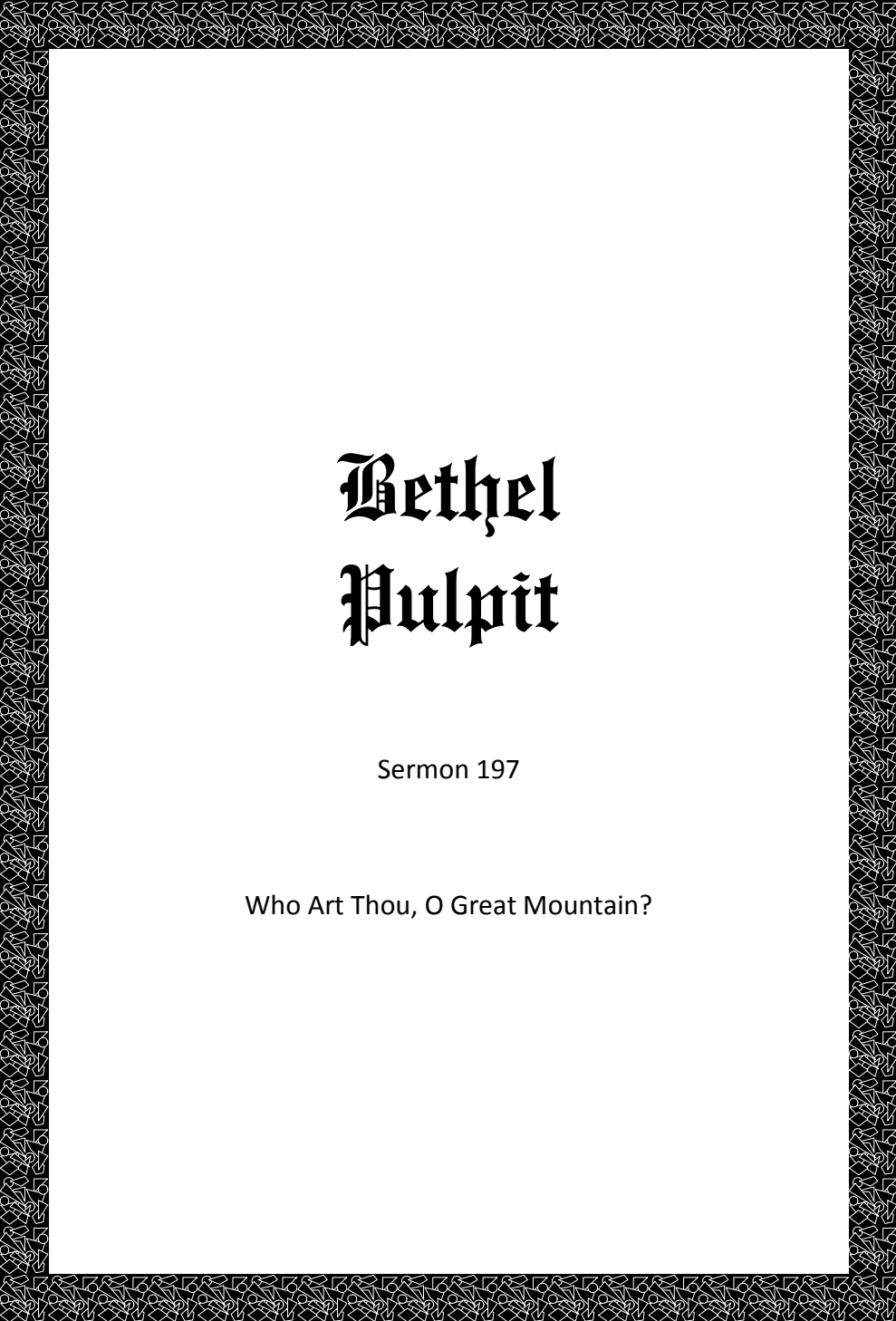




Bethel Pulpit

Sermon 197

Who Art Thou, O Great Mountain?

