

# CHEER UP, MY DEAR FRIENDS!

Charles H. Spurgeon (1834-1892)

*“And he set the priests in their charges, and encouraged them to the service of the house of the LORD.”—2 Chronicles 35:2*

**J**OSIAH, as you remember, in the early part of his reign set his face against the idolatries that prevailed to root them out of the land. He then bent his thoughts upon repairing and beautifying the temple. After that, it was his heart’s aim to restore the sacred services, to observe the solemn feasts, and to revive the worship of God after the due order, according to the words of the book of the covenant that was found in the house of the Lord. Our text tells us something of the method with which he went to work; and it may well serve us as a model.

The first thing is to get every man into his proper place. The next thing is for every man to have a good spirit in his present place, so as to occupy it worthily. I will suppose, dear friends, that in the providence of God you are in your place, and that by the direction of God’s Spirit you have also sought and found the precise form of usefulness in which you ought to exercise yourself. Tonight, it shall not be my business to arrange you; but assuming that it is well for you to keep where you are, my object shall be to *encourage you to do your work for your Lord without being cast down*. I am hardly going to preach so much as to talk to different persons who are discouraged in the work of the Lord, that we may rouse them up, rally them round us, and encourage them to keep rank. And, first, I would speak a little,

**I. TO THOSE WHO THINK THAT THEY CAN DO NOTHING.** They will tell me that in such a sermon not a sentence can concern them: if I am to encourage men to the service of the house of the Lord, it will be in vain for them, as they can do nothing at all. Well, dear friends, you must not take that for granted. You must make quite sure that you cannot do anything before I may venture to speak to you as if it were a matter of fact—for sometimes there is a want<sup>1</sup> of way because there is a want of will. Though I do not go so far as to allege that this is your case, we know too well that “cannot” often does mean “will not,” and “not to have triumphed” may mean “*you have not tried*.” You have been so discouraged that you have excused yourself for inaction, and your inaction has grown into indolence.<sup>2</sup> If a man under the notion that he could not lift his right hand constantly kept it still, I should not wonder if after weeks and months it would become a matter of fact that he had not the power to use it. It might actually stiffen for no reason [except] he had not moved it. Do you not think that, before your muscles get rigid, it would be well to exercise them by attempting some kind of service? Especially you younger folk: if you do not work for the Lord almost as soon as you are converted, it will be very difficult afterwards to make you take to it. Aptitude,<sup>3</sup> I have often noticed, comes with employment;<sup>4</sup> through negligence and sloth, people become enervated<sup>5</sup> and helpless. You say that you cannot move your arm, and so you do not move it. Take heed, for by-and-by your *pretence* will become the *parent* of real powerlessness.

But I will take what you have said as being true. You are ill. The vigor you felt in the bright days of health fails you now. You have to suffer pain, weariness, and exhaustion. You are often detained at home; and home seems now to you a gloomy hospital all the day long, rather than a genial hostelry<sup>6</sup> when evening shadows fall. Little indeed, therefore, can you do—so little that you are apt to reckon it as nothing at all. The thought is a burden to you. You wish you could serve the Lord. How constantly you have dreamed of the pleasure since you have been denied the privilege! How willing your feet would be to run! How ready your hands would be to labor! How glad would your tongue be to testify! You envy those who are able, and you would fain<sup>7</sup> emulate and excel them—not indeed that you harbor ill will against them, but you devoutly wish that you could do some personal service in the cause of your Master.

Now, I want to encourage you first by reminding you that the Law of the Son of David is the same as the law of David himself; and you know the law of David about those that went to the battle. There were some that were lame and some that were otherwise incapable of action, and he left them with the baggage. “There,” he said, “you are very weary and ill. Stop in the camp. Take care of the tents and the ammunition, while we go and fight.” Now, it happened once on a time<sup>8</sup> that the men who went to fight claimed all the spoil. They said, “These people have done nothing! They have

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<sup>1</sup> want – lack.

<sup>2</sup> indolence – avoiding activity or exertion; laziness.

<sup>3</sup> aptitude – the quality of being fit for a purpose.

<sup>4</sup> employment – the use to which a thing is devoted.

<sup>5</sup> enervated – weakened.

<sup>6</sup> genial hostelry – cheerful lodging.

<sup>7</sup> fain – gladly.

<sup>8</sup> once on a time – at a certain time in the past.

been lying in the trenches. They shall not carry off a share of the booty.” But King David there and then made a law that they should share and share equally—those that were in the trenches and those that engaged in the fray.<sup>9</sup> “As his part is that goeth down to the battle, so shall his part be that tarrieth by the stuff: they shall part alike. And it was so from that day forward, that he made it a statute and an ordinance for Israel unto this day” (1Sa 30:24-25). Nor is the Law of the Son of David less gracious. If by sickness you are detained at home—if for any other reason, such as age or infirmity, you are not able to enter into actual service—yet if you are a true soldier and would fight if you could and your heart is in it, you shall share even with the best and bravest of those who, clad in the panoply<sup>10</sup> of God, encounter and grapple with the adversary.

