

Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit.

WITNESSES AGAINST YOU.

A Sermon

INTENDED FOR READING ON LORD'S-DAY, JANUARY 19TH, 1890,

DELIVERED BY

C. H. SPURGEON,

AT THE METROPOLITAN TABERNACLE, NEWINGTON.

“I set a great assembly against them.”—Nehemiah v. 7.

THE facts are these. At the time when certain of the Jews returned with Nehemiah to Jerusalem, many of them were in very straitened circumstances; and, contrary to the Jewish law, the richer Jews lent them money upon usurious interest, amounting to the hundredth per month, or twelve per cent, per annum. They took from their poorer brethren their lands, or put a heavy mortgage upon them; and in some cases took the men themselves to be slaves for debts which they had unavoidably incurred. Now, as you know, every Jew was a landholder, and his land, if mortgaged for a time, must return free to him in the fiftieth year; and, though a Jew might for a while become a servant to his Jewish brother, yet he must go out free at the end of the seventh year. He could only be bound for a short period of servitude. Nehemiah called to him, therefore, the elders, and nobles, and rulers of Jerusalem, and showed them how wrong they were to bold their poorer brethren in bondage. “Ye exact usury, every one of his brother,” he says; and he rebukes them sharply for it. When he found that his own words were scarcely powerful enough with them, he gathered together the people, and let them all have a voice, and in the many voices there was power. “I set,” said he, “a great assembly against them.” Some persons are deaf to the voice of justice until it is repeated loudly by thousands of their fellow-men. The silent voice of principle and right they will not hear, and the gentle rebuke of some one faithful friend they will despise; but when righteousness enlists public opinion on its side, when many are seen to be

its advocates, then these very persons will show that they have relics of conscience left, and they yield to right demands, because they see them not only to be just, but to be popular. This is the main point with those of the feebler sort; and we turn the scale, if, like Nehemiah, we “set a great assembly against them.”

Now, it struck me tonight that I could most properly, without any difficulty whatever, set a great assembly against every unconverted person here; and, in addition to calling upon him in the name of God, and by the claims of truth, to consider his ways and turn to God, I might summon a great assembly who should testify against the evil course which the unconverted are pursuing.

I shall try to act upon this plan tonight, in reference to those who remain unconverted. I would set a great assembly against you. You have not repented of your sins; you have not accepted the salvation which is provided in Christ Jesus; you live without prayer; you seek your own, instead of seeking God.

I set against you the great assembly of all the godly that are upon the earth. They all testify against you. They look upon you with love and anxiety, and desire to see you converted; but, while you are as you are, they are against you. Does not the consistent life of every true Christian rebuke you? When you see humble persons devout, gracious, though nothing be said, and though they be not eloquent in speech, is not their life eloquent? Do you not feel it? Have you never felt, even in your most careless moods, that it would be better for you if you were as they are? And when you have seen them remain true and upright under temptation, have you not said within yourself, “After all, there is something in them which I admire, and I wish that I possessed the same strong principles to keep me right in the hour of trial”? Every man, after all, in the bottom of his soul, feels the power of godliness: he cannot help it. In the assembly of the righteous God is greatly feared. The wicked know God’s presence among his people, and they do fear it, whether they confess it or not. In fact, slander, ridicule, and persecution are a form of homage which rebellion pays to obedience, which sin pays at the footstool of righteousness. The evil hate the good, because it condemns their evil; they try to make themselves despise it because it makes them despise themselves.

The righteous do not only stand against you in the consistency of their character, but their joy in God rebukes you. If you happen to be an unconverted man, and to have had a godly mother, the subject of

much weakness and pain, you cannot have forgotten the sacred cheerfulness with which she bore her life-long affliction. Or, if you have lost a Christian wife, who enjoyed but little comfort in her life with you, you cannot but remember that pale yet happy face when it bade you adieu, and entered into its rest. You know there was a calm about that woman in the time of trouble which you could not imitate; that she took patiently pain which would have startled you into madness, for the power of grace was in her, and made her strong. She, and such, as she was, children of God, made calm, and peaceful, and happy—I set them in an assembly against you, and they bear witness against you, because you obey not the living God.

Moreover, they do not only bear witness, but their very horror at your sin and at your state is a witness against you. I often think that, if I really could know the condition of my unconverted hearers (thoroughly know it), it might be impossible for me to address them. I do try to realize the position of some of you, and to project my mind into the future which awaits you if you die without God, and without hope. I am not about to give any terrible descriptions of the world to come; but, remember, the most terrible I could give would fall infinitely short of what the reality must be. If I could realize that dreadful future more fully, this tongue might be silent through the horror of my heart's emotions. I pray you, therefore, by that terror which we experience in speaking to you, let it stand as a witness against the sin which will bring upon you such misery. We cannot bear to think of that which awaits you. Holy Whitefield, when he began to touch upon that subject, would, with the tears streaming down his cheeks, cry "The wrath to come! The wrath to come!" It was too much for him. He could but repeat those words, and there cease. We feel for you, if you will not feel for yourselves. There are those present who never bow the knee at night without praying for the unconverted with great burden of spirit. I know some here, strong men, whom I have seen overcome with sacred passion when they have agonized for you, and for the souls of the ungodly. It has not been merely a plentiful stream of tears bedewing their manly cheeks, but their hearts have heaved within their bosoms, and their whole being has been convulsed with agony of spirit, lest, peradventure, you should perish.

All the praying people in the world I set as an assembly against you. Shall they pray for you, and will you never pray for yourselves? Shall horror seize them on account of your sins, and shall no horror ever

seize you? Shall a godly mother waste—no, it is not waste, shall she spend nights in tears for your soul, and will you never weep the tear of repentance? Shall we plead with you with all the eagerness our heart is capable of, and search for words with which to plead with you, and feel that we have done all too little when we have done our best to persuade you—shall we do all this, and yet will you say, “It is nothing to me. It is nothing to me”? Well, then, if it must be so, I can only say that I set the whole assembly of the living saints upon earth against you. Let them have some influence over you.

“Ah!” say you, “but there are many hypocrites amongst them.” Very well, they shall go over to your side: you shall be welcome to them; but all the sincere I set against you.

“But it is not the sincere only that pray.” Very well, you shall have all the insincere. Poor company! I wonder you should claim them; but still, every sincere believer does, as it were, when he pleads with God, protest against you that your knees are never bent, and your hearts never cry to God as the Father of spirits. Some live week after week, and month after month, and year after year, without prayer. The very Mahometans and heathen rebuke you: they dare not live a single day without their prayers. You are worse than they are. The little chick, as it drinks at the stream, lifts its head as though to thank God. You are worse than the poor fowls. You have become like the swine under the oak, which search for the acorns, but never think of the tree. You receive the mercies of God, but never give thanks to the Giver. O conscience, if there be conscience left, cry shame upon the man who dares to live without God! I set the prayerful, then, against you.

But next, I have another mighty squadron to call. I set against unconverted men all the inspired writers of the Old and New Testaments. Let them come up, one by one, and speak as they were wont to do. Not one has a word of comfort for a man that will not repent of his sins. “Mercy,” they will all cry, to the man that accepts the atoning sacrifice; but if he will not believe in Jesus, with one chorus, all the prophets, and the apostles too, will say, “Woe, woe, woe, woe unutterable to the man that lives and dies without Christ!” The universal consent of all the men that ever spake as the Spirit moved them is against the ungodly.

But I mention a larger host than either of these, and that is, the departed saints. Oh, could you see them this day in their white robes, could you hear their sacred song, it were a sight worth dying to behold; and the sound—it were worth losing all the voices of earth in the

silence of death to hear! But suppose you, an unconverted person, should seek a friend amongst that blood-washed host. I will picture you beholding them as they stand in their glorious ranks, and you say, "I am an enemy to God, I am prayerless, I am impenitent, I am graceless, and I intend to remain so; which among you all will be a friend to me?" Not an eye will glance upon you, except with indignation; not a hand will be put out to grasp you. There! March down that long file, look into those joyous faces, and see if you can find among them all a trace of sympathy with your obstinate rebellion. Ask them; conjure them to come and assist you in your sins, or to comfort you in your impenitence. Is there one that will do it? I set the whole assembly against you. And there stands one—you remember her, for though she is strangely changed, and the beatific vision makes every part of her to shine so gloriously, yet you know her. It was your mother, who wept over you in childhood, and who died with prayers for you upon her lips. Ask her whether, if you live and die unconverted, she will be your friend; and that face, which you have often gazed upon with affection, and which was always full of love to you, is turned from you. What has she to do, even with her child, if that child is an heir of wrath? She loves the Saviour too much to side with the Saviour's enemies. On earth she could weep and pray for you: in heaven she has other work to do, and has undergone such an absorption into the will of God that, if your spirit should pass into another world unrenewed, she, with those dear lips, would say, "Amen!" most solemnly to your condemnation. She, too, will confess, with all the army of the faithful, that the sentence would be just. There is not one of all you knew on earth who is now in heaven who can love you, unless you are renewed and changed in heart. I have sought with many of you, many times, to put the truth as plainly as I could, and to speak as earnestly as I could; but, once past the portal, and you are gone into another world, no preacher shall ever trouble you there. Go down to the shades of death and hell, and no earnest voices shall ever plead with you there. You shall have nobody to ridicule as a fanatic there. You shall hear no sermons of which you can say, "How the man seems to rave!" Ah, no! you shall have other company, and other engagements, but all God's ministers will be against you; and, as long as you remain ungodly here, they are against you. I set the whole host of the redeemed in heaven before you now, and challenge you, by all their glory, to turn from the error of your way, lest that glory should only increase your misery by contrast.

I have to add to all these saints on earth, and glorified spirits in heaven, the whole company of the angels. They are the friends and companions of the saints, but they are by no means the friends of the ungodly. They would rejoice over you if you repented; but, while you do not repent, it seems to me as if full often the angels, as they fulfil their errands among us, must feel tempted to cry, “Great God of vengeance, let us draw our swords, and let us smite these rebels!” There stands a man who the other day cursed God, and dared him to blast his limbs. If there had been an angel passing by, and doubtless it might have been so, I wonder he did not pause, suspended in mid-air, in very horror. I should not wonder if he felt in his soul that it was poison to him to be near to such a man, and would fain have drawn the mighty sword, which seraphs wield, to cut the man down. The angels are against you. No one of the sacred host is friend to the man who is the foe of God.

The worst is to come: *God is against you*. “The face of the Lord is against them that do evil, to cut off the remembrance of them from the earth.” He would fain have you saved. He has sworn with an oath, “As I live, saith the Lord God, I have no pleasure in the death of the wicked; but that the wicked turn from his way and live.” But if you will not turn, you must burn. If you will not repent, you must perish. God has said it, and he will not lie. Justice demands it, and the Judge of all the earth must be just.

And, to crown all, Jesus Christ, the Son of God, is against you if you resolve to be the enemy of God. He loves sinners: he died for sinners: he is ever willing to receive them; but as long as they remain impenitent and unbelieving, he cannot love their sin, he cannot love them, viewing them in the light of wilful, persistent rebels. And when he comes in the latter days, you know what will happen to those that loved not Christ: they will be Anathema Maranatha—cursed at his coming. He himself will say it; and it appals me to have to remind you of the fact—he himself, whose gentle lips were like lilies dropping sweet-smelling myrrh, tender as a woman’s—he himself, when he comes, will say, “Depart from me, ye cursed, into everlasting fire, prepared for the devil and his angels!” You will find no friend in Christ in that last tremendous day. He will break you in pieces with a rod of iron, as potters’ vessels are broken into shivers. So, then, I set this great assembly against you: saints on earth and saints in heaven, the angels, and God, and Christ himself against you.

