

# Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit

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**NEITHER FORSAKEN NOR FORGOTTEN**

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A Sermon

Delivered by

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*“Behold, I have graven thee upon the palms of my hands.”*  
— *Isaiah 49:16.*

You have probably noticed, dear friends, while reading the chapter from which our text is taken, that it seems to divide itself into two parts. The first portion concerns that glorious Servant of God, “who, being in the form of God, thought it not robbery to be equal with God,” even our Divine Redeemer, the Lord Jesus Christ. There is, in this part of the chapter, somewhat of complaint; Christ was, as it were, uttering one of his Gethsemane groans when he said, “I have laboured in vain, I have spent my strength for nought, and in vain: yet surely my judgement is with Jehovah, and my work with my God.” As far as our Lord's personal ministry among the Jewish people' was concerned, it did seem as if he had laboured in vain, for almost all of them rejected him, and they even imprecated an awful curse upon themselves and their

descendants when they said, “His blood be on us, and on our children.” He is here represented as crying out before Jehovah concerning this apparent failure of his earthly mission; and an answer is at once given to him which must have been eminently satisfactory to our Saviour’s spirit, for he adds, “Though Israel be not gathered, yet shall I be glorious in the eyes of Jehovah, and my God shall be my strength. And he said, It is a light thing that thou shouldest be my servant to raise up the tribes of Jacob, and to restore the preserved of Israel: I will also give thee for a light to the Gentiles, that thou mayest be my salvation unto the end of the earth.” Oh, what joy must have filled the heart of our Divine Master, even in the depths of his agony, as he saw that, through his death, all nations should ultimately behold the light of God’s salvation! What though Israel for a while rejected him? Yet multitudes of the Gentiles would receive him; and then, by-and-by, in the fullness of time, the Jews would also receive him, and own as King the Nazarene whom once they crucified on Calvary. The second part of the chapter, singularly enough, relates to the Israelitish Church, and, to a large extent, to the whole Church of God, and it also contains a complaint. In the expressive language of verse 13, God bids the heavens and the earth rejoice: Sing, O heavens; and be joyful, O earth; and break forth into singing, O mountains: for Jehovah hath comforted his people, and will have mercy upon his afflicted.” Yet, even while that jubilant note is pealing over sea and land, there is heard the wailing of poor forsaken Zion, — Judæa’s Church, the ancient Church of the living God; and she sighs, “‘Jehovah hath forsaken me, and my Lord hath forgotten me.’ He is blessing the Gentiles, but I am left unblessed. He is gathering multitudes unto himself, to glorify his Son; but his poor Israel, his ancient choice, his first love, he seems to have left out of all reckoning,’ Jehovah hath forsaken me, and my Lord hath forgotten me.’ ” Then comes the Lord’s answer, “Can a woman forget her sucking child, that she should not have compassion on the son of her womb? Yea, they may forget, yet will I not forget thee. Behold, I have graven thee upon the palms of my hands.” Israel shall yet own her King, her salvation waits for the appointed time. There is a high destiny in store for the Israel of God; and many shall yet see the day when he, who died as King of the Jews, shall live again to wear that title, and to be acknowledged as the head of all the house of Abraham.

My object, in speaking upon the familiar and precious words of our text, is just this. Sometimes, you and I get into the same sad

condition as Zion was then in, and we fancy that God has forgotten us, so I want to show you that, if we are believers in the Lord Jesus Christ, the Lord gives to us an answer similar to that which he gave to sorrowful Zion, “I have graven thee upon the palms of my hands.” Upon that short sentence I shall try now to speak to you.

I. First, let us think, for a while, upon **THE FEAR EXPRESSED** — the fear in the hearts of God’s people, which led to the utterance of our text. In verse 14, this fear is thus expressed, “Jehovah hath forsaken me, and my Lord hath forgotten me.”

