

The Apple of His Eye

"He that toucheth you toucheth the apple of his eye." –

Zechariah 2:8

Summary:

The imagery of the apple of the eye in Scripture highlights God's close relationship with his people, showing how highly he values, carefully cares for, and compassionately sympathizes with them. Through Christ, those who were once distant from God are now brought close and considered precious to him. Any harm inflicted on them personally affects him, and every act of love toward them is like serving him. This truth offers comfort to believers, warns their enemies, and encourages God's people to protect his cause, pursue holiness with care, and hold fast to his word with tenderness.

Outline:

1. Union with God

Through Christ, believers are reconciled to God and joined to him in the closest fellowship.

2. The value of God's people

The Lord treasures the gracious and contrite as his portion, his jewels, and his glory.

3. The vigilance of divine protection

God guards his people more carefully than the eye is naturally guarded from harm.

4. The tenderness of divine sympathy

Their afflictions touch him personally, and his compassion is joined with wisdom and almighty power.

5. The believer's answering duty

Christians should serve God's people, cherish his honour, walk carefully, and keep his commandments.

Text

Scripture's imagery is remarkably suited for conveying popular instruction and impression. It draws not from advanced sciences or mechanical arts—except their simplest, most familiar operations—but from nature, the seasons, life's events, and the human body with its parts, qualities, and functions, all created marvellously. Who does not quickly grasp and feel the allusion here? "He that toucheth you toucheth the apple of his eye." This signifies union. Sin separated us from God, leaving us distant; yet, through Christ's blood, we are brought near. In Christ, we are reconciled and reunited with God, becoming one with Him. The analogy is so strong that various forms of close union are used to illustrate it: we are one as father and child, husband and wife, head and members, even as the soul and body are united—"He that is joined to the Lord is one spirit."

It speaks of value

It's no surprise that touching the eye's apple equates to touching one's most cherished part. It reflects a high value. Even out of selfishness, this member is prized. The eye's apple offers immense usefulness and pleasure, making it highly prized. Someone would rather give up many things than lose this or suffer harm in this area. This shows how precious the Lord finds His people – calling them His portion, jewels, and glory. Those who attract God's attention are not the mighty but the humble and gracious. "To that man," He says, "who is poor, contrite, and trembles at my word, I will look." He delights in those who fear and hope in His mercy, rejoicing over them and singing for joy.

It speaks of attention

This indicates that just as a man guards his eye's apple, so will God care for and protect His people. It is worth noting how the Creator has carefully protected this small yet invaluable part of the body, using fluids, coverings, eyelashes, and eyelids. Nature instinctively teaches us to hide and guard it when exposed. However, all these efforts are far below the care God offers His people. The eye is more vulnerable to damage than they are, yet God's protection surpasses all human measures, as He watches over them constantly, day and night.

In two instances, his vigilance is illustrated through the imagery before us. In one, it is beseeched: "Keep me," says David, "as the apple of the eye; hide me under the shadow of thy wings."

In the other, it is affirmed: "He found him in a desert land, and in the waste howling wilderness; he led him about, he instructed him, he kept him as the apple of his eye." This shows how well those whom God guards are protected!

"Happy art thou, O Israel: who is like unto thee, O people saved by the Lord, the shield of thy help, and who is the sword of thy excellency! And thine enemies shall be found liars unto thee; and thou shalt tread upon their high places."

It speaks of Sympathy

It shows sympathy. The pupil is very sensitive and delicate; you don't need to stab it with a knife to make it recoil. Even a tiny speck, or a mild touch as described here, can cause offense and immediately influence all its sensations.

Is it not said, 'In all their affliction he is afflicted?' A friend shows sympathy in a friend's sorrow; a mother feels a deeper interest in her child's suffering. Still, Job states, 'My friends scorn me,' and Isaiah mentions that 'The mother may forget' her nursing child and 'not have compassion on the son of her womb.' However, a person's feeling for an injured part of their body—especially the eye or the pupil of the eye—is not only intense but also absolutely unavoidable.

The Lord's compassion for his people is just as certain and gentle. "He that toucheth you toucheth the apple of his eye"—a deep source of comfort. This is especially reassuring knowing his sympathy is paired with infinite wisdom and all-powerfulness. "He doeth great things and unsearchable; marvellous things without number—to set up on high those that be low; that those which mourn may be exalted to safety." Indeed, "Nothing is too hard for the Lord."

Let the adversaries of his people learn their danger.

They despise the godly and seek to harm them; although their malice is often controlled, the Lord observes their intentions and will judge them based on their motives, desires, and efforts. He sees them as opposing Himself: "Why," he asked Saul, "do you persecute me?" Though he did not injure him personally, he was harming his followers. The head was beyond their reach, but it felt the wounds inflicted upon the foot. Those who suffer for His sake can trust in Him, for they belong to Him and serve Him. He will surely defend their cause: "He that toucheth them toucheth the apple of his eye."

Let this motivate us to serve the people of God.

He "is not unrighteous to forget your work and labour of love, which ye have showed toward his Name, in that ye have ministered to the saints, and do minister." "He," said the Saviour, "he that receiveth you receiveth me, and he that receiveth me receiveth him that sent me."

Anyone who welcomes a prophet as a prophet will receive a prophet's reward, and anyone who welcomes a righteous person as a righteous person will receive a righteous person's reward. Additionally, whoever gives even a simple cup of cold water to one of these little ones because they are a disciple will certainly not lose their reward.

Let his people also learn their duty.

They observe how he cares for them and is concerned about their well-being—so they should consider him with the same care and be concerned for his reputation! They ought to hold his cause close to their hearts. They should mourn for the solemn assembly. Those who criticize him should realize that they are also accountable for their reproaches. Those who dismiss strict piety as unnecessary should remember that all that is required of us is to avoid evil appearances, walk carefully, and remain diligent in the Lord's work. We must treat his word with the utmost reverence, as we do the most delicate part of the body: "Keep my commandments, and live; and my law as the apple of thine eye."

This sermon is taken from William Jay's devotional, *Morning and Evening Exercises* (January 8, Evening), first published in 1854.