

All's Well that Ends Well

A SERMON – Preached on Sunday Morning, October 28th, 1866, by

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"So the workmen wrought, and the work was perfected by them, and they set the house of God in his state, and strengthened it"-2 Chronicles xxiv. 13.

IT is the three latter clauses that we have to attend to this morning- the perfection, the order, and the strengthening; after just noticing one point that we last Lord's day morning, pertaining to the preceding clause, omitted, and that is where the apostle, when speaking of spiritual builders, saith of them that they shall suffer loss, yet they themselves shall be saved so as by fire. Those words apply, in the first place, to ministers; and secondly, to Christians at large. Ministers do sometimes, through mistakes, build up or receive people that turn out ere long not to be silver, or gold, or precious stones; but wood, hay, or stubble; and such, of course, are not fireproof; so Satan throws upon them a spark of his satanic fire, and such persons turn round and become filled with enmity, and do all the injury they can to the very minister, Judas-like, that they have professed to be blessed under. Now these are the hay, the wood, and the stubble, and so the minister suffers loss, and may be called to have a very fiery time of it from these apostate and ungodly professors. This has been the case in all ages, and will be, I suppose, down to the end of time. Yet the minister himself shall not be destroyed because of these mistakes that he has made; he himself shall be saved so by fire. The words also apply to the private Christian. Hence it is that the Lord brings you into fiery trials to destroy your false confidences, that you may not be character-proud, nor doctrine-proud, nor experience-proud, but that you may be stripped of all boasting. And if need be you shall be slandered and evil spoken of in a variety of ways, and you shall be lowered in the estimation of many of your fellow-creatures with whom perhaps, according to the feelings of your flesh, you would like to stand well; but it is better to stand badly with men and well with God than it is to stand badly with God and well with men. It is very difficult to attain the two, for "they that will live godly in Christ Jesus shall suffer the loss of many things." Yet, notwithstanding the reproach cast upon them before men, God will cast no reproach upon them; he will turn their reproach away, and they shall be saved so as by fire. Every Christian is tried as by fire. Your religion is not worth having if it has not been put to the test. How are we to know what you are if you have not been tried by those fires that we referred to last Lord's Day morning? And therefore you suffer loss, and that lose will be your gain. Hence the apostle rejoices in his losses. He says, concerning Christ, "For whom I have suffered the loss of all things." And was he grieved about it? No; he says, "I count them but dung, that I may win Christ. And there is nothing more winning to the Saviour than the necessities of the sinner; the deeper your necessities, the more winning you are to him. Hence he himself declares that the poor, the needy, the wounded, the sick, that need the physician-that those are the objects of special attraction to the Savior; and so he came not to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance. What we lose, then, for the truth's sake, the truth is well able to make up; as saith the Saviour, "Whosoever hath forsaken houses, or lands or wife or children, for my sake and the gospel's"- for one of the evangelists puts the two together very beautifully,:-" for my sake and the

gospel's, shall receive an hundredfold even in this world; that is, he shall receive a peace with God in his soul that is of more value than all the treasures of Egypt, because that peace with God in the soul enables you to bear what there is to bear with some degree of equanimity-"calm amidst tempestuous motion;"- and enables you to look forward to the time when these things will cease, and your soul shall enter upon the fullness of that verse which the Lord Jesus Christ says you shall receive an hundredfold in this world. Houses- God himself will be your house, the gospel shall be your house; and lands-the promises of the gospel shall be your lands; and brothers, and sisters, and mothers-the people of God shall become your near relations, your dear relations too, for it is an evidence of having passed from death unto life if we love the brethren. Yet "to which of the saints wilt thou turn?" and the answer will be, To none you must turn to none, and hold the people of God as in the choice of God, as in the Christ of God, as in the Spirit of God, as in the faith of God as in the family of God. If we can view them there, and meet them there, and hold them there, then we realize the truth of Mr. Hart's words,

"When it is Christians all agree,
And let distinctions fall?
Nothing in themselves they see,
But Christ is all in all"

Thus, then, all must suffer loss, and be saved so as by fire; and we shall have at the last to bless the Lord for every fiery trial, because those fiery trials prepare our hearts for the more eager reception of the gospel; these fiery trials dry us up, and make our souls like a dry and thirsty land, fitting us for the promise, "I will pour water upon him that is thirsty, and floods upon the dry ground."

I will now come to these clauses of our text, and first I notice the perfection. It is said of the house that it was perfected by them. We might here show that these working men in the house of the Lord were types of Jesus Christ, and that their perfecting the work is a type of Him that would not stay until the work was perfect. But that is not the view under which I wish this morning to make a few remarks. I will take their completing of the house as representing your completing your pilgrimage completing the building up, as it were, of your profession, until your tower shall be finished, until the last victory shall be gained; for the last enemy is in sight, and that enemy is death, already swallowed up in victory. Now, then, those that hold out to the end, it may be said of them that their profession is completed by them; as saith the apostle, "I have kept the faith;" but then, of course, it is done by them as the Lord worketh in them to will and to do of his good pleasure. As we are all drawing near, and I myself much nearer than some of you, I therefore feel a great pleasure in dwelling much upon that hour which I know I must soon meet. Death to me, for many years, has lost much of its terror; life has lost much of its charm; but heaven has not lost its attraction, Christ has not lost his preciousness, the truth of God has not lost its power, nor the people of God lost their attraction with me, nor has the welfare of the souls of men ceased to be what it always was-an object of sincere prayer and concern to my soul. Let us, therefore, look at the end of just a few of the Lord's people, and see whether we have that in our souls that will amount to anything like an assurance that we shall come to the same end to which they came. Let us take, in the first place, the words of Jacob. Jacob said, "I have waited for thy salvation." Just see the spirit in which he walked, that it was a spirit of faith in God's salvation. Jacob saw that there was a salvation to be wrought that was complete; he saw eternity in that salvation; he saw God in his immutability in that salvation. And you may gather what Jacob's spirit was, and what his faith was, if you go back to the 28th of Genesis, where the Lord appeared to him, and gave him yea and amen promises. You observe the promises the Lord gave him they were yea and amen promises, promises that did not belong to the old, but to the new covenant, promises that could not be confirmed by typical sacrifices, but were to be confirmed by the one great sacrifice, Christ Jesus himself, who should come into the world to put away sin by the sacrifice of himself.

Now for the revelation of this to his soul, and for the full possession of this, he waited. And when he sums up his life; how beautiful it is, at least I think so-"Few and evil have the days of the years of my life been." Humble man, sober man, right-minded man. Can I, therefore, fall back upon my life as my hope of a right to eternal life? Can I fall back upon my life as a right why the Lord should receive me to himself? No; but I will fall back upon God's salvation-"I have waited, O Lord, for thy salvation." Now, my hearer, how is it with us? Are we brought to know something of this salvation, and are we so at home in it that any deviation from the completeness, the eternity, and certainty of this salvation would touch us to the very quick; any doctrine interfering with the completeness of it, the eternity of it, the certainty of it, would be rejected and despised by us with all our hearts and souls? Let such doctrine be brought in as feasible a form as it may, and if a thousand scriptures were quoted in the letter to back it up, we should reject the whole, because there stands the declaration that "Israel shall be saved in the Lord with an everlasting salvation, shall not be ashamed "-having a salvation that takes all shame away, because it swallows up all their sins as a fathomless ocean-"nor confounded;" it takes all confusion away, and brings the soul into sweet and divine order, where all is calm. Thus, then, the work shall be perfected by them; they shall go on to the end. And if this salvation, or God in this order of things, be now your only hope, then you will make a good end. There is everything in this salvation, everything; all the grace you need in your journey through life, all you need in a dying hour, and all you will need to all eternity. Because when Jacob saith, "I have waited for thy salvation," it is nothing else but to say- O God, I have waited for thee as my salvation; thou art my salvation, and I have waited for thee after this order. Then you come to another - namely David. When he got to the end he said, "This is all my salvation," had been for years, "and all my desire," even "though He make it not to grow." Now where did David find this? Did he find this salvation in any human works, or human merit, or human duty whatever? Where did he find it? Why, he found it in God's everlasting covenant. "He hath made with me an everlasting covenant." Here he found salvation. And oh, my hearer, if thou knowest the value of a covenant salvation-for the farther we go the clearer it appears-thou wilt hold it fast. As Mr. Hart sings very nicely, among the many great and blessed things he sings,-

"Whatever loss we bear beside,
Oh, never give up this."

