

THE SIMILITUDE OF THE FOUR CARPENTERS

We are with Zechariah and John this morning. They are both our brethren. They were interested in the same things and aiming at the same ends. The whole family of God are alike in this respect. It is in fact this that makes them the family of God—their knowledge and love of Him, their submission to Him, and their joyful anticipation of the good thing He has promised to the house of Israel and the house of Judah. It is this common sympathy with God and all things appertaining to Him that makes them one, wherever they meet, and that will tie together in a common joyful affinity men of extremely different countries, age and custom. When they meet at the resurrection they will be no strangers. The reserves and checks of the present state, when the children of God are scarce, and no man can be sure that he knows who is who, will entirely disappear with the evil age to which they belong, and the fountains of heart and mind will be opened in streams of joy.

We find Zechariah among things relating to the down-trodden state of Israel—among visions and symbols—horses of different colour, horns and carpenters—matters having no interest for his contemporaries. His contemporaries were not distressed at the condition of the Lord's land or the Lord's nation. They cared nothing for any prospects there might be of a different state of things. They were pleasantly occupied with their own prosperities. The "heathen" were "*at ease*." This was a state of things not pleasing to God, though it was He who had put Israel down, and caused the heathen to triumph over them.

"I am very sore displeased with the heathen that are at ease, for I was but a little displeased and they helped forward the affliction" (Zech. 1:15).

The situation is similar now. All things pertaining to God's purpose are in the dust; and few are "*grieved at the affliction of Joseph*." There are a few—a very few—watchman on Zion's walls, who give the Lord no rest on the subject, but remind Him day and night of the promised restoration of His favour. The mass of the population are worse than heedless; they hate everything connected with God. They are taken up only with their own pleasure which they follow with great talent and diligence. The situation is trying to the children of Zion. They are liable to feel disconsolate oftentimes; and to mourn sore with David at the grievousness of living solitarily in a wilderness. But reason comes to their aid. The day of desolation is appointed.

"Ye shall weep and lament, but the world shall rejoice."

But the day of desolation has an end. The day of unspeakable comfort is fixed and hastens with every hastening year.

"I will see you again and your heart shall rejoice."

"Ye shall be comforted in Jerusalem."

"As one whom his mother comforteth, so will I comfort you."

Wherefore, "*be glad with Jerusalem all ye that mourn for her*."

"Pray for the peace of Jerusalem."

The enemy "*mocked at Zion's Sabbaths*." They mock at her symbols. We share in this affliction also. In revealing His mind, God has "*multiplied visions and used similitudes by the ministry of the prophets*" (Hosea 12:10). We get to know His mind by the study of those similitudes; and allusion to these similitudes necessarily enters largely into our communications on the subject. We speak of "*the beast*," "*the Dragon*," "*the Euphrates*," "*the frogs*," etc. The mirth of the enemy is excited by such allusions, and derision naturally inflicts pain. But we endure it. It is for God's sake we suffer this; for it is with Him that these things have originated. We know what He has said:

"They shall not be ashamed that wait for Me."

We can afford to wait. What becomes of human consequentiality in 100 years? Search for it among the worms. Where will human scorn at the things of God be when God lifts up His hand again the second time, to show His glory to affrighted man, and bring into contempt all the honourable of the earth? Yes, we can afford to wait.

Zechariah heard a question propounded which we can well accommodate to our own age. Jerusalem had been in ruins for 70 years; and the time for promised revival had come. And the question was—

“O Lord of Hosts, how long wilt Thou not have mercy on Jerusalem and on the cities of Judah, against which Thou hast had indignation these threescore and ten years?”

“And,” Zechariah says, “the Lord answered the angel that talked with me with good words and comfortable words.”

The similarity of our position you will perceive at a glance. For a long period Jerusalem has lain in the down-trodden state foretold by Jesus. The times of the Gentiles, during which that downtreading was to continue, are nearly at an end; and it is a rational prayer for us to pray in the words that Zechariah heard: “O Lord of Hosts, how long wilt Thou not have mercy on Jerusalem and on the cities of Judah, against which Thou hast had indignation these 1,800 years?” If we could hear a response to our words as Zechariah heard, we should hear “good words and comfortable words” like him.

“My cities through prosperity shall yet be spread abroad: and the Lord shall yet comfort Zion and shall yet choose Jerusalem.”

