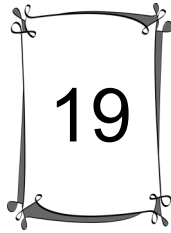


The background of the cover is a photograph of a scenic landscape. A paved road curves through a valley, bordered by a fence. To the left, a railway track with overhead power lines runs parallel to the road. The trees are in autumn, with yellow and orange leaves. In the distance, a large mountain peak is visible under a cloudy sky. The entire image is framed by a green border with rounded corners.

Sermons of Robert Murray M'Cheyne

**19. The Sword Over the
Ungodly**

Sermons
of
Robert Murray
M'Cheyne



The Sword Over the
Ungodly

“A sword, a sword is sharpened, and also furbished: it is sharpened to make a sore slaughter; it is furbished that it may glitter: should we then make mirth? it contemneth the rod of my son, as every tree.” Ezekiel. 21:9, 10.

From the second verse of this chapter we learn that this prophecy was directed against Jerusalem: “Son of man, set thy face toward Jerusalem, and drop thy word toward the holy places, and prophesy against the land of Israel.”

We have already told you that Ezekiel, while yet a youth, was carried captive by Nebuchadnezzar, and placed, with a number of his countrymen, by the river of Chebar. It was there that he delivered his prophecies during a space of twenty-two years. The prophecy I have read was delivered in the seventh year of his captivity, and just three years before Jerusalem was destroyed and the temple burnt. From verse 2, we learn that these words were directed against Jerusalem; for though God had taken Ezekiel away to minister to the captives by the river of Chebar, yet He made him send many a message of warning and of mercy to his beloved Jerusalem. “Son of man, set thy face toward Jerusalem, and drop thy word toward the holy places, and prophesy against the land of Israel.”

God had already fulfilled many of the words of his prophets against Jerusalem. He had fulfilled the word of Jeremiah against one of their kings (Jehoiakim). “He shall be buried with the burial of an ass: drawn and cast forth beyond the walls of Jerusalem.” He had fulfilled the word of the same prophet in carrying another king (Jehoiakin) to Babylon with all the goodly vessels of the house of the Lord. But still neither prophecies nor judgments would awaken Jerusalem; so that we are told (2 Chron. 36:12) that Zedekiah, the next king, “did that which was evil in the sight of the Lord his God, and humbled not himself before Jeremiah the prophet, speaking from the mouth of the Lord.” Verses 14–16: “Moreover, all the chief of the priests and

the people transgressed very much, after all the abominations of the heathen; and polluted the house of the Lord, which he had hallowed in Jerusalem. And the Lord God of their fathers sent to them by his messengers, rising up betimes, and sending; because He had compassion on his people, and on his dwelling-place: but they mocked the messengers of God, and despised his works, and misused his prophets, until the wrath of the Lord arose against his people, till there was no remedy.”

It was in a time of great hardness and impenitence in Jerusalem that the prophecy before me was delivered, and just three years before the wrath of God was poured on them to the uttermost. *First*, All was mirth and sensuality in Jerusalem. *Second*, The false prophets prophesied peace, and the people loved to have it so. *Third*, There was no noise but that of revelry within the devoted city. But in the midst of that din and revelry, the lone prophet by the river of Chebar heard the muttering of the distant thunder. The faithful servant of God saw God arming himself as a mighty man for the war, and the glittering sword of vengeance in his hand, and he calls aloud to his countrymen, all at ease, with awakening thunders, “A sword, a sword is sharpened, and also furbished: it is sharpened to make a sore slaughter; it is furbished that it may glitter: should we then make mirth?”

My friends, those of you who are unconverted are in the very same situation as Jerusalem was. In the years that are now fled like the mists of the morning, how many messages have you had from God! How many times has He sent his messengers to you, rising up early and sending them! His Bible has been in your houses, a silent but most mighty pleader for God; his providence has been in your families, in sickness and death, in plenty or poverty, — all, all beseeching you to flee from the wrath to come, — all, all beseeching you to cleave to the Lord Jesus, the only, the all-sufficient Saviour. All these messages

have come to you, and you are yet unconverted — still dead, dry bones, without Christ and without God in the world; and you are saying, Soul, take thine ease, eat and drink and be merry. But do, my friends, hearken once more, for God does not wish any to perish. I have a word from God unto thee: “A sword, a sword is sharpened, and also furbished: it is sharpened to make a sore slaughter; it is furbished that it may glitter: should we then make mirth?”

Doctrine.—It is very unreasonable in unconverted persons to make mirth.

