

# A Call To Prayer And Testimony

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A Sermon Delivered On Lord's-Day Morning,  
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“I Have Set Watchmen Upon Thy Walls, O Jerusalem, Which Shall Never Hold Their Peace Day Nor Night: Ye That Make Mention Of The Lord, Keep Not Silence, And Give Him No Rest, Till He Establish, And Till He Make Jerusalem A Praise In The Earth.” Isaiah 52:6, 7

IN the opening verses of this chapter our Lord declares that he will not rest till his purpose of grace is accomplished. “For Zion’s sake will I not hold my peace, and for Jerusalem’s sake I will not rest.” His soul is set upon the perfection of his church. There is never a moment when the heart of Christ ceases to beat high with desire for the salvation of his redeemed. From the dreadful work of making atonement he stayed not his hand, but set his face like a flint towards it, till he could say, “It is finished”: and now the following work of the out-gathering of his chosen he carries on with quenchless zeal, never staying his divine intercession, never withholding his hands from wielding that “all power” which is given him in heaven and in earth.

Mark well, beloved, how he would have his people to be in tune with himself! He will have no rest till salvation work is done; and he would not have us take rest; but he would have us stirred with passionate desire, and fired with holy zeal for the accomplishment of the divine plan of grace. Till he holds his peace he will not allow us to be silent. You that have the Revised Version will be struck with the more literal and forcible rendering of our text — “Ye that are the Lord’s remembrancers, *take ye no rest, and give him no rest*, till he establish, and till he make Jerusalem a praise in the earth.” A restless Savior calls upon his people to be restless, and to make the Lord himself restless — to give him no rest till his chosen city is in full splendor, his chosen church complete and glorious. Ah! when the three unite, the Son, the people whom he has redeemed, and the Lord who worketh all things, then shall the golden age have come!

Learn from this fact a valuable lesson, that Christ’s determination to perform a work, his decree that so it shall be, is no argument for our idleness, but is the best plea and encouragement for our endeavors. “If it is to be,” cries one, “I need not do anything.” Nay, friend, thou arguest slothfully. On the contrary, the earnest heart will reason itself into immediate and confident action. If it were not to be, to what purpose my zeal? Even if I do not know whether it is to be or not to be, if I think it desirable, I will labor for it with anxiety; but if I am assured that the Lord has appointed it, I labor with might and main, feeling a holy confidence in doing the work of the Lord. Since he wills it, we will it; and so it shall be. Predestination, when rightly understood, never leads to sloth: it has frequently, in human history, been of tremendous force for the production of the most daring and determined action, and it shall be so again. *Deus vult,*” God wills it, is a grand cry to produce a crusade.

God wills it, therefore it shall be. Like thunderbolts flung from an almighty hand, believers crash through every difficulty under the irrepressible impulse of fulfilling a divine purpose. Oh, that our meditations at

this time may bring us all to this resolve, that we will not rest, and we will give God no rest, till his decree is fulfilled, and till he has established and made Jerusalem a praise in the earth!

**I. In my text I see three things, which I will mention one by one.** The first is RESPONSIBLE OFFICE — I have set watchmen upon thy walls;” Ye that make mention of the Lord, keep not silence,” or, as your margin and the Revised Version have it, “Ye that are the Lord’s remembrancers.” Here are three responsible offices — *watchmen* set upon the walls, *speakers* who never hold their peace, and *remembrancers* who cease not to plead with their Lord.

May the Holy Spirit help us while we think of the Lord’s people as *watchmen*! In times of war every fortified city had upon its walls certain watchmen, so placed as to see eye to eye: that is to say, the eye of one sentinel reached to the eye of another, and so they encompassed the city round about. Whoever passed that way by day or night, they challenged him; and if he turned out to be a foe, they gave an alarm, and straightway men-at-arms came forth from the guard-room, and the city was protected against surprise. God’s people, and especially the stronger, the more instructed, and the most experienced of them, should act as watchmen upon the walls, for Christ’s sake.