*This fear has been felt by very many.* Fear is a most contagious and infectious thing. When it has taken hold on one person, it has been often known to spread to many others till a terrible panic has resulted from a very slight cause. Here is the whole Jewish Church expressing the fear that God has forgotten her. I feel sure that I am not now addressing such a church as that; I hope that the most of those now present know that God has not forgotten them, and that they are walking in the light of his countenance so that they do not imagine that Jehovah has forsaken them.

But, still, this fear has darkened, shall I say, every sky, and passed before the window of every spirit? Well, I will not go quite that length; yet I know that there must be but very few of us who have not, at one time or another, naughtily whispered to our own heart, if we have not said it aloud, “Jehovah hath forsaken me, and my Lord hath forgotten me.” We have gone up to the house of God with our brethren, and we have seen them very happy. The Word of God has been precious to them, and they have seemed to enjoy it to the full; but we could not feed upon it, or get a glimpse of the Well-beloved; and we have gone out of the place sighing, “Jehovah hath forsaken me, and my Lord hath forgotten me.” Have you never had that thought? If you never have, I hope you never will; but I fear that the most of us have, at some time or other, been subject to that distressing complaint.

*And it has sometimes been very plaintively expressed.* It is so in the text. I think I hear the mountains echoing the joyous voice of God, and the very skies reverberating with the song of the redeemed; and then, in between the breaks of the glad chorus, I catch this little mournful note, “Jehovah hath forsaken me, and my Lord hath forgotten

me.” Perhaps it is all the more plaintive because the tone seems to indicate that Zion felt that she deserved to have it so. She thought herself so insignificant, so sinful, so provoking, that it was no wonder that the great Jehovah should forget her in her littleness, and that the pure and holy God should turn away his face from such iniquity as hers. Brothers and sisters, I feel sure that you and I must have been in that state in which we could weep and groan and sigh because of the joy in the air of which we could not partake, the songs in which we could not unite unless we became utter hypocrites. We heard the sweet strains of the holy merriment in the Father’s house, but we felt that we could not join in it; and we sat by ourselves mourning, with our harps hanging on the willows, while everyone around us only increased our grief in proportion to his own delight. I am trying to speak to such troubled souls; God comfort them! There are many such, and their grief is great.

And some, too, are very obstinate while they are in that condition, for our text contains *a very unreasonable complainer*. Read the latter part of the 13th verse: “Jehovah hath comforted his people, and will have mercy upon his afflicted.” Yet, in the teeth of that double declaration, Zion said, “Jehovah hath forsaken me, and my Lord hath forgotten me.” Ah! Dear friends, our complaints of God are generally groundless. We get into a state of mind in which we say, “God has forsaken us,” when he is really dealing with us more than he was wont to do. A child who is feeling the strokes of the rod is very foolish to say, “My father has forgotten me.” No; those very blows, under which he is smarting, are reminders that his father does not forget him; and your trials and your troubles, your depressions and your sorrows, are tokens that you are not forgotten of God. The chastening which is guaranteed to every legitimate son is coming to you. If you had not been chastened, there would have been far more cause for saying, “My Lord hath forgotten me.” Besides, dear friend, you have had some comforts though you have had many sorrows; you can say, “Comforts mingle with my sighs.” Do not forget that. It is not all gall and wormwood; there is so much honey as greatly to mitigate the bitterness. Think of that, and do not obstinately stand to a word which, perhaps, you spoke in haste. If you have said, “My Lord hath forgotten me,” call back the word, for it cannot be true. You have slandered him who can never forget one of his own people. And if you have said, “Jehovah hath forsaken me,” again I ask you to call back the evil and false word, and eat it. Never let it be heard again, for it is impossible that Jehovah

should change, or that the immutable love of his infinite heart should ever die out. Be not obstinate about this matter, I implore you; yet I have known some of God's people stick to this grave falsehood, to their own grievous wounding and hurt.

