

A Sermon to Open Neglecters and Nominal Followers of Religion

A Sermon

(No. 742)

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At the Agricultural Hall, Islington

“But what think ye? A certain man had two sons; and he came to the first, and said, Son, go work to day in my vineyard. He answered and said, I will not: but afterward he repented, and went. And he came to the second, and said likewise. And he answered and said, I go, sir: and went not. Whether of them twain did the will of his father? They say unto him, The first. Jesus saith unto them, Verily I say unto you, That the publicans and the harlots go into the kingdom of God before you. For John came unto you in the way of righteousness, and ye believed him not: but the publicans and the harlots believed him: and ye, when ye had seen it, repented not afterward, that ye might believe him.”—[Matthew 21:28-32](#).

THE SIGHT OF THIS VAST ARENA, and of this crowded assembly, reminds me of other spectacles which, in days happily long past, were seen in the amphitheatres of the old Roman Empire. Around, tier upon tier, were the assembled multitudes, with their cruel eyes and iron hearts; and in the center stood a solitary, friendless man, waiting till the doors of the lion's den should be uplifted, that he might yield himself up a witness for Christ and a sacrifice to the popular fury. There would have been no difficulty then to have divided the precious from the vile in that audience. The most thoughtless wayfarer who should enter into the amphitheatre, would know at once who was the disciple of Christ and who were the enemies of the Crucified One. There stood the bravely-calm disciple, about to die, but all around, in those mighty tiers of the Colosseum, or of the amphitheatre of some provincial town, as the case might be, there sat matrons and nobles, princes and peasants, plebeians and patricians, senators and soldiers, all gazing downward with the same fierce, unpitied look; all boisterous for their heathen gods, and all vociferous in the joy with which they gazed upon the agonies of the disciple of the hated Galilean, butchered to make a Roman holiday. Another sight is before us to-day, with far more happy associations; but alas! it is a far more difficult task this day to separate the chaff from the wheat, the precious from the vile, than in the day when the apostle fought with beasts at Ephesus. Here, in this arena, I hope there are hundreds, if not thousands, who would be prepared to die for our Lord Jesus; and in yonder crowded seats, we may count by hundreds those who bear the name and accept the gospel of the Man of Nazareth; and yet, I fear me, that both in these living hills on either side, and upon this vast floor, there are many enemies of the Son of God, who are forgetful of his righteous claims—who have cast from them those cords of love which should bind

them to his throne, and have never submitted to the mighty love which showed itself in his cross and in his wounds. I cannot attempt the separation. You must grow together until the harvest. To divide you were a task which at this hour angels could not perform, but which one day they will easily accomplish, when at their Master's bidding, the harvest being come, they shall gather together first the tares in bundles to burn them, and afterwards the wheat into Jehovah's barn. I shall not attempt the division, but I shall ask each man to attempt it for himself in his own case. I say unto you, young men and maidens, old men and fathers, this day examine yourselves whether you be in the faith. Let no man take it for granted that he is a Christian because he has helped to swell the numbers of a Christian assembly. Let no man judge his fellow, but let each man judge himself. To each one of you I say, with deepest earnestness, let a division be made by your conscience, and let your understandings separate between him that feareth God and him that feareth him not. Though no man clothed in linen, with a writer's inkhorn by his side, shall go through the midst of you to set a mark upon the foreheads of the men that sigh and cry for all the abominations of this city, let conscience take the inkhorn and honestly make the mark, or leave the favored sign unmade, and let each man question himself this morning, "Am I on the Lord's side? Am I for Christ, or for his enemies? Do I gather with him, or do I scatter abroad?" "Divide! divide!" they say in the House of Commons; let us say the same in this great congregation this day. Political divisions are but trifles compared with the all-important distinction which I would have you consider. Divide as you will be divided to the right and to the left in the great day when Christ shall judge the world in righteousness. Divide as you will be divided when the bliss of heaven, or the woes of hell, shall be your everlasting portion.

