

# Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit.

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AN INDICTMENT WITH FOUR COUNTS.

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## A Sermon

DELIVERED BY

C. H. SPURGEON,

AT THE METROPOLITAN TABERNACLE, NEWINGTON.

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“She obeyed not the voice; she received not correction; she trusted not in the Lord; she drew not near to her God.”—Zephaniah iii. 2.

FOUR heavy counts of a terrible indictment against Jerusalem and the Jewish people. Is it not sad to reflect that Jerusalem was the city of the great king, and yet fell from its high estate? It was the place of the temple; there the light of God shone forth, while other nations were in darkness; there the solemn worship of God was celebrated, whilst false gods were being adored elsewhere; and yet its sin provoked the Lord till he gave it up to the destroyer. It is clear, therefore, that no degree of light, and no amount of privilege, can keep a people alive and right before God. If the heart be not changed, if the grace of God go not with outward ordinances, those who are exalted to heaven may yet be cast down to hell. The putrefaction of the best produces the worst, and when a city which has been favoured as Jerusalem was becomes a den of unclean beasts, then it is a den indeed. Neither Nineveh, nor Babylon, nor Tyre, nor Sidon could equal in criminality this once chosen city of the great king. Let us not, therefore, as a nation begin to exalt ourselves because of our privileges, for if we do not prove worthy of them the candlestick will be taken out of its place, and our darkness will be all the denser because of the light we have lost. If we walk not before the Lord obediently, it may please him to make this island as great a scene of destruction as the mounds of Babel or the rock of Tyre.

We usually take Jerusalem to be the type of a church, and it is one of the fullest types of the one church: “Jerusalem which is above, the mother of us all.” We may therefore regard the fate of Jerusalem as being a special warning to churches. In a church is God’s dwelling-place, there is the light of knowledge, there is the fire of sacrifice, out of it hath God shined. But a church may sadly decline. There is a church which is now worthy of the name of Antichrist: she went further and further astray, till she has made a man to be her head, and called him infallible, till she set up lords many and gods many, saints and saintesses, and innumerable objects of worship even to cast

clouds and rotten rags. There is a church against whom this indictment might be laid to-day: "She obeyed not the voice;"—she did not hear the gospel. "She received not correction;"—when reformers came she sought their blood. "She trusted not in the Lord; she drew not near to her God;" but she went after others, and set up other intercessors than Christ, and rejected the true Head of the church.

Other churches may fall into like sin unless they are guarded by spiritual power. Remember Laodicea, and how she was spued out of the mouth of Christ, because she was neither cold nor hot. Remember Sardis, which had but a few names in it that were undefiled. Where are those cities and those churches now? Let desolation answer. It might be said of them as of Gilgal, of which the Lord said, "Go ye there to the place where my name was at the first, and see if there be one stone left of it upon another which hath not been cast down." Oh that we as a church, and all our sister churches, may walk before the Lord with holy jealousy as to doctrinal correctness, practical holiness, and inner spiritual life; for, if not, our end will be miserable failure. If the salt of grace be not in a church, it cannot be an acceptable sacrifice to God, nor can it long be kept from the corruption which is natural to all masses of flesh. What are one people more than another? and what is one community more than another? We are men by nature, prone to the same evil, and we shall fall into the same transgression unless the Lord that keepeth Israel shall keep us; and therein is our confidence, that he doth neither slumber nor sleep.

