

## THEREFORE CAME I FORTH

Three months ago, in Glendale, Arizona, Hans Schmidt was preaching the gospel on the street before his church's evening service. Suddenly, he fell to the ground. He then stood up, collected his things, and drove to the church. There his wife saw that he was bleeding from his head. He began having seizures, and vomiting. Someone rushed him to the hospital, where medical staff found a bullet lodged in his brain. Someone had shot Schmidt in the head while he was preaching. The medical staff concluded that removing the bullet was too risky, so they left it where it was. Schmidt's condition has greatly improved. One week ago, Schmidt attended church. The police have arrested no one for the attempted murder. Henry Branch, who lives in the area, said, "Who knows why someone would want to take it out on a preacher like that because he's speaking the gospel and good news to everybody. He's out to help the community." Hans Schmidt was zealous to preach the gospel, and for his zeal he greatly suffered. Not all Christians should preach on the street, but all Christians should be zealous to proclaim the good news of Jesus Christ, no matter the consequences.

When Ahaz was king in Judah, he was very wicked, and led the people in the worship of idols, and even of child sacrifice. When threatened by Rezin, king of Syria, and Pekah, king of Israel, he did submit to the Lord, but subjected himself to Tiglath-pilezer, the king of Assyria in exchange for protection. The king of Assyria conquered the kingdom of Israel, and carried the people away into exile. In this way, the Lord punished the wicked kingdom of Israel for their sins.

Hezekiah succeeded his father, Ahaz, and he was a good king in Judah. The Scriptures say, "He trusted in the LORD God of Israel; so that after him was none like him among all the kings of Judah, nor any that were before him. [6](#)For he clave to the LORD, and departed not from following him, but kept his commandments, which the LORD commanded Moses." (2 Kings 18:5, 6; compare 2 Chronicles 31:20, 21) He abolished idolatry, and restored worship of the Lord in His holy temple. When he rebelled against Sennacherib, the king of Assyria, Sennacherib invaded Judah, and compelled Hezekiah to pay tribute. Hezekiah rebelled a second time, and sought aid from Egypt. So, Sennacherib sent to Hezekiah a blasphemous letter in which he defied the Lord, and threatened to take the city of Jerusalem. He said:

Let not thy God, in whom thou trustest, deceive thee, saying, Jerusalem shall not be given into the hand of the king of Assyria. Behold, thou hast heard what the kings of Assyria have done to all lands by destroying them utterly; and shalt thou be delivered? Have the gods of the nations delivered them which my fathers have destroyed, as Gozan, and Haran, and Rezep, and the children of Eden which were in Telassar? Where is the king of Hamath, and the king of Arphad, and the king of the city of Sepharvaim, Hena, and Ivah? (Isaiah 37:10–13)

When Hezekiah received the letter, he prayed to the Lord for help. He prayed:

O LORD of hosts, God of Israel, that dwellest between the cherubims, thou art the God, even thou alone, of all the kingdoms of the earth: thou hast made heaven and earth. Incline thine ear, O LORD, and hear; open thine eyes, O LORD, and see: and hear all the words of Sennacherib, which hath sent to reproach the living God. Of a truth, LORD, the kings of Assyria have laid waste all the nations, and their countries, And have cast their gods into the fire: for they were no gods, but the work of men's hands, wood and stone: therefore they have destroyed them. Now

therefore, O LORD our God, save us from his hand, that all the kingdoms of the earth may know that thou art the LORD, even thou only. (Isaiah 37:16–20)

God heard Hezekiah's prayer, and granted his request. The angel of the Lord killed one-hundred eighty-five thousand Assyrian soldiers. Jerusalem was saved. Sennacherib retreated to Nineveh. Some years later, when Senacherib was worshiping in the temple of his god, his two sons killed him with their swords. (Isaiah 37:38; 2 Kings; 2 Chronicles 32:21)

Some time after this, Hezekiah became deathly ill. He prayed to the Lord to restore him to good health, and the Lord did so, granting him fifteen more years of life. When Merodach-baladan, king of Babylon received word of Hezekiah's recovery, he sent a delegation to congratulate him. Hezekiah saw in this an opportunity to form an alliance with the great king, and so he showed the delegation all of his treasure, and all of his arms. After this, Isaiah prophesied concerning the kingdom of Judah:

Hear the word of the LORD of hosts: Behold, the days come, that all that is in thine house, and that which thy fathers have laid up in store until this day, shall be carried to Babylon: nothing shall be left, saith the LORD. And of thy sons that shall issue from thee, which thou shalt beget, shall they take away; and they shall be eunuchs in the palace of the king of Babylon. (Isaiah 39:5–7)

Hezekiah, king of Judah, sought a political alliance with the king of Babylon, but the time would come when the king of Babylon would conquer the kingdom of Judah, loot the treasury, and carry Hezekiah's sons into exile in Babylon. God would cause this to be done because of the many sins of the people of Judah, including Hezekiah's sin of failing to trust the Lord, and so making an alliance with a heathen nation. Hezekiah responded, "Good is the word of the LORD which thou hast spoken... For there shall be peace and truth in my days." (Isaiah 39:8) Hezekiah was not perfect, but he was a good man, and a good king, and he surrendered to the will of God, grateful that future calamity would come after his reign had ended.

The book of Isaiah continues:

Comfort ye, comfort ye my people, saith your God. Speak ye comfortably to Jerusalem, and cry unto her, that her warfare is accomplished, that her iniquity is pardoned: for she hath received of the LORD'S hand double for all her sins. (Isaiah 40:1, 2)

When Moses asked the Lord to reveal to Him His glory, the Lord said:

The LORD, The LORD God, merciful and gracious, longsuffering, and abundant in goodness and truth, Keeping mercy for thousands, forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin, and that will by no means clear the guilty; visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children, and upon the children's children, unto the third and to the fourth generation. (Exodus 34:6, 7)

The Lord is severe, but He is also merciful. His prophets prophesied destruction, but also restoration. God's prophets were to condemn the people, but they were also to comfort them. The people would be taken into captivity in Babylon, but their time of captivity would come to a close, and God would forgive their sins. God's people would have suffered enough for their transgressions.

Then the Scriptures say:

The voice of him that crieth in the wilderness, Prepare ye the way of the LORD, make straight in the desert a highway for our God. Every valley shall be exalted, and every mountain and hill shall be made low: and the crooked shall be made straight, and the rough places plain: And the glory of the LORD shall be revealed, and all flesh shall see it together: for the mouth of the LORD hath spoken it. (Isaiah 40:3–5)

The prophets would cry out in the wilderness, calling on everyone to make way for Jews to leave exile in Babylon, and to be restored to their homeland. God would reveal His glory by punishing the Jews when they rebelled, but also by restoring them when they repented.

The Scriptures say:

The voice said, Cry. And he said, What shall I cry? All flesh is grass, and all the goodliness thereof is as the flower of the field: The grass withereth, the flower fadeth: because the spirit of the LORD bloweth upon it: surely the people is grass. The grass withereth, the flower fadeth: but the word of our God shall stand for ever. (Isaiah 40:6–8)

Men might doubt the word of God, but He would reassure them. Grass withers, and flowers fade. All men are like grass, and their faithfulness like the flowers of the field. Men wither, and their faithfulness fades. God is not like men, however, He is always faithful. His word is true, and never fails.

Then the Scriptures say:

O Zion, that bringest good tidings, get thee up into the high mountain; O Jerusalem, that bringest good tidings, lift up thy voice with strength; lift it up, be not afraid; say unto the cities of Judah, Behold your God! Behold, the Lord GOD will come with strong hand, and his arm shall rule for him: behold, his reward is with him, and his work before him. (Isaiah 40:9, 10)

The people of God would return to Jerusalem to restore it, and that city would proclaim to the other cities the good news. They would proclaim that God had promised to restore His people, and that He is powerful enough to do it. God is not like the gods of the heathens. No one helped God create the world. No one teaches God, or advises Him. God is great, and with His greatness the greatness of the nations cannot compare. Great nations have power, but not like God's. Great nations have wisdom, but not like God's. Compared to God, the nations are weak, and foolish. They are pitiful, and insignificant. To what can God be compared? God is incomparable. Yet, fools think they can out of metal or wood fashion a likeness of God.

The prophecy continues:

Have ye not known? have ye not heard? hath it not been told you from the beginning? have ye not understood from the foundations of the earth? It is he that sitteth upon the circle of the earth, and the inhabitants thereof are as grasshoppers; that stretcheth out the heavens as a curtain, and spreadeth them out as a tent to dwell in: That bringeth the princes to nothing; he maketh the judges of the earth as vanity. Yea, they shall not be planted; yea, they shall not be sown: yea, their stock shall not take root in the earth: and he shall also blow upon them, and they shall wither, and the whirlwind shall take them away as stubble. To whom then will ye liken me, or shall I be equal? saith the Holy One. Lift up your eyes on high, and behold who hath created

these things, that bringeth out their host by number: he calleth them all by names by the greatness of his might, for that he is strong in power; not one faileth. Why sayest thou, O Jacob, and speakest, O Israel, My way is hid from the LORD, and my judgment is passed over from my God? Hast thou not known? hast thou not heard, that the everlasting God, the LORD, the Creator of the ends of the earth, fainteth not, neither is weary? there is no searching of his understanding. He giveth power to the faint; and to them that have no might he increaseth strength. Even the youths shall faint and be weary, and the young men shall utterly fall: But they that wait upon the LORD shall renew their strength; they shall mount up with wings as eagles; they shall run, and not be weary; and they shall walk, and not faint. (Isaiah 40:21–31)

Some might doubt that God was able to do what He promised. How could they doubt? They ought to know better. They were taught better. God is not a part of the creation; He is far above it. He sits in heaven which encircles the earth, and from there He rules the world. As grasshoppers are to men, so are men to God. The men who rule the world are nothing to God. They stand tall for time, but, like grass, they wither and die. There is none equal to God. A man looks into the heavens and sees the expanse with all its heavenly bodies. God created them, and as a general commands an army, so God commands the heavenly host, and not one fails to obey His command. When Israel were in captivity, why should they think that God is unaware of them, or that He ignores them. They should never think that God does not see their plight, that He ignores their cause. They know better. They know that God is the eternal and almighty Creator of all things, and He never grows tired. God does not think as men do. His understanding is beyond man's understanding. Men may think that God is ignorant, or neglectful, but He is not; men are. Men are unreliable, but God is reliable. To the weak He gives power, and to one who lacks power He gives great might. Youths grow faint and weary, and young men collapse after exhausting themselves. Yet, those who trust in the Lord, those who patiently wait for Him, He will renew their strength. They will soar like eagles; they will run and not grow weary; they will walk and not grow faint. If a man will trust in the wisdom and power of God, and not in his own, then God will guide him and strengthen him. God promised to redeem His people, and He would make good in His promise. His people had but patiently to trust Him. This was the good news that God gave His prophets to proclaim, and they were glad to proclaim it.

Of course, the Jews did return to their homeland, and they did rebuild the city of Jerusalem, and the temple there; but this was not the ultimate fulfillment of Isaiah's prophecy. Saint Mark began His gospel by relating the ministry of John the Baptist. He wrote: "The beginning of the gospel of Jesus Christ, the Son of God; As it is written in the prophets, Behold, I send my messenger before thy face, which shall prepare thy way before thee. The voice of one crying in the wilderness, Prepare ye the way of the Lord, make his paths straight." (Mark 1:1–3) John prepared the way for the Christ by preaching a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins, and proclaiming, "There cometh one mightier than I after me, the latchet of whose shoes I am not worthy to stoop down and unloose. I indeed have baptized you with water: but he shall baptize you with the Holy Ghost." (Mark 1:7, 8) The Son of God came into the world to redeem His people by making atonement for their sins, and giving them power to obey. When He began His earthly ministry, He proclaimed, "The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand: repent ye, and believe the gospel." (Mark 1:15) The Son of God came into the world to establish His kingdom, and only those may enter who repent of their sins, and believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God. Jesus, by the power of the Spirit, performed many miracles as proof that He is, in fact, the Son of God. Saint Mark wrote:

And forthwith, when they were come out of the synagogue, they entered into the house of Simon and Andrew, with James and John. But Simon's wife's mother lay sick of a fever, and anon they tell him of her. And he came and took her by the hand, and lifted her up; and immediately the fever left her, and she ministered unto them. And at even, when the sun did set, they brought unto him all that were diseased, and them that were possessed with devils. And all the city was gathered together at the door. And he healed many that were sick of divers diseases, and cast out many devils; and suffered not the devils to speak, because they knew him. And in the morning, rising up a great while before day, he went out, and departed into a solitary place, and there prayed. And Simon and they that were with him followed after him. And when they had found him, they said unto him, All men seek for thee. And he said unto them, Let us go into the next towns, that I may preach there also: for therefore came I forth. And he preached in their synagogues throughout all Galilee, and cast out devils. (Mark 1:29–39)

The mother of Saint Peter's wife was sick, and Jesus healed her. After this, people brought to Jesus many those who were sick with various diseases, and who were possessed by demons, and Jesus healed many, and cast demons out of many. Next day, Jesus rose early to go to a place where He could be alone to pray. Saint Peter, and some others, followed Him, and, when they found Him, they told Him that people were looking for Him. Jesus said to them, "Let us go into the next towns, that I may preach there also: for therefore came I forth." (Mark 1:38) Jesus had a mission, and that mission was to go from town to town proclaiming to people that the kingdom of God was being established, and so they should repent of their sins. Not only did Jesus live to preach the gospel, but He died for it.

Jesus commissioned a number of men, apostles, to proclaim the gospel under His authority. Saint Paulk was one. He wrote to the Corinthians:

For though I preach the gospel, I have nothing to glory of: for necessity is laid upon me; yea, woe is unto me, if I preach not the gospel! For if I do this thing willingly, I have a reward: but if against my will, a dispensation of the gospel is committed unto me. What is my reward then? Verily that, when I preach the gospel, I may make the gospel of Christ without charge, that I abuse not my power in the gospel. (1 Corinthians 9:16–18)

Saint Paul had a right to be paid for his ministry; yet, he did not insist on that right. He believed the gospel, and was compelled to proclaim it whether he was paid, or not. He surrendered some of His rights so that he might not be hindered in proclaiming the gospel. Preaching the gospel was its own reward.

He further wrote:

For though I be free from all men, yet have I made myself servant unto all, that I might gain the more. And unto the Jews I became as a Jew, that I might gain the Jews; to them that are under the law, as under the law, that I might gain them that are under the law; To them that are without law, as without law, (being not without law to God, but under the law to Christ,) that I might gain them that are without law. To the weak became I as weak, that I might gain the weak: I am made all things to all men, that I might by all means save some. And this I do for the gospel's sake, that I might be partaker thereof with you. (1 Corinthians 9:19–23)

Saint Paul was a servant of God, and ultimately answered to Him. Yet, Saint Paul gave up his rights, and made himself the servant of men, so that he might save some. When ministering to Jews, he followed their law, like their rules of diet. When ministering to Gentiles, he did not follow the Jewish law, although he always followed the law of God. He gave up his freedom so that he might serve others.

Saint Paul wrote to the Corinthians of an important principle of Christian ethics: the Christian should give up his rights for the good of others, and he should do this because that is what love does. After all, this is what the Son of God did when He became incarnate to atone for the sins of men.

Let us praise God that He loves us, and gave His Son a sacrifice for us. Let us follow the example of Christ who gave up His rights that He might serve us. Let us proclaim to the world the good news that God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life.

Unto him that loved us, and washed us from our sins in his own blood, And hath made us kings and priests unto God and his Father; to him be glory and dominion for ever and ever. Amen.