



Bethel Pulpit

Sermon 62

Sound an Alarm (2)

**Sermon preached at Bethel Chapel, Luton,
by Mr. B. A. Ramsbottom,
on Lord's day evening, 26th August, 1990**

Text: *“Blow ye the trumpet in Zion, and sound an alarm in My holy mountain: let all the inhabitants of the land tremble: for the day of the Lord cometh, for it is nigh at hand” (Joel 2. 1).*

This is God's trumpet, not man's, yet He appoints sinners, sinners saved by grace, to blow the trumpet, and they are commanded to blow it with no uncertain sound. “For if the trumpet give an uncertain sound, who shall prepare himself to the battle?” “Blow ye the trumpet in Zion, and sound an alarm in My holy mountain.” Then later in the chapter He repeats it: “Blow the trumpet in Zion, sanctify a fast, call a solemn assembly” (verse 15). Now the second time He speaks of this trumpet being blown, He lays such an emphasis on the solemn assembly. If words mean anything at all, this scripture means that if anything in your life and mine comes before the house of God, then weighed in the balances, we are found wanting.

“Blow ye the trumpet in Zion, and sound an alarm in My holy mountain.” “Blow the trumpet in Zion, sanctify a fast, call a solemn assembly.” Because of the awfulness of the day, there is this emphasis on the solemn assembly, and the complaint made how few there are who come to Zion's solemn feasts. “Blow the trumpet in Zion, sanctify a fast, call a solemn assembly: gather the people, sanctify the congregation, assemble the elders, gather the children, and those that suck the breasts: let the bridegroom go forth of his chamber, and the bride out of her closet.” If words mean anything at all, this means that in these solemn days, the house of God has to come first. May this trumpet tonight sound in your conscience, whether really, as before God, the house of God is coming first with you. He does not leave anyone out. He takes those who are elderly, and He commands that they are to be gathered, that they are to assemble. Then He takes the children, and He commands that they are to be gathered, “and those that suck the breasts.” Beloved friends, it has always been a cause of delight to me, the way in which you have sought to bring your children to chapel right from the time of their birth. There are some people who do not agree with this, some people who do not approve of it.

You will find that there are some places, and it is not regarded as normal for little ones to be taken to the sanctuary. Here is the divine authority for our practice: “Gather the children, and those that suck the breasts.” It is a terrible thing when people count the little ones a nuisance. You do not count them a nuisance, do you? What happens when one of these little ones begins to cry? Do you show disapproval, or do you pray that one day that little one may be a father or mother in Israel?

“Blow the trumpet in Zion, sanctify a fast, call a solemn assembly: gather the people, sanctify the congregation, assemble the elders, gather the children, and those that suck the breasts.” And then He concludes it like this: “Let the bridegroom go forth of his chamber, and the bride out of her closet.” Now what does that mean? Well, literally it means this. When the solemn assembly was called in Zion, there was no excuse for any person to be absent. If anyone that day had an excuse to be absent, surely it was the man and woman, the boy and girl, who were being married, whose wedding day it was. If anybody in Israel could say, “Surely I can be spared today from this solemn assembly; it is my wedding day; we are just married,” it was that pair. “No,” says the Lord. “Let the bridegroom go forth of his chamber, and the bride out of her closet.” Let me emphasise that in what I am saying now, I am speaking of the literal meaning of it here in the context, when this special solemn assembly on this one solemn occasion was called in Zion. If you want its spiritual application to us, surely the meaning of it is that the things of God must always come first, that in all things the Lord Jesus might have the pre-eminence. Now let these sayings sink deep down in your ears. “Blow the trumpet in Zion, sanctify a fast, call a solemn assembly: gather the people, sanctify the congregation, assemble the elders, gather the children, and those that suck the breasts: let the bridegroom go forth of his chamber, and the bride out of her closet. Let the priests, the ministers of the Lord, weep between the porch and the altar.”

“Blow ye the trumpet in Zion, and sound an alarm in My holy mountain.” Now beloved friends, this morning I tried to speak of this word concerning the international situation, and conditions in England, and then concerning the church of God, and in our midst. Now I want to emphasise it more personally this evening, your personal state and standing before God, my personal state and standing before God.

“Blow ye the trumpet in Zion, and sound an alarm in My holy mountain.” This is one part of preaching. It is to sound an alarm. It is to blow that ram’s horn of the holy law of God like Joshua did, and the priests. You know what happened: the walls of Jericho fell flat. “The weapons of our warfare are not carnal, but mighty through God to the pulling down of strongholds.” There are a lot of walls that sin and Satan have reared up. There are a lot of hearts more tightly shut up than ever Jericho was. Well, may we still go on blowing the trumpet, and then it is God’s work to cause those walls to fall completely flat.