This text is not only applicable to a nation and to a church, but to individuals among God's own people, though of course only in a degree. Some of God's people follow Christ afar off, their spiritual life is better seen in their fears than in their confidences; they are trembling always, their hands are slack, their hearts are faint. We trust they are alive unto God, but that is all we can say. I fear it may be said of them, "She obeyed not the voice:" the gentle whisper of divine love falls upon a deaf ear. Oh, how often, brethren, has God spoken and we have not hearkened so as to obey his voice. I fear, too, that there are times when we have not "received correction," when affliction has been lost upon us. We have risen from a sick-bed worse than when we went to it. Our losses and crosses have provoked us to murmuring rather than to heart-searching. We have been bruised as in a mortar among wheat with a pestle, and yet our folly has not departed from us. And this is a very provoking thing, when we despise the rod and the hand that uses it, and turn not at the smiting of the Lord. Yet it is so with some of God's people: they obey not the voice, they receive not correction, and therefore it comes to pass that at times "they trust not in the Lord." They try to bear their trials themselves. They go to friends for advice, and they inherit a curse, for it is written, "Cursed is he that trusteth in man, and maketh flesh his arm." They get into a withered state; like the heath in the desert, they see not when good cometh, because they trust in man. Must not some of us plead guilty here?

To add to our faults, whenever we have backslidden we have "not drawn near to the Lord our God." The joy and the strength of the Christian life are found in living near to God, living like sheep close to the shepherd, wandering never, but lying down in green pastures to

which he leads the way, himself better than the pasture, our joy and our delight. But, alas! it may be said of some, "Thou hast restrained prayer before God." "Are the consolations of God small with thee? Is there any secret thing with thee?" Your transgressions and your iniquities have hidden your God from you. He walks contrary to you because you walk contrary to him. This is too, too often the case, with even those who do trust in Jesus, and have passed from death unto life; and whenever it is the case it means sorrow. He that is no child of God, but a hypocrite, may wander as far from the path of integrity as he chooses without having to suffer for it till the last day; but a child of God cannot sin without smarting for it. Is it not written, "You only have I known of all the families of the earth: therefore I will punish you for your iniquities"? Our Father whips his own children. The boys in the streets may do as they please, but our great Father is sure to chasten those he loves. "As many as I love I rebuke and chasten: be zealous, therefore, and repent."

At this time I do not intend to use the words of our text in any of those ways, but to take it as it may refer to unconverted persons, for it very clearly, without the slightest strain, describes many who are living far away from God, and I shall want you to give me your attention for a little time while I notice *four great sins*. When these are mentioned I shall try to dig into the text, to bring out of it *four hidden consolations*:—they are not apparent on the surface, but when faith applies the microscope and looks into the centre of the text, it discovers four things by which the penitent sinner may be encouraged to come to Christ.

I. First, here are FOUR MANIFEST SINS.

I wonder whether the fact that my text is in the feminine is intended in the providence of God that this sermon may be especially adapted to a woman: I cannot tell, but I should not wonder. I may have been moved to this text on purpose that some poor wandering sister may feel as if God specially directed it to her sex. It says *she*—"She obeyed not the voice." Whatever belongs to any of our race may be taken by all, since in Christ Jesus there is neither male nor female. However, I point out the fact, and pray God that his word may be directed as he wills by the Holy Spirit.

The first sin is *not hearkening to God's voice*. Many have never hearkened to God's voice throughout a long life. They have heard it,—they could not help that; but they have never given heed, they have never lent an attentive ear, saying, "Speak, Lord, for thy servant heareth." He has spoken to many here present in *warnings*. He has said, "My daughter, if thou doest this, it will lead thee to grief and sorrow; if thou remainest hard, and careless, it cannot end well. Nothing can be right at the last which is not right now; wrong must bring woe with it." Sometimes this warning has come home into the heart, but the person of whom I am speaking has stifled it and said, "No, but I will go after mine own way and follow my own pleasure." That warning has come, perhaps, in the silence of the night, or in the very midst of the sin, a something that checked, a pulling of the rein, but the sinner could not be held in, nay, not with bit nor bridle, but he has taken the bit between his teeth, and dashed on in sin. Oh, remember, you that have neglected divine warnings; *you* may have

forgotten them, but God has not. When you who love your children have spoken to them and warned them, they may have gone their way and quite forgotten "what mother said," but mother recollected it: her tears flowed, and wrote the memorial of her rebukes upon her face. And God forgets not warnings he has tendered to the sons of men.

