you have made us to drink the wine of astonishment." That will bring you right again. I have no doubt myself that Job had got a religious manufactory of his own, began to manufacture a little goodness of his own; and though in his religion he was right, yet he himself was getting a little wrong. So, the Lord swept everything away, except Job himself, he would not sweep him away; and this swept all Job's goodness away, and he came at last down to that humility that made him feel that to grace how great a debtor daily he was constrained to be; and he was so happy that he could not die for a hundred and forty years afterwards. So, then, they cannot be cut off because they are believers; nothing else can cut them off but disbelief in God's truth. Is not this enough to make us love God? Is not this enough to make us live for him? Is not this enough to make us lay down our lives for his cause or his people if needs be? "The love of Christ, says the apostle, "constrains us." Whereas your feasible duty-faith and free-will gospels would rob us of the love of Christ.

Another reason why they shall not be cut off from the city is, because they are not murmurers nor complainers. Why, just now you told us they are not murmurers nor complainers. Why just now you told us they were rebellious people. Not with God's truth, no. No breaking in, no going out, no complaining in the streets. "Happy is the people that is in such a case; yes, happy is the people whose God is the Lord." "We shall be satisfied with the goodness of your house, even of your holy

temple.” I have often said, and I repeat it, it may seem strong language, but no stronger than true, I believe that when I get to heaven I shall not be more satisfied with God’s truth than I am now. I have been now for forty-two years as satisfied with his truth as I could be if I were in heaven. And I have fallen out with pretty well with everything too, with some of you, I believe I have; and with myself perpetually quarrelling; and I have fallen out with ministers, or else they have fallen out with me, I have fallen out with pretty well everything except God’s truth; I have not fallen out with that. “Great peace have they that love your law;” that is, the law of truth. Nothing in that law shall offend them. So that they are not murmurers nor complainers, no. The Lord says, as you are satisfied with the goodness of my house, even of my holy temple, you shall stop with me; I like to have a contented people; and if you can better yourselves, go somewhere else. No, “Lord; to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life.” Our fear is lest we should be cast out; we have no desire to go out, but here to dwell for ever and ever. The third reason they shall not be cut off from this heavenly city is because of the completeness they have in Christ. They always stand the same there. The Lord will not behold iniquity in Jacob, nor see perverseness in Israel.

The fourth reason they cannot be cut off is because of the unchangeability of the blessed God, with whom there is no variableness, neither shadow of turning. Ah, Lord, here am I, a greater sinner every day, as it were, a poor creature, and do you love me still? Yes, he rests in his love. “I have loved you with an everlasting love; therefore, in lovingkindness have I drawn you.” What the Lord has done he has done in infinite knowledge, and therefore there is no necessity for it to be undone. The last reason I name why they shall not be cut off is because there is no one that can cut them off. Satan cannot, for he is cut off himself; sin cannot for it is cut off; death cannot, for it is swallowed up in victory. The law will not cut them off, for the law is established; God is on their side, there is not anything that can cut them off. God is on their side; the Messiah died for them, rose triumphant from the dead; and now they defy their mightiest foes.

But the other side. Those that profess to be citizens of Zion, that cannot join in the closing verse of the 48<sup>th</sup> Psalm: “This God is our God for ever and ever; he will be our guide even unto death;” and that cannot receive understandingly and truly the order and plan of eternal salvation; they must be cut off. See the 46th Psalm: which is what I call a through high Calvinist Psalm, everything is decisive, “God is in the mist of her, she shall not be moved.” How then can they be cut off that God has thus taken into his own love, his own city, his own kingdom?

“Where is the power can reach them there?  
And what shall force them thence?”