Who is there for you? Who is there on your side, O enemies of God? It is as dreadful to think of those who are for you as of those who are against you; for those who are for you, and on your side, are the ungodly, like yourselves; and the lost in hell, who are now what you must be, except you escape; and the devil and his angels, themselves punished for their sins. A grim assembly, surely, those that are for you! Methinks a man should start up and say—"I cannot abide in such company as this! Do I sail in this pirate's vessel, with such a dreadful crew on board, and Satan for captain? In God's name I will jump overboard, and swim to another ship, for in this vessel I will never stay, and under this black flag I will never fight, let the bribe be as high as it may. I cannot serve Satan, and I will not." Friends, if such be your language, I stand here, as a servant of Jesus, and hold above you the blood-stained banner of Christ's cross. Oh, ye who will take the enlisting-money, here it is: come and take it, for whosoever receives Christ—receives him by trusting him—to him is given power to become a servant of Christ, and a soldier of the cross; and then I shall have no assembly to set against him, but the same august assembly shall be on the side of the man saved by faith in Jesus! God grant that these words may be found useful, and Christ shall have the glory!

For a few minutes I will vary the strain, but keep closely to the same idea. Some say that sin is a very pleasant and profitable thing: indeed, many profess to be of that opinion nowadays. I may have some here, particularly some young men just commencing life, who are fascinated by the charms of London life, and have begun to sip of the dangerous wine which is vended in the house of the strange woman. To them it seems that vice is pleasure. O young man, I wish I had thee in a room alone, that I might speak to thee, for some things that I would say earnestly to thee in private I must but hint at in a public assembly. The results of sin are not such as I can speak of here. Thou art under great delusions. If thou thinkest sin will give thee pleasure, I will set an assembly against thee concerning this dream. Oh, what an assembly it would be if I could bring up from the hospitals the wretches who are suffering an earthly hell from their sins! Have I not seen them? Have I not seen them crawling through the earth, creatures that dare not look up, broken down with hypochondriasis, desponding and despairing, with that despair which nothing but vice ever brings on man? Have I not seen them when their very bones have rotted through their sin? There are diseases which are the stamp and seal of the curse of the

Eternal upon transgression. There are diseases which are the big first drops of the everlasting rain of hell's tremendous tempest. If there were a physician or a surgeon here, he could tell you that there are sins which are commonly practised, which bring on men, even in this life, a penalty most terrible. The furnace of hell devours; but, like Nebuchadnezzar's guards, men in this life are made to fall down, slain by the powerful heat that glows from the eternal burnings, when God suffers a portion of the results of sin to come upon them in this life. Could I not bring up here tonight, if it were fit and proper, spendthrifts, who squandered their early days in all manner of dissoluteness, and who have brought themselves to rags and disease? Go over the casual ward, enter the union-house, spend an evening in a low lodging-house, and sit down and hear the tales of sons of ministers, of sons of gentlemen, of sons of noblemen, of men that once were merchants, traders, lawyers, doctors, who have brought themselves down by nothing else than their own extravagance and sin, to eat the bread of pauperism, and to know the lack even of that bitter fare. Tell me sin is pleasure! If it be, you can have too much of it; but it is bitterness before long, and they are wise who flee from it.

"Well, well," cries one, "we are not all lovers of that kind of sin." Indeed, I hope you are not: I, too, refused such sins, but I had other sins—the world would not call them sins, but they were such—and when, before I found the Saviour, I began to discover what sin was (I speak what I do know), my sins, to me in my consciousness, were a little hell. I know that men who are not saved, sometimes on a dark night, or in sickness, or in trouble, or when alone, will permit conscience to work, and they feel dreadfully uneasy. Have I not seen your cheek blanch when you have been told that your friend was dead? When the funeral knell has been tolling, have you not wished yourself in the depths of the forest, that you might not hear it? When you have been compelled to sit a little while alone, you feared to allow your mind to meditate upon eternity; but you tried to fly off again to the frivolities of time, though you felt there was nothing in them. Sin is a wretched thing, unsatisfying at best. Even painted sins, with their Jezebel faces, are not truly beautiful. What men call immoralities are wretched in themselves, upon the outside; and a grain of common-sense will enable a man to see that their misery far exceeds their pleasure. I set an assembly against the man who declares that there is pleasure in iniquity.