Observe what manner of watchmen we ought to be. It is written, “*I have set watchmen.*” We are under divine command. In the old Roman days, when a sentry was placed in his position by his centurion, he never thought of quitting his post. Rocks might roam, but not the sentinels of the empire. There was found in Pompeii, among the ashes, a sentry, standing in his place with his javelin in his hand: he had not flinched amid the deadly shower which fell from the volcano and buried the city. His centurion, in the name of the emperor, had set him there, and there he stood. How steadfast and immovable ought these to be, whom the Lord himself has set in their place in connection with his church! It is Jehovah who says, “I have set watchmen upon thy walls.” By a divine arrangement, and by a sacred command, saints are set in their positions, and they must stand fast, and, having done all, must still stand; for they have received their charge from the King himself.

These watchmen guarded the city of cities, *thy walls, O Jerusalem.*” The legionary who guarded old Rome felt that, if he did not fight for his native city, he would be base indeed. If we are set to guard the church of God, what shall I say to him who sleeps at his post, or proves a traitor? If you do not throw your whole strength into the guarding of such a cause as this, what will arouse you? Know ye not that the church is purchased by the blood of Christ; that it is God’s peculiar heritage? “The Lord’s portion is his people.” O shepherds, watch well the sheep that cost your Lord so dear. “Feed the flock of God which he hath purchased with his own blood.” If we do not guard the truth of God once for all delivered to the saints, we are something worse than traitors. No word has yet been invented which can set forth the perfidy of the man who betrays the cause of Christ and of the gospel; he is the murderer of souls. God has set us to guard his own city, and we must not slumber. Let the other cities go, if go they must; but as for thee, Salem, city of peace, and city of God, if I forget thee, let my right hand forget her cunning: if I count thee not beyond my chiefest joy, let me be in sorrow for ever! See, brethren, your responsible office: watchmen of God’s setting, watchmen on the walls of God’s own city!

The service is seen to be responsible to the utmost degree when we see that it demands constant care: the Lord says of these watchmen, “*they shall never hold their peace day nor night.*” We are not set to keep the church of God by day only, but amid the dews or frosts of the darkest night we are to maintain our watch. Christians are to be sentries who will not retreat into the barrack-room because of the cold, nor quit the rampart because of the heat. At night, watchmen are most required. We are to be instant in season,

giving the password at each particular time when the watch reports itself, and thus never holding our peace day nor night. We are to be instant out of season; for at such times the enemy is most likely to come. God's watchmen are not taken on by the hour, to watch by turns: but they are bound to be, throughout life, watchers for souls. We are never off duty. We take a day and a night shift. Our rest is in the Lord's service; our recreation is in change of occupation. Ours is a life service, and a constant service. Believers raise no discussion with their Lord as to how many hours of the day they shall spend for him. Our hours are these: — "They shall never hold their peace day nor night." St. Augustine desired to be always found *aut precantem, aut predicantem*; that is, either praying or preaching; either speaking to God for men in prayer, or speaking for God to men in his ministry. Ministers of Christ especially should give themselves, not to the serving of tables, but to the ministry of the word and to prayer. For us to give ourselves to getting up entertainments, to become competitors with theatres and music-halls, is a great degradation of our holy office. If I heard of a minister becoming a chimney-sweep to earn his living, I would honor him in both his callings; but for God's watchmen to become the world's showmen is a miserable business. God keep all of us who are ministers of Christ from entangling ourselves with the things of this life! The proverb says, "Stick to your last, cobbler"; and I would say — Stick to your pulpit, minister! Keep to your one work, and you will find quite enough for all the strength you have, and even more. Oh, for preachers who "shall never hold their peace"! You Christian people, you also must fulfill your watch. You also are called to ceaseless service. A policeman wears an armband to show that he is on duty, and all believers should feel that such a badge is worn upon their very heart day and night. "The love of Christ constraineth us," not now and then, but evermore. Our service of the Lord's cause comes not once a week, on Sundays, but so often as we have opportunity. These must watch always who would be watchmen for souls, watchmen for God, watchers against error and sin, watchers for the coming of the Lord. "I have set watchmen upon thy walls, O Jerusalem, which shall never hold their peace day nor night." But, in the next place, we are to be *spokesmen*; for we are never to hold our peace, but make mention of the Lord. Believers are to speak for God to the people. If you have the ability and the commission, speak to the great congregation. You have both ability and commission, each one of you, to speak to those round about you. Be always ready to speak a word in season. Keep a shot in the locker: never run short of a good word for these whom God's providence puts in your way. If there be nobody near to whom you can speak for God, then in your solitude speak to God for your fellow-men. What a blessed thing to be so familiar with God that you have his ear for your friends and neighbors! Plead with him for the erring, the unbelieving, the profane. Never hold your peace towards God, for in this case speech is more than golden. By prayer you unlock the treasuries of heaven: keep the golden key in constant motion. Never cease to pray, since intercession is benediction. If the world be asleep, if the church be asleep, hold not your peace by night; and should the church become active, and the world be a little awakened, redouble your prayer till the world is won. Ye spokesmen *for* God, and spokesmen *to* God, never hold your peace day nor night. Sick saints are especially set to take the night-watches. While the most of us are blessed with refreshing slumber, these find that sleep forsakes their eyes. They hear the clock's unwearied tick, and listen to the slow striking of the hours. Now let them lift their hearts heavenward on behalf of the Lord's cause and kingdom.