**Sermon preached at Bethel Chapel, Luton,
by Mr. B. A. Ramsbottom,
on Lord's day evening, 25th November, 2001**

Text: *"Who art thou, O great mountain? before Zerubbabel thou shalt become a plain: and he shall bring forth the headstone thereof with shoutings, crying, Grace, grace unto it" (Zechariah 4. 7).*

No doubt most of you have heard me speak from this word before, or if not from this word, from the chapter. Also you must have heard me quote this verse on many occasions. I think there is hardly a verse in Scripture that I think of more than this. I mean every weekend, almost without exception, the services of the Lord's house, this great mountain, too great for me. But then, "Who art thou, O great mountain?" The Lord's blessed ability to deal with mountains, to make them into plains. You know what we mean by mountains: these things which are too hard for us, too great for us, troubles, difficulties, problems, sorrows, perplexities, obstacles in the way, mountains. The point is, it is so easy for our great and gracious God to take these mountains and to remove them out of the way, whatever they are.

"Who art thou?" I do not take this to be a question. I take it to be a challenge. "Who art thou, O great mountain?" It does not matter what the trouble, the problem, the difficulty is. It does not matter what it is. It does not matter how great it is. "Who art thou, O great mountain? before Zerubbabel thou shalt become a plain." I suppose many of you here this evening have your various mountains that are too great, too high for you. You cannot see any way over them or through them or round them. You fear they are going to fall on top of you, crush you, kill you. "Who art thou?" The mountain too great for you, too great for me, but not for our God. And there is a promise. "Who art thou, O great mountain? before Zerubbabel thou shalt become a plain."

And now with the Lord's help I should like to bring this beautiful word before you in three different ways. First of all, as it stands here in the Word of God in this text, and the things that were happening at the time, and what this literal mountain is. That is the first thing. And then secondly, is there any spiritual application of it? We find throughout Scripture we have the church of God compared to a building made of living stones, and there are these mountains in the way, but the Lord will

remove them. That is the second thing. The third thing: these great mountains that you and I come face to face with personally.

I. Well then, “Who art thou, O great mountain? before Zerubbabel thou shalt become a plain.” Now who was Zerubbabel? At that time there was no king over Israel, no king over Judah, but Zerubbabel belonged to the royal line. Actually, the Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ was descended from Zerubbabel. Zerubbabel was a prince of the house of Judah, and at the time he was the governor, the ruler of God’s ancient people. That is Zerubbabel. But at this time he had an insurmountable, impossible problem, this great mountain. Under Zerubbabel a little remnant had returned from Babylon where the Jews had been held captive, and they had begun the rebuilding of the temple in Jerusalem. The foundation had been laid and they had once again begun building the temple which lay in ruins. Without going into great detail, the temple at Jerusalem meant so much to a godly Israelite. There was a high priest there. There was a sacrifice there. There was precious blood there. There was a lamb there. There was incense there. There was intercession there. So the temple meant so much to a godly Israelite. But now that work, and it was God’s own work, had come to a complete standstill. It seemed that the work of God had come to an end. It seemed that Satan had triumphed. It was about sixteen years and there was not a single stone had been laid. There was the foundation and the beginning of the building, but what was happening? Nothing. That was the great mountain before Zerubbabel. It was his work to see that the temple was built, but there was no way the temple could be built; it was impossible.

Why had the work ceased? Why was the temple not being built? Really, for two reasons. First of all, there had come a decree from Babylon, from the mighty ruler of Babylon, that the work must cease. Secondly, the people had no desire to go on with the building. It was too much difficulty, too much trouble, too much bother. You see this insurmountable problem. Beloved friends, it was God’s purpose that this temple should be built, that this temple should be finished, and that Zerubbabel should be in charge, that he should do it. “Who art thou, O great mountain?” You say, It is impossible. We have a commandment from Babylon on pain of death. We are not allowed to work. But even if the people were allowed to work, they had no mind. “Who art thou, O great mountain? before Zerubbabel thou shalt become a plain.” That mountain of difficulties, obstacles, problems is going to be completely

taken out of the way. God is going to do it. “And he” – that is Zerubbabel – “shall bring forth the headstone.” He has seen the foundation laid and he is going to see the topstone put in its place, and the people with joy shouting, “Grace, grace unto it,” which literally came to pass very, very soon after this, and which is faithfully recorded in the Book of Ezra chapter 6 when there were those shoutings as the headstone was put in its place.

How was it possible? What happened? Well, first of all the Lord stirred up the spirit of the people, and though they had all the power of Babylon against them, they began to build. What did their enemies do? They appealed to Babylon that the work should be stopped. The answer came back, surprisingly, that anyone who sought to stop the work should be put to death. Their enemies had to help them. Really, it was a miracle. Is there anything God cannot do? “Behold, I am the Lord, the God of all flesh: is there any thing too hard for Me?” That is what it means in the context here. Zechariah was the prophet who, along with Haggai, God sent to the people to stir them up to work. This was the prophecy of what was going to take place, and it was fulfilled within a few months afterwards. “Who art thou, O great mountain? before Zerubbabel thou shalt become a plain.” How? “Not by might, nor by power, but by My Spirit, saith the Lord of hosts.” What? “The hands of Zerubbabel have laid the foundation of this house; his hands shall also finish it.” “He shall bring forth the headstone thereof with shoutings, crying, Grace, grace unto it.”

Now let us leave the historical side, though I do think it is right and important that these things should be put in their proper setting if we are rightly to divide the Word of truth and to seek the mind of the Spirit in it.

II. Now the second thing, the spiritual significance of this. Sometimes our young people will ask the question; more often enemies of the truth will ask the question: This is something that happened in ancient Jewish history; what has it to do with us today? What right have we to spiritualise it? Well, there are a few answers to that. One is that the Word of God is a spiritual Book, and you find constantly, again and again, these ancient prophets were speaking of what was taking place, and suddenly they were transported in their thoughts to gospel times. There is so much of Christ in the Book of Zechariah, and the New Testament confirms it in quite a number of places, clearly tells us that what is written in the Book of Zechariah is coming to pass in the life of the Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.

There are other things. If this is just a wonderful account of the building of the temple, it does not mean too much to us – only that God will have the last Word, He will accomplish His purpose. But when you come to other parts of Scripture, and especially to the Epistles, how often you have the church of God compared to a building, the foundation laid, Christ! “Other foundation can no man lay than that is laid, which is Jesus Christ.” These living stones being hewn out of the quarry of nature, shaped, fitted, fashioned, each put in their place, the temple daily rising higher.

There is another thing, though. There are many things said concerning Zerubbabel in the Old Testament which were never literally filled in him, but which must belong to the Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. Let me mention just one of them. “In that day, saith the Lord of hosts” – this is Almighty God speaking – “will I take thee, O Zerubbabel, My servant ... and will make thee as a signet: for I have chosen thee, saith the Lord of hosts.” The signet ring on the hand of Almighty God. Of course, the point of the signet ring was that husbands wore a signet ring with their wife’s name engraven on it. The point of a signet ring, it was engraven with the name of the person loved most. The name on God’s signet ring is Zerubbabel’s greater Son, the Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. So I have no hesitation in speaking of this word concerning the Saviour, our heavenly Zerubbabel. As we sing,

“Our Saviour, by free grace alone,
His building shall complete;
With shouting bring forth the head stone,
Crying, Grace, grace to it.”

The foundation of the church of God is laid in the everlasting purposes of God in the covenant of grace; deeply laid when the Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ died; personally laid in the hearts of every sinner saved by grace. “Behold, I lay in Zion for a foundation a stone, a tried stone, a precious corner stone, a sure foundation: he that believeth shall not make haste.” “They trust their whole salvation here, nor shall they suffer shame.” So this building is being erected. Every elect, redeemed soul is a living stone in the building, hewn out of the quarry of nature, fitted and shaped and fashioned, blessed with repentance and faith, taught their need of the Saviour, graciously drawn. When Solomon’s temple was being built, we are told there was not the sound of a hammer or chisel heard. Of

course, literally how it took place, the work was done right away from the temple. But the spiritual significance is that this is a secret, silent, inward work of the Spirit of God in sinners' hearts. "Not by might, nor by power, but by My Spirit, saith the Lord of hosts."

So since Adam fell, this work has been going on. The first living stone was Abel, a sinner redeemed with blood, saved by grace, and he was laid in his place in the building. You think of all the multitude, ten thousand times ten thousand, but they are all resting their weight upon the same foundation, and, "They all declare, I nothing am, my life is bound up in the Lamb." If you are one of them, you will be on the foundation. "No help in self, on firmer ground they stood; their only hope was in the Saviour's blood." The great thing is to be a living stone in this spiritual house, the church of God.

Now God's work is going on. There are times when it has gone on more rapidly; there are times when it seemed to be at a standstill; but none of God's purposes have ever been overthrown and none ever will. God's work is going on, and this building is higher tonight than it has ever been since Adam fell, and there are still living stones being added. How many living stones there are still to be added to the building we do not know, but when the last living stone is hewn out, fitted, put in its place, then the angel shall declare that time shall be no longer. This is the only reason the world exists, until this glorious temple is complete. And,

"O what a sweet, exalted song
Shall rend the vaulted skies,
When shouting, 'Grace,' the blood-washed throng
Shall see the topstone rise!"

"And He shall bring forth the headstone thereof with shoutings, crying, Grace, grace unto it."

O but this great mountain, the opposition of Satan, the unwillingness of our carnal hearts by nature, our sin and guilt and shame, our unbelief, the opposition of the world, the allurements of the world. O there is this mountain of opposition to God's work going on, God's work being continued and God's work being completed. Now, "Who art thou, O great mountain?" What art thou before our God and Saviour? "He shall bring forth the headstone thereof with shoutings, crying, Grace, grace unto

it.” “The hands of Zerubbabel have laid the foundation of this house; his hands shall also finish it.”

The point I would press you on tonight is this: whether you and I are living stones, if we have ever been built in this spiritual building, this spiritual temple. Not everybody who attends a chapel, not everyone who attends the services, are part of this glorious building. I have often said this, and it is solemn, but I repeat it. You may watch a building going up and you are interested to see it being erected. There is all the scaffolding, and you can see more scaffolding than building, and the scaffolding rises higher than the building; but it is never part of the building. It is never built on the foundation. When the building is complete, what happens to the scaffolding? Well, it is not needed any more. It has served its purpose, and it is taken away. It is discarded. Now how many of us here tonight, in the great day will prove to be nothing but scaffolding? We were there side by side with the temple, the living stones, but never part of it. What is the difference? The scaffolding was never built on the foundation. The scaffolding never said, “I cannot do without Thee, Thou Saviour of the lost.” The scaffolding never cried, “Give me Christ, or else I die.” The scaffolding never feared the Lord and hoped in His mercy. O we do not want to be scaffolding, do we?

How long this chapel building will exist, we do not know; whether it will be here to the end of time or not, we do not know. The future is wisely hidden from us. But we do know this: there will come a time when God’s work in this chapel is complete and the last living stone is put in its rightful place, and that will be the end of God’s work in Bethel Chapel, Luton. In the great day it will be known whether you and I were part of that spiritual building or not, or whether we were only the scaffolding.

“Prevent, prevent it by Thy grace;
Be Thou, dear Lord, my hiding-place,
In this the accepted day.”

O to have an interest in this great work of God! He says, “Upon this Rock I will build My church; and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it.” “Who art thou, O great mountain? before Zerubbabel thou shalt become a plain.” It is God’s work, not man’s, by His Spirit. “Not by might, nor by power, but by My Spirit, saith the Lord of hosts.”

III. This brings us to the third thing, and that is these mountains in your little life and mine. The Lord has, we trust, laid the foundation in our souls, and we hope one day He will also lay the topstone – O but between the moment when the Lord begins with us and the moment when we hope “Grace all the work shall crown, through everlasting days,” these mountains! You know them, don’t you? Some of you do more than others. You know how great these mountains are. What about this great mountain of sin and guilt? “Who art thou, O great mountain?” Only the Lord knows the immensity of our sin, the immensity of our guilt, how high it rises towards heaven crying for vengeance. We in our measure, and it is a little measure, understand it. But O this mountain between our souls and Christ, between our souls and heaven. “Who art thou, O great mountain?” Is it possible? Who can deal with it? Who can remove it? You know the answer, but we want to feel it.

“There is a fountain filled with blood,
Drawn from Immanuel’s veins,
And sinners plunged beneath that flood,
Lose all their guilty stains.”

“The blood of Jesus Christ His Son cleanseth us from all sin.” “In that day there shall be a fountain opened to the house of David and to the inhabitants of Jerusalem for sin and for uncleanness.” It removes this great mountain of guilt so that “In those days, and in that time ... the iniquity of Israel shall be sought for, and there shall be none; and the sins of Judah, and they shall not be found.”

Look at Adam. His sin ruined the whole human race. All the sin, all the sorrow that came through Adam’s fall! But what about that great mountain? Well, as Adam shines in glorious robes in heaven, that great mountain is for ever gone, and with the redeemed he sings the praises of “Him that loved us, and washed us from our sins in His own blood.” A dying thief, a Manasseh, a Mary Magdalene – for

“That sacred flood, from Jesus’ veins,
Is free to take away
A Mary’s or Manasseh’s stains,
Or sins more vile than they.”

“Who art thou, O great mountain?” You see it at Calvary, the great aggregate, the great mountain of the sins of all the elect in all ages.

“Before Zerubbabel thou shalt become a plain.” “It is finished.” “To make an end of sins ... and to bring in everlasting righteousness.”

“Who art thou, O great mountain? before Zerubbabel thou shalt become a plain.” Now you will have many other great mountains spiritually. What about your unbelief, that blind unbelief, that vile unbelief that fights against God, that dishonours Him? “Who art thou, O great mountain?” And the Lord can make that mountain of your unbelief into a plain. O, you say, my heart, my stony heart! Now one touch, one smile, and that mountain of your hard heart dissolves like snow in the midday sun. Now, “Who art thou, O great mountain?” With some, it is the opposition of the world. With some, it is the power of temptation. With some, it is Satan himself. “Who art thou, O great mountain?” Our God and Saviour is greater than sin. He is greater than Satan. He is greater than the world. It is “grace, grace” that is going to reign, “grace, grace” that is going to triumph. “That as sin hath reigned unto death, even so might grace reign through righteousness unto eternal life by Jesus Christ our Lord.”

“Who art thou, O great mountain? before Zerubbabel thou shalt become a plain.” Now then, what about the troubles you have, and the difficulties and the perplexities and the sorrows and the fears? Do they rise like a great, black, gloomy mountain before you? You cannot move them. I often think of that wonderful chapter Isaiah 41. There you have a great mountain and there in front of it you have a worm. Now is there a greater contrast in Scripture than a mountain and a worm? “Fear not, thou worm Jacob.” And worm Jacob begins to rise and thresh the mountains just like someone going to his threshing floor, separating the chaff from the wheat, seeing the chaff blow away. Worm Jacob threshes the mountains. It is an impossible thing. It is a strange figure, worm Jacob threshing the mountains. He beats them small and sees them blow away as chaff. I wonder if worm Jacob is here tonight. Not only do you have a mountain, but you feel as helpless as a worm. How do you thresh mountains? By prayer, as God enables you. Have you ever threshed a mountain? Have you ever beaten it small? Have you ever seen it blow away like the chaff as the Lord has enabled you to plead His power, His mercy, His promise?

“Who art thou, O great mountain?” What is your mountain? Is it something in your life, something in your family, something in your circumstances, something in your relationships with other people? Do you

believe that the Lord can deal with that mountain, even your mountain, or are you going to say, Lord, I can see it in the Word of God and in everyone else? You are not going to say the mountain is too hard for your Saviour and God, are you? “Who art thou, O great mountain?” You say, I cannot see it. “When, and where, and by what means, to His wisdom leaving.” Is it your health? Is it the unknown way? Is it tomorrow? Is it this week? Is it the coming winter? Is it the day you are thinking of? Or is it just a general fear of the unknown? “Who art thou?” Now it is “grace, grace,” because Satan says you do not deserve it, but it is “grace, grace unto it.” Who can say which is greater, His grace or His power? All He needs to do is to touch the mountain and it blows away like smoke. Has the Lord ever touched a mountain for you? What of that wonderful promise, “I will make all My mountains a way”? We think they are ours, but the Lord says, No, they are Mine. I have appointed them. I am going to deal with them and I am going to make them a way, all of them.