If the whole of us were thus divided into two camps, and we could say these have made a covenant with God by sacrifice, and those on the other hand are still enemies to God by wicked works, looking at the last class we might still feel it necessary by way of personal application to make a division among them; for although all unbelievers are alike unpardoned and unsaved, yet they are not alike in the circumstances of their case and the outward forms of their sins. Alike in being without Christ, they are still very varied in their mental and moral condition. I trust I was guided by the Spirit of God to my text this morning, for it is of such a character, that while it enables me to address the whole mass of the unconverted, it gives me a hopeful opportunity of getting at the conscience of each by dividing the great company of the unconverted into two distinct classes. O that for each tribe of unbelievers, there may be a blessing in store this day.

First, we shall speak to *those who are avowedly disobedient to God*; and, secondly, to those who are *deceptively submissive to him*.

I. First, we have a word for **THOSE WHO ARE AVOWEDLY DISOBEDIENT TO GOD**. There are many such here. God has said to you as he says to all who hear the gospel, "Son, go work to day in my vineyard;" and you have replied, perhaps honestly, but certainly

very boldly, very unkindly, very unjustly, “I will not.” You have made no bones about it, but given a refusal point-blank to the claims of your Creator. You have spoken your mind right out, not only in words, but in a more forcible and unmistakable manner, for actions speak far more loudly than words. You have said, over and over again, by your actions, “I will not serve God, or believe in his Son Jesus.” My dear friend, I am glad to see you here this morning, and trust that matters will change with you ere you leave this hall; but at present you have not yielded even an outward obedience to God, but in all ways have said, “I will not.” *Practically* you have said, “I will not worship God, I will not attend a place of worship on the Sunday—it is a weariness intolerable to me. I shall not sing the praise of my Maker—I will not pretend to bless the God for whom I have no love. In public prayer I shall not join—I have no heart for it. I shall not make a pretense of repeating morning and nightly prayer in private—what is the good of it? I will not pray at all; I do not believe in its efficacy, and I will not be such a hypocrite as to follow a vain practice in which I have no belief whatever. As for what is called sin, I love it and will not give it up.” You are proud of being called an honest man, for you own the claims of your fellow men upon you, but you scorn to be thought religious, for you do not admit the rights of your Maker. To the righteous requests of others you yield a cheerful obedience, but to the just and tender requests of God you give a plain and evident denial. As clearly as actions can speak, you say by your neglect of the Sabbath, by your disregard of prayer, by your never reading the Bible, by your perseverance in known sin, and by the whole course of your life, “I will not.” Like Pharaoh, you have demanded, “Who is the Lord that I should obey his voice?” You are of the same mind as those of old, who said, “It is vain to serve God, and what profit is there if we keep his ordinances?”

Moreover, my friend, you have not as yet given an assent to the doctrines of God’s Word; on the contrary, *intellectually* as well as practically, you go not at God’s bidding. You have set up in your mind the idea that you must understand everything before you will believe it—an idea, let me tell you, which you will never be able to carry out, for you cannot understand your own existence; and there are ten thousand other things around you which you never can comprehend, but which you must believe or remain for ever a gigantic fool. Still you cavil at this doctrine and that doctrine, railing at the gospel system in general; and if you were asked at a working man’s conference, why you did not go to a place of worship, you would perhaps say that you kept away from worship because you did not like this doctrine or that. Let me say on my own account, that as far as I am personally concerned, it is a very small consideration to me whether you do like my doctrine or do not; for your own sake I am anxious above measure that you should believe the truth as it is in Jesus; but while you live in sin, your dislike of a doctrine will very probably only make me feel the more sure of its truth, and lead me to preach it with more confidence and vehemence. Think you that we are to learn God’s truth from the likings or dislikings of those who refuse to worship him, and want an excuse for their sins? O unconverted men and women, it is very long before

we shall come to you to learn what you would have us preach, and when we fall so low as to do that, you yourselves will despise us. What! shall the physician ask his patient what kind of medicine he would wish to have prescribed? Then the man needs no physician, he can prescribe for himself. Show the doctor out at the back door directly. What is the use of such a physician? Of what service is a minister who will truckle to depraved tastes and sinful appetites, and say, "How would you like me to preach to you? What smooth things shall I offer you?" Ah souls! we have some higher end to be served than merely pleasing you. We would save you by distasteful truths, for honeyed lies will ruin you. That teaching which the carnal mind most delights in, is the most deadly and delusive. With many of you, your beliefs, and tastes, and likes, must be changed, or else you will never enter heaven. I admit that in a measure I like your honesty in having said outright, "I will not serve God;" but it is an honesty which makes me shudder, for it betrays a heart hard as the nether millstone.