The answer that Zechariah thus received was immediately illustrated by one of those “*similitudes*” which the Truth enables us to understand. And by the illustration we may see that the answer related to the whole future of God’s purpose with Israel. Four horns were shown to him, concerning which he was told that they were the horns or powers that had “*scattered Judah, Israel, and Jerusalem.*” This was showing, on the smallest scale the antagonism of the Gentiles to God’s land and people in their whole history. Other visions show us that this antagonism has assumed the form of four successive empires—represented to Daniel by four beasts; and that it will not go beyond the fourth beast phase which is destined to be destroyed by the coming of the Lord. Four horns comprehend all. Then he saw “*four carpenters,*” coming to fray or cut them down, “*What come these to do,*” was his question. The answer was:

“These are come to fray them—to cast out the horns of the Gentiles which lifted up their horn over the land of Judah to scatter it” (v. 21).

This is plain. The four horns are the Judah-scattering powers of the Gentiles; the four carpenters are the destroyers of those powers at the last. Now we know that Jesus and the saints are the appointed executioners of Yahweh’s judgments against the powers of the Gentiles when the time comes to put them all aside and to set up the Kingdom of God. Why should they be represented by carpenters? Probably the answer is suggested by another question which was put 1,800 years ago concerning Jesus:

“Is not this the carpenter?”

Jesus is the covering name of the whole body. Relatively to the world’s corporations, they are the carpenter community, destined to cut the others all down. Why four? There being four Gentile horns, a carpenter for each horn is appropriate; but the principal reason doubtless lies in the four-camp organization of Israel’s host when they came out of Egypt—a matter of divine arrangement with typical forecasts. This division of the camp into four gave an analogical relation to the commonwealth of Israel in its final aspect as a city lying four-square; and also yielded four cherubic living creatures as the symbol of the divine organization—corresponding antagonistically to the four beasts into which the camp of human Satanism has been historically divided. However this may be, there can be no

difficulty in recognising Jesus and his brethren in the four Gentile-levelling carpenters. Thus we read ourselves into the symbol. We assemble round this table of the crucified carpenter—a carpenter to build as well as to destroy. We are here because his name has been named upon us; and we bear that name and all the dishonours meanwhile associated with it in the hope of being finally chosen for the real and ultimate work for which the carpenter community is being developed—a work of pulling down the evil and building the good—that the earth may be filled with joy to God and man.

In John's company (in Rev. 14), we are permitted to behold a community in the day of their elevation to power and glory. John sees "*a Lamb on the Mount Zion and with him an hundred, forty and four thousand having his Father's name written on their foreheads.*" A lamb—here is another of the divine symbols. The various secret orders and societies among men have their symbols and mysteries. Their employment is found to be convenient and effective. The idea of using them is doubtless of divine origin. The Freemasons claim to be descended from Solomon as regards the insignia of their craft—in which there may be a grain of truth. The meaning of the Lamb we know: slain at the Passover, and every morning and evening, it was pre-eminently the symbol of the reconciliation to be effected in the sacrifice of Christ, in whom God was to be exalted, and man abased, sin condemned and righteousness declared—as the foundation of the system of love and purity and life to be established finally in all the earth. Amongst all the animals, the lamb most fitly represents the innocence and gentleness and harmlessness of the Christ character; which is developed in times of evil with a view to glorious establishment in times of perfect well-being. The Lamb and all who are with him are of a like character—the Father's name in the foreheads of all, that is the knowledge and love of God established in their understandings and hearts. John saw them as 144,000—the arithmetical symbol of their complete multitude. Their root is 12—12 tribes, 12 apostles, 12 thrones; and the square of this root (or the sum resulting from the number being multiplied by itself), is, 144. Absolutely, their number is a countless multitude—embracing all the faithful from Abel to the generation contemporary with the Lord's coming. It is the peculiarity of a symbolic vision to represent them by a number of Israelitish meaning.

They are seen as a rejoicing multitude. John heard their voice "*as the voice of many waters and as the voice of a great thunder,*" "*the voice of harpers harping with their harps.*" Let us realise this for our comfort. We are in distress on many accounts at present. It will not always be so.

"Weeping may endure for a night; joy comes in the morning"—a morning without clouds.

It is the dawn of this morning that John saw, and that we see through his description. Let us remember it is not a piece of fancy. His words are "*words of righteousness, of truth and soberness.*" They are "*the true sayings of God.*" They present to us a transporting vision of light and joy awaiting our issue from the present vale of darkness and tears. While we are in this vale, it seems as if we would always be here. Remember, this is an illusion of finite sense. A little common reflection will help us to dissipate it. We are only here for a short time. We may not have to wait the full efflux of the latter-day programme of signs. The curtain of death may drop at any day on our present scene; and in death there is no interval. Ages pass in a moment to the dead. The curtain will drop and the curtain will seem immediately to rise on the things seen in the vision by John, but then become joyful realities. Hold on to this comfort in the dark. It is real and lasting. Our present life is but an appearance, lasting a very little while; what is coming is real, joyful and lasting. Godliness will not always be a thing of faith, self-denial and endurance. The things that God has in store for them who love Him pass human imagination.

