

~Other Speakers A-F: Andrew Bonar:

What I write is not a vision, nor a dream; it is an allegory of its kind. You will follow me into another region, to a spot where angels are gathered together in quiet, happy converse. They are all 'ministering spirits, sent forth to minister for them who shall be heirs of salvation' (Heb. 1:14); but they are creatures, and so they need intervals of rest. They, as well as we, find 'iron sharpeneth iron.' Let me tell you my visit to one of these meetings, held under the shadow of that Throne whereon sitteth the 'Angel of the Covenant,' who cared for Hagar, visited Abraham, wrestled with Jacob, spoke in the Burning Bush. On the right hand of that Throne, just where one arm of the emerald Rainbow dipt downwards, a group of these ministering spirits were met to speak of the past, and prepare for coming work. I got entrance into their circle, and they received me with great respect and glowing kindness, not for anything in myself, but for my work's sake and my Master's, I being on earth an 'Angel' of a Church of Christ, serving the same Lord whom they so loved and served.

Seated among them, I was allowed to listen and learn. Only a few spoke. It would have been most interesting to have heard anything from the two compassionate Angels who, in hurrying Lot and his family out of Sodom, taught us to 'pull men out of the fire.' But nothing fell from their lips, nor from any of the Mahanaim host (Gen. 32: 2), who could have told of Jacob's timely comforts; nor from the Angel who delivered Daniel from the lions; nor yet from the affable Angel with whom the Prophet Zechariah became so familiar. The notes I give, however, are a few recollections of what passed, and these bearing on things that concern us here below, in our sphere of service.

I

The first who spoke was the irresistible Angel who, on the night of the Passover, was sent forth to destroy the firstborn of Egypt (Heb. 11: 28). He referred to that service as something very terrible, almost too terrible; but he was upheld by the discovery he got of the glory of divine justice taking vengeance on sin. Glorious justice! how bright it shone forth in every stroke of his sword. Nor less was he revived when his eye from time to time turned to the blood-sprinkled lintels and door-posts of Israel, where grace was seen saving its thousands at the cost of divinely precious atonement, set forth in the blood of the Paschal Lamb. 'Angel of the Church of Finnieston (said he to me), tell your flock—never fail to tell and tell again—the justice of God, and, at the same time, the power of the blood which God has provided. Tell both unceasingly, that the justice may send souls to the blood and our God be glorified in the highest, when "a thousand fall at thy side and ten thousand at thy right hand," but the sword comes not nigh to those whose lintels and door-posts are sprinkled.'

II

He sat down. And there rose up one like him in aspect, every way as majestic and mighty, yet very solemn and calm. It was the angel who smote the host of Sennacherib, an hundred and eighty-five thousand in one night, using the drawn sword that once threatened death to Jerusalem (1 Chron. 21:16). He pictured the scene of exuberant and boisterous mirth in the Assyrian tents; their boastful exultation, as they fancied themselves already in the Temple; and then how the revelry died away, and sleep stole over them. How easy it was for him to go forth on his work! He needed only to flash his sword, and the heart of every sleeper was still for ever. 'But (said he) most dreadful was that scene of death, needing all the relief afforded by the blessed sight of believing Jerusalem at rest in the everlasting arms. As I passed Hezekiah's palace, how unutterably sweet it was to hear low-breathed words of calm confidence in our Jehovah! How peaceful were the dwellings of Jerusalem! O Angel of the Church of Finnieston, when you return, tell your flock what simple faith in our Jehovah wins. Tell anxious ones to look upon the blood of the mercy-seat, as did that king and his people, and use continually the appeal of simple faith.'

III

When he had finished, another rose who prefaced what he was about to say by looking to me (as they all did, in their brotherly, familiar kindness) and stating who he was. 'I am the Angel who was sent to stop the false prophet Balaam on his way to curse Israel. It seemed a very small matter, scarcely requiring an Angel to be despatched from heaven to earth; but I joyfully went forth when my Lord called. And soon it appeared that had that man gone on to pronounce his withering curse, Israel would have had no courage to fight; Israel would not have entered the land; the promise to the seed of Abraham would have failed; Messiah would not have come; your world would have been unredeemed! Go and tell your flock the importance of a small service. Tell parents and teachers that to arrest evil, in the case of even one soul, may turn out to have been an inestimable blessing to the whole world.'

IV

And now one rose who seemed the very ideal of angelic grace and kindness—the Angel who did that service, in the wilderness of Beersheba, to Elijah under the juniper-tree. He extolled the grace of his Lord and ours in delicately and tenderly reproving, while upholding, the desponding man of God. He rejoiced to relate how grace shone forth that day, when the peevishness of Elijah was twice requited by most seasonable refreshment, sent by Him who would take no notice of His servant's infirmity in praying for death; for his God meant to take him up ere long to be Enoch's companion, without tasting death. When he had finished his brief story, his eye fell on me; and to me this message was intrusted. 'Angel of the Church of Finnieston, bid any who work for the Lord, but who have become desponding, and have thought of working no more, because success seems to be so inadequate, bid them remember that day of which I speak. And see that thou thyself dost not lose temper with them; whereas thou shouldst rather carry to them, as I did to the prophet, the food and the water that will revive even a peevish worker's heart.'

V

I saw next a mighty Angel prepare to speak, one whose name I soon learnt. But I should remark that for the most part I could not catch the names of almost any. They did not seem to care to be known individually by any one but their Lord. What a lesson (I thought) to some workers among us, who, unless they be spoken of, and their names made prominent, will not persevere in what they undertake. I saw there is no such sinful sensitiveness, no such ambition in that holy heaven!

It was Gabriel who stood up now. With clear, full voice, that often quivered with joyous emotion, he told of his privilege in being the messenger sent to Daniel, 'the man greatly beloved,' to make known the time of the appearing of the Saviour, who was to finish transgression, make an end of sin, and bring in Everlasting Righteousness. With that eloquence that is peculiar (1 Cor. 13:1) to an angelic tongue, and to one who is high among them, 'standing before God,' he went on to describe his second visit to earth on the same errand, when sent to the Temple of Jerusalem to announce the birth of Messiah's forerunner. But oh, how he was moved when next he related his mission to Nazareth, in which he announced to Mary that she was the mother of the Word made flesh! He did not, however, dwell upon his own feelings; the subject seemed too great even for him. 'But (said he ere he closed), Angel of the Church of Finnieston, we desire to look into your blessings, amid all our joys. O tell your Elders, and all among your flock who try to proclaim the love of God in sending His Son, that to us their privilege seems the highest that a creature can enjoy! To have such news to proclaim! It passes knowledge!'

VI

Scarcely had he ended, when the subject was taken up by that favoured Angel who brought the tidings to the shepherds at Bethlehem, 'To you is born a Saviour, Christ, the Lord,' while the glory of the Lord shone round about. 'Perhaps (he began) I may say my privilege was greater than Gabriel's, for I am the only one of our number who ever preached the Gospel! Oh, it is sweet to sound the silver trumpet! When I was done with my brief message, how happy I thought the shepherds in being permitted to go everywhere and tell it all to their friends and neighbours. O Angel of a Church on earth, bid all your flock who know the 'Wonderful, the Mighty God, the Prince of Peace,' go among their friends and neighbours as these shepherds gladly did. Nor forget to carry a word to those in your congregation who lead the song, and to all in the flock (for surely they all join in the song, every one?), regarding the praise they offer. The multitude of the heavenly host, who joined me on that night almost ere I was done with my message, have often since declared that never did they find themselves so lifted up and blessed, as in singing to Him who sent His Son, and singing with their eye on Him who had come down to obey and suffer and die for sinners.'

He was about to close, when once more his eye fell on me, and he added, 'O son of man, you may have in your flock some who have your world's goods, which they might dedicate to their Lord and Saviour's use. A few days after that memorable night, when carrying a message to Joseph, who was still at Bethlehem (Matt. 2:19), I saw the wise men who had been worshipping at the feet of Christ the Lord, and who had gladly offered gifts, because their hearts were melted and moved and won at the sight of Incarnate Love. Use that argument, O man of God, whenever you would thaw the icy heart of any one among your flock who gives little to Him who gave all for him. Tell your Deacons to use it, if they would open hearts; and let them enjoin their Collectors to employ this argument, which prevails when all others fail.'

VII

A pause followed. I half expected to hear something from those Angels who 'came and ministered' to the Lord

after the forty days' temptation, I hoped in my own mind that, in that case, I should have been able to tell at least the joy of our heavenly brethren not only in taking charge over us 'lest we dash our foot against a stone,' but also in witnessing our success in times of temptation, when we overcome Satan 'by the blood of the Lamb and the word of His testimony.' But it seemed as if they were afraid lest we should look to them for the ministry of refreshment in hours of trial, rather than to the Holy Ghost, whose it is to anoint the overcomers 'with the oil of gladness.' As I was thus musing, one rose in whose utterance was an indescribable solemnity. He told of what work he had done on earth. This was the Angel who had strengthened the Lord Jesus in His agony in Gethsemane (Luke 22:43). 'O Angel of yonder Church on earth (said he), say to your Communicants—If they had been there! if they had seen one of the great drops of blood that fell on the cold ground! or one tear on that holy countenance, so marred and worn more than any man's! or had heard one groan, as He cried, "Abba, Father, if it be possible let this cup pass from Me!" they would surely come to the Communion-table with awful reverence and wonder, their tears dropt into the cup of blessing, and the broken bread wet with the weeping of grateful love. Redemption money, what a price! Redeeming love, unfathomable! O Redeemer of men! for ever be honour and glory and blessing and thanksgiving to Him that sitteth upon the throne, and to the Lamb!

VIII

By this time the fervour of the angelic assembly was gloriously intense. Everything about our Redeemer was evidently as interesting to them as to me. And forthwith the theme was continued; for the next speaker was the Angel who rolled away the stone from the door of the sepulchre (Matt. 28:2). 'I was bidden that morning to put on the brightest robe in heaven, white as the snow, and my countenance was made to shine like the lightning, on which no man could gaze. I was to be employed in some very great work that day. Soon I learnt that what was required of me was to go down to your world, and, in Joseph's garden, roll away a stone from the door of the sepulchre of your Lord and ours. Was this a work worthy of an Angel's powers, and of one so arrayed in glory? Angel of yonder Church on earth, tell your people that to do the least service to the Lord of Glory is an inconceivable privilege and joy. Let it be known to your Church-Officer let it be known to those who "keep a door" in God's house, as well as all who carry a cup of cold water to the sick, or sew garments for the poor, that no moment in my past life in heaven was to me half so sweet as was that time I sat on the rolled-away stone. I was rewarded by seeing Him come forth, breaking the bands of death; a sight so glorious that no words could describe it to men. My task was very simple: the day before two men had rolled that stone to its place, and yet this was my reward! O the joy of working for the Lord of glory! O the bliss of being permitted to serve Him in the commonest and easiest duty!

IX

I had no more than time to note down this message, when two, who had been sitting at my side, rose as if they would like to speak. They were clothed in white raiment, and were very joyous. They seemed to me the 'Peter and John' of their company. Whether or not they were the same who were seen in the sepulchre of Christ, sitting, one at the head, the other at the feet where the body of Jesus had lain, I did not learn, though somehow I understood this to be the case. Both of these made as though they would have spoken; but one gave place to the other, and, as he did so, whispered to me, 'Have not your feet stood on the Mount of Olives?' 'Yes,' I said, 'and though it is now more than thirty years ago, I never can forget that hill and its olive-trees.' 'And you were at Bethany, and you will remember well the slope down the hill that leads toward that favoured spot? It was there I and my brother Angel stood on the day he is about to speak of.' Upon this I turned to listen; and that other Angel told how, on the day of the Ascension, just when the wondrous procession was moving toward the Throne, and the glorified humanity of the Lord Jesus was beginning to light up heaven with transcendent brightness—just when the interest and rapture of the heavenly hosts had risen to a height beyond what was ever known before—a sign was made to himself and his brother Angel to leave the hosts and turn down to earth, to the Mount of Olives, that there they might deliver a brief message to eleven disciples, sorrowing because their Master had been taken from their head, at the moment when they had begun to hope that the kingdom He had taught them to look for was about to appear. 'We were (he added) for a moment startled; we almost fancied that this duty, even if very urgent, might, at any rate, have been devolved on one only, and so two need not have missed being present at that scene which can never occur again in the history of the universe, when the hosts of Angels and the redeemed around the throne witnessed the Father's welcome to His Beloved Son returning from redemption finished. O to have heard, "Sit down at My right hand!" But tell it on earth, O man of God, that forthwith we remembered His holy will! our rising regret had gone, and we went forth, our soul overflowing with delight, and with new and rarest joy. If any of your flock be at times tempted to think hardly of their all-wise God when He detains them from the Sanctuary and the Communion-table, let them know there is a joy quite peculiar and most satisfying given to those who work for God in self-denying service, or who can acquiesce in His ways. Forget not also to remind all mourners that the tender sympathy of your Lord and ours is such that, amid His own glory (glory above measure glorious !), and in the rapturous hour of

welcome to the right hand, He would comfort His sorrowing ones, and point them to the day when He shall return to wipe away all tears. And not less plainly, also, did we see that day, the Holy Ghost, the promised Comforter, in the greatness of His love, anticipate the day of Pentecost, by letting fall some drops of the oil of gladness upon the bereaved disciples.'

X

Excepting Gabriel - (as I noticed before), no one of the assembly seemed to be marked out from each other by names. All were ready to serve unnoticed by their fellows. It was no wonder, therefore, that no name was given when the Angel who had been directed to go to Samaria, and send Philip away from that city to the road which led to Gaza (Acts 8:26), said a few things about that mission. 'I learnt again that day the deep lesson of Jehovah's sovereignty. Sometime before, one of our number, when he was sent to set free the twelve Apostles (Acts 5:19), was bidden tell them to "Go and preach all the words of this life," but was not allowed himself to proclaim these words. And so it was in my own case now. I was not commissioned to give one ray of light to the Ethiopian eunuch in his sadness, but was simply bidden draw Philip away to a desert road, to meet one man, at a time when his hands were full of work in a crowded city. After delivering my message I lingered near. The Spirit directed him to go up to the chariot, and explain to the Ethiopian inquirer the words about the Lamb led to the slaughter. O man of God, when you or any of your flock are dealing with an anxious soul, remember that day. All was still on the dusty road to Gaza; all was solemn and calm in the tone of Philip; there was deep earnestness, but no boisterous energy. He set forth the simple and clear truth about the Son of God who had come to be the sin-bearer. As he was telling the story of God-man led as a lamb to the slaughter, "the Just suffering for the unjust," it pleased the Holy Spirit to touch the heart of the Ethiopian; the scales fell from his eyes. He was filled with joy—and I hastened up to my place in heaven, to share the joy which fills the heavenly courts when one sinner repenteth.'

XI

I now wondered in myself what might be the next word from the lips of these Angel workers. It was from the Angel who had been despatched to Jerusalem to open the prison and set Peter free. Reference was made to Cornelius at Caesarea (Acts 10:3), but I cannot be sure that he was the same who carried the answer of prayer to that Gentile centurion. However that may be, referring to both Cornelius and Peter, he did not fail, for my sake, to dwell upon the power of prayer, and the honour put upon it. 'Let the Lord's remembrancers know what we have been sent to do because they prayed. One man at Caesarea prayed and was heard. At Jerusalem, a little band united in the cry (Acts 12: 5, 7, 13); and let the youngest be often reminded that that little maid Rhoda's believing expectation was of no small importance in winning the answer.' Had time permitted he would have gone on; and would probably have told about his being sent to complete the answer to the prayer, by cutting off proud Herod in the noonday of his pride.

XII

There was evidently an understanding among the gathered Angels that their hour of conference was near a close. But they were all, desirous, in the exuberance of their brotherly love, that I should listen to Michael the Archangel, the leader of their host, whose very name is his banner, and declares his burning zeal for his Lord: for his name signifies, 'Who is like God?'

On rising to close the meeting, he made allusion to events in his past errands to our world, such as his contending with the Devil for the body of Moses, the man of God; but, instead of dwelling on any of these, he took up another theme. His Lord and ours had made known to him a great work in prospect, which was ever present to his thoughts, viz., not only that he was to stand up for Israel in the Latter Day (Daniel 12:1), but that he should be sent to our world, to sound the Last Trumpet at the Coming of Christ (1 Thess. 4:16). 'What a day (said he) that will be! O man of God, think often and much about it as I do, and lead others to think on it much. You will forget all toil and weariness and care and trial on that day! The workers among you, the sowers who went out weeping, bearing precious seed, shall then have their day of reaping, and their bosom filled with sheaves. The trumpet shall sound and the Son of God shall speak (John 5: 25), and the dead in Christ shall rise, and the living saints be changed, a multitude whom no man can number, in resurrection-glory, and strength, and beauty, bearing the image of the heavenly! There are many mansions in New Jerusalem; and my brother Angel here, who once led the beloved John through New Jerusalem, declares that such is the glory of the place that he scarcely wondered when the bewildered disciple fell twice at his feet as if he would worship him. "Eye has not seen, nor ear heard, nor has it entered the heart of man what your God has prepared for those that wait for Him." The city He has prepared for them is worthy of the God of grace and of glory. Angel of yonder Church on earth, hasten on to that day, and call on all your flock to hasten unto it, looking for the City, whose builder and maker is God, and for the Bright Morning Star. We are to be with Him when He comes down to you that day;

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we are to gather His elect from the four winds, and then stand round you, beholding the glory and the rapturous joy, and joining in your Songs of Jubilee. Peace, peace be with you till that hour when we shall meet again. The time is not revealed; "of that day and hour knoweth no man, neither the Angels in heaven." We understand, indeed, that now it is very near; but it shall come as a thief. Meanwhile, my beloved brother, be "steadfast, unmoveable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, forasmuch as ye know that your labour is not in vain in the Lord."