“Who art thou, O great mountain? before Zerubbabel thou shalt become a plain.” A God who hears and answers prayer, a God with whom nothing is impossible; a God who says, “Call upon Me in the day of trouble: I will deliver thee, and thou shalt glorify Me”; a God who says, “Commit thy way unto the Lord” – *thy way*, that which lies closest to your heart. There might be many things mentioned this evening and you feel your mountain is passed over, missed out. “Commit thy way unto the Lord; trust also in Him; and He shall bring it to pass.” “Is any thing too hard for the Lord?”

“Who art thou, O great mountain? before Zerubbabel thou shalt become a plain.” Perhaps it is not yourself; perhaps it is someone else you are praying for. We think of that poor father. He had a mountain, his son. His son had a deaf and dumb spirit. He was plagued by Satan. He had suicidal tendencies. If he saw fire, he threw himself into it. If he saw water, he threw himself into it. And the disciples could not do anything to help. “The work exceeds all nature’s power.” The Lord asked how long he had had it. “Of a child.” It was deep-rooted, deep-seated. “I brought him to Thy disciples, and they could not cure him.” Jesus said, “Bring him unto Me.” This cause that is too hard even for the disciples of the Lamb is not too hard for the Lord and Saviour. “Bring it unto Me, and I will hear it.” “Bring him unto Me.” And that poor father’s prayer had a lot of unbelief in it, but he threshed the mountains like poor worm Jacob and he saw them laid low. He said, “If Thou canst do any thing, have compassion

on us, and help us.” What an *if* was there, putting an *if* on the Lord Jesus. “*If* Thou canst do any thing.” There was a lot of unbelief there. It was not the best of prayers. “*If* Thou canst do any thing.” But Jesus puts an *if* the other way round. He said, “*If* thou canst believe, all things are possible.” And with tears he cried, “Lord, I believe; help Thou mine unbelief.” And the devil had a last fling, but the Lord restored the boy completely whole.

What was it in that poor father’s prayer if there was so much wrong? Well, “If Thou canst do any thing, have compassion on us, and help us.” He cast himself completely on the compassion of the Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ, and if you are enabled to do that by faith, you can never falter, never fail. O the wonderful, wonderful compassion of the Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ! He sympathises, He cares, He understands. A great High Priest “touched with the feeling of our infirmities,” He will not break the bruised reed; He will not quench the smoking flax. “Bring him unto Me.” “If thou canst do any thing, have compassion on us, and help us.” And He restored the child to him whole.

“Who art thou, O great mountain?” In the life of the Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ here on earth, there were many who had these great mountains. You think of Jairus. You think of the woman with the issue of blood. You think of the leper. You think of the blind man. “Who art thou?” “Who art thou, O great mountain? before Zerubbabel thou shalt become a plain.” Now do you believe it? This same Jesus, the same in His power and the same in that wonderful compassion. “Jesus Christ the same yesterday, and to day, and for ever.” O His blessed ability to make mountains into plains! “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.”

Then, “Who art thou, O great mountain? before Zerubbabel thou shalt become a plain.” O but that last great mountain, death, and it is a mountain, isn’t it? “Who, except Jesus smiles within, can look the monster in the face?” It is a monster, and we do want to be ready, and we do want to be right. How many of the Lord’s dear people, when they have come there, not before, but when they have come there, have found that the great mountain has been made a plain; or to change the figure, the swellings of Jordan have been divided. “Nor fear to cross that gloomy sea, since Thou hast tasted death for me.”

Beloved friends, I know a lot of you have your mountains. May you by faith look to the heavenly Zerubbabel. May you prove His mercy and His power. May you experience His compassion, and may you live to see these mountains one by one made into plains. I believe in the great day, when we come to the end, we shall look back over our little lives like the apostle did when he said, “Out of them all the Lord delivered me.” We will see every single mountain from first to last made a plain. And then everlasting bliss and blessedness.

“Who art thou, O great mountain? before Zerubbabel thou shalt become a plain.”