I address some, however, who have not only received warning and rejected it, but they have received much *teaching*. You were in a Sabbath school class while yet a girl; you knew the plan of salvation very early in life, and you know it now, but still you have not obeyed the voice. There is Christ, but you have not touched his garment's hem. There is the fountain filled with blood of which you have been accustomed to sing, but you have never washed therein: there is the bread of life, but you have never fed thereon, and in consequence you live not unto God. Oh, it is a sad thing when it can be said, "She obeyed not the voice."

To some who are here present God's voice has come by way of *ex postulation*. There are many expostulations in the word of God such as this—"Turn ye, turn ye; why will ye die, oh house of Israel?" "Come now, and let us reason together: though your sins be as scarlet, they shall be as white as snow." "Come, and let us return unto the Lord: for he hath torn, and he will heal us; he hath smitten, and he will bind us up." "Say unto him, take away all iniquity, receive us graciously, and love us freely." Some of you had many such expostulations addressed to your heart and conscience, but you have not obeyed the voice.

And then at the back of this have come *invitations*, sweet invitations. In the Bible you have read them, in hymns you have sung them, from the pulpit you have heard them, from kind friends you have received them. Oh, how sweetly doth Jesus bid the hungry and the thirsty come to him; the heavy laden and such as are bowed down, to come and find rest in him. You used at one time to feel as if you would yield to these invitations; but you did not, and this sin lieth at your door, a stumblingblock in the way of your peace,—“She obeyed not the voice.” When men fail to do right, they usually commit the wrong which is the reverse of it. You have listened to other voices, the siren voice of temptation has enchanted you, the voice of flattery has puffed you up, the voice of Satan has beguiled you, the voice of the flesh has fascinated you, the voice of the world hath wooed you and hath held you captive.

While we lay this indictment before you some of you cannot help saying, "He means me: it is even so with me." The Lord give you repentance, and open your ear: for is it not written, "Incline your ear and come unto me; hear, and your soul shall live, and I will make an everlasting covenant with you, even the sure mercies of David"? Oh: divine Spirit, let not men be deaf any longer, but touch them with thy finger, that they may hear the voice of God and live.

That is the first count of the indictment, and the second one is like unto it and groweth out of it—"she received not correction." When men refuse God's voice they soon become more hardened still and reject his correction, like a horse which does not answer to the rein, and by-and-by even kicks at the whip, and will not be ruled at all. The Lord's correction comes to us sometimes from *his word*, when he speaks in

anger and reminds us that his wrath abideth on the man that believeth not in Christ. Oh, there are heavy tidings from the Lord for you that are impenitent. This book is not a book to play with, it is full of the terrors of the Lord against such as go on in rebellion against him. Perhaps you have been made to tremble as you have read your Bible, and have seen how the Lord pronounces a solemn curse against the man that goeth on in his iniquity.

But the correction may also have come to you from *your own conscience*, quickened by the Word of God. You have come to be uneasy, you start in your sleep with dreams that alarm you. If you are as I once was, everything you look upon seems to have a mouth to accuse you. I remember when the Lord's corrections were very heavy upon me. I could not see a funeral but what I wondered when I too should be carried to the grave; I could not pass a churchyard without the reflection that I should soon be there; and when I heard the passing bell, it seemed to tell me that I should soon be judged, and condemned, for I had no hope of pardon. These are corrections of God, and I pray you regard them.

Possibly, however, you have endured *affliction*. You are not well; you have been made to look into eternity through death's door. Peradventure one or another of your friends has been taken home. You wear the garb of mourning now. God has corrected you. You have had a loss which you thought you could scarce survive, it was so severe. "Despise not thou the chastening of the Lord," but hear his rod, and listen to what he has to say to you in it. Remember, God may smite you worse than he has done; for these few aches and pains he can send something more sharp and smarting. If one child has gone, he can take another, even from your breast; if one relative has died, another may follow, for the great archer hath many arrows in his quiver, and when one sufficeth not he speedily wings another in its painful flight. I pray thee beware, and let it not be said of thee, "She received not correction," or, "He received not correction"; but may you be willing to listen while God is thus dealing with you.