May be, God arouses them to this end, that they may keep the nights safe by their prayers; chasing away ill spirits, and keeping the incense burning upon the altar of acceptable intercession. The Lord girdles the globe with intercessions, by his daily and nightly watchers. As our Queen's morning drum beats round the globe, so does ceaseless prayer cast a belt of golden grace around the earth. O ye that are the Lord's remembrancers, never suffer the flame of prayer to die down! Arise, even in this night season of the church, and trim your lamps. Lift up your voices again *for* your God, and *with* your God. Let no dumb spirit possess you. As speakers heavenward and earthward, never hold your peace day nor night.

A third office is brought before us in the marginal reading, and in the new version: "Ye that are *the Lord's remembrancers*, take no rest." This is a singular expression — "The Lord's remembrancers." I

find the same word elsewhere translated “recorder”; and truly we are to be the Lord’s recorders, and keep in memory his great goodness. A high office is that of Remembrancer to the King of kings. Every Christian holds this eminent position. Oriental kings maintained an officer whose business it was to remind the king of these promises which he had made aforetime. He said this to that courtier, that to the other; but his majesty had plenty of other things to think of, and therefore, every now and then, his Remembrancer would say, Please your majesty, you promised to do this and that; may it please you to perform your word.” Now, the Lord has appointed his praying people to be his remembrancers. I should never have dared to use such an expression had I not found it in the inspired Word itself. The Lord says, in Isaiah 43:26, “Put me in remembrance.” The Lord cannot forget; but in condescension to our forgetfulness, he bids us act as if he could do so, and put him in remembrance. By calling the promise to the Lord’s remembrance, we are ourselves made to be the better acquainted with it. I find that a Remembrancer was also appointed in our English courts to remind the officers of their duty to their sovereign; and this is also a part of our work to remind the world that there is a God, and that he claims obedience from his creatures. Brethren, fulfill your office!

If you would be good remembrancers towards God, you must know the promises of which you remind him. You must be acquainted with your Bibles so as to fill your mouths with arguments and order your petitions aright. You must come to the great King and say, “Lord, do as thou hast said. Fulfil this word unto thy servant whereon thou hast caused me to hope.” If we pray without a promise we have no reason to expect an answer. God will do what he has promised to do: he may do somewhat more, but we have no right to expect it. The best praying in the world is pleading the promises. I wish we all practiced this sort of prayer. It is wise to bring before the Lord his own words, and plead his divine veracity: “Thou hast said it, thou art true, therefore fulfill thy word!”

It is your business, as the Lord’s remembrancers, to be well acquainted with these sacred words of grace which you are to bring to remembrance. If you do not remember them yourself, how can you bring them to the Lord’s memory? Your office of remembrancer is to be carried on incessantly. “Ye that are the Lord’s remembrancers, take ye no rest, and give him no rest.” I fear that very many of God’s promises are seldom used. They are like the whitesmith’s bunch of keys. Why are they so rusty? Because they are not in constant use. They have not been turned in the lock day by day, or they would be bright enough. Are there not exceeding great and precious promises which to some of you are a dead letter? Promises lie hidden away in God’s most holy Word, which you have never used; perhaps you do not even know that they are there. One came to me, not long ago, and said, “I was surprised to find these words in the Bible.” To him I answered, Your remark makes me fear that you have not searched your Bible as you should have done.” We ought to know the length and breadth of the estate which the Lord has given us. Oh, that we would incessantly use the promises in prayer! One said, with a smile, the other day, “It is a fine thing to have a cheque-book, to get what money you please by signing your name!” I did not stop to explain to him the limits of that power; but I noted that he looked like one who, if he had owned such a cheque-book as he spoke of, would have written down larger amounts than the most of us could compass. Still, his folly was not equal on the one side to the unwisdom of these who err in the other direction; for they have a cheque-book, and yet never use it. The treasury of heaven lies open to faith, and yet we fret and worry about our little daily cares. We have but to plead a promise of God to put him in remembrance, and he will supply all our needs: why, then, do we pine in want? Fools that we are, to be anxious and poverty-stricken with the possibilities of infinite riches close at hand! Who among us is there that comes up to the text, “Ye that are the Lord’s remembrancers, take ye no rest, and give him no rest?”

Thus much upon the office: may the Holy Spirit lead all believers to undertake and carry on this sacred work! Ministers, deacons, and elders of churches are specially called to this. You older and more advanced Christians should lead the way in this holy employment; and, as I have already shown you, the sick must take their turn. Every Christian should aspire to take his place in the cordon, and in some way

watch on the behalf of Zion; but especially should we be constant, instant, and fervent in pleading the precious promises of our Lord. These were not given to be forgotten, but to be pleaded, and then to be fulfilled. It is written, "For this will I be enquired of by the house of Israel, to do it for them." It is the rule of God's kingdom that we must bring to his remembrance the promise which we would have fulfilled in our own experience; therefore, "Ye that are the Lord's remembrancers, take ye no rest."

**II. My second head is a REMARKABLE CAUTION:** "Ye that are the Lord's remembrancers, *take ye no rest.*" I quote the best translation. *Take no rest from prayer.* be always praying. If not always in the act of prayer, be always in the spirit of prayer. "Pray without ceasing." Not only reason, but wrestle with God in prayer. Sometimes pray without words, and sometimes with them. Pray alone, and often pray with brethren. There is special prevalence in the prayer of two or three. "If two of you shall agree on earth as touching anything that they shall ask, it shall be done for them of my Father which is in heaven." Gather in the greater congregations for prayer. "Forsake not the assembling of yourselves together, as the manner of some is"; as, I regret to say, the manner of many churches has come to be in these days. The moderns despise the meeting for prayer; and in this they condemn themselves, by owning that they attach little value to their own prayers. Possibly their consciousness of having lost all power with God in prayer is thus betraying itself. Where the prayer-meeting is despised, there may be cleverness in the preacher, but there will be no unction for the hearer. O my brethren, I beseech you, both as individuals and as a church, do not restrain prayer. "Watch and pray" — that precept is a condensation of our text.

*Never rest from prayer because you are weary of it.* Whenever prayer becomes distasteful, it should be a loud call to pray all the more. No man has such need to pray as the man who does not care to pray. When you can pray, and long to pray, why then you will pray; but when you cannot pray, and do not wish to pray, why then you must pray, or evil will come of it. He is on the brink of ruin who forgets the mercy-seat. When the heart is apathetic towards prayer, the whole man is sickening for a grievous disease. How can we be weary of prayer? It is essential to life. When a man grows weary of breathing, surely he is near to dying: when a man grows weary of praying, surely we ought to pray anxiously for him, for he is in an evil case. *Never rest from prayer because you have prayed enough.* When has a man prayed enough? The greatest pleaders with God in prayer are the hungriest after more of it. The more a man gets from God, the more he desires from God. These who have but little, ask but little: but to him that hath shall be given, and he shall have abundance. Does anyone say, "I have long been prayerful and watchful, and I shall now take things more easily"? Yes. I saw a good man taking it easy the other day: he was riding upon a bicycle with both feet off the pedals, and with the brake in full force. I did not blame the cyclist; but one thing was quite clear — *he was going down the hill.* He would not have had his feet on the rests in that fashion if he had been upon the up-grade. Brother, whenever you begin to put your legs up, and have no more work to do, you are going down hill, and there is no doubt about it. The way to heaven is up hill, and every inch of the way will need effort; for the kingdom of heaven suffereth violence. Grace does not exempt us from activity, but works it in us. If you know the power of the weapon called "all-prayer," never put it up into its sheath, but continually call upon the Lord, and in this matter "take no rest."

*Do not fall into the habit of praying as a matter of routine.* "Ye that are the Lord's remembrancers, take ye no rest." I have heard of soldiers sleeping while on the march, and I have known some good people sleep while praying, till I have thought that their prayers were a kind of pious snore. They go on with the old phrases without considering what they mean by them. They are like crickets, whose notes are for ever the same. "I sleep," says the spouse, "but my heart waketh"; but these might more truly say, "I do not sleep, and yet my heart is not awake." Many prayers are like a grocer's or a draper's account: "Ditto, ditto, ditto." The petitions are as per usual." It is dreary work when we have the shell of prayer before us, but have no oyster in it. The brother's lips are here in prayer, but his soul has gone home to his shop, or to

his farm. The sails of his mill go round as the wind blows, but he is not grinding anything — there is no grist in the mill, no intelligent, loving desire. Let us get out of the ruts of phrases and set petitions. Mere routine religion is hateful, and yet how easily we all fall into it! Let us not rest on our oars, and hope to make progress by the impetus already gained. All progress made heavenward by the natural drift of the current is seeming, and not real. All worship which is mechanical is so far dead. God is a spirit, and we can only worship him acceptably in spirit and in truth: if the spirit be gone, the very truth of the worship is gone, and it becomes an offense rather than a sweet-smelling savor. Brethren, *take no rest, so as to pray by fits and starts*. Look at what has been done in many churches: they plan to have a grand time, and possibly they succeed. Everybody comes up to the prayer meetings, and all appear to be in earnest about the conversion of souls. There is great excitement, and probably much good is done. But after that there is a reaction, a stupor of indifference. As in nature, after high hills deep valleys; so is it with some religious communities. We say of a man, in the proverb, “He is as sound asleep as a church.” Yes, very good; nothing does sleep so soundly as a church, and especially after a time of excitement. Men, who are at one time lively beyond measure, are apt at another time to sleep beyond waking. After a high wind there may come a lull, wherein everything drops, and stagnation reigns supreme. The Lord save us from spasmodic religion! “Ye that make mention of the Lord, take ye no rest.” Keep in a high state of revival always, or if that be a state which cannot be maintained, suspect that it is a condition unhealthy and undesirable. If there is a kind of celestial delirium here and there — and I am afraid that such is a correct description of it — avoid it. The wild fury of the flesh, in which everything is done by noise, and men are saved by bluster, is not of God. An excitement which cannot be kept up, since the spirit of man would be exhausted by it, is questionable. An excitement which is lawless and ungovernable, since the Spirit of God is not ruling it, is to be dreaded. Fanaticism is a tornado of the flesh, and not the health-giving breath of the Holy Ghost. It is well to be as you would wish always to be. That pace is best which can, by divine grace, be maintained from year to year. Enoch walked with God: he could not have run with him, but he was enabled always to keep in step with God; and God’s pace is always the right one. Oh, for a gracious energy which does not flag, but goes from strength to strength! “Ye that are the Lord’s remembrancers, take ye no rest.”

Above all, *let us never rest out of despair*. The feeling does come over you sometimes — “What is the use of our labor? So little comes of it. What is the use of protesting for the truth? The churches will not hear you. You only earn ill-will, and are ridiculed as an old fogey. What is the use of being earnest about winning souls? Men are indifferent. The present engrosses thought — social questions are pressing. Everybody pines for sensationalism or amusement. What profit is there in keeping to the old way?” That spirit creeps over the child of God like the cold of the Arctic regions, numbing him and tending to send him into the sleep of despair. The evidence of this evil power is found in the tendency to restrain prayer before God. From this may our God rescue us! Come, my brothers, I do not know who among you is going to sleep; but I would like to shake the man who is so benumbed, and wake him up; and I hope that, in your turn, when you see me benumbed, you will shake me also, and wake me up to diligence in prayer. Let us awake this morning, and begin again. We must not, will not, yield to slumber. There is small cause for fear, and no cause for despair. Our cause defeated? Not a bit of it! All will come right yet. God waits; but he waits that he may be gracious unto us. His time to favor Zion will come, and the good old cause will win the victory. The work of the Lord is in a greater hand than ours. He will not fail nor be discouraged.” “Men ought always to pray, and not to faint”; and when they feel that they are fainting, they should resolve to pray with double earnestness, and faintness will yield to joy.

Only one more observation: *avoid setting any time to God in your prayers*. He says, “Ye that are the Lord’s remembrancers, take ye no rest.” A wife said that she would pray for her husband for ten years and if he was not converted then, she would conclude that there would be no use in further pleading. To that good wife I would say, “You are right in praying ten years, but you must not limit the Holy One of Israel. Who are you, to put your finger down on the almanack and say, ‘God shall answer me on such a day, or I

will pray no more'? Plead for your husband as long as he lives." "Well," says one, "I have been praying a long time for a favor, and I am inclined now to cease pleading for it." If you have a question about the rightness of the prayer, do not persevere in a mistake. Solve as quickly as possible the question as to the correctness of the request; for if you waver on that point, your prayer will be of that wavering kind which meets no acceptance with the Lord. If you are asking what you know the Lord has promised, and what is certainly for his glory, you may pray with confidence, and you may even spend the last breath in your body in praying for it. Give the Lord no rest, and take no rest yourself, but incessantly, perpetually, continually plead with God till he answers you out of his holy place.

**III. And so I come, in the last place, to dwell upon the third matter, which is very singular.** The charge to take no rest was notable, but here is A STILL MORE REMARKABLE CHARGE: *Give him no rest.*" What a word is this! I speak with solemn awe upon me. When the Lord condescends so greatly, we must be doubly reverent. Give God no rest! I am amazed at such a command. Come, gracious Spirit, and teach me how to speak! I see then, first, very clearly, that *importunity is here commanded.* "Give him no rest" is our Lord's own command to us concerning the great God. I do not suppose any of you ever advised a beggar to be importunate with you. Did you ever say, "Whenever you see me go over this crossing ask me for a penny. If I do not give you one, run after me, or call after me all the way down the street. If that does not succeed, lay hold upon me, and do not let me go until I help you. Beg without ceasing." Did any one of you ever invite applicants to call often, and make large requests of you? Oh, no! Importunity is a common enough thing when men are seeking earthly boons; but it is so sadly rare in heavenly concerns, that the lord has to exhort us to be importunate with him. He does in effect say, "Press me! Urge me! Lay hold on my strength. Wrestle with me, as when a man seeks to give another a fall that he may prevail with him." All this, and much more, is included in the expression, "Give him no rest." Importunity is commanded.

*Importunity is influential with God.* How vividly the Savior sets this forth in his parables! The poor widow seeks justice of an unrighteous judge. She had a good case, and she appeared in court begging for justice, where she might expect it. She cried, "My lord, hear my suit!" She meets with no response: the harsh magistrate declares that he cannot attend to her. The court is occupied with other cases. At the first pause the widow is heard crying, "My lord, there is now an interval; will you hear me?" She is sternly refused. Another day she appears, and another, and another: her case is urgent, and she is in terrible earnest to be heard. She is put out of the court, once and again. Then the order is given that she shall be kept out. But she gets in somehow, and her voice, so touching and piercing, is heard in season and out of season, seeking to be delivered from her adversary. Just as the court is closing she cries, "My lord!" and is answered, "Have not I told you many times before that I cannot attend to you?" "But, my lord!" He turns on his heel, and is gone to his home. The next morning, when he comes forth from his gate, there is the widow. She cries, "My lord!" With a curse he spurns her. He goes down to the court, and he takes his seat. You see "his excellency" on the bench with his officers around him — a very great personage is he. The first thing he hears is, "My lord, I pray thee, avenge me of mine adversary!" "That woman again! Let her be removed. Go on with the next case." All day long whenever there is a pause, or when his lordship rises to retire, there is the same bitter wail, "O my lord, hear me, I pray thee!" The widow haunts him. He dreams about the sad-faced woman with the uplifted finger, and the cry, "Hear me, my lord; hear me!" The next morning it is no dream. He is at breakfast, when the servant says, "A person begs to see you, sir. She has been at the door very often, and she will not go away." "What is she like?" "Well, it is a woman dressed in mourning — no doubt a widow." "Drive her away. She is a common nuisance!" He goes to the court, and there is the woman, and she begins again. Then the judge says to himself, "Though I fear not God, nor regard man; yet because this widow troubleth me, I will avenge her, lest by her continual coming

she weary me.” The Lord puts that woman’s importunity before us as a model, and as an encouragement. “And shall not God avenge his own elect, which cry day and night unto him?” Pray like that widow. Do not take “No” for an answer.

Study that other picture. A man has a friend, who arrives at his door in the dead of night. The friend has been walking a long, long way, and is worn out. When he gets to the door, he says, “I am glad I have got here at last. I lost my way in the burning heat of the sun, and it has taken me many hours to find the track and reach thy door. Give me, I pray thee, a morsel of bread, for I am near to die of hunger.” “I have not a morsel in the house: I have nothing to set before thee. Come in and try to sleep; for food I have none.” “Alas! I could not sleep, I am so faint with hunger; I pray thee, find me food, or I shall perish.” The compassionate householder resolves to go down the street to a friend, and beg from him three cakes. He knocks at the door, but he has no answer. He knocks, and knocks, and calls aloud to his neighbor. The answer comes from the top of the roof that the man is in bed, and cannot rise at that unearthly hour to search for bread. The householder is not to be put off, for his friend is dying of hunger; and so he knocks and shouts, and ceases not. The man in bed on the roof tries to sleep, but the noise is too great, and the children are being frightened, and asking what is the matter. He hears the pleadings of his friend, and again reminds him that the request is unreasonable at such an hour; but this does not end the matter. Knock! Knock! Knock! Call! Call! Call! “I will not go down!” vows the man in bed. “I will not go away!” says the man below. He keeps up an incessant shout and clatter. Again you hear knock! knock! knock! The man has turned on the other side, and tried to go to sleep, but he cannot manage it; that knocking is too vigorous. Although he will not help him because he is his friend, “yet because of his importunity he will rise and give him as many as he needeth.” After this manner pray ye, and ye shall prevail. Oh, for grace to knock till God’s door is opened! You may have what you will if you understand the art of importunity. “Give him no rest!” Importunity would not have been commanded had it not been right for us, and prevalent with God. How safely may we commend what the Lord commands! God is to be moved by the importunate prayers of his people. He will hear; he must hear, if we will pray with persistent faith.

*Importunity on our part is the sign of coming action on God’s part.* Sometimes the Lord seems, according to Old Testament figure, to put his right hand into his bosom. We cry to him, “O Lord, how long?” But his right hand is in his bosom still. Error prevails, sin triumphs, God’s people are despised; but his right hand is in his bosom still. Take no rest from prayer, and give him no rest. Ere long he will pluck his right hand out of his bosom, and he will roll up his sleeve, and you will see what his bare arm will do. He will work as soon as he sees that his time is come, and that will be when we are in earnest, and give him no rest.