Again, you have said, "I will not serve God," and up to this time it is very possible that you have never been in the humor to repent of having said it, for the ways of sin are sweet to you, and your heart is fixed in its rebellion. You have never felt that conviction of sin, which the Holy Spirit has wrought in some of us; if you had felt it, you would soon have been shaken out of your "I will not." If God's power of grace, of which thousands of us bear witness that it is as real a power as that which guides the stars or wings the wind—if God's almighty grace should once get a hold of you, you would no longer say, "I do not believe this or that;" for, as tremblingly as any of those whom you now despise, you would cry out, "What must I do to be saved?" Up till now you have never felt that power, and therefore I cannot wonder that you do not acknowledge it, although the testimony of honest witnesses ought to have some weight with you. You are practically, intellectually, and avowedly no Christian; you have never deceived yourself and others by making a profession which you do not honor, but you have gone on in your own chosen path, saying with more or less resolution, in answer to every call of the gospel, "I will not."

We said just now that the answer of the son to his father as recorded in our text was very plain; it was not, however, very genuine, or such as his father might have expected. His father said, "Son, go work to day in my vineyard;" and the son rudely said, "I will not, that is flat;" and without another word of apology or reason went his way. This is not quite as it should be. Is it? Even so, my friend, you may have been too hasty and so have been unjust. Is it not very possible you have denied to God and to his gospel the respect which both really deserve? You have spoken very plainly, but at the same time very thoughtlessly, very harshly to the God who has deserved better things of you. Have you ever given the claims of the Lord Jesus a fair consideration? Have you not dismissed the gospel with a sneer quite unworthy of you? Have you not been afraid to look the matters between God and your soul fairly in the face? I believe it to be the case of hundreds here; I know it to be the case of thousands and tens of thousands in London. They have put their foot down, and they have

said, "None of your religion for me! I have made up my mind and I will never alter; I hate it and will not listen to it." Does no small voice within ever tell them that this is not fair to themselves or to God? Is the matter so easily to be decided? Suppose it should turn out that the religion of Jesus is true, what then? What will be the lot of those who despised him? My hearer, the religion of Jesus is true, and I have proved its truth in my own case; do, I pray you, consider it, and do not trifle away your immortal soul. Thus saith the Lord, "Consider your ways."

It is now time for me to tell the openly ungodly what is his real state. You have been more than a little proud of your honesty; and looking down upon certain professors of religion you have said, "Ah! I make no such pretences as they do, I am honest, I am." Friend, you cannot have a greater abhorrence of hypocrites than I have; if you can find a fair chance of laughing at them, pray do so. If by any means you can stick pins into their wind-bags, and let the gas of their profession out, pray do so. I try to do a little of it in my way, do you do the same! You and I are agreed in this, I hope, in heartily hating anything like sham and falsehood; but if you begin to hold your head up, and think yourself so very superior because you make no profession, I must take you down a little by reminding you that it is no credit to a thief that he makes no profession of being honest, and it is not thought to be exceedingly honorable to a man that he makes no profession of speaking the truth. For the fact is, that a man who does not profess to be honest is a professed thief, and he who does not claim to speak the truth is an acknowledged liar; thus in escaping one horn you are thrown upon another, you miss the rock but run upon the quicksand. You are a confessed and avowed neglecter of God, a professed despiser of the great salvation, an acknowledged disbeliever in the Christ of God. When our Government at any time arrests persons suspected of Fenianism, they have no difficulty about those gentlemen who glory in wearing the green uniform and flaunting the big feather. "Come along," says the constable, "you are the man, for you wear the regimentals of a rebel." Even so when the angel of justice arrests the enemies of the Lord, he will have no difficulty in accusing and arresting you, for, laying his hand upon your shoulder, he will say, "You wear the regimentals of an enemy of God; you plainly, and unblushingly, acknowledge that you do not fear God nor trust in his salvation." No witnesses need be called concerning you at the last great day; you will stand up, not quite so bravely as you do to-day, for, when the heavens are on a blaze, and the earth is rocking to and fro, and the great white cloud fills the field of vision, and the eyes of the great Judge shall burn like lamps of fire, you will put on a different mien and a different carriage from that which you maintain before a poor preacher of the gospel Ah! my ungodly hearer, with such a case as thine there shall be no need to judge, for out of thine own mouth shalt thou be condemned.