On the other hand, it is said that true religion makes people miserable. I would set an assembly against anybody who dares to say that. It was in my mind to ask you who are unhappy through being Christians, to bear witness tonight against Christianity; and then I thought perhaps I would put it the other way; and let those of you who love the Saviour, and find consolation and happiness in him, sing with me one of our joyous hymns; and I warrant you, sirs, we would make this great dome resound with hearty music. Unhappy! Unhappy through being Christians! I have suffered as much of bodily pain as most here present, and I know also about as much of depression of spirit at times as anyone; but my Master's service is a blessed service, and faith in him makes my heart leap for joy. I would not change with the most healthy man, or the most wealthy man, or the most learned man, or the most eminent man in all the world, if I had to give up my faith in Jesus Christ—tried as it sometimes is. Ah! it is a blessed thing to be a Christian, and all God's people will tell you so. It is oftentimes our lot to go to see the sick, but sick believers usually cheer our heart. There is a seat just below that used to be occupied by a beloved sister, well-known to you, whom I went to visit in her sickness; and I do assure you, when she was in a consumption, and near to death, I never spent a happier hour than I did with her. And only last week, or ten days ago, when I sat down with her, and she could scarcely speak, yet what she did say was as full of sacred joy as words could compass.. She is in heaven now, and heaven was in her then. "So much farther on have I got," said she, "to the better land—so many the fewer of these hard breaths to fetch, and so many the fewer of these hard pains to bear. I shall soon be where Jesus is;" and she talked as freely about dying, and going home, as I should talk of going to my own house when this service is ended. Before she fell asleep yesterday, about twelve o'clock, she said to those about her she felt strangely as if she were going through a river. At one time she said she was in the midst of it, the floods were round about her; and soon she said, in intervals of consciousness, "I am going up the other side; the waters are shallower: I am mounting the other bank." At length she cried, "Jesus is coming for me! I can hear the music of heaven!" Her heart seemed to be overpowered with some sweet mystic melody, which, if it did not enter her soul by the ear, at any rate reached her inmost spirit by some other channel. "I can hear them sing! I can hear them sing!" she said, "and when Jesus comes, don't keep him waiting for me; don't wish me to stop. Let me go." She is gone. Never one I

think suffered more in dying, and never had a consumptive more difficulty in breathing. Thank God, they do not often suffer as much as she did; yet there was never one more calm, more comfortable, and more joyous on the bed of death than this daughter of affliction.

I believe in God without any evidence except himself, and his own revelation of himself to my soul; but yet I thank God for evidences, and among those most helpful to me are the death-beds of believers. It does my soul great good to see the Lord's people depart this life. I grieve that you should be taken away to heaven, for we want you here; but ah! if the departure of any of you shall be so sweet as those I have been privileged to witness of late, I shall come to my pulpit boldly. If the religion that I teach makes men and women die like this, I am not ashamed to preach it. If the faith that I have delivered to them, by the power of the Holy Ghost, makes them so triumphant in the last article of death, I will deliver nothing else, but still continue to tell them to trust simply in the substitutionary sacrifice of Jesus Christ, and rest wholly and only there. I buy, then, by the living saints that do rejoice, and by the dying saints who die without a fear, I set an assembly against the man who dares to slander true religion by saying that it does not make men happy.

I had many other things to say, but it were well to leave you where you are, only praying you, by the shortness of time, by the suddenness of death, by the certainty of judgment, by the terrors of hell, by the glories of heaven, by the value of your own souls, by the blood of Jesus, and by the glory of the eternal God, to cease being his enemies. Seek ye his face. "Let the wicked forsake his way, and the unrighteous man his thoughts: and let him return unto the Lord, and he will have mercy upon him; and to our God, for he will abundantly pardon." "Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved;" for "he that believeth and is baptized shall be saved; but he that believeth not shall be damned." From that, God save you! Amen.

PORTION OF SCRIPTURE READ BEFORE SERMON—Isaiah i. 1–20.

HYMNS FROM "OUR OWN HYMN BOOK"—387, 84, 614.