Meanwhile, those who belong to the 144,000 are strangers on the scene. This is intimated pretty strongly in the words John was directed to write:

“These are they which were not defiled with women; for they are virgins.”

Here is something requiring understanding. Some have read the statement literally, with disregard of the symbolic character of the vision. This mistake has doubtless done something to establish monasticism in the earth. We have been emancipated from many mistakes of the past, and this is among the number. The virgin-community are the redeemed who surround the Lamb in the day of his return. They are *“redeemed from the earth,”* and they *“follow the Lamb whithersoever he goeth.”* It is so stated plainly (v. 4). We have only to ask who they are who do so. This we learn in many ways. Paul’s definition is sufficient:

“They who are Christ’s at his coming” (1 Cor. 15:23).

These include *“men and women,”* for men and women were baptised (Acts 8:12), and they are *“heirs together of the grace of life (1 Peter 3:7).* They include Peter and other apostles who were married (1Cor. 9:5). If then married, male and female are ingredients in the body of Christ, what can be the meaning of speaking of that body as consisting of those who are *“virgins,”* and of their virginity particularly consisting of not being *“defiled with women.”* There must be a meaning to such words. They are remarkable words. When studied they become intelligible words, and instructive words in a direction somewhat astounding to the religious and secular respectabilities of Christendom.

Women have a symbolical sense in the Apocalypse. The nature of this sense we easily discover from the study of the two leading women of the vision—one an intoxicated harlot, and the other a pure and chaste bride. Of the first it is said *“The woman that thou sawest is that great city that reigneth over the kings of the earth”* (17: 18)—in whom, therefore, we discover Rome; for to no other city could this description apply in the days of John. It is Rome in her ecclesiastical relations, for she is said to have made all nations drunk with what she administers to them; and to maintain unlawful intercourse *“with the kings of the earth.”* The other is said to be *“the Lamb’s wife”*—the true ecclesia of Christ. Women, therefore, when symbolically employed, represent ecclesiastical communities. Now, where are the communities with which the saints of God are declared to be undefiled? The answer is suggested to us by the name applied to the head woman of the earth in Christ’s absence—the *“Mother of Harlots.”* Rome is the Mother-Church.

Where are the daughter churches? They are to be found in all the earth. We need not trouble ourselves about other countries. If there are churches in Britain affiliated to the Roman Mother, there are *“women”* in the country from which it is the duty of the friends of God to stand apart. Are there such? Nay, where is the church that is not affiliated to Rome, both in the sense of holding her leading doctrines, and recognising her membership of the body of Christ? There is scarcely such a church to be found. A spurious charity is advocated everywhere, which, discarding *“party shibboleths”* (as the claims and obligations are styled), seeks to embrace all creeds and churches in one indiscriminate communion whose principle shall be to insist on no principle. Apocalyptically speaking, the practisers of this doctrine are *“defiled with women.”* By taking part with them, they make themselves responsible for the universal revolt against the divine principles which were placed in the world by the instrumentality of prophets and apostles (long dead), and preserved in the pages of the holy oracles inscribed by inspiration for the preservation of their message. The 144,000 are not in this position. They stand apart from them all. They are *“not defiled with women.”* They are not to be found in the Church of England, nor in the so-called evangelical communions, nor in the various sects and denominations that acknowledge each other as members of the *“church universal.”* They stand apart in virgin isolation, *“built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets,”* and repudiating all identity with the Bible-nullifying institutions that men have built up and established in the earth.

Is it unreasonable that God should require this at our hands? On the contrary, does not the logic of all the past and of every known principle of truth necessitate it? God has

appointed faith in His promises and obedience to His commandments as the condition of our acceptability with Him. How then could He regard with favour, if for the sake of respectability or the things of this life, we make ourselves one with those who are either ignorant of or deny His promises and violate His commandments every day of their lives, and yet who ostentatiously parade themselves in various assemblies and institutions as His very elect in all the earth? The way of life is thoroughly reasonable, but for that reason it is narrow; for that reason it is hard for the present; but it is not an impossible way, many have trodden it before us. Let us not fail where others have overcome. Let us renew our courage and go forward with resolution. The way may be toilsome, but it is not long. It may be hard to endure, but there is every inducement that can possibly influence men to great achievement. The rugged, dark, and narrow way has its exit in the bosom of the 144,000.

Taken from: - "Seasons of Comfort" Vol. 2
Pages 195-200
By Bro. Robert Roberts