1. It is unreasonable, *because they are under condemnation.*

The sword is sharpened, and also furbished. It is sharpened to make a sore slaughter; it is furbished that it may glitter. Should we then make mirth? There is a common idea that men are under probation, as Adam was, and that Christless persons will not be condemned till the judgment; but this is not the case. The Bible says, “He that believeth not is condemned already.” “He that hath not the Son shall not see life, but the wrath of God abideth on him.” “Cursed is every one [not shall be] who continueth not in all things written in the book of the law to do them.” Christless souls are at present in the horrible pit, every mouth is stopped, and they are guilty before God. They are in prison, ready to be brought out to execution. Therefore, when God sends us to preach to Christless persons, He calls it “preaching to the spirits in prison,” that is, who are under condemnation. The sword is not only unsheathed, it is sharpened and furbished. It is held over their heads.

Should they then make mirth? It is unreasonable in a condemned malefactor to make mirth. Would it not greatly shock every feeling mind to see a company of men condemned to die, meeting and making merry, talking lightly and jestingly, as if the sword was not over them? Yet this is the case of those of you who are unconverted and yet live lives of mirth. You have been

tried in the balance and found wanting. You have been condemned by the righteous Judge. Your sentence is past. You are now in prison; neither can you break out of this prison: the sword is whetted and drawn over you. And oh! is it not most unreasonable to make mirth? Is it not most unreasonable to be happy and contented with yourself and merry with your friends? Is it not madness to sing the song of the drunkard? “Eat, drink, and be merry, for to-morrow we die.”

2. Because God's instruments of destruction are all ready.

Not only are Christless persons condemned already, but the instruments of their destruction are prepared and quite ready. The sword of vengeance is sharpened, and also furbished. When swords are kept in the armoury, they are kept blunt, that the rust may not hurt their edge; but when work is to be done, and they are taken out for the slaughter, then they are furbished and sharpened, — made sharp and glittering. So it is with the sword of the executioner: when not in use, it is kept blunt; but when work is to be done, it is sharpened and made ready. It is sharpened and furbished just before the blow is struck, that it may cut clean. So is it with God's sword of vengeance. It is not sheathed and blunt, — it is sharpened and furbished, — it is quite ready to do its work, — it is quite ready for a sore slaughter. The disease by which every unconverted man is to die is quite ready, — it is perhaps in his veins at this very moment. The accident by which he is to drop into eternity is quite ready, — all the parts and means of it are arranged. The arrow that is to strike him is on the string, — perhaps it has left the string, and is even now flying towards him.

The place in hell is quite ready for every unconverted soul. When Judas died, the Scripture says, “he went to his own place.” It was his own place before he went there, being quite prepared and ready for him. As when a man retires at night to his sleeping room, it is said he has gone to his own room, so a

place in hell is quite ready for every Christless person. It is his own place. When the rich man died and was buried, he was immediately in his own place. He found everything ready. He lifted up his eyes in hell, being in torments. So hell is quite ready for every Christless person. It was prepared, long ago, for the devil and his angels. The fires are all quite ready, and fully lighted and burning.

Ah! should Christless souls then make mirth? A malefactor might perhaps say that he would be merry as long as the scaffold was not erected on which he was to die. But if he were told that the scaffold was quite ready, — that the sword was sharpened, and the executioner standing ready, — oh! would it not be madness to make mirth? Alas! this is your madness, poor Christless soul. You are not only condemned, but the sword is sharpened and ready that is to smite your soul; and yet you can be happy, and dream away your days and nights in pleasures that perish in the using. The disease is ready, the accident is ready, the arrow is on the string, the grave is ready, yea, hell itself is ready, your own place is made ready; and yet you can make mirth! You can play games and enjoy company! How truly is your laughter like the crackling of thorns under a pot: a flashy blaze, and then the blackness of darkness for ever!

3. *The sword may come down at any one moment.*

Not only are Christless persons condemned already, and not only is the sword of vengeance quite ready, but the sword may come down at any one moment. It is not so with malefactors; their day is fixed and told them, so that they can count their time. If they have many days, they make merry to-day at least, and begin to be serious to-morrow. But not so Christless persons; their day is fixed, but it is not told them. It may be this very moment. Ah! should they then make mirth?

Some malefactors have been found very stout-hearted to the very last. Many have received their sentence quite unmoved, and

with a determined countenance. Some have even gone to the scaffold quite unmoved; some even with a light, careless spirit. But when the head is laid down upon the block, — when the eyes are covered, and the neck laid bare, — when the glittering sword is lifted high in the air, and may come down any one moment,— that is a dreadful time of suspense. It would be very horrible to see a man in a light careless spirit at that time. Oh! it would be madness to be merry then. Alas! this is your madness, poor Christless soul. You are not only condemned, and not only is the sword ready, but it may fall on you at any one moment. Your head is, as it were, on the block. Your neck is bared before God, and the whetted sword is held over you; and yet can you make mirth? Can you take up your mind with business and worldly things, and getting rich, building and planting, and this night your soul may be required of you? Can you fill up your time with games and amusements, and foolish books and entertaining companions? Can you fill up your hours after work with loose talk and wanton behaviour, adding sin to sin, treasuring up wrath against the day of wrath, when you know not what hour the wrath of God may come upon you to the uttermost? Can you go prayerless to your bed at night, your mind filled with dark and horrid imaginations not fit to be named, and yet you may be in hell before the morning? A sword, a sword; it is furbished!

4. *Because God has made no promise to Christless souls to stay his hand one moment.*

All the promises of God are yea and amen, that is, they are true. He always fulfils his promises. But the same scripture says they are “yea and amen *in Christ Jesus.*” All God’s promises are made to Christ, and to sinners that cleave to Christ. I believe that it is impossible, in the nature of things, that God would make a promise to an unconverted man. Accordingly, all God’s promises are made to Christ, and to every sinner that cleaves on

to Christ. But unconverted persons are those who have never come to Christ; therefore there are no promises made to them. God nowhere promises to make them anxious. He nowhere promises to bring them to Christ. He nowhere promises to keep them one moment out of hell. "Should they then make mirth?"

Let me speak to Christless persons who are at ease. Many of you hearing me may know that you are in a Christless state; and yet you know that you are at ease and happy. Why is this? It is because you hope to be brought to Christ before you die. You say, Another day will do as well, and I will hear thee again of this matter; and therefore you take your ease now. But this is very unreasonable. It is not worthy of a rational being to act in this way. God has nowhere promised to bring you to Christ before you die. God has laid himself under no manner of obligation to you. He has nowhere promised that you shall see to-morrow, or that you shall hear another sermon. There is a day near at hand when you shall not see a to-morrow. If this be not the last, there is a sermon yet to be preached which will be the last you will ever hear.

Let me speak to Christless persons who are anxious about their souls. Some hearing me know that they are in a Christless condition, and this made them anxious; and yet it is to be feared some are losing that anxiety, and now going back to the mirth of the world. Why is this? This is most unreasonable. If you are still out of Christ, however anxious you have been, remember God has made no promises to save you. The sword is still over you, furbished and sharpened. Ah! do not then make mirth. Strive to enter in at the strait gate. Take the kingdom of heaven by violence. Press into it. Never rest till you are in the bonds of the covenant. Then be as happy as the day is long.

5. It is a sore slaughter: "A sword! a sword!"

First, Sore, because it will be on all who are Christless.

The dreadfulness of the slaughter in Jerusalem was, that all

were slain, both old and young. The command which the prophet heard was (Ezekiel 9:5), “Go ye through the city, and smite. Let not your eye spare, neither have ye pity. Slay utterly old and young, both maids and little children and women; but come not near any man upon whom is the mark.” Such is the sore slaughter waiting on unconverted souls. All Christless persons will perish, young and old. God will not spare, neither will his eye pity. Think of this, *old grey-headed persons*, that have lived in sin, and never come to Christ; if you die thus, you will certainly perish in the sore slaughter. Think of this, *middle-aged persons*, hard-working merchants and labourers, who make money, but do not sell all for the pearl of great price. Think of this, ye *Marthas*, who are careful and troubled about many things, but who forget the one thing that is needful, you also will fall in the sore slaughter. Think of this, *young persons*, who live without prayer, yet in mirth and jollity; you that meet to jest and be happy on Sabbath evenings; you that walk in the sight of your own eyes, — you, too, will fall in that sore slaughter. Think of this, *little children*, you that are the pride of your mother’s heart, but who have gone astray from the womb, speaking lies. Little children who are fond of your plays, but are not fond of coming to Jesus Christ, who is the Saviour of little children, the sword will come on you also. Oh! it is a sore slaughter that will not spare the young, nor the lovely, nor the kind — the gentle mother and affectionate child — the widow and her only son. Should you then make mirth? Unconverted families, when you meet in the evening to jest and sport with one another, ask this one question, Should we make mirth? Is your mirth reasonable? Is it worthy of rational beings? Unconverted companions, who meet so often for mirth and amusement, should you make mirth together when you are in such a case? Ah! how dismal will the contrast be when God says, Bind them in bundles to burn them!