“Blow ye the trumpet in Zion, and sound an alarm in My holy mountain.” Do you know that this is one of the great purposes of preaching, to alarm the people? If you have never gone home from chapel alarmed in your conscience, I doubt the reality of your religion. The people are to be warned, warned of the very nature and character of God, His holiness, His sovereignty, His might, His majesty, His glory, His justice. Now the trumpet in Zion is to sound this forth clearly, and also concerning His wrath, His anger against sin. “God is angry with the wicked every day.” (I just put this scripture in, shall I just say in parenthesis, in brackets here, because it has been much on my spirit recently: “O Lord God of hosts, how long wilt Thou be angry against the prayer of Thy people?” Now I know that it is not in penal wrath, in judicial wrath; it is in fatherly love and correction.)

But, “Blow ye the trumpet in Zion, and sound an alarm in My holy mountain.” The law is used by the Holy Ghost that sinners might be alarmed. “Blow ye the trumpet in Zion,” not only to set out the awful, holy, solemn character of God, but also man’s lost, ruined, vile condition through the Fall, and by practice in thought and word and deed. “Thine’s, alas! a lost condition,” and nothing we can do can change our condition. “Blow ye the trumpet in Zion, and sound an alarm in My holy mountain.” Tell sinners that by nature, by birth, by practice, their relationship with God is wrong. It is a relationship in which they are under divine wrath. We speak of sin and sinners. You girls and boys, you young people, do not just think of sin as a person going out and telling a lie, or committing adultery. It is the whole point of ourselves and our relationship with God. We are the children of wrath by nature. Our relationship with God is wrong. We are enemies, we are rebels, we are disobedient. “Blow ye the trumpet in Zion, and sound an alarm in My holy mountain.” God’s

character, our character; God's wrath, our danger. The purpose of this alarm is to warn. When a fire alarm goes off, it is that people might flee. And this alarm is that guilty sinners might flee from the wrath to come. "Blow ye the trumpet in Zion, and sound an alarm in My holy mountain." This trumpet, this alarm, it speaks of wrath. "Let all the inhabitants of the land tremble." Tell me, do you tremble when you, hear the alarms of God's holy law, or have you ever trembled? When the trumpet with no uncertain sound speaks of the judgment day, when it speaks of the wrath to come, when it speaks of the eternal sentence, now have you ever trembled? "Let all the inhabitants of the land tremble." It is a warning. It is a call to trembling. It is a call to be ready.

"For the day of the Lord cometh, for it is nigh at hand." That is what the trumpet in Zion sounds. Of course, you can understand "the day of the Lord" a few ways. In the immediate context, the day of the Lord which was going to come was going to be this terrible plague of locusts and caterpillars and palmerworms and cankerworms which were going to devastate the land. Taking a larger view of it, it was the Assyrian armies which were going to invade the land and make such havoc. But looking ahead, it was the day of the Lord's appearing, the day when He comes to judge the world in righteousness. Now, "The day of the Lord cometh, for it is nigh at hand."

"Blow ye the trumpet in Zion." Beloved friends, you will never be able to say that you were not warned. "Blow ye the trumpet in Zion, and sound an alarm in My holy mountain." But what an unspeakable mercy that there is another trumpet, the silver trumpet of the gospel which sounds with an inviting voice. O what a mercy that is! "And it shall come to pass in that day, that the great trumpet shall be blown, and they shall come which were ready to perish in the land of Assyria, and the outcasts in the land of Egypt."

"What a divine harmonious sound
The gospel trumpet gives!"

"It speaks of pardon, full and free,
Through Christ, the Lamb once slain."

"The vilest sinner out of hell,
Who lives to feel his need,

Is welcome to a throne of grace,
The Saviour's blood to plead."

What an unspeakable mercy that as well as the trumpet of the law, there is the silver trumpet of the gospel!

"Blow ye the trumpet in Zion, and sound an alarm in My holy mountain." But you see, there is another alarm which the trumpet sounds in Zion, and if ever there was a day when it needed to be sounded, it is today. That is, that *there is a difference between true religion and false*. We think of how Agrippa trembled and said, "Almost thou persuadest me to be a Christian." Now, "blow ye the trumpet in Zion," and let all the "almost Christians" in this chapel tonight tremble. How many "almost Christians" are there here tonight? You go so far; you are convinced of the truth; you believe everything which we teach and preach, and yet in your very heart of hearts you know you are not ready to meet God, you are not "made a real Christian, washed in the Redeemer's blood." "Almost thou persuadest me to be a Christian" – almost, but not quite; almost, but not altogether; almost, and eternally lost. There is a lot of religion today, and I would say this: one of the most remarkable features of the last thirty or forty years has been the revival of interest in reformed truth, in Calvinistic truth. Go back forty years ago, where would you find a church, a chapel, which was preaching the doctrines of grace? But during these last years there has been a tremendous return to the letter of the doctrine of truth. But how solemn if it is only the letter, if there is no reality! How much passes under the name of truth today! How much passes under the name of evangelical religion which, when weighed in the balances, is found wanting! Now, "Blow ye the trumpet in Zion, and sound an alarm in My holy mountain." We need the alarm to be sounded, and it is this: "Examine yourselves, whether ye be in the faith; prove your own selves. Know ye not your own selves, how that Jesus Christ is in you, except ye be reprobates?"

"Blow ye the trumpet in Zion, and sound an alarm in My holy mountain." Then this alarm needs to be sounded concerning our lives, each of us who in any measure profess the name of the Lord Jesus. "Blow ye the trumpet in Zion, and sound an alarm in My holy mountain: let all the inhabitants of the land tremble." Are you, am I amongst those who tremble at the Word of God? The Lord says, "To this man will I look, . . .

to him that ... trembleth at My Word.” That does not mean being frightened of the Bible, but it means having a holy reverence for it and walking in obedience to it. Do you tremble at the Word of God? Is your life governed by it? Is my life governed by it? Or are we Jehoiakims? You say, “What do you mean?” Well, when he heard the Word of God read, there was a little piece he did not like, so he took a penknife and cut it out and threw it on the fire. Yet he could not destroy the Word of God: it is written in heaven. But those little pieces in the Word of God which condemn you, perhaps some commandment, some exhortation, or there is something in your business and it irritates your conscience – what do you do?. Do you cut them out of your Bible? So take the whole of your life, your family, your business, everything. Can you lay it bare before God? My religion, is it real? My profession, is it consistent? What of the way I behave, the way I act, in my family, in my home, with my friends, in the church of God? “To the law and to the testimony: if they speak not according to this word, it is because there is no light in them.”

“Blow ye the trumpet in Zion, and sound an alarm in My holy mountain.” How often when you read the Word of God does it alarm you? You say, “We have a sweet hope in God’s mercy.” Yes, but how often has the Word of God alarmed you? “O,” you say, “I did not realise that secret sin had crept into my life. I did not realise that was an idol. I did not know how dead and dry I had become.” “Sound an alarm in My holy mountain.” How long is it since you were reading your Bible at home, or you were listening to it being read in family worship, or it was read in chapel, and it sounded an alarm in your conscience, it touched your conscience, it began to prick you? What about your prayers, what about your behaviour, what about your dealings one with another? “Blow ye the trumpet in Zion.” O, if ever an alarm needed to be sounded in the holy mountain, it is today – the backwardness, the worldliness, the inconsistency, the shortcomings, the excuses, the covering things over, the hiding things. “Blow ye the trumpet in Zion, and sound an alarm in My holy mountain: let all the inhabitants of the land tremble: for the day of the Lord cometh.” We should live as in the light of eternity. We should live as if today were our last. For, “the day of the Lord cometh, for it is nigh at hand.”

So this is a very solemn call, and really beloved friends, it is a solemn call to three things. First of all, it is a solemn call to

self-examination – not the person sitting next to you, or sitting behind you. The old negro preacher on one occasion preached on the awful sin of generosity. His congregation said afterwards, “What do you mean, the sin of generosity?” He said, “Well, my congregation is too generous. I speak of a sin, and they hand it to the lady the other side of the chapel, or to the person next to them.” It is *you*, it is *me*, before a holy, heart-searching God. O may the Lord bless us each in the light of eternity, in the light of the solemn happenings in the world at present, in the light of the low state of Zion, in the light of all that has taken place among us this year. May the Lord give us grace to hear and to heed this call to self-examination. Perhaps we shall have to go before the Lord like this: “Search me, O God, and know my heart: try me, and know my thoughts: and see if there be any wicked way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting.” “Blow ye the trumpet in Zion, and sound an alarm in My holy mountain.” So first of all it is a solemn call to self-examination.

Secondly, it is a very solemn call to *repentance* – no salvation without repentance, no hope for our nation without repentance, no hope for our churches without repentance. Now repentance is godly sorrow for our failures, our shortcomings and our sins. But it is also a forsaking them. It is one thing to drop a tear, it is one thing to be sad, but it is forsaking that sin. “Whoso confesseth and forsaketh them shall have mercy.” It is a solemn call to repentance. “Let the priests, the ministers of the Lord, weep between the porch and the altar.” That is where it has to begin. “For the time is come that judgment must begin at the house of God: and if it first begin at us, what shall the end be of them that obey not the gospel of God? And if the righteous scarcely be saved” – did you know that, that the righteous *scarcely* are saved? – “where shall the ungodly and the sinner appear?” It is a solemn call to repentance. “Blow ye the trumpet in Zion, and sound an alarm in My holy mountain.” It is a solemn call to confession of sin. “Turn ye even to Me with all your heart, and with fasting, and with weeping, and with mourning: and rend your heart and not your garments, and turn unto the Lord your God.” That is repentance. Then you see, he brings the gospel in. Why? Because the law does not give any place for repentance. You might repent, you might weep the rest of your life, but the law does not give any place for repentance, even if you could so repent that you never sinned again. Of course, that is impossible, but if you could do that, repentance does not wipe out one past sin. So he

brings the gospel in to encourage repenting sinners to confess their sin. He is “gracious and merciful, slow to anger, and of great kindness.” “Blow ye the trumpet in Zion, and sound an alarm in My holy mountain.” It is a solemn call to repentance.

And thirdly it is a solemn call to *humility*. “Humble yourselves therefore under the mighty hand of God.” O our wretched pride – our pride as a nation, our pride as churches, our pride personally! It is a call to humility, to self-abasement, to fall prostrate before God. “Humble yourselves therefore under the mighty hand of God, that He may exalt you in due time: casting all you care upon Him; for He careth for you.” The Lord deliver us from pride. The Lord deliver us especially from spiritual pride. The Lord bless us with humility. The Lord bless us with gracious, godly humility. Then this alarm will be heeded. “Blow ye the trumpet in Zion, and sound an alarm in My holy mountain” – a solemn call to self-examination, a solemn call to repentance, a solemn call to humility.

At the end of the chapter we read of gospel days, the pouring out of the Spirit. Why, it is a promise of the day of Pentecost. “It shall come to pass afterward, that I will pour out My Spirit upon all flesh; and your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, your old men shall dream dreams, your young men shall see visions: and also upon the servants and upon the handmaids in those days will I pour out My Spirit” (verses 28, 29). That is our only hope in our churches, and our only hope personally. I might stand here and preach until midnight. It would not do any good, apart from the application of the Holy Spirit. But if the Holy Spirit is poured upon us, all the fatalism will go. If the Spirit is poured upon us, we will be like that person: “If there is only one person chosen in all Luton, then living and dying, let me be that one person.” “Until the Spirit be poured upon us from on high, and the wilderness be a fruitful field.” There is no substitute for it. It is God’s work, not man’s. May there be a crying out for the return of the Spirit, the pouring out of the Holy Spirit. At Pentecost there was a gracious fulfilment of what Joel prophesied. If the Spirit is poured out upon us, then there will be self-examination, real godly repentance, true humility – not man’s work, God’s, the work of the Holy Spirit.

“Blow ye the trumpet in Zion, and sound an alarm in My holy mountain.” Now there are two short simple words that come afterwards. I

want to leave them with you. One is this word: SPARE (verse 17). It is the cry of this soul who under self-examination has been brought to true repentance and humble confession. The cry of that awakened soul is, “Lord, *spare*. In the riches of Thy mercy, *spare*. Through Thy precious blood, *spare*.” Now may that be the result of the blowing of the trumpet in Zion, the sounding an alarm in the holy mountain. “Let the priests, the ministers of the Lord, weep between the porch and the altar, and let them say, Spare Thy people, O Lord, and give not Thine heritage to reproach.” *Spare*.

And the other word: THEN (verse 18). Not before. Not while there is all this hardness and unbelief and fatalism and worldliness and carnality and formality and pharisaism and hypocrisy. Not before. But when the Spirit is poured out, when there is that cry, *Spare*, when there is the rending of the heart and not the garments, “*Then* will the Lord be jealous for His land.” *Then* will the Lord “pity His people.” *Then* will the Lord “answer and say unto His people, Behold, I will send you corn, and wine, and oil, and ye shall be satisfied therewith.” What does that mean? All this devastation taken away. *Then*, “I will remove far off from you the northern army, and will drive him into a land barren and desolate. And I will restore to you the years that the locust hath eaten, the cankerworm, and the caterpillar, and the palmerworm, my great army which I sent among you.” SPARE! THEN!

“Blow ye the trumpet in Zion, and sound an alarm in My holy mountain: let all the inhabitants of the land tremble: for the day of the Lord cometh, for it is nigh at hand.”