

The city of God remaineth!

In the summer of 410 AD, the unthinkable happened. The city of Rome was sacked. For six hundred years it had been 'the eternal city,' the hub of the mighty Roman Empire. Across the greater part of the inhabited world, Rome had conquered. From Persia in the east to Hadrian's Wall in the west; from northern Germany to the sands of the African Sahara, Roman rule was everywhere. Rome's power seemed invincible, impregnable, imperious and all-conquering.

Now, in August 410, the city of Rome fell to the Visigoth invaders. It seemed like the end of the world. If Rome could fall, what could stand? Across the Mediterranean Sea in North Africa, Bishop Augustine pondered on these momentous events. Two years later his great apologetic work began to appear. It was entitled, *De Civitate Dei*, the City of God. It was the Church's last and greatest apologetic against paganism. In the Fall of Rome Augustine saw a parable. The world's empires come and go; the Assyrian, Babylonian, Persian and Greek empires had risen, ruled and then been over-thrown. Now mighty Rome was going the same way. But God's Kingdom will stand forever. Over against the kingdoms of men stands God's City and it will never be overthrown! That City remaineth!

Eleven centuries later Martin Luther was the prophet of Reformation in the Church. Often oppressed almost beyond endurance, and with his life frequently in danger, he remembered Augustine's 'City of God' and took comfort from its pages. In one period of particular persecution, he penned his celebrated *Ein feste Burg*. 'A safe stronghold our God is still.'

*And were this world all devils o'er
And watching to devour us
We lay it not to heart so sore
Not they can overpower us....*

*And though they take our life
Goods, honour, children, wife
Yet is their profit small
These things shall vanish all
The city of God remaineth.*

The city of God remaineth! Augustine knew that! Martin Luther knew that! Four hundred years later, while the bombs were falling on London, William Edwin Sangster knew that. A Methodist minister in the city, he and his family spent many nights with the people of London sheltering in the underground stations from the falling terror. But he, too, knew that the City of God will not fall. In those months he was reading, studying and writing his doctoral dissertation on Christian holiness, later published as *The Path to Perfection*. With all Europe, and much of the world, embroiled in war, Sangster was writing about sanctification! A hobby? A diversion? An indulgence? An escape from reality? No, but a recognition that God's kingdom, established in our hearts by Christ and His Spirit, will outlast the world.

Bishop Augustine, Martin Luther, William Sangster and all God's people in every age have known that his Kingdom alone will outlast the world. Let us take heart! We are more than conquerors! The city of God remaineth!

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