

An Exhortation to the People of God Not to Be Discouraged in Their Way, by the Scoffs and Contempt of Wicked Men

By George Whitefield

Sermon 56

Hebrews 4:9 — “There remaineth therefore a rest to the people of God.”

When we consider the persecutions they are exposed to, who live righteously and godly in this present world; it is amazing to consider, that the people of this generation should be so fond of a name to live, while they are in effect dead. The people of God are to expect little else but troubles and trials while they are in this world; common experience is a contradiction to my text, that there is a rest to the people of God; but the author of the Hebrews, when speaking of this rest, did not mean that they should have a rest here. No; he too well knew that the people of God, all who would seek and serve the Lord Jesus, must be despised, hated, scoffed, slandered, and evil entreated; but the time was hastening when they should have a perfect rest. There is a rest laid up for them, and this is an encouragement for you, my brethren, to hold on, and hold out your way rejoicing; after death there will be a rest for ever; at judgment, you shall be taken up to dwell with the Lord Jesus Christ; and there, you shall be for ever exempted from sin; you shall rest from all manner of sorrow, and be no more troubled with the temptations of Satan. Now, you can set about nothing for the glory of God, or for your own soul's welfare, but the devil is dissuading you from it, or distracting you in it, or discouraging you after it. Here we are scoffed and derided; as the world hated the Lord Jesus Christ, so will it hate you. But be not discouraged, though we are here the scorn and offscouring of all things; and are as a gazing stock to men and angels. Though they put us out of their synagogues, cast out our name as evil, and look on us as persons unfit for their company; yet, in that rest which is prepared

for you, my brethren, we shall then be gazed at for our glory, and they shut out of the assembly of the saints, and separated from us, whether they will or no; unless the Lord Jesus Christ, by his free, rich, and sovereign grace, brings them unto himself.

The letter-learned Scribes and Pharisees of this day, look on us as madmen and enthusiasts; but though they make so much noise about the word “enthusiast,” it means no more than this, one in God; and what Christian can say, he is not in God, and God in him? And if this is to be an enthusiast, God grant I may be more and more so; if we being in Christ, and Christ in us, makes us enthusiasts. I would to God we were all more and more enthusiasts. They now think it strange, that we run not with them into all excess of riot, and because we will not go to the devil's diversions with them, therefore they speak evil of us. We cannot now go along the street, but every one is pointing out his finger with scorn, and cries, Here comes another of his followers; what! You are become one of his disciples too! But there is a rest which will be a complete deliverance for you. Let none of these things move you; for, though you are thus treated here, consider, you shall in heaven have no discouraging company, nor any but what will be an assistance to you; you will have no scoffer there, all will be ready to join with heart and voice in your everlasting joy and praises. You will not be counted enthusiasts, madmen, and rabble, in that rest which remaineth for the people of God. Therefore, possess your souls in patience; account it matter of joy when you fall into tribulation; God, in his own time, will deliver us; let not their hindering us from preaching in the church, be any discouragement; do not shrink, and draw back, because of opposition; be not ashamed of your work or master; but hold fast your integrity. You must expect to go through evil report, and good report; fear not the violence of unreasonable men; let them hate you, and cast you out for the Lord's sake, behold he shall appear to your joy, and they shall be ashamed: therefore hold on, and hold out to the end. Be steadfast and patient, and bear the troubles of the

world; if you are the people of God, there is a rest provided for you, which you shall certainly obtain.

I shall not speak unto you, Pharisees, this morning, nor to any, except to you who have experienced the pangs of the new-birth, or are at present under them, and who know what it is to love the Lord Jesus in sincerity and truth. Do not be discouraged, or think hard of the ways of God, my dear brethren, because you are not loved by the men of this world; if you were of the world it would love you; it would then be pleased with your company; it would not thrust you from a tavern, or an alehouse; it would not dislike you for singing the songs of the drunkard, or for going to plays, balls, or other polite and fashionable entertainments, as they are called; no, these the children of the world like; but if you will sing hymns and psalms, and go to hear what God hath to say unto your souls, and spend your time in reading, praying, and frequenting religious assemblies, then it is that they dislike you, and thrust you out of their company, as unworthy thereof; but let none of these things move you, for the rest which Jesus Christ hath prepared for you, is an ample recompense for all you may meet with here.