Yet I came not here to tell you of your sins only, but to help you to escape from them. It is necessary that this much should be said, but we now turn to something far more

pleasant. I am in hopes this day that some of you will listen to that little word in the text, "*afterward*." He said, "I will not; but *afterward* he repented, and went." It is a long lane, which has no turning, let us trust that we have come to the turning now. There is space left you for repentance; though you may have been a drunkard, or a swearer, or unchaste, the die is not yet cast, a change is yet possible. May God grant that you may have reached the time when it shall be said of you, "Afterward he repented; he changed his mind; he believed upon Jesus, and obeyed the word of the Lord, and went." Perhaps the son in the parable thought a little more calmly about it. He said to himself, "I will consider the matter, second thoughts are often best. I growled at my good father, and gave him a sharp answer, and I saw the tear standing in the good man's eye. I am sorry I grieved him. The thought of grieving him makes me change my mind. I said 'No' to him," said he, "but I did not think about it. I forgot that if I go and work in my father's vineyard, I shall be working for myself, for I am his eldest son, and all that he has will belong to me, so that I am very foolish to refuse to work to my own advantage. Ah! now I see my father had my advantage at heart, I will even go as he bade me." See, he shoulders his tools, and away he marches to labor with all his might. He said, "I will not," but he repented and went, and it is admitted by all that he did the will of his father. Oh, I hope that many a man and woman now in this Agricultural Hall will this day cry, "I do retract what I have said. I will go to my Father, and will say to him, 'I will do thy bidding. I will not grieve thy love. I will not lose the opportunity of advancing my soul's best interest; I obey the gospel command.'" I will suppose that I see one such before me, and I will speak to him. Perhaps he said, "I will not," because he really did not understand what religion was. How few after all know what the way of salvation is; though they go to church, and to chapel, they have not yet learned God's plan of pardoning sinners. Do you know the plan of salvation? Hear it and live by it. You have offended God; God must punish sin; it is a fixed law that sin must be punished; how then can God have mercy upon you? Why, only in this way: Jesus Christ came from heaven and he suffered in the room, place, and stead of all who trust him; suffered what they ought to have suffered, so that God is just, and yet at the same time he is able to forgive the very chief of sinners through the merits of his dear Son. Your debts, if you be a believer in him, Christ has paid on your behalf. If you do but come and rest upon Jesus and upon Jesus only, God cannot punish you for your sins, for he punished Jesus for them, and it would not be just of him to punish Christ and then to punish you, to exact payment first from the Surety and afterwards from the debtor. My dear hearer, whoever thou mayst be, whatever thy past life may have been, if thou wilt trust Christ, thou shalt be saved from all thy sin in a moment, the whole of thy past life shall be blotted out; there shall not remain in God's book so much as a single charge against thy soul, for Christ who died for thee, shall take thy guilt away and leave thee without a blot before the face of God. Read the last verse of my text, and you will see that it was by believing that men entered into the kingdom of God of old, and it is still by believing that

men are saved. "Behold the Lamb of God," said John the Baptist, and if you look to that bleeding Lamb, you shall live. Do you understand this? Is it not simple? Is it not suitable to you. Will you still refuse to obey it? Does not the Holy Spirit prompt you to relent? Do you not even now say, "Is it so simple? I will even trust in Jesus:

'Guilty, but with heart relenting,
To the Savior's wounds I'll fly.'

I will come, by God's help, this morning, lest death should come before the sun sets. I will trust Christ to save me. Precious way of salvation! Why should I not be saved?"

It is possible too, that you may have said, "I will not," because you really thought there was no hope for you. Ah! my friend, let me assure you—and oh! how glad I am to be able to do it—that there is hope for the vilest through the precious blood of Jesus. No man can have gone too far for the long arm of Christ to reach him. Christ delights to save the biggest sinners. He said to his apostles, "Preach the gospel to every creature, but begin"—where? "begin at Jerusalem. There live the wretches who spat in my face. There live the cruel ones that drove the nails through my hands. Go and preach the gospel to them first. Tell them that I am able to save, not little sinners merely, but the very chief of sinners. Tell them to trust in me and they shall live." Where are you, you despairing one? I know the devil will try to keep the sound of the gospel from your ears if he can, and therefore, I would "cry aloud and spare not." O ye despairing sinners, there is no room for despair this side the gates of hell. If you have gone through the foulest kennels of iniquity, no stain can stand out against the power of the cleansing blood.

"There is a fountain filled with blood,
Drawn from Immanuel's veins,
And sinners plunged beneath that flood,
Lose ALL their guilty stains."

Oh, I trust, now that you know there is hope for you, you will say, "I will even come at once, and put my trust in Jesus."

While I would thus encourage you to repent of your neglect of God, let me invite you to come to Jesus, and press it upon you yet again. Ah! my dear friend, you will soon be dying, and though some wicked men, in their stupid insensibility, die very calmly, and as David said, "They are not in trouble as other men, neither are they plagued like other men, but their strength is firm," yet, whether they perceive it or not, it is a dreadful thing to die with unpardoned sin hanging about you. What will your guilty soul do when it leaves the body? Think of it a minute. It is a matter worthy of your thought. Some of you, in all probability, will die this week. It is not probable that so many thousands of us will march through a whole week, and be found alive at the other end of it. Well then, as we *may* some of us go soon, and all of us *must* go ere long, let us look before us and think a bit. Imagine your soul unclothed of the body. You have left the body behind you, and your disembodied spirit

finds itself in a new world. Oh, it will be a glorious thing if that separated spirit shall see Jesus whom it has loved, and fly at once into his bosom, and drink for ever of the crystal fountain of ever-flowing bliss: but it will be a horrible thing if instead of it, your naked shivering spirit should wake up to find itself friendless, homeless, helpless, hopeless, tormented with remorse, afflicted with despair. What if it should have to cry out forever, "I knew my duty but I did it not, I knew the way of salvation but I would not run in it. I heard the gospel, but I shut my ears to it. I lived and at length left the world without Christ, and here I am, past hope, no repenting now, no believing now, no escaping now, for mercy and love no longer rule the hour." Have pity on thyself, my hearer. I have pity on thee. Oh, if my hand could pluck thee from that flame, how cheerfully would I do it! Shall I pity thee and wilt thou not pity thyself? Oh, if my pleadings should by God's grace persuade you to trust in Christ this morning, I would plead with you while voice, and lungs, and heart, and life held out! But oh, have pity on thyself! Pity that poor naked spirit which so soon will be quivering with utmost agony, a self-caused agony, an agony from which it would not escape, an agony of which it was warned, but which it chose to endure sooner than give up sin and yield to the scepter of sovereign grace.

I would fain hope that you are saying, "I do now repent, and by God's grace I will go." If so, let me tell you there are a great many in heaven who once, like you, said, "I will not," but they afterwards repented and are now saved. I will give you one picture. Yonder, I see a company of men on horseback, and there is one, the proudest of them all, to whom they act as a guard; they are going to Damascus, that he may take Christians to prison and compel them to blaspheme. Saul of Tarsus is the name of that cruel, murderous persecutor. When Stephen was put to death, God said to this man Saul, "Go, work in my vineyard," but Saul said plainly, "I will not," and to prove his enmity, he helped to put Stephen to death. There he is riding in hot haste, upon his evil errand, none more set and determined against the Lord. Yet my Lord Jesus can tame the lion, and even make a lamb of him. As he rides along, a bright light is seen, brighter than the sun at noonday; he falls from his horse, he lies trembling on the ground, and he hears a voice out of heaven, saying, "Saul, Saul, why persecutest thou me?" Lifting up his eyes with astonishment, he sees that he had ignorantly been persecuting the Son of God. What a change that one discovery wrought in him. That voice, "I am Jesus, whom thou persecutest," broke his hard heart, and won him to the cause. You know how three days after that, that once proud and bigoted man was baptized upon profession of the faith of Christ, whom he had just now persecuted! and if you want to see an earnest preacher, where can you find a better than the apostle Paul, who, with heart on fire, writes again and again, "God forbid that I should glory, save in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ." I hope there is a Saul here, who is to be struck down this morning. Lord, strike him down! Eternal Spirit strike him down *now*! You did not know perhaps, that you had been fighting God, but you thought the religion of Jesus to be a foolish dream. You did not know

that you had insulted the dying Savior; now you do know it, may your conscience be affected, and from this day forth may you serve the Lord.

I must leave this second point when I have just said this. If there be one here who after a long refusal, at last relents, and is willing to become a servant of God by faith in Jesus Christ, let me tell him for his encouragement, he shall not be one whit behind those who have been so long making a profession without being true to it, for the text says, "The publicans and harlots go into the kingdom;" but what else? "Go into the kingdom" *before* those who made a profession of serving God, but who were not true to it. You great sinners shall have no back seats in heaven! There shall be no outer court for you. You great sinners shall have as much love as the best, as much joy as the brightest of saints. You shall be near to Christ; you shall sit with him upon his throne; you shall wear the crown; your fingers shall touch the golden harps; you shall rejoice with the joy which is unspeakable and full of glory. Will ye not come? Christ forgets your past ill manners, and bids ye come to-day. "Come," saith he, "unto me all ye that labor and are heavy laden and I will give you rest." Thirty years of sin shall be forgiven, and it shall not take thirty minutes to do it in. Fifty, sixty, seventy years of iniquity shall all disappear as the morning's hoar-frost disappears before the sun. Come and trust my Master, hiding in his bleeding wounds.

"Raise thy downcast eyes, and see
What throngs His throne surround!
These, though sinners once like thee,
Have full salvation found.
Yield not then to unbelief;
He says, 'There yet is room:'
Though of sinners thou art chief,
Since Jesus calls thee, come."

II. Bear with me a little time while I speak to the second character, THE DECEPTIVELY SUBMISSIVE, by far the most numerous everywhere in England, probably the most numerous in this assembly. Oh! you, my own regular hearers, you who have heard my voice these thirteen years many of you are in this class. You have said to the Great Father, "I go, sir!" but you have not gone. Let me sorrowfully sketch your portraits: you have regularly frequented a place of worship, and you would shudder to waste a single Sunday in an excursion, or in any form of Sabbath breaking. Outwardly you have said, "I go, sir." When the hymn is given out, you stand up and sing, and yet you do not sing with the heart. When I say, "Let us pray!" you cover your faces, but you do not pray with real prayer. You utter a polite, respectful "I go, sir," but you do not go. You give a notional assent to the gospel. If I were to mention any doctrine, you would say, "Yes, that is true. I believe that." But your heart does not believe: you do not believe the gospel in the core of your nature, for if you did, it would have an effect upon you. A man may say, "I believe my house is on fire," but if he goes to

bed and falls to sleep, it does not look as if he believed it, for when a man's house is on fire he tries to escape. If some of you really believed that there is a hell, and that there is a heaven, as you believe other things, you would act very differently from what you now do. I must add that many of you say, "I go, sir," in a very solemn sense, for when we preach earnestly the tears run down your cheeks, and you go home to your bedrooms, and you pray a little, and everybody thinks that your concern of mind will end in conversion: but your goodness is "like the morning cloud and the early dew." You are like dunghills with snow upon them: while the snow lasts you look white and fair, but when the snow melts the dunghill remains a dunghill still. Oh, how many very impressible hearts are like that! You sin, and yet you come to a place of worship, and tremble under the word; you transgress, and you weep and transgress again; you feel the power of the gospel after a fashion, and yet you revolt against it more and more. Ah! my friends, I can look some of you in the face and know that I am describing some of your cases to the letter. You have been telling lies to God all these years, by saying, "I go, sir," while you have not gone. You know that to be saved you must believe in Jesus, but you have not believed. You know that you must be born again, but you are still strangers to the new birth. You are as religious as the seats you sit on, but no more; and you are as likely to get to heaven as those seats are, but not one whit more, for you are dead in sin, and death cannot enter heaven. O my dear hearers, I lament that ever I should be called to say such a thing as this, and not be more affected by the fact; and, wonder of wonders, that you, some of you, know it to be true, and yet do not feel alarmed thereby! It is the easiest thing in the world to impress some of you by a sermon, but, I fear me, you never will get beyond mere transient impressions. Like the water when lashed, the wound soon heals. You know, and you know, and you know; and you feel, and feel, and feel again, and yet your sins, your self-righteousness, your carelessness, or your willful wickedness, cause you, after having said, "I go, sir," to forget the promise and lie unto God.

Now, I spoke very honestly to the other class, and must be equally plain with you. You, too, *criminate yourselves*. There will be no need of witnesses against you. You have admitted that the gospel is true. You did not quarrel with the doctrine of future punishment or future glory. You attended a place of worship, and you said that God was good and worthy to be served; you confessed that you owed allegiance to him, and ought to render it. You have even knelt down and in prayer you have said, "Lord, I deserve thy wrath." The great God has only to turn to some of your formal prayers to find quite enough evidence to secure your condemnation. Those morning prayers of yours, those evening prayers, hypocritical every one of them, will be more than sufficient to condemn you of your own mouth. Take heed! take heed, I pray you, while you are yet in the land of hope.

All this while, as the thirty-second verse reminds me, while you have remained unsaved, you have seen publicans and harlots saved by the very gospel which has had no power upon you. Do not you know it, young man? You, I mean, the son of a godly mother? You know

that you are not saved, and yet you had a drunken workman in your father's employment, and he has been these last few years a sober Christian man, he is saved, and you perhaps have taken to the habits which he has forsaken. You know that there have been picked off of the streets poor fallen women who have been brought to know Christ, who are among the sweetest and fairest flowers in Christ's garden now, though they were once castaways; and yet some of you respectable people who never committed any outward vice in your lives, are still unconverted, and still saying to Christ, "I go, sir," but you have not gone. You are still without God! Without Christ! Lost, lost, lost! Yet fairer outward characters could scarcely be found. I could fain weep for you! Oh! beware, beware of being like the apples of Sodom, which are green to look upon, but when crushed, crumble to ashes. Beware of being like John Bunyan's trees that were green outside, but inwardly rotten, and only fit to be tinder for the devil's tinder-box. Oh! beware of saying as some of you do, "I go, sir," while you go not. I sometimes see sick people who quite alarm and distress me. I say to them, "My dear friend, you are dying; have you a hope?" There is no answer. "Do you know your lost state?" "Yes, sir. "Christ died for sinners." "Yes, sir." "Faith gives us of his grace." "Yes, sir. They say, "Yes, sir; yes, sir; yes, sir; yes, sir; yes, sir." I sometimes wish before God they would contradict me, for if they would but have honesty enough to say, "I do not believe a word of it," I should know how to deal with them. Stubborn oaks are leveled by the gale, but those who bend like the willow before every wind, what wind shall break them? O dear brethren, beware of being gospel hardened; or, what is the same thing, softened but for a season. Beware of being a promising hearer of the word, and nothing more!

I do not mean to close my discourse by speaking to you in this apparently harsh way, which; harsh as it seems, is full of love to your soul. I have a good word for *you* too. I trust that you, in this Agricultural Hall, will have a change wrought in you by the Holy Ghost, for although these many years you have made false professions before God; there is yet room in his gospel feast for you. Did you notice the text? "The publicans and sinners enter into the kingdom of heaven *before you*." Then it is clear you may come after them, because it could not be said they entered *before* you, if you did not come after them. If the Lord shall break your heart, you will be willing to take the Lord Jesus for your all in all in just the same way as a drunkard must, though you have not been a drunkard. You will be willing to rest in the merit of Jesus just as a harlot must, though you have never been such. There is room for you, young people, yet, though you have broken your vows, and quenched your convictions. Ay, and you grey-headed people may be brought yet, though you have lived so long in the outward means, but have never given up your hearts to Jesus. Oh, come! This twenty-fourth day of March, may the Lord bring you in this very place may the Lord lead you to say silently, "By the grace of God I will not be an open pretender any longer; I will give myself up to those dear hands that bled for me, and that dear heart that was pierced for me, and I will this day submit to Jesus' way.

The fact is, to close the subject, there is, my dear friends, the same gospel to be preached to one class of men as to every other class. I pray God the day may never come when we shall be found in our preaching talking about working classes, and middle classes, and upper classes. I know no difference between you, you are the same to me when I preach the gospel, whether you are kings and queens, or crossing sweepers; satin and cotton, broadcloth and fustian, are alike to the gospel. If you are peers of the realm, we trim not our gospel to suit you, and if you are the basest of thieves, we do not exclude you from the voice of mercy. The gospel comes to men as sinners, all equally fallen in Adam, equally lost and ruined by sin. I have not one gospel for Her Majesty the Queen, and another gospel for the beggar-woman. No, there is but one way of salvation, but one foundation, but one propitiation, but one gospel. Look to the cross of Christ and live. High was the brazen serpent lifted, and all that Moses said was, "Look." Was a prince of the house of Judah bitten, he was told to look; without looking his lion standard of costly emblazonry could not avail him; was some poor wretch in the camp bitten, he must look, and the efficacy was the same for him as for the greatest of the host. Look! look! look to Jesus. Believe in the Son of God and live! One brazen serpent for all the camp, one Christ for all ranks and conditions of men. What a blessing would it be if we were all enabled to trust Christ this morning! My brethren, why not?—He is worthy of the confidence of all. The Spirit of God is able to work faith in all. O poor sinner, look to him! Dear hearers, I may never speak to some of you again, and I would therefore be pressing with you; by the hour of death, by the solemnities of eternity, I do implore and beseech you accept the only remedy for sin which even God himself will ever offer to the dying sons of men, the remedy of a bleeding Substitute, suffering in your room and stead, believed on and accepted in the heart. Cast yourself flat upon Christ. The way of salvation is just this—rest alone upon Christ! Depend wholly upon him. The negro was asked what he did, and he said, "I jest fall down on de rock, and he dat is down on de rock cannot fall no lower." Down on the rock, sinner! Down on the rock! The everlasting rock of ages! You cannot fall lower than that. I will conclude with a well-known illustration. Your condition is like that of a child in a burning house, who, having escaped to the edge of the window, hung on by the window-sill. The flames were pouring out of the window underneath, and the poor lad would soon be burnt, or falling would be dashed to pieces; he therefore held on with the clutch of death. He did not dare to relax his grasp till a strong man stood underneath, and said, "Boy! drop! drop! I'll catch you." Now, it was no saving faith for the boy to believe that the man was strong—that was a good help towards faith—but he might have known that and yet have perished; it was faith when the boy let go and dropped down into his big friend's arms. There are you, sinner, clinging to your sins or to your good works. The Savior cries, "Drop! drop into my arms!" It is not doing, it is leaving off doing. It is not working, it is trusting in that work which Jesus has already done. Trust! that is the word, simple, solid, hearty, earnest trust. Trust and it will not take an hour to save you, the moment

you trust you are saved. You may have come in here as black as hell, but if you trust in Jesus you are wholly forgiven. In an instant, swifter than a flash of lightning the deed of grace is done. O may God the Spirit do it now, bringing you to trust, that you may be saved.

PORTION OF SCRIPTURE READ BEFORE SERMON—Psalm 103.