Sometimes God’s work goes on so well that we have much cause for gratitude; and yet we feel that the pace might be greatly quickened. A sermon that could save a hundred could as readily save a thousand, if God blessed it to that extent. The same truth which sways one mind could sway a million minds, if applied by the Great Spirit. There is no reason why the sowing of the Lord’s word should not bring forth a hundred-fold instead of twenty-fold. We may not dream that the Spirit of the Lord is straitened. When God is with us, all things are possible. When the Lord fires his saints with zeal, his own work never lags behind. God is never behind the desires of his people: in fact, their longings are prophecies of his givings. When we cry day and night, God will work day and night. When saints groan and sigh for revival, it is because the revival is already come, and has begun within their souls. When the whole company of the faithful shall glow together with passionate desire and importunate prayer, we may know that our redemption draweth nigh.

*Importunate prayer is the sign of a growing work.* The sighs and cries of the church are growing pains. Prayer is the thermometer of grace. The Lord has committed his divine force in a large degree to the



custody of his people. Unbelief shuts up that force: as it is written, He did not many mighty works there because of their unbelief." Faith, on the other hand, sets the sacred force free; for "all things are possible to him that believeth." When saints are all alive and instant in prayer, it is the index and token that the Lord will open the windows of heaven and pour them out such a blessing that they shall not have room enough to receive it.

I have done when I have urged you, my well-beloved friends, to take this text as a lesson to be practiced. This first sermon on my return ought to be the key-note of this year's service of God. Have you a mind for great grace and grand enterprises? Or do you prefer to slacken? I hope you will not hesitate, or choose the meaner part. Does the Lord put it into the heart of one and another to feel an agony concerning the unconverted? Do some of you feel a deep concern for the souls of others? Does this happen to you that teach in the Sunday-school, or who go out to the lodging-houses? Is this state of mind prevailing among the officers of the church? Is this the condition of a large proportion of private members? Then a grand future lies before us. If God gives all of us to travail for souls, we shall see greater things than these. Brethren, we hold the truth of God. If we had wickedly departed from the way of the Lord, all the praying in the world would have brought us no spiritual progress; but holding fast the everlasting gospel, what is now wanted is the fire from heaven to fall upon our altar and consume the sacrifice. Oh, for the Holy Ghost! Oh, for the working of God himself in our midst!

I exhort you who fear the Lord, and are his appointed remembrancers, to be much in prayer, and in testimony. Pray and preach. Keep not silent. Tell out the simple gospel. The more you tell of pardon bought with blood the better. I saw my dear brother, Archibald Brown, this week, and he told me of a poor fellow in East London who had been visited by a soul-winning brother. He had been a wild and wicked man. He was ill, and the visitor talked long with him. It seemed to make no impression, till one day he explained substitution to him, and the man asked pointedly, "If I believe in Jesus, do you tell me that he took all my sins upon himself?" "Yes, he bore all your sins in his own body on the tree." "Well, well," the man cried, "if *he* took them, I have not got them." "No," said the other; "that is the glorious truth. The Lord suffered for your sins." "Then I shall not have to suffer for them?" "No," said the visitor. "Your sin is put away." "Never heard that before," said the rough man; "that is the wonderfulest thing I ever heard. I believe it. Blessed be God, I believe it, and I am saved!" Soon after his son came in — another fellow of the Bill Sykes order and the visitor began exhorting him. The older man cried out, "Give him that little bit; that will do it." Just so, "that little bit will do it." The visitor told the story of Jesus dying in the sinner's stead, and the little bit did the work. Our chief business should be to cry, "Behold the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world." We must bid men look to Jesus and live. Keep not silence. Publish this salvation far and wide. Preach the cross, and plead the blood. Preach and pray for Jesus: he is all in all. Keep his sacrifice to the front, and God will bless his own word. Oh, that he may now grant us a glorious period of genuine grace-work! Amen.