Your journey will end badly without God's salvation; your journey will end very badly without a covenant salvation; your journey will end very sadly without a covenant ordered in all things and sure. Hold that fast, and then whatever thy sorrows, all will be swallowed up and ended, and thy soul made, by the boundless grace of God, as triumphant as Calvary's wondrous cross can make you. Then, if we come to the New Testament, and take one scripture, how it sums up the whole! - "These all died in faith." And then take the apostle's definition of faith, - "It is by faith that it might be by grace, and to the end the promise might be sure to all the seed." Oh, how many there are in the world calling this Antinomianism; and if they should die in that state, and lift up their eyes in hell, they will then see what that is that they have called Antinomianism; if they should die in enmity with this faith that maketh it all of grace, and the promise sure to all the seed, and lift up their eyes in hell, they will then see who the people were and are that they have called, in the plenitude of their self-conceit and their self-granulations, Antinomians. So it has been; so it must be. "Ye shall be hated of all men for my name's sake." Care not for it; I say, care not for it. No; the great thing with us is to make a good end. "All is well that ends well." Now, then, "these all died in faith." "It is by faith that it might be by grace, to the end the promise might be sure to all the seed." Then, again, with Stephen-see what a glorious end he made by the grace of God. He was filled with the Holy Ghost. And what were the accusations brought against Stephen? Why, that he spoke "against the law and against this holy place." The law certainly was holy, and the law is holy; but what they called "the holy place" -namely, the temple-was become a den of thieves, was become a den of devils; the devil reigned in it now; the man of sin sat there, and gave sentence against the Saviour. So Stephen, they said,

was a very unholy man; he spoke against the law; does not keep the law; and against this holy place. So it was then; so it is now. But what was the Lord's dealing with Stephen? Filled him with his presence. We could hardly say there was "a mortal paleness on his cheek," for his soul was so filled at the end of his journey with the glory of God that his face shone as an angel's, and they saw it, not to be converted by it, not to be humbled and seek for mercy by it; they saw it to hate it, were cut to the heart, ran upon him with one accord; while he, in the magnanimity of his soul, feeling that he was a sinner saved by grace, conscious that instead of being what he was and where he was, but for the grace of God, he should have been one of them, he therefore said, "Lord, lay not this sin to their charge;" and after praying, "Lord Jesus, receive my spirit," he fell asleep, seeing the Son of man rise from his seat to receive his departing spirit. Here is the end of the journey, - a glorious and a blessed end. Then, again, take Simeon; see where he was. "Now, Lord, lettest thou thy servant depart in peace, for mine eyes have seen thy salvation," for myself, and for thousands, yea, for millions of others, for it is "a light to lighten the Gentiles, and the glory of thy people Israel." Now it would be taking me rather further abroad than I ought to range in this part of the subject, or else I might ask here, when you come to die, what part of the gospel could you in that hour dispense with? If you put it to the test, you that are alive from the dead would at once see that you will need it all. Will you not need in that hour the atonement of Christ, to keep the last enemy under your feet? Will you not need in that hour the righteousness of Jesus Christ, to bring the smiles of heaven upon you? for "in thy righteousness shall they be exalted, and shall walk in the light of thy countenance." Will you not need the love of God to soothe you in that solemn hour? Will you not need the electing grace of God to hold you absolutely fast with its almighty grasp? Will you not need the unchanging counsel of God in that hour to abide with you through it? Will you not need the Spirit of God with you in that hour? Will you not need the promise of God there? Will you not need what will fear no evil, for thou art with me? Will you not need the Lord in all he is in these dear and blessed truths? Oh, then, is it any wonder that one of old, when he saw it in a misty sort of way-he saw it darkly, but he saw enough to bring out the momentary wish, "Let me die the death of the righteous, and let my last end be like his." But he had no desire to live the life of the righteous; he had no desire to lay his covetousness aside, and to go over to the people of God, as Ruth did, and as Moses had done in Egypt; he had no desire for that. No, he said, give me the reward, but I have no desire to live their life; I cannot love the things that pertain to them; I see them; and I should like to die the death of the righteous. But he had no desire to live the life of the righteous, and without the life of the righteous, in the very nature of things, we cannot die the death of the righteous. Unless Christ be my life now, I cannot die in him. And to die the death of the righteous is to die in the Lord, to die in Christ, where our righteousness is.

Thus, then, the work was perfected. I might say very much here to you. If any of you are tempted to give up seeking, let me remind you that such a feeling comes from the evils of your nature and from Satan. No, do not give up seeking; for, "Thou, Lord, hast not forsaken them that seek thee." Ah, but you do not know how many drawbacks I have, and how I am compassed with faults and infirmities. Well, I do not wish to know any further than by the word of the Lord, and by what I know of human nature in general. But is there any fault in you that God in his infinite mercy cannot pardon, that the blood of Christ cannot make white as snow that he cannot make as wool that he cannot save you from? If there be, then give up. But all the time he remains able to save unto the very uttermost-, then never give up. Others of you are perhaps saying, "Well, I go week after week, month after month, perhaps some say year after year, and I seem to get no good, and it is chiefly from this cause that I feel disposed to give up. Well, we will suppose that you seem to get no good; have you got any harm? What harm has it done you? Can you point out any one gospel truth that has done you any harm? No, say you, I cannot say that; but I have not got the good I could wish. Very true, but you will have, that is, if you know your need of these things, and are seeking for them, you will have it. Know you not that the word of God declares there is a set time. The time may seem long to you, but it is not long to the Lord; one day with the Lord is as a thousand years,

and a thousand years as one day. "The vision is for an appointed time; it will surely come, it will not tarry." And therefore when the question comes, "Will ye also go away?" you will say, "Lord, to whom shall I go?" You desire to live the life of the righteous, you desire to love the habitation of God's house, the place where his honor dwells; you love to meet his saints, you love to hear his word, and you are convinced that it is not what the minister may say, but the power, the vitality the Lord is pleased to put into what he saith; it is the spirit the Lord is pleased to bless you with to enable you to profit thereby. Well, then, do not give up, do not go away; still abide by him. There is not an instance all through the Bible, whatever occurred, that the Lord sent one of his children away. No, he well knows that whatever is the matter if it is not put right by him, it cannot be put right by anyone else; if it is not healed by him no one else can heal it; he knows whatever perplexities his people get into, if they are not brought out of the maze by him, he well knows no one else can bring them out; and whatever fire they may get into, he knows if he doth not take away its violence no one else can; If he doth not divide the Jordan, throw down the walls of Jericho, and save Rahab-mercy upon me for mentioning her name-no one else can. And thus he teaches them that there is none like him, and the soul is brought to this conclusion; "Whom have I in heaven but thee? And there is none upon the earth "-no God, no gospel, no salvation-"that I desire beside thee." Thus then to their honor it is said the work was perfected by them; and to the honor of the saints it will be said, "These all died in faith." "This honor have all his saints," and then shall the song begin, praising the Lord their God, that hath thus dealt so wondrously with them. What do you say to this this morning? Can you say you feel a oneness with these truths, and that while you have many mercies that you desire at the hands of the Lord for yourself, for your family, and in a variety of ways, yet if you are in your right mind, the first, and foremost, and most important of all will be that you may endure unto the end, for " he that shall endure unto the end, the same shall be saved." Ah, let me say, the Israelite was to go on by his daily sacrifice; you go on by the continuity of the priesthood of Christ, for he abideth a priest continually. You are a poor creature every day of your life, but remember there is the fountain always open; there is Jesus on his throne always a priest, there is his blood always pleading; there is his righteousness always speaking. Ah, then, what doth he require of thee, seeing he hath showed thee these good things? What doth he require of thee but to do justly with thy God, and acknowledge his mercy; to love mercy, and to walk humbly with thy God; to seek his company, and to say, Lord, thou knowest that my heart is never so happy as when I have a little of thy presence; thou knowest my soul is never so happy as when the anointing's of thy Spirit rests upon me, and I can feel that God is my God, that he is my life, the length of my days, and my portion. Thou knowest, Lord that I am never so happy as when I am thus favored with a little, even if it be but a little of thy blessed presence. It is that that will make our hearts burn within us. Thus, then, the end. I ought perhaps here to say that as a church and congregation we have been highly favored in this respect. I have positively been astonished at the few cases of apostasy we have had. I do not think we have had half a dozen in the church for more than thirty years. And some that did not see their way clear to join the church, they held out well, were friends to the cause: loved the truth, and died happy. I look back, and see hundreds since I have been favored to be in the ministry that have lived well and come to a blessed end. One I have to bury next week, one of our members, a very quiet one, a dear old Huntingtonian; he held out to the end; he spoke like a lion, I was going to say, on behalf of God's truth when he came to the last struggle. Oh, I liked it. I like to see the soul when upon the threshold of heaven more than ever in love with a covenant God, in love with his yea and amen truth, because that soul is just going to where God is all in all, and it is fitted for it. Bring anything else, it grates upon a dying ear, but let the dying ear listen to the living truths of a covenant God, yea and amen promise, Christ all in all, the victory he has wrought, there it is the soul can triumph even in a dying hour. We have had much to be thankful for in this. We have been cautious as to who and what we received into the church, and we still wish to be cautious. We well know the strength of a church doth not consist in the number of its members, but in the character of its members; the strength of a congregation doth not consist in its number, but in the individual character of the people. If they are personal lovers of God's truth then they

stand as an impenetrable phalanx, and prevail they must. You might as well get straws, and try to knock St. Paul's down therewith as to move a people that are banded together by the eternal Spirit of God, the truth of God, one with the everlasting covenant, and their souls sworn sacredly to that covenant. Move them you cannot. "They that trust in the Lord shall be as Mount Zion, which cannot be removed, but abideth forever."

But I must hasten to the next part-the order; "And they set the house of God in his state "-that is, they set the house of God in proper order to worship God after his own order. Some people say, Oh, it does not matter how you worship, so that you do worship. Very well. You go into the country, and say to the farmer, "Can you give me some work?" "Yes, go into that field, and pluck all the weeds up." In you go, and you tear up every stalk of wheat that there is there, and leave all the weeds. The farmer comes, "Well, what you have done?" "Why, pulled the weeds up, to be sure, and left the good things." "Why, you fool, you have torn the wheat up and left the weeds." And that is just the way men would serve God; they would root his truth up, and leave all the weeds of free will, duty faith, creature sovereignty, human duty; and when the Savior came into the field not a single ear of wheat to be seen. That is what they would do. It does matter how you serve God, then, after what order. Let me give you just a concise hint or two here. Now, to set the house of God in his state implies a very many, many things. What do you think will be the first thing? I know if I had been there, what I should have called for first; I know what the first thing would have been with me. What is that? The sacrificial altar; let us have that. The idolaters had taken it away. Let me have the sacrificial altar; let a sacrifice be made there; let the fire descend from heaven; let me stand and look on, and see the sacrifice accepted. We cannot serve God without the Substitute; it must be by the sacrificial substitution of Christ. And the next thing would be the altar of incense. I want that sacrifice to go into the holy of holies, the priest to go into the holy of holies with the blood of that sacrifice, and there plead my cause. You cannot worship God acceptably without an Intercessor. Christ is the intercessor; he maketh intercession for us by the infinite worth of his own wondrous sacrifice. The next thing for me would have been what the Savior commanded for the damsel that he raised from the dead. He said, "Give her something to eat." So I say; now sin is gone, the holy of holies is open, now let us have the shew bread. And so there was the shew bread, and you could not worship God acceptably without it, because the Levites were to be sustained by that, and were here a special figure of the people of God, that having provision in the Christ of God they are not to go away. Suppose the Levites to be going off. What are you going away for? No bread in the house. But they never had that excuse, for the table was never allowed to be empty. There were sometimes thirteen loaves on the table, but never eleven. There are the twelve; they put one on, and then take one off. You would have to be careful how you changed the bread, and were here a special figure of the people of God, that having provision in the Christ of God they are not to go away. So we cannot worship God without sustenance. If the word of the Lord did not nourish our faith, and our hope, and our love, if it were not food to us, why, we should have no confidence, no hope, no strength, and should give up. But bless the Lord, as he takes us into his service he sustains us there. Another thing with me would have been the brazen sea, with twelve oxen under it. It wants no remark to show the meaning of that; it is a beautiful representation. And those twelve oxen were to stand in groups of three, with their faces towards the four cardinal points of heaven. Who will say that that brazen sea, in which the priests and Levites were to wash, is not a beautiful figure of the gospel? And who will say that the twelve oxen do not represent the apostles? Who will say that their heads, three towards each cardinal points, do not represent the apostles in that mission the Saviour gave, "Go ye into all the world, and preach the gospel to every creature." I must worship God after the order of his gospel, for if I set his gospel aside, then he will set me aside until I am content to worship him in his own order, and then I must also have the ten lavers of water; and what are they? The doctrines of the gospel. The sacrifices of the people were not acceptable unless they were washed in those lavers. And if the various truths of the gospel do not cleanse you, you cannot be accepted of God. The laver of God's love washes you; so does