This leads to a third count, in which lies the very essence of deadly sin: "*She trusted not in the Lord.*" She would not come and trust in Christ for salvation; she would believe in her own righteousness. She would not trust in Christ to help her to overcome sin, she said she was quite able to purify herself. Oh, many a young man has started fair for heaven to all appearance, but it has been in his own strength, and, like Pliable, he has no sooner stumbled into the Slough of Despond than he has turned his back on the heavenly city, and returned to the place from which he set out. Beware, I pray you, of having anything to do with a hope that is not based upon trust in God in Christ Jesus. Your religion is vanity, and an insult to high heaven, unless it be based on the atonement of Jesus Christ. Where there is no faith in Jesus peace is presumption. He that dares to hope till he has believed in Christ hopes in vain. But ah, there are some who are driven to do many apparently gracious things, but yet this one thing they will not do, they will not trust in the Lord; and I have known this to be sadly the case with some in great affliction. She did not trust in the Lord: she was a widow, but she did not trust in the Lord. She had many

little children, she knew not where to find them bread, but she did not trust in the Lord. She was sick and ill herself, but she trusted not in the Lord. She was laid at death's door, she was in the infirmary, in the hospital, but she trusted not in the Lord. Her heart was very heavy, and she said she wished she could die, but she trusted not in the Lord. Her friends did not help her: those who ought to have been kind were cruel, but she trusted not in the Lord: she was driven into a corner, and yet she did not trust in the Lord.

Ay, but this is a great sin, for surely God takes away our props and dependences on purpose that we may throw our whole weight on himself; but there are some who will have nothing to do with this trusting, neither for time nor for eternity, neither for body nor for soul. Woe unto any man, be he even a child of God, if he once gets off the pathway of faith, for when we walk by sight we shall see things which shall make us wish we were blind, and only when we trust shall we have to say, "I am not confounded nor ashamed, nor shall I be, world without end." This is sad—"She trusted not in the Lord."

The fourth crime was, "*She drew not near to her God.*" There was no prayer. There was much talk about her trouble, much talk about what she would like to do, but there was no asking of God, no going into the chamber and spreading the case before him, and pleading his mercy. There was no thought of God; the mind did not get near to him. The desires rambled round in a thousand devious paths, but did not come to God. Oh, it is hard to get some of you to think of God. I try and preach as best I can, and try to find striking words to make you think of God, but, oh, how often do I fail! The choicest ways I use defeat themselves. May it not be so now! Let it not be said of you any longer that "she drew not near to her God." We ought to think of him, we ought to seek him, we ought to come to him, as little chicks, when there is a hawk in the air, and they hear the call of the mother hen, soon hide away under her feathers. We ought to run in prayer, that it might be true of us, "He shall cover thee with his feathers, and under his wings shalt thou trust: his truth shall be thy shield and buckler." If you had a child that in its troubles ran out into the street, and when its little heart was heavy went away to strangers, and never told father or mother its sorrow, you would feel much hurt. This is God's quarrel with his rebellious people, that they will go to Satan himself before they will come to him. Nay, think not that I run too far, and use an extravagant expression, for Saul did this; when God answered him not, he offered no penitent petitions, but resorted to a witch for help. Many would penetrate into the recesses of the unseen world, and tamper with spiritual mysteries sooner than they will go to God. Silly women will believe a fortune teller, but will not trust the Saviour.

Is it so with any of you? Then let this word of accusation sink deep into your spirits, and confess your transgression unto the Lord.

Putting the four sentences together: "She obeyed not the voice; she received not correction; she trