

Cheer Up, My Comrades!

A Sermon by Charles Spurgeon

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R. Perkins

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Cover Picture:

Bombardment of Fort Sumter by the Batteries of the
Confederate States, April 13, 1861

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PREFACE

Charles Haddon Spurgeon (1834-1892) endures as one of the most beloved Christian pastors and writers of all time. He pastored a Baptist church in London and many of his sermons were copied by stenographers and then distributed for a penny. But like all the great writing of the past, his sermons become harder for us to follow with each successive generation. Language is constantly evolving, and what was a common expression in 19th-century England may now seem unusual or even incomprehensible in 21st-century America.

This sermon has been carefully and thoughtfully updated so that you can read it without the distractions of obsolete words, strange spelling, and figures of speech that don't make sense to us today. Additionally, Spurgeon's speech was always peppered with Bible jargon; in this updated version of *Cheer Up, My Comrades* I have footnoted most of these, but Spurgeon often paraphrases and combines several verses and I did not attempt to change this. None of its substance has been changed; I have strived to maintain the heart and depth of his messages while updating them for the modern reader.

“But who am I, that I should alter the words of one of the greats? I’m not qualified to do that.” These and other thoughts previously kept me from completing this task. I have updated several other books, mainly for children, and when I came across this sermon, I thought, “Everyone should read this!” But knowing my own family and friends, I couldn’t imagine most of them reading something like this. But as I delayed, the prompting kept coming back to me to make this sermon more accessible to all.

If you’re an avid reader, theology student, professor, or just someone familiar with Spurgeon, you will most certainly enjoy the *original* more than this modern version. But for the rest of the believers who are not, I hope this adaptation speaks to your heart as it did mine.

Rebecca Perkins
December 2022

Cheer Up,
My Comrades!

Charles Spurgeon

AND JOSIAH SET THE PRIESTS IN THEIR DUTIES
AND ENCOURAGED THEM FOR THE SERVICE OF
THE HOUSE OF THE LORD.

2 CHRONICLES 35:2

Josiah, as you remember, in the early part of his reign determined to destroy the idolatries that prevailed, to root them out of the land. He then turned his thoughts to repairing and beautifying the temple. After that, it was his heart's aim to restore the sacred services, observe the solemn feasts, and revive the worship of God as he instructed, according to the words of the Book of the Covenant that was found in the house of the Lord.¹ Our text tells us something about the method with which he went to work, and it may well serve us as a model.

The first thing is to get each person into his proper place. The next thing is for each one to have a good spirit in his present place, to occupy it worthily. Let's suppose, dear friends, that in the providence of God you are in your place, and by the direction of God's Spirit you have also looked for and found the precise form of usefulness in

¹ 2 Chronicles 34:13

which you should exert yourself. Tonight it will not be my business to decide your place. But assuming that you are in the right place, my purpose will be to encourage you to do your work for your Lord without being disheartened. I am hardly going to preach as much as talk to different people who are discouraged in the work of the Lord, that we may rouse them up, rally them around us, and encourage them to keep rank.

And first, I want to speak a little to...

THOSE WHO THINK THAT
THEY CAN DO NOTHING.

They will tell me that in such a sermon as this, not a sentence can concern them. They think that if I encourage people to serve the Lord, it will be useless for them since they can do nothing at all. Well, dear friends, you must not take that for granted. You must make quite sure that you cannot do anything before I dare to speak to you as if it were a fact; for sometimes there is a lack of way because there is a lack of will. Though I do not go so far as to allege that this is your situation, we know too well that *cannot* often really means *will not*, and to have not triumphed may

mean that you have not tried. You have been so discouraged that you have excused yourself for inaction, and your inaction has grown into laziness.

If a man, under the notion that he could not lift his right hand, constantly kept it still, it would be no wonder if, after weeks and months, it would become a matter of fact that he had no power to use it. It might actually stiffen for no reason other than that he had not moved it. Don't you think that before your muscles get rigid, it would be good to exercise them by attempting some kind of service? Especially you younger folks, if you do not work for the Lord almost as soon as you are converted, it will be very difficult afterward to make you want to do it. Ability, I have often noticed, comes with *doing*, and through negligence and laziness, people become drained of energy and helpless. You say that you cannot move your arm, and so you do not move it. Watch out, for eventually, your inaction will lead to real powerlessness.

But let's take what you have said as being true. You are sick. The strength you felt in the bright days of health fails you now. You have to suffer pain, weariness, and exhaustion. You are often detained at home, and home now seems

like a gloomy hospital all day long, rather than a warm respite when evening shadows fall. Therefore, you really can do little—so little that you are apt to believe it is nothing at all. The thought is a burden to you. You wish you could serve the Lord. How constantly you have dreamed of the pleasure since you have been denied the privilege! How willing your feet would be to run; how ready your hands would be to labor; how glad your tongue would be to testify! You envy those who are able, and you would gladly emulate and surpass them. You certainly don't harbor ill will against them, but you devoutly wish that you could do some personal service in the cause of your Lord.

Now, I want to encourage you first by reminding you that the law of the Son of David² is the same as the law of David himself, and you know the law of David about those who went to the battle. Some were hurt, and some were otherwise incapable of action, and he left them with the supplies. "You are very weary and ill," he said. "Stop in the camp, take care of the tents and the ammunition, while we go and fight." Now, it happened one time that the men who went to fight claimed all the spoils. They said, "These

² Jesus

people have done nothing; they have been lying in the trenches; they should not get a share of the loot.” But King David then and there made a law that they should share and share equally—those who were in the trenches and those who were engaged in the battle. “The share of the man who stayed with the supplies is to be the same as that of him who went down to the battle. All will share alike.” And from that day forward, he made it “a statute and an ordinance for Israel.”³ The law of the Son of David is no less gracious. If you are detained at home by sickness or for any other reason, such as age or infirmity, you are not able to enter into actual service; yet if you are a true soldier and would fight if you could and your heart is in it, you will share even with the best and bravest of those who, dressed in the full armor of God, encounter and grapple with the adversary.

And brothers and sisters, you have no reason to envy (though you may admire to your heart’s content) all who are diligent and successful in the service of Christ. Let me remind you of a law of the kingdom of heaven with which you are all familiar—“Whoever welcomes a prophet

³ See 1 Samuel 30: 10, 21-24

as a prophet will receive a prophet's reward."⁴ In truth, it is a magnificent calling to be a servant of the Lord. David thought so, for you often read at the beginning of his psalms, "A prayer of David, the servant of God,"⁵ though you never read, "A prayer of David, the king of Israel." He thought more of being enlisted as a servant of God than of being called a king of Israel.

Health and strength, ability, and opportunity to fulfill a mission for the Lord are all very desirable, but these are not always to be taken as reliable evidence of personal salvation. A man may preach admirably and he may work marvels in the church, and yet not be a partaker of saving grace. For this reason, when the disciples came back from preaching and said, "Lord, even the demons are subject to us through your name," the Lord said, "Nevertheless, in this rejoice not, but rather rejoice because your names are written in heaven."⁶ Judas was among them. Judas cast out demons. Judas preached the gospel. And yet Judas was a son of perdition and is lost forever. Just because you cannot do much, you

⁴ Matthew 10:41

⁵ Psalm 18:1, Psalm 36

⁶ Luke 10:17, 20

must not infer that therefore you are not saved; for if you were among the most esteemed of Christian workers, it would not prove that you were certainly a child of God.

Don't be uneasy then, because you are left out from the cheerful activities that others share, for as long as your name is written in heaven and your heart truly follows after the Lord, you will be abundantly repaid at the last great day, even though here you are consigned to be a sufferer rather than a worker.

But to me, it seems more than possible that some of you, dear friends, whose minds are tinged with melancholy, have painted your condition in darker shades than the reasonableness of the situation deserves. Is your life indeed a dull routine that, for lack of busy change and lively pursuits, leaves no record behind? I think not. "*The rich relics of a well-spent hour*" do sometimes "*pour around your path a stream of light*"⁷ that cheers others, though you may not even notice it. Are you patient under your sufferings? Do you try to keep the flesh under control, govern your spirit, refrain from

⁷ *The Pleasures of Memory - Part II* by Samuel Rogers (see appendix)

complaining, and foster cheerfulness? That, my friend, is doing a great deal! I am sure that the holy peace of a suffering child of God is one of the best sermons that can ever be preached in a family. A sick saint has often been more useful in a home than the most eloquent theologian could have been. They see how sweetly you submit to the divine will, how patiently you can bear painful operations, how the Lord gives you songs in the night. You are greatly useful!

I have sometimes been called to visit bedridden people who have been unable to rise for many, many years, and I know that their influence has extended over whole parishes. They have been known as poor devout women or as experienced Christian men, and many have gone to visit them. Christian ministers have said that they derived more benefit from sitting for half an hour talking to poor old Betsy than they did from all the books in their library, and yet Betsy said that she was doing nothing. Look at your situation in that light, and you will see that you can praise God in your bed, and make your bedroom to be as vocal for God as this pulpit ever can be.

Besides, dear friends, don't you think we frequently limit our idea of serving God to the

public activities of the sanctuary and forget that our Lord has a strong claim on our private faithfulness and obedience?⁸ You say, “I cannot serve God,” when you cannot teach Sunday School or preach in the pulpit, when you are unable to sit on a committee or speak on a platform—as if these were the only forms of service to be taken into account. Don’t you think that a mother nursing her baby is serving God? Don’t you think that men and women going about their daily toil with patient hard work, doing the duties of domestic life, are serving God?

If you think correctly you will understand that they are. The custodian sweeping the room, the homemaker preparing the meal, the workman driving a nail, and the businessman calculating his ledger, ought to do all in the service of God. Though of course, it is very desirable that we each have some specifically Christian work to do, it is much better that we sanctify our common skills, and make our ordinary work chime with the melodies of a soul attuned to heaven.

Let true religion be our life, and then our life will be true religion. That is how it ought to be. “Whether you eat or drink, or whatever you

⁸ 1 Corinthians 15:20

do, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him.”⁹ So then, let the stream of your common life as it flows on, obscure and unobserved, be holy and courageous. You will find that while “*they also serve who only stand and wait,*”¹⁰ you shall not be neglected or overlooked, you who simply sit at Jesus’ feet and listen to his words when you can do no more. This is a service done for him that he can appreciate, no matter what others say.

Know too, my dear sister, that by your sorrows, the Lord has drawn out your sympathy. You, my dear brother, know that by the discipline which has chastened you, you have learned to be a comforter¹¹. You say then that you cannot do anything? I know a few secrets about you that you forget. You do not count your worth as we count you. Didn’t you try to cheer a poor neighbor the other day by telling of the Lord’s goodness to you when you were very sick yourself? Didn’t you shed a sacred tear for another’s pain? Isn’t it your habit, as a poor

⁹ Combination of: 1 Corinthians 10:31 & Colossians 3:17

¹⁰ *Sonnet 19: When I Consider How My Light is Spent*, John Milton

¹¹ 2 Corinthians 1:4

sufferer, to drop just a few words for your Lord to others in a similar condition whenever you can? You tell me that you cannot do anything. Oh, dear hearts, the refreshing of God's saints is one of the highest works that anyone can be occupied with.

God will send prophets to his servants at times when they need to be rebuked. If he wants to comfort them he generally sends an angel to them, for that is angels' work. Jesus Christ himself, we read, had angels sent to minister to him. When? Was it not in the Garden of Gethsemane, when he was bowed down with sorrow? Comforting is not ordinary work; it is a kind of angelic work. There appeared to him an angel strengthening him.¹² A prophet was sent to warn the Israelites of their sin; but when Gideon was to be encouraged to go and fight for his country, it was the angel of the Lord that came to him.¹³ So I gather that comforting work is angels' work.

You, dear kind Christian men and women, who think that you are not able to do anything but console some downhearted and hurting souls

¹² Luke 22:43

¹³ Judges 6:11

with cheery words, you are offering a most blessed assistance, and doing work that many ministers find difficult. I have known some who have never known suffering or poor health, and when they try to comfort God's weary people they are dreadfully awkward at it. They are like elephants picking up pins—they can do it, but it is with great effort. God's people who have suffered can comfort each other with tenderness; they take to the work as a fish to water. They understand the art of speaking the appropriate word at the right time to those who are weary, and when this is the case, they should not complain that they are doing nothing.

And yet, beloved, I hope that you who thought that you did nothing, and now realize that you really are useful, will perceive that there is still a wider region into which you can advance. Breathe tonight the prayer of Jabez, who was more honorable than his brothers, because he was the child of his mother's sorrow. This was the prayer—"Oh, that you would bless me indeed, and enlarge my territory!"¹⁴ Ask God to open up to you a larger region of usefulness, and he will do it.

¹⁴ 1 Chronicles 4:10

Now let me address a few words to another group of workers...

THOSE WHO THINK THAT THEY ARE SET ASIDE.

“Pastor,” someone says, “I wish you would encourage me. I used to be useful. At least, I was recognized as one of a group who worked heartily together. But since I’ve moved, I’m unknown in the new neighborhood and I seem to have dropped out of the ranks. I’ve done little or nothing lately, and I feel uneasy about it. I wish that I could get to work.” My dear brother, I hope you will, but do not waste five minutes thinking it over. These times need so much Christian effort that when a man asks me, “How shall I do work for Christ?” I am accustomed to saying, “Go and do it.”

“But what is the way to do it?”

“Start now. Get at it, my brother. Do not be out of service for a minute.”

But if you must desist for a while, do not let your interest in the cause of our Lord decline. Some of the best of God’s workers have been set aside for long periods. Moses was in the desert for forty years doing nothing. A greater man than he, our blessed Savior himself, was for thirty

years—I won't say doing nothing—but certainly doing no public work. When you are in a retired and inactive position, be preparing for the time when God brings you out again! If you are put away on the shelf, do not rust there, but pray to the Lord to brighten you up so that when he comes to use you again you will be fully prepared for the work he has ready for you.¹⁵

While you must be set aside, I want you to do this: pray for others who are at work. Help them; encourage them. Do not get into that irritable, miserable frame of mind that grudges and undervalues other men's works. Do not be like the dog in the manger.¹⁶ Some people, when they cannot do anything themselves, do not like anybody else to be diligent and laborious. Say, "If I cannot help, I will never hinder; I will cheer on my brothers and sisters."

Spend your time praying that you may be ready for the Lord's use, and meanwhile, be prompt in helping others. You may remember that at the Siege of Gibraltar when the fleet surrounded it and determined to storm the "Old

¹⁵ 2 Timothy 2:21

¹⁶ Aesop's Fables

Rock”, the governor fired red hot shot¹⁷ down on the men of war. The enemy did not appreciate the governor’s warm welcome at all. Think about how it was done. There were gunners on the ramparts firing away, and every man in the garrison would have liked to do the same. What did those men do, who could not use a gun?¹⁸ *They heated the shot*, and that is what you must do! I am the master gunner here generally. Heat my shot for me, if you will. Keep the furnace going, so that when we do fire off a sermon it may be red hot, through your earnest prayers. When you see your friends sitting in Sunday School, or standing out in the street working for God, if you cannot join them yet, say, “It’s okay. I will heat the shot for them. My prayers will not be lacking, even if I cannot contribute anything else.” That is advice for those of you who are set on the shelf for a while.

¹⁷ cannonballs

¹⁸ cannon

There are others who are very discouraged because...

THEY ONLY HAVE A LITTLE TALENT.

They say, “Oh, I wish I could serve Jesus Christ like Paul, or like Whitefield¹⁹—that I could travel the country proclaiming his dear name and winning thousands of converts. But I don’t speak well and I am not smart, and what I attempt produces little or no effect.” Well, brother, make sure you do what you can. Do you remember the parable of the men who had talents entrusted to them?²⁰ I do not want to over-stress the fact that it was the man who had one talent who buried it. Yet why is he represented as doing so? I think it was not because the men of two and five talents do not sometimes bury theirs, but because the temptation lies most with the one-talent people. They say, “What can I do? What use do I have? I am excused.” That is the temptation.

Brother, do not be entangled in that snare. If your Lord has only given you one talent he

¹⁹ George Whitefield, evangelist, preacher

²⁰ See Matthew 25:14-30 for the Parable of the Talents. In this parable, a talent is a specific amount of money.

does not expect you to make the same interest on it as the man with five; but still, he does expect his interest, so do not wrap your talent in a cloth. It is only with the strength given by God that any of us can serve him. We have nothing to consecrate to him except the gift we have first received from him. You are weak; you feel it. But what does your God say to you? “Not by might nor by power, but by my Spirit, says the Lord.”²¹ He can make you useful even though you have no extraordinary capabilities. Grapeshot²² may do great damage to the enemy, though it cannot compare with a grenade or bombshell. A sinner may be brought to Christ by the simple earnestness of a farmer or an artisan, without calling in the aid of a professor’s education or a preacher’s eloquence.

God can bless you far above what you think is your capacity, for it is not a question of your ability, but of his aid. You tell me you have no self-reliance. Then take refuge in God, I urge you, for evidently you need more divine assistance in the battle. Go and get it; it is there for you. He provides the weak with strength. “The young

²¹ Zechariah 4:6

²² A cluster of small cannonballs

men shall faint and be weary, but they that wait upon the Lord shall renew their strength.”²³ I think you are more likely to do good than if you had five talents because now you will pray more and you will depend more on God than you would have if you had possessed strength of your own.

One more thought. Since you are not enriched with many talents, be sure you make the most of those you have. Do you know how merchants and tradesmen who have only a small capital in business manage to compete with those who have greater means? They try to turn their money over every day. The small business owner cannot afford to sell his goods to men who will pay him in three months—not him. He must get his cash at the door, and then go and buy more merchandise tomorrow morning and sell that, or else he could not make his living with so little invested.

If you only have a dime, make it “nimble,” and you will get as much profit out of a nimble dime as another person would out of a lazy dollar. Activity often makes up for lack of ability. If you cannot get enough force by the weight of the cannonball, get it by the speed with which it

²³ Isaiah 40:30-31

travels. A simple man with one talent on fire may become a great nuisance to the devil and a champion for Christ. As for that great theologian with his five talents, who marches on so sleepily, Satan can always outmatch him and win the day. If you can just turn over your one talent again and again, in the name of God, you may achieve great wonders. So I encourage you in the work of the Lord.

I will now have a word with the Lord's workers...

WHO ARE UNDER GREAT DIFFICULTIES.

There have been days when perplexities pleased me, dilemmas delighted me, and instead of declining a difficult task I rather liked it. Even now I enjoy puzzling over a problem and attempting what others decline. Nothing good in this world can be achieved without difficulty. The biggest diamonds lie under heavy stones that lazy people cannot turn over. That which is easy to do is hardly worth doing. In the face of difficulty, the man with an ardent, persevering spirit braces his nerves, sharpens his wits, and brings all his powers into play to achieve a goal that will reward his efforts.

Do you have great difficulties, dear friend? You are not the first worker for God who has encountered difficulties. Let us go back to Moses again. He was supposed to bring Israel out of Egypt, but his path did not appear very clear. He knew he must go to Pharaoh and deliver God's command. Pharaoh looked right through him when he said, "Let my people go." The prideful

monarch was greatly surprised to hear anybody, especially a Hebrew, talk like that, and so he told him to go away. But Moses returned with, “Thus says the Lord, ‘Let my people go’”; and even then his courage was not crowned with immediate success. There had to be plague upon plague, plague upon plague, until at last proud Pharaoh’s heart was broken, the Israelites were saved from the hand of the man who hated them, and Egypt was glad when they departed. This, however, was just the beginning of Moses’ mission. ²⁴

His was a life of difficulty—the meekest man, but the most provoked. Until he got to the top of Mt. Pisgah and his gracious Lord kissed away his soul²⁵, Moses the prophet of Horeb was never done with difficulties. Any good thing, I say, especially any good thing done for God, will be surrounded by difficulties and resisted by adversaries. Look at Nehemiah, and Ezra, and Zerubbabel,²⁶ and those who built Jerusalem the second time. These good men worked zealously, but Sanballat and Tobiah were jeering and

²⁴ See Exodus Chapters 5-10 for the whole story of the deliverance of Israel from Egypt.

²⁵ Deuteronomy 34: 1-5 Moses died on Mt. Pisgah

²⁶ see Ezra and Nehemiah

mocking, and trying to tear down the wall. If you build a city without difficulty, it is not Jerusalem. Be sure of that.

As soon as you begin working for God you will find a great power working against you. If you encounter opposition, take it as a good sign. When our young men go to a small town to preach and I want to know how they are doing, after listening to their story, I ask, "Has somebody slandered you yet? Do the newspapers denounce you as a fool?" If they say, no, I conclude that they are not accomplishing much. If Christ's cause is prospering, the world will reproach the soul-winner. If you do damage to the devil's kingdom he will roar at you.

If your way is smooth, it is because Satan says, "There is nothing to disturb me in that man's monotonous talk. I do not need to shoot the fiery dart of slander at him.²⁷ He is just a speck in the porridge; I will leave him alone." Such a man generally goes through life very comfortably. People say, "He is a quiet, inoffensive sort of man." We do not want such soldiers in the service of Christ.

²⁷ Ephesians 6:16

“What an annoying person!” said a king once of an officer whose sword rattled on the floor. “That sword of his is most offensive.”

“Sire,” said the officer, “that is exactly what your majesty’s enemies think.” When ungodly people say that we are troublesome, we are not broken-hearted at being out of their good graces. If the King’s enemies think we are troublesome, we consider it high praise. When you, my dear brother, meet with opposition, face it with prayer. Exercise more faith. Antagonists should never hinder you from going forward in the cause of Christ. Diamond must cut diamond. There is nothing so hard in this world that you cannot cut it with something harder. If you ask God to steel your soul up to the conquering point and make your resolve like an adamant stone, you can cut your way through a mountain of diamond in the service of your Lord and Savior.

Let me inspire you in the face of assailants. The forces against you might be stumbling blocks to fools, but they will only prove to be a stimulus to courageous men. One day your honor will be greater and your reward will be higher because of these adverse elements. Therefore, be brave and fear not, but advance in the strength of God.

I now gladly speak a passing word of comfort to another class of workers...

THOSE WHO ARE NOT APPRECIATED.

I am not going to say much, because I do not have much sympathy for them. Yet I know that the smallest slight annoys those who are oversensitive. They murmur, "I do my best and nobody thanks me." You think you are a martyr and complain that you are misrepresented. Even if you are, dear friend, that was your Lord's lot and it is the lot of all his servants. This is a cross we must all carry or we will never wear the crown.²⁸ Do you think that this is a new experience? Look at Joseph. His brothers could not bear him, and yet it was he who saved the family and fed them in time of famine.²⁹ Look at David. His brothers asked why he had left the care of the sheep to come down to the battle, suspecting that the pride of his heart had brought him among the soldiers and the flags. Yet nobody could bring back Goliath's head but that young

²⁸ James 1:12

²⁹ Genesis 39-46

David.³⁰ Take a lesson from that ruddy hero—take no notice of what your brothers say about you. Go and bring back the giant’s head. A good adventure is the best answer to evil accusations.

If you are serving the Lord, let their gossip inspire you to more self-consecration. If they complain that you are too forward, serve the Lord more vigorously and you will antidote the venom of their tongues. Did you enter into Christ’s work to be honored among men? Then retire from it, for you came with a bad motive. But if you enlisted purely to bring honor to Him and to win his smile, what more do you want? What more do you want? So do not be disheartened because you are not applauded.

Be certain of this, that to be kept in the rear rank is often necessary to future eminence. If you take a man and put him in front, and pat him on the back and say, “What a great man he is!” he will stumble before long, and that will be the end of your hero. But when a man is brought forward by God, he is often one whom everybody criticizes, finds fault with, and declaims as an impostor, but the banter he is exposed to serves as a stabilizer for his mind. When he attains success he will not be spoiled with conceit, for

³⁰ 1 Samuel 17

the grace of God will make him bow with gratitude. The sword that is meant for a prince to split through the skull and backbone on the day of battle, must be heated in the furnace again and again. It cannot be fit for such dangerous work until it has passed through the fire many times. Do not ask to be appreciated. Never be so small as that. Appreciate yourself in the serenity of conscience, and leave your honor to your God.

Lastly, I must speak now a little more at length to...

THOSE WHO ARE DISCOURAGED BECAUSE
THEY HAVE HAD SO LITTLE SUCCESS.

It was my great delight a few evenings ago to meet a splendid group of men and women who are the Sunday School teachers of our church. You may think it is strange that until then I did not thoroughly understand the extent of their work, as I had never added up the total of the various schools. But when I did, and found that they added up to six thousand children, I felt full of joy. I will overflow with delight if they increase to twelve thousand in another twelve months. For such a large district, this would not be too many, but still, our current number is extremely encouraging.

Now I know that some of our teachers are working away in back streets and we hardly knew of them because they were pursuing their simple, unobtrusive labors so quietly. Are there any of you who fear that you have toiled in vain and spent your strength for nothing? I urge you, dear friends, not to be satisfied with casting the seed unless you reap some good results; yet do not be

so faint-hearted as to give up because of a little disappointment. Though you can't be satisfied without fruit, do not cease to sow just because one season proves to be a failure. I would not want our friends the farmers to abandon agriculture just because this year they have a bad crop. If they were to measure their future prospects by the present failure, it would be a great pity.

If you have preached or taught or done work for Christ with little success until now, do not infer that you will always be unsuccessful. Regret the lack of prosperity but do not give up seeking it. You might reasonably be sorrowful, but you have no right to despair. Non-success is a trial of faith that has been endured by many trusty servants who have been triumphant in the matter. Didn't the disciples toil all night, and catch nothing?³¹ Didn't we just read about some who cast the net, and yet caught no fish? Didn't our Lord say that some seed would fall on stony ground, and some among the thorns, and that from these there would be no harvest?³² What good did Jeremiah do? I have no doubt he

³¹ Luke 5:5

³² Mark 4:5-6

labored, and God blessed him, but the result of his preaching was that he said, “The bellows are burned in the fire.”³³ He had blown the fire until he had burnt the bellows, but no man’s heart was melted. “Woe is me!” he said. “Oh, that my head were waters, and my eyes a fountain of tears!”³⁴ I don’t know the result of Noah’s ministry, but I do know that he was a preacher of righteousness for a hundred and twenty years, and yet he never brought a soul into the ark except his own family. We may consider it poor preaching, judging by the influence it had, and yet we know that it was grand preaching that God commended. So do not resent the time or the strength you expend in the service of our great Lord because you do not see your efforts thrive, for better men than you have wept over failure.

Remember, too, that if you really do serve the Lord thoroughly and heartily, he will accept you and acknowledge your service, even if no good comes of it. It is your business to cast the bread on the waters. If you do not find it after many days, that is not your business.³⁵ It is your

³³ Jeremiah 6:29

³⁴ Jeremiah 9:1

³⁵ Ecclesiastes 11:1

business to scatter the seed, but no farmer says to his worker, “John, you have not served me well, for there is no harvest.” The man would say, “Could I create a harvest? I have plowed and I have sown the seed. What more could I do?” Likewise, our good Lord is not harsh, nor does he demand of us more than we can do. If you have plowed and sown, even if there is no harvest, you are blameless and accepted.

Has it ever struck you that you may now be employed in breaking up the ground and preparing the soil, and other laborers who come after you will reap very plentifully? Perhaps your Lord knows what an excellent plowman you are. He has a large farm, and he never intends to let you become a reaper because you do the plowing so well. Perhaps your Lord does not intend you to take part in the harvest because you are such a good hand at sowing; and since he has crops that need sowing all year round, he keeps you at that work. He knows you better than you know yourself. Perhaps if he were to let you get on the top of a loaded wagon of your own harvest you would get dizzy and fall, so he says, “You keep to your plowing and sowing, and somebody else will do the reaping.”

Perhaps when your course is run you will see from heaven where it will be safe for you to see it, that you did not labor in vain or spend your strength for nothing. “One sows and another reaps.”³⁶ This is the divine economy. I think that everyone who loves his Lord will say, “As long as a harvest comes, I will not stipulate who reaps it. Give me enough faith to be assured that the reaping will come, and I will be content.” Look at William Carey going to India, his prayer being “India for Christ.” What did Carey live to see? Well, he saw enough good results for his heart to rejoice, but he certainly did not see the fulfillment of all his prayers. Successive missionaries have gone since then and spent their lives on that vast missionary field. With what result? A result that was sufficient enough to justify all their toil, but compared with the millions that are without Christ, utterly inadequate to the craving of the church, much less to the crown of Christ. It doesn’t matter much how any one person fares. That mighty empire will return to our Redeemer, and I can almost see in the records of the future, the words, “These are the names of the mighty

³⁶ John 4:37

men whom David had,"³⁷ as the valiant deeds of his heroes are chronicled by our Lord.

When old St. Paul's Cathedral had to be taken down to make room for the current grand structure, some of the walls were immensely strong and stood like rocks. Sir Christopher Wren determined to break them down with the old Roman battering ram. They began to work the battering ram and the men worked at it for hours and hours, day after day, without apparent effect. Blow after blow hit the wall, tremendous thuds that made the bystanders tremble. The wall continued to stand until they thought it was a useless operation. But the architect knew.

He continued working his battering ram until every particle of the wall felt the motion, and at last, over it went in one tremendous ruin. Did anybody commend just those workmen who caused the final crash, or ascribe all the success to them? Not at all. It was the whole of them together. Those who had gone away to their meals, those who had begun days before, had as much honor as those who struck the last blow.

And so it is with the work of Christ. We must keep on battering, battering, battering, and at last—though it may not be for another

³⁷ 2 Samuel 23:8 *ff*

thousand years—the Lord will triumph. Though Christ “comes quickly”³⁸ he may not come for another ten thousand years, but in any case, idolatry must die and truth must reign. The accumulated prayers and energies of ages will do the deed, and God will be glorified. Let us just persevere in holy effort and the end is certain. When a certain American general was fighting, people said, “What are you doing?” He said, “I am not doing much, but I keep chipping away.” That is what we must do. We cannot do much at any one time, but we must keep on. We must keep on chipping away at the enemy, and something will come of it eventually.

Possibly, dear friends, some of you who think you have had slim success may have had a great deal more than you know. There may be others whose lack of success should be an indication to them to try somewhere else or try some other method. If we cannot do good in one way we must do it in another. Bring the matter before God in prayer. Cry out mightily to him, for he will help you do it in time, and he will get the glory. When he has laid you low, when he has taught you how inefficient you are, when he has driven you in despair to rely completely on him,

³⁸ Revelation 22:20

then it may be that he will give you more trophies and triumphs than you ever dreamed of. Anyhow, whether I prosper in life or not is not my question. To bring souls to Christ is my main endeavor, but it is not the ultimate proof of my ministry. My business is to live for God, to lay aside self, and give myself up wholly to him, and if I do that, I will be accepted, whatever else may happen.

I wish we had the spirit of that brave old man who was condemned to the stake. They were going to burn him. He knew that the sentence would be carried out the next morning, but with a soul full of courage, and with a merry heart, he sat late at night talking with his friends—wood and fire to face in the morning, remember—and he said to one of them, “I am an old tree in my Master’s orchard. When I was young I bore a little fruit by his grace. It was unripe and sour, but he accepted it, and I have grown mellow in my older days and produced some fruit for him by his grace. Now the tree has grown so old that my Master is going to cut it down and burn the old log. Well, it will warm the hearts of some of his family while I am burning.” He even smiled for joy to think that he would be used by God for so good a purpose.

I want you to have that spirit and say, “I will live for Christ while I am young. I will die for him, and warm the hearts of my brothers.” You know that the persecutions of those martyr days gave rise to such heroism and gallantry among followers of Christ that prudent people in peaceful times can hardly imagine. It is said of the old Baptist church over in the city that the members went to Smithfield early one morning to see their pastor burned, and when someone asked the young people why they went there, they said that they went to learn the way. That is splendid! They went to learn the way.

Oh, go to the Lord’s cross to learn the way to live and die! See how he spent himself for you, and then venture forth and spend yourselves for him. “Though Israel be not gathered, yet shall I be glorious in the sight of the Lord.”³⁹ Though you may think that you do not succeed, your whole-hearted devotion will be your honor in the day of the Lord. By your holy life and humble service, you will bring glory to his name. Oh Lord, set us in our duties, and encourage us in the service of your house!⁴⁰ “Let the beauty of the

³⁹ Isaiah 49:5

⁴⁰ 2 Chronicles 35:2

Lord our God be upon us, and establish the work of our hands for us; yes, establish the work of our hands.”⁴¹ May the blessing of our covenant God rest upon you, my brothers and sisters, for Jesus’ sake. Amen.

⁴¹ Psalm 90:17

Appendix
The Pleasures of Memory - Part II by Samuel Rogers
Final verses:

But can the wiles of Art, the grasp of Power,
Snatch the rich relics of a well-spent hour?
These, when the trembling spirit wings her flight,
Pour round her path a stream of living light;
And gild those pure and perfect realms of rest,
Where Virtue triumphs, and her sons are blest!

Sonnet 19:
When I Consider How My Light is Spent by John Milton

When I consider how my light is spent,
Ere half my days, in this dark world and wide,
And that one Talent which is death to hide
Lodged with me useless, though my Soul more bent
To serve therewith my Maker, and present
My true account, lest he returning chide;
“Doth God exact day-labor, light denied?”
I fondly ask. But patience, to prevent
That murmur, soon replies, “God doth not need
Either man’s work or his own gifts; who best
Bear his mild yoke, they serve him best. His state
Is Kingly. Thousands at his bidding speed
And post o’er Land and Ocean without rest:
They also serve who only stand and wait.

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