I suppose that Zion came to this conclusion *because she was in banishment*. She was away from the land that flowed with milk and honey, and she was suffering in exile. Is this the conclusion to be drawn from all suffering? Does the vine say, "The vinedresser hath forsaken me because he prunes me so sharply"? Does the invalid say, "The physician hath forgotten me because he gives me such bitter medicine"? Shall the patient, beneath the knife, say, "The surgeon hath forsaken me because he cuts even to the bone"? You see at once that there is no reasonableness about such talk, so dismiss it at once. "Judge not the Lord" by outward providences, any more than "by feeble sense," but trust him even when you can see no trace of his goodness to you. "Let God be true, and" every circumstance, as well as "every man, a liar;" for God must keep his promise to his people. He is immutable; he cannot possibly change. He must be true to every word that has gone forth out of his mouth. The fear that God may forsake and forget his own, if obstinately indulged, will certainly deserve to be set down among the wanton and unreasonable transgressions of his people against their gracious God.

Yet I think that *there is some measure of grace mingled with this fear*. Let me read you this passage straight on: "Jehovah hath comforted his people, and will have mercy upon his afflicted. But Zion said, Jehovah hath forsaken me, and my Lord hath forgotten me." She did not say that till God had visited her. "The Lord hath comforted his people." He has brought them out of a yet lower depth that they were in, and they have been lifted up so high as now to want his presence, and to sigh for it. Beloved brother, you who are so deep down in the dungeon, I feel glad that you want to get out of it. There is, in your soul, a longing after God, is there not? There is a panting and a crying after peace with God, is there not? You are not satisfied as long as you even think that God has forsaken you, are you? Ah, then! this is the work of his Holy Spirit in your soul, making you long after the living God, so that there is some sign of grace even in that discontented moan of yours, for it proves that you cannot bear that God should forsake you. Now, if you belonged to the world, it would be nothing to you if the Lord did forsake you. If

there were no grace in you, you would not care whether God forgot you or not; indeed, you might almost wish that he would forget you, and not visit you in his wrath. There is, therefore, some trace of his hand in your spirit, even now that you say, “Jehovah hath forsaken me, and my Lord hath forgotten me.”

Besides, although the text is a word of complaint, it has also in it a word of faith: “*my Lord.*” Did you notice that? Zion calls Jehovah hers though she dreams that he has forsaken her. I do love to see you keep the grip of your faith even when it seems to be illogical, — even if you fancy that the Lord hath forgotten and forsaken you. Though you fear that it is so, yet still say, “my Lord,” hold on to this assurance with a death-grip. If you cannot hold on with both hands, hold on with one; and if sometimes you can hold with neither hand, hold on with your teeth. Let Job’s resolve be yours: “Though he slay me, yet will I trust in him...Though after my skin worms destroy this body, yet in my flesh shall I see God;” — “and every scattered grain of this my dust shall still confide in God.” Oh, for the faith that laughs at impossibilities, that leaps with joy between the very jaws of death itself, and sings in the very centre of the fire! Such a faith as that, whatever weakness there may be about it, brings glory to God. So I treasure up that little word “my.” There are only two letters in it, but they are fraught with untold hope to the man who can use them as Zion does here, “my Lord.”

So much for the fear which the text is intended to meet.

**II.** Now I come, as God shall help me, to speak concerning **THE COMFORT BESTOWED** : “I have graven thee upon the palms of my hands.”

This assurance is the Lord’s answer to Zion’s lament, “Jehovah hath forsaken me, and my Lord hath forgotten me;” so take it from God’s own mouth, and never doubt it. God’s remembrance of his people as a whole, and of each individual in particular, has been secured by him beyond all question. “That we might have a strong consolation, who have fled for refuge to lay hold upon the hope set before us,” he has said to each of us, “ ‘I have graven thee upon the palms of my hands,’ I have done it, and I have done that which will render it utterly impossible that I should ever forget one of my people. I the Lord have committed myself to something which will henceforth render it absolutely certain

that I never can forget my own, for 'I have graven thee upon the palms of my hands.' ”