election, so does predestination, and so do the promises. The next thing I should want would be the seven candlesticks. I do not like preaching in the dark, either spiritually or literally, always like the place well lighted, if there were anything that would make me proud of our place, that would be one—that it is always well lighted I could wish were favored to light it spiritually as well as it is lighted up literally. The seven candlesticks set forth the perfect light of the glorious gospel of the blessed God. Having got things so far, I should then want, in addition to the Ark of the Covenant and the mercy seat, the presence of the Lord. Let us have the presence of the Lord, here is the house in order. Then we may come to the consequences; our fields, and our orchards, our gardens, our flocks, our herds, our children, and ourselves, we shall all do well; and so they did, all the time they worshipped the Lord after this order. I am speaking now of the literal worship. Of course it has a spiritual meaning. So the people of God, conformed to God's own order of things, here they serve the Lord acceptably, and the gospel shall be unto them as a garden, as a vineyard, as a field which the Lord hath blessed; their oxen shall be strong to labor, and there shall be no breaking in, no going out, no complaining in these heavenly streets, where the Lord thus dwelleth in Zion, the Zion which he loveth, and which he will never leave nor forsake. It is a great thing therefore to worship God acceptably after his own order. But as I have said, the sacrificial altar is a matter of infinite importance. That is the very first thing. It is no use, you know, friends, if you want a favor of a fellow-creature, and there is a quarrel between you, no use to ask the favor before you have got the quarrel set right, you are sure to get a black look and a cross word, and be sent about your business. The best way is to touch upon the quarrel first, and see if there is no means of setting that right; and when you have got that right, and found that your friend is as glad to make it up as you are, then if you want a favor it is the time to ask it. Just so our God; he hath a quarrel with us as sinners, and, unhappily, we have a quarrel with him, for the carnal mind is enmity against God. His quarrel with us is just, but our quarrel with him is unjust and sinful. Now, then, God hath put the quarrel right; he hath slain the enmity, brought about peace, reconciling us to himself, not imputing our trespasses unto us; and now, being reconciled, we may ask anything, and he will not say us nay in any one thing that is good for us. Reconciliation is brought about; it was love that appointed the reconciliation, and that same love that appointed the reconciliation will now do anything that is needful to be done. "He that spared not his own Son, but delivered him up for us all," to bring about this reconciliation, "how shall he not with him also freely give us all things?" God help us, then, thus to keep the house of God in its state. You see this would afford me an opportunity to have said something about baptism, the Lord's supper, the order of Christian worship, but time does not permit me to dwell upon that this morning.

Lastly, the strengthening;—"and strengthened it." Let this be a figure, a representation of our being strengthened. When we read that he that hath begun the good work will carry it on, is not that strengthening? When we read that he who cannot lie hath said, "I will never leave thee nor forsake thee," is not that strengthening? And is it not said in the 147th Psalm that "He hath strengthened the bars of thy gates; he hath blessed thy children within thee. He maketh peace in thy borders, and filleth thee with the finest of the wheat." Take the strengthening, then, to denote those things by which we are strengthened, made strong in the Lord. Oh, it is a great thing to have a strong love to the church of God, to the truth of God, to the God of truth.