Brethren, you have no reason to envy—though you may admire to your heart’s content—all that are diligent and successful in the service of Christ. Let me remind you of a Law of the Kingdom of Heaven with which you are all familiar: “He that receiveth a prophet in the name of a prophet shall receive a prophet’s reward” (Mat 10:41). In truth, it is a splendid appointment to be a servant of the Lord. David thought so, for you often read at the commencement of his psalms, “A prayer of David, the servant of God,” though you never read, “A prayer of David, the King of Israel”—for he thought more of being enrolled a servant of God than of being entitled a king of Israel. Health and strength, ability and opportunity, to fulfill a mission for the Master are much to be desired, but these are not always to be taken as reliable evidence of personal salvation. A man may preach admirably, and he may work marvels in the church, and yet not be a partaker of saving grace. Hence, when the disciples came back from preaching and said, “Lord, even the devils are subject unto us through thy name,” the Lord said, “Notwithstanding in this rejoice not...but rather rejoice, because your names are written in heaven” (Luk 10:17, 20). Judas was amongst them; Judas cast out devils; Judas preached the Gospel—and yet Judas was a son of perdition<sup>11</sup> and is lost forever. Because you cannot do much, you must not infer that therefore you are not saved; for if you were to be among the chief of Christian workers, it would not prove that you were certainly a child of God. Do not fret, then, because you are shut out from the cheerful activities in which others share. For as long as your name is written in heaven and your heart truly follows after the Lord, you shall have an abundant recompense at the last great Day,<sup>12</sup> even though here you are doomed to be a sufferer rather than a worker.

But to me it seems more than possible that some of you, dear friends, whose minds are tinged with melancholy, have painted your own lot in deeper shades than the justice of the case deserves. Is your life indeed a dull routine, which, for lack of busy change and lively enterprise, leaves no record behind? Not so, methinks. “The rich relics of a well-spent hour”<sup>13</sup> do sometimes pour around your path a stream of light that cheers our eyes, though it may escape your notice. Are you patient under your sufferings? Do you try to keep the flesh in subjection, to govern your spirit, to refrain from murmuring, and to foster cheerfulness? That, my friend, is doing a great deal. I am sure that the holy serenity of a suffering child of God is one of the best sermons that can ever be preached in a family. A sick saint has often been more serviceable in a house than the most eloquent divine could have been. They see how sweetly you submit to the divine will, how patiently you can bear painful operations, how the Lord gives you songs in the night. Why, you are greatly useful. I have sometimes been called to visit bedridden persons who have been unable to rise for many, many years; and it has been within my knowledge that their influence has extended over whole parishes. They have been known as poor, pious women or as experienced Christian men, and many have gone to visit them. Christian ministers have said that they derived more benefit from sitting half-an-hour talking to poor, old Betsy than they did from all the books in their library, and yet Betsy said that she was doing nothing. Look at your case in that light, and you will see that you can praise God upon your bed and make your chamber to be as vocal for God as this pulpit ever can be.

Besides, dear friends, do you not think we frequently limit our estimate of serving God to the public exercises of the sanctuary and forget the strong claims that our Lord has upon our private fidelity and obedience? You say, “I cannot serve God,” when you cannot teach in the school or preach in the pulpit, when you are unable to sit on a committee or speak on a platform—as if these were the only forms of service to be taken into account. Do you not think that a mother nursing her baby is serving God? Do you not think that men and women going about their daily toil with patient industry discharging the duties of domestic life are serving God? If you think rightly, you will understand that they are. The servant sweeping the room, the mistress preparing the meal, the workman driving a nail, the merchant casting up his ledger, ought to do all in the service of God. Though, of course, it is very desirable that we should each and all have some definitely religious work before us, yet it is much better that we should hallow<sup>14</sup> our common handicraft and make

<sup>9</sup> **fray** – battle.

<sup>10</sup> **panoply** – complete armor or defense.

<sup>11</sup> **perdition** – complete ruin and destruction.

<sup>12</sup> See *Free Grace Broadcaster* 210, “Day of Judgment,” available from CHAPEL LIBRARY.

<sup>13</sup> Samuel Rogers, “The Pleasures of Memory, Part 2” in *The Pleasures of Memory and Other Poems* (London: Thomas Bensley, 1802).