These words seem to say to us that God has already secured, beyond any possible hazard, his tender memory towards all his own. He has done this in such a way that forgetfulness can never occur at any moment whatsoever. The memorial is not set up in heaven, for then you might conceive that God could descend, and leave that memorial. It is not set up in any great public place in the universe, nor is it engraven in a signet ring upon God's finger, for that might be taken off. It is not written upon the Almighty's skirts, — to speak after the manner of men, — for he might disrobe himself for conflict; but he has put the token of his love where it cannot be laid aside, — on the palms of his hands. A man cannot leave his hands at home. If he has put something, by way of memorial, upon the walls of his house or the gates of his home, he may go away, and forget it. Or if, as I have said, he shall write the memorial upon some precious diamond, or topaz, or other jewels which he wears, yet he might lay them on one side. But God says, "I have graven thee upon the palms of my hands," so that the memorial is constantly with him; yea, it is in God himself that the memorial of his people is fixed.

I suppose the allusion is to an Oriental custom, possibly not very common, but still common enough to have survived to this day. Mr. John Anderson, the pastor of the Presbyterian Church at Helensburgh, who was a very dear friend of mine, told me that, on one or two occasions, he had seen, in the East, men who had the portraits of their friends, and others who had the initials of their friends, in the palms of their hands. I said to him, "But I suppose that, in time, they would wash off or wear out." "No," he said, "they were tattooed too deeply in to be removed, so that, whenever they opened their hand, there were the familiar initials, or some resemblance to the features of the beloved one, to keep him ever in remembrance." And the Lord here adopts that ancient custom, and says, "I cannot forget thee; it is impossible for me to do so, for I have engraven thee where the memorial can never be apart from myself. 'I have graven thee upon the palms of my hands.'"

Now, what is it, clear friends, that makes it so certain that God cannot forget his people? Well, first, *God remembers his eternal love to his people*, and his remembrance of them is constant because of that love. He says to each believing soul, "I have loved thee with an

everlasting love.” The people of God were loved by him long before the world was created; he has loved them too long ever to forget them. “I have loved too long,” said one man, “to be turned aside by the blandishment of another.” We cannot imagine anything that could separate us from that dear heart to which our heart is knit even with a human love; while both of us shall live, the twain are indeed one. And God has loved us more than husbands love their wives, or fathers love their children, or brothers love their brothers. His love is like a great ocean of which all human love is but a drop of spray; and he has loved us so long, so well, so deeply, so unreservedly, that he cannot forget us. Even when any one of his people wanders from him, and grieves his heart, he says, “Yes, but I have loved thee with an everlasting love, and I will not cast thee off. Though all that thou now art might tend to wean me from thee, yet mine is not the love of yesterday, it is not a passion like that which flames within some men for a brief space, and then quickly goes out in darkness.” It is God’s eternal love that makes him keep us in memory. He has graven us, from all eternity, upon the palms of his hands, and therefore he cannot forget us.

Next, *God’s suffering love secures his memory of us.* Well did we sing, just now, —

***“The palms of my hands whilst I look on I see  
The wounds I received when suffering for thee?”***

Oh, how deeply the cruel gravers cut our names in Christ’s dear hands! Those nails that fastened him to the cross were the graving tools, and he leaned hard while the iron pierced through flesh, and nerve, and vein. Yet the graving of which our text speaks is more than that, for the Lord himself says, “I have graven thee upon the palms of my hands.” The sufferings of Christ for us were such that never, by any possibility, can he forget us. Since he has died for us, he will never cast us away. By his death, on Calvary’s cross, Christ ensured that all those for whom he died shall live with him in his kingdom as surely as he himself lives. He paid not in vain such a tremendous price; neither shall he lose any part of that which he has thus purchased for himself. What a blessed memorial, then, is not only God’s eternal love, but Christ’s suffering love!

