

“Shall the Prey be Taken from the Mighty, or the Lawful Captive be Delivered?”

John Elias, the great Welsh preacher (1774-1841), in the course of his sermon at the close of an Association made use of the following striking and bold delineations of characters on the subject of man's spiritual deliverance. His text was 'Shall the prey be taken from the mighty, or the lawful captive be delivered' (Isaiah 49:24)?

'Satan,' exclaimed he in a very peculiar manner, 'what do you say, "Shall the prey be taken from the mighty?"' 'No, never, never; I will increase the darkness of their minds, the hardness of their hearts, the lusts of their souls, the strength of their chains; and my holds shall be made stronger. The captives shall never be delivered. I utterly despise the puny efforts of ministers.'

'Gabriel, messenger of the Most High God', exclaimed Elias again in a different tone of voice, looking upwards, "Shall the prey be taken from the mighty?" What dost thou say? 'Ah! I apprehend not; I have been hovering these two days over this vast assembly hearing the Word of God, expecting to see some chains broken, some prisoners liberated; but now the opportunity is near over, and the multitudes are on the point of separating. Ah! There is no sign of one being converted: and I shall not have to convey the gladdings of one sinner repenting for his sins, to the heavenly world.'

Then Elias, turning to the preachers, asked, 'What think you, ministers of the living God? "Shall the prey be taken from the mighty?"' Alas! Who hath believed our report? And to whom is the arm of the Lord revealed?" "We have laboured in vain, and have spent our strength for nought." The Lord seemeth to hide his face from us; his arm is not stretched out. Oh! we fear there is but little hope of the captives being delivered.'

'Zion, "Shall the prey be taken from the mighty?" What do you say?' Ah! The Lord hath forsaken me, and my Lord hath forgotten me. I am left alone, and am childless: so that my enemies say, "This is Zion, whom no man seeketh after!" Oh I am afraid none shall be delivered.'

'Praying Christians, what do you think, "Shall the prey be taken from the mighty?"' Lord God, thou knowest, "High is thy hand and strong is thy right hand". O that thou wouldest put forth thy strength and overcome! "Let the sighing of the prisoner come before thee: according to the greatness of thy power, preserve thou those that are appointed to die." Though I am nearly weary in crying, yet I have a slender hope that the year of Jubilee is at hand.'

Then Elias looked up in a very serious manner, as if going to speak to the Almighty, and asked, 'And what is the mind of the Lord respecting these captives?' "Thus saith the Lord, Even the captives of the mighty shall be taken away, and the prey of the terrible shall be delivered." 'O! delightful,' he exclaimed; 'there is now no doubt or hesitation respecting the liberty of the captives, it is positively declared, they shall be delivered, they shall be saved. Yea, "The ransomed of the Lord shall return, and come to Zion, with songs and everlasting joy upon their heads.'"

The eloquence of the preacher was wonderful, and the effects that followed were amazing and indescribable. The above is merely an outline of a small part of the excellent discourse.