<sup>14</sup> **hallow** – set apart as sacred to God.

our ordinary work chime with the melodies of a soul attuned for heaven. *Let true religion be our life, and then our life will be true religion.* That is how it ought to be. “Whatsoever ye do in word or deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks unto God and the Father by him” (Col 3:17). So, then, let the stream of your common life as it flows on—obscure, unobserved—be holy and courageous. You will find that while “they also serve who only stand and wait,” you shall not be neglected or overlooked who simply sit at Jesus’ feet and listen to His words when you can do no more. This is service done for Him that He can appreciate, complain who may.

Know, too, my dear sister, that by thy sorrows the Lord has drawn out thy sympathies. Thou, my dear brother, know that by the discipline that has chastened thee, thou hast learned to be a comforter. Say you, then, that you cannot do anything? I know a few secrets about you that you forget. You do not reckon yourself up as we reckon you. Did you not try to cheer a poor neighbor the other day by telling of the Lord’s goodness to you when you were very sick yourself? How started from your eye that tear most sacred shed for a fellow-creature’s pain? Is it not your habit, poor sufferer as you are, to let drop just a few words for your Master to others in a like condition whenever you can? You tell me that you cannot do anything. Why, dear hearts, the refreshing of God’s saints is one of the highest works in which anyone can be occupied! God will send prophets to His ser-vants at times when they need to be rebuked. If He wants to comfort them, He generally sends an angel to them; for that is angel’s work. Jesus Christ Himself, we read, had angels sent to minister to Him. When? Was it not in the garden of Gethsemane, when He was bowed down with sorrow? Comforting is not ordinary work: it is a kind of angelic work. “There appeared an angel unto him...strengthening him” (Luk 22:43). A prophet was sent to warn the Israelites of their sin; but when a Gideon was to be encouraged to go and fight for his country, it was the angel of the Lord that came to him. So I gather that comforting work is angel’s work.

You, dear, kind Christian men and women, who think that you are not able to do anything but to condole<sup>15</sup> or to console with cheery words some souls cast down and sore dismayed, you are fulfilling a most blessed office and doing work that many ministers find it difficult to perform. I have known some who have never known suffering or ill health, and when they try to comfort God’s weary people, they are dreadfully awkward over it. They are like elephants picking up pins: they can do it, but it is with a wonderful<sup>16</sup> effort! God’s tried people comfort each other *con amore*;<sup>17</sup> they take to the work as a fish to water. They understand the art of speaking a word in season to him that is weary; and when this is the case, they may not complain that they are doing nothing.

Yet, beloved, you who thought that you did nothing and now perceive that you are useful will, I hope, perceive that there is still a wider region into which you may advance. Breathe tonight the prayer of Jabez, who was more honorable than his brethren were because he was the child of his mother’s sorrow. And this was the prayer: “Oh that thou wouldest bless me indeed, and enlarge my coast” (1Ch 4:10)! Ask God to open up to you a larger region of usefulness, and He will do it. Now let me address a few words to another class of workers,

**II. TO THOSE WHO THINK THAT THEY ARE LAID ASIDE.** “Dear Sir,” says one, “I wish you would encourage me. I used to be useful once. At least, I was recognized as one of a band of men who worked together right heartily—but since I have changed my residence, I am unknown in the neighborhood where I am living, and I seem to have dropped out of the ranks. I have done little or nothing lately, and I feel uneasy about it. I wish that I could get to work.” My dear brother, I hope you will. But do not waste five minutes in thinking it over. These times need so much Christian effort that when a man asks me, “How shall I do work for Christ?” I am accustomed to say, “Go and do it.” “But what is the way to do it?” Start at once. Get at it, my brother. Do not be out of harness a minute. But suppose that you are obliged to desist awhile: do not let your interest in the cause of our Lord and Master decline. Some of the best of God’s workers have been laid aside for long periods. Moses was forty years in the desert, doing nothing. A greater than he, our blessed Savior Himself, was thirty years—I will not say doing nothing, but certainly doing no public work. When you are in a retired and inactive position, be preparing for the time when God brings you out again. If you are put away on the shelf, do not rust there; but pray the Master to brighten you up so that when He comes to use you again, you may be fully fitted for the work that He has in hand for you.

While you must be laid aside, I want you to do this: pray for others that are at work. Help them. Encourage them. Do not get into that peevish,<sup>18</sup> miserable frame of mind that grudges and undervalues other men’s works. Be not like the dog in the manger. Some people, when they cannot do anything themselves, do not like anybody else to be diligent and laborious. Say, “If I cannot help, I will never hinder, but I will cheer my brethren.”

<sup>15</sup> **condole** – to express sympathy with another in his affliction.

<sup>16</sup> **wonderful** – very great.

<sup>17</sup> *con amore* – Italian: with love.

<sup>18</sup> **peevish** – easily annoyed or irritated.