Yet again, by the expression, “I have graven thee upon the palms of my hands,” God seems to say, “*I have done so much for you that I*

*can never forget you.*” God has actively wrought for his people in many ways, but I will only now mention what his Spirit has wrought in you; what a theme that is! And, from the fact that the Spirit of God has wrought so much in us, we derive the satisfaction that he will never forget us. A man does not forget the work of his own hands, especially if it is something very choice. I remember that, in the siege of Paris, a great artist hid away a grand picture which was then but partly finished. Did he forget to go to Paris when it had its liberty, and to seek out his painting? Assuredly not; he remembered the work of his own hands, and back he went to draw it out, and put the finishing touches to it. So, God has done too much for us for him ever to lose us. Has he not created us anew in Christ Jesus, and given his Spirit to dwell within us? Then, surely, he will never turn away from work so costly, so divine; but he will complete it to his own praise and glory.

But, once more, when a memorial is engraven on a man’s hand, *then it is connected with the man’s life.* While he lives, that memorial is a part of his life. So is it with God. He has linked his people with his life. Our Lord Jesus said to his disciples, “Because I live, ye shall live also.” The union between your incarnate God and yourself is a thing which is so complete that your life is intertwined with his life. Christ and you have become one fabric. To tear you away would be to destroy him. “Your life is hid with Christ in God;” and until Christ himself shall die, his people shall not die. Oh, think of this wondrous mystery! The ever-blessed Son of God is bound up in the bundle of life with all his people.

This I take to be the meaning of the Lord’s words, “I have graven thee upon the palms of my hands.” I cannot go deeper into this blessed subject; but I pray God to take you deeper, for there is a great depth here.

**III.** Now, beloved, I turn to the third head of my discourse, upon which I will be very brief. We have had a fear expressed, and a comfort bestowed; now, here is **AN INSPECTION INVITED.** “Behold,” says Jehovah, “Behold, I have graven thee upon the palms of my hands.”

Come, then. “Behold.” Look for yourselves. There is God the Father; did you say that he had forsaken you? But how can that be? Behold, and see. He is your Father if you are trusting in his Son, Jesus

Christ. Do you forget, do you forsake your own children? Tell me. You had a boy, who well-nigh broke your heart, he went away, and you were sadly glad when he went, for he had so grieved you that you thought it better that he should be out of sight. But have you forgotten him? Suppose he came back to-night. 'Tis years now since he left you without your blessing. Mother, you have never heard from him. Father, no tidings of your boy ever come to you. But if, when you went home to-night, there should be a big fellow sitting by the fireside, — not your boy any longer, and yet your own long-lost son, — after the first surprise, and after you had seen that it was your son, tell me, mother, would you turn him out of doors for all his ingratitude to you? Father, what would you do, first of all? I know what I should do if it were my case; I should fondly kiss that cheek, and bless God that I had lived to see my son again, whatever he might have been, and however much he might have grieved me. If you, then, being evil, neither forget nor forsake your children, will your Father who is in heaven forget you? Behold, and see if it is possible. God the everlasting Father does so intensely love, so infinitely love his own children, that it must never be dreamt for a moment that it is possible for him to forget any one of them.

Come now, and look again. Behold, by faith, the second Person of the Blessed Trinity in Unity, Jesus, the Lamb of God. Look at him on the cross; oh, what griefs he there bore for his people! Take down the blessed body — (you can scarcely bear to handle it), and help to wrap it in its linen cloths, and lay it in the tomb. Why did he suffer thus? Why did he die? For his own loved ones; then, can he ever forget them? Is it possible? After all that agony, can Jesus forget? Oh, no! Our children may forget us; but the mother remembers how she suffered for the child, and she loves it for the very pangs she endured in its birth. She knows the struggles of her widowhood to find bread for the child, — how she starved herself to satisfy its hunger. Oh, what agony and self-denial some parents have suffered for their children; but these make them all the dearer, and render it all the more impossible that they should ever forget them. Well, then, remembering all this, look into the face of your Saviour, who died for you, and will you dare to say that he can possibly forget you? It cannot be; he has graven you upon the palms of his hands, and he will never forget or forsake you.