This rest is the fruit of the blood of the Lord Jesus Christ. O how will it fill our souls with love, to think that through the streams of this blood, we have overcome the violence of the world, and the snares of the devil. My dear brethren, be not discouraged at the treatment you meet with here, but let it be a means to stir you up to advance in the love of the Lord Jesus Christ, who hath prepared a rest for you. Can you consider, what Christ has done and suffered for you, and have your hearts stupefied with vile and senseless pleasures? Can you hear of a panting, bleeding, dying Jesus, and yet be dull and unaffected? Was there any sorrow like unto his sorrow? And all this, he underwent to save you, who were vile, and polluted, and by nature, since the fall, a motley mixture of the beast and devil. Jesus Christ, by dying upon the cross, intended to take away the devil and beast from your heart, and to prepare it for himself to dwell in. Think of the love of this

your Jesus, and then, will a little reproach and scorn move you? Sure it will not. I hope better things of you, and things that accompany salvation.

O think with what pleasing astonishment you will see the Lord Jesus Christ, when he comes to take you to his rest. Now his heart is open to us; but our hearts are shut against him; then, then, his heart shall be open, and ours shall be so too. O my brethren, how will your love be increased? With what raptures will you see the Lord Jesus Christ? Therefore, undergo a few reproaches here patiently, and revile not again. Let them say what they please of me, the reproaches, scorns, and contempt of this world, will no ways hurt me, but will recoil upon their own heads; leave it to the Lord, who knows what is best for you and me. Do not question his love; he will be with you; only do you, who have tasted the Lord to be gracious, follow hard after him.

And now, let me speak a word unto you, who have not yet experienced the love of Christ to your souls, but are waiting for his appearance. I shall be but very short, because I would not break in upon the duties of the day.

I shall speak unto you a word of invitation; even, to wait still on the Lord; do not forsake him, though he may not answer your petitions at once or twice seeking unto him; hold on, do not leave seeking him, and you shall have an answer of peace; remember the poor man who was lame, and had lain at the pool of Bethesda thirty-eight years for relief, yet at last he found that it was worth waiting for, he obtained his desire.

And if you are but zealous for the Lord, and seek unto Jesus, if your zeal be according to godliness, and you pray unto him for his Spirit, you shall certainly have an answer of peace; you shall find it is good to seek unto the Lord, you will be adopted into his family, and by his spirit be enabled to cry, "Abba, Father." O then do not leave, but be continually waiting at wisdom's gate, and you shall find all her ways to be ways of pleasantness, and all her paths are peace; then, you shall

find that it is worth waiting on the Lord Jesus; and when you have got his Spirit within you, all the power of men or devils cannot make you forsake the ways of the Lord Jesus Christ.

If you do but once taste of his pardoning love, it will be so delightful unto you, that you will cry for more and more thereof; you will be as full as you can hold, and still not be satisfied; you will desire more and more of this love of Jesus, you will hunger and thirst, and hunger and thirst again, and never be satisfied till you come to that rest which is prepared for the people of God, where all hungering and thirsting will cease, and will be turned into songs and hallelujahs, and that for ever and ever.

As many of you as design to partake of the emblems of the body and blood of our dying Lord, examine well yourselves, lest by eating and drinking unworthily, you eat and drink damnation unto yourselves. Remember the dying love of your dying Lord, and eat and drink in commemoration thereof; do not let the world keep you from partaking hereof; and when you have eaten and drank, do not go away and run into the world; let the world see that you have been with Jesus; give them no room to speak unseemly, they do that enough without occasion; but how would they rejoice if they had just reason.

Look well then unto your paths, that you do not slip; remember that all your faults are magnified, and that all your little slips are laid upon me; therefore, look well unto your ways, your words, your actions, that they may silence gainsayers; let them see that we have the presence of God with us, and that there has been good done by field preaching.

Let me exhort you once more to consider the love of the Lord Jesus Christ. O do not forget this love. Consider, I beseech you, how great it has been unto you, and do not slight this his grace, the riches, the love, the kindness of your dear Redeemer, the Lord Jesus Christ, who hath prepared this eternal rest for you; he

also laid down his life for your sakes. What great love was here! that while you were enemies to the Lord of glory, he died for you, to redeem you from sin, from hell and wrath, that you might live and reign with him, world without end.

The Lamb that died, and was buried, is now risen and exalted, and sits on the right-hand of God the Father; and when he shall come to judge all the world, then, my brethren, it will be seen whether we have deserved the usage the world has given us; then it will be known who are the true followers of the Lord Jesus, and who are madmen and fools; but, may it be determined in this world, that we and our present enemies may enter into that rest which God hath prepared for those that love him.

Which God of his infinite mercy grant!

My brethren, let not these few words of exhortation be forgotten, but lay them up in your hearts, and remember they must be called over another day. I should have enlarged, but the duties of the day obliged me to forbear.

Now, to God the Father, Son, and Holy Ghost, be all power, &c.