Second, Sore slaughter because the sword is the sword of God.

If it were only the sword of man that is furbished and sharpened for the slaughter, it would not be very terrible. But it is the sword of Almighty God, and therefore it is very terrible. “Fear not them that kill the body, but after that have no more that they can do. But I will forewarn you whom ye shall fear: Fear Him, who after He hath killed the body, is able to cast body and soul into hell; yea, I say unto you, fear Him.” If it were the sword of man, it could reach only to the body; but, ah! it is the sword of God, and the iron will enter into the soul. It is the same sword that appeared in the garden of Eden, — “a flaming sword, that turned every way to keep the way of the tree of life.” It is the same sword which pierced the side of Jesus Christ in his agony.

“Awake, O sword, against my Shepherd, and against the man that is my fellow, saith the Lord of Hosts: I will smite the Shepherd, and the sheep shall be scattered.” It is that sword of which Christ speaks, when He says, “It shall cut him asunder, and appoint him his portion with hypocrites: there shall be wailing and gnashing of teeth.”

Dear brethren, it is not a few flesh wounds that that sword will make. It will cut asunder,—it will be a death-blow,—eternal death. It is a death which body and soul will be always dying, yet never dead.

(1). *Let me speak to the old.*

There may be some hearing me in whom these three things meet, namely, that they are old, and Christless, and full of mirth. Oh! if there be such hearing me, consider your ways, — consider if your mirth be worthy of a rational being. I have shown you plainly out of the Scriptures what your case is: *First*, That you are condemned already. *Second*, That God’s sword is ready. *Third*, That it may come down any moment. *Fourth*, That

God has made you no promise to stay his hand. And, *Fifth*, That it will be a sore slaughter. Consider, then, if it be reasonable to believe a lie, — to deceive your own soul, and say, Peace, peace, when there is no peace. In the ordinary course of things, you must soon go the way of all living, — you must be gathered to your fathers; and then all that I have said will be fulfilled. Should you then make mirth? Are you tottering on the brink of hell, and yet living prayerless and Christless, and playing yourself with straws, — telling over the oft-repeated tale of youth, and laughing over the oft-repeated jest? Alas! what a depth of meaning was there in the word of Solomon! “I said of laughter, It is mad; and of mirth, What doeth it? Even in laughter the heart is sorrowful, and the end of that mirth is heaviness.”

(2). *Let me speak to the young.*

There may be many hearing me in whom these three things meet: They are young in years, far from Christ, and yet full of mirth. Now, my dear friends, I entreat you to consider whether your mirth is reasonable. The sword is sharpened for a sore slaughter. Should you then make mirth?

Objection 1. Youth is the time for mirth.

Answer. I know well youth is the time for mirth. The young lamb is a happy creature as it springs about on the green pasture. The young kid leaps from rock to rock with liveliest glee. The young horse casts its heels high in the air, full of life and activity. But then they have no sin, and you have; they have no hell, and you have. If you will come to Jesus Christ now, and be freed from wrath, ah! then you will find that youth is the time for mirth, — youth is the time for enjoying sweet peace in the bosom, and liveliest intercourse with God, and brightest hopes of glory.

Objection 2. You would have us to be gloomy and sad.

Answer. God forbid. All that I maintain is, that until you are come to Christ, your mirth is mad and unreasonable. If you will come to Christ, then be as happy as you will; there are no bounds to your joy there, for you will joy in God. And when you die, you will come to fullness of joy in his presence, and pleasures at his right hand for evermore.

Objection 3. If I be Christless, it will not bring me into Christ to be sad, and therefore I may as well be merry.

Answer. True, to be sad will not bring you into Christ; and yet, if you were really awakened to cry to God, peradventure He would hear your cry. If you were striving to enter in, you might find entrance. If you were pressing into the kingdom, you might take it by violence. Seek meekness, seek righteousness. It may be ye shall be hid in the day of the Lord's anger. If you stay where you are, you are sure to be lost. If you live on in carnal security, in mirth and jollity, while you are out of Christ, you are sure to perish.

“Rejoice, O young man, in thy youth, and let thy heart cheer thee in the days of thy youth, and walk in the ways of thine heart, and in the sight of thine eyes; but know thou that for all these things God will bring thee into judgment.”