Then think, also, of that dear and blessed Spirit of God, who has come into your heart, and striven with you when you resisted him, and at last won the day; and, since then, has helped your infirmities, checked your hastiness, aroused you from your sloth, and been everything to you that he could be; and do you think that, after all this, he will ever forget or forsake you? Oh, if he had meant to cast you away, he has had many opportunities when he might have done so. Surely, he would never have come to dwell in such a hovel as your fallen nature is if he had not intended to transform it, and make it into a pure alabaster palace wherein the living God might dwell. "Behold," says the Lord. That is, look into this great truth; look deeply into it, and then say to yourself, "My fears of being forgotten or forsaken are all gone, for I am graven upon the palms of his hands."

**IV.** So I close by referring very briefly to the last point, which is this, **A RETURN SUGGESTED.**

I want, brothers and sisters, to speak in a very homely and familiar way to each one of you; and, at the same time, to be speaking to myself as well as to you.

Does Christ remember us as I have tried to prove that he does? *Then, let us remember him.* To that end he ordained that blessed supper to which many of us are coming presently, — the eating of the bread, and the drinking of the cup in memory of him. "This do ye in remembrance of me." Now try to forget everything but your Lord and Saviour. Pass an act of oblivion on all your cares, and troubles, and sorrows; and only look at him as though, like a mysterious stranger, he stood at the pew door, and leaned over you, and you seemed to feel his shadow falling upon you. Now think of him, for he is very near you, and you are very near to him.

And, brethren, let us not only remember him at his table, but *let us remember him constantly.* Let us, as it were, carry his name upon the palms of our hands; let us ask God to help us always to think of Jesus, — never to forget him, but to have the memory of him intertwined with our very breathing, with the pulsing of our blood, till our whole nature, like a bell, shall ring out but one note, and that shall be love to Jesus, and our heart shall be like Anacreon's harp, of which he said that he wished to sing of the deeds of Cadmus, but his heart and his harp

resounded love alone. Oh, for the love of Christ to be the one all-engrossing, all-absorbing theme of our entire being, till we truly say to Christ, "I have graven thee upon the palms of my hands."

And, brothers, *let us remember Christ practically*. We ought so to wear Christ on our hands that whatever we touch should be thereby Christianised. I have heard of the "christening" of babies, that is an idle superstition, and a perversion of Christ's ordinance of believers' baptism; but I believe in the Christ-ening of everything a Christian touches. Make it all Christ-like by doing everything in the name of the Lord Jesus, as the apostle Paul says, "Whether therefore ye eat, or drink, or whatsoever ye do, do all to the glory of God." Thus engrave his name upon the palms of your hands.

And, so brethren, *let the name of Christ, and your memory of it, become vital to you*. Not with a broad phylactery, not with the borders of your garments enlarged, not with outward signs and tokens of which some think a good deal too much in these days, — for true religion consists not in a dress of this cut or that, nor does it lie in boasting, like Pharisees, what we are, sounding our own praise at the corners of the streets that all may know it and observe; — but true religion lies in this, that we cannot live without Christ, that our ordinary life becomes uplifted by the Christ who dwells within us, till every meal is a sacrament, every garment is a vestment, every place is an altar, and the whole world a temple in which we are kings and priests because God has made us so. Unto this may we each of us come, and come now!

If any of you have not yet believed in Jesus, oh, how I wish you would! As I am going away for a while, I shall not be able to speak personally to you for some time to come; but I hope that those, whom my voice has failed to influence, may be reached by some other servant of the Lord Jesus Christ, who shall occupy this pulpit to speak to you in my absence. Oh, that you all knew my Lord! There is none like him. His bonds are freedom; his service is rest; to die for him, is life; to live for him, is heaven. God bring you to him, and fasten you to him for ever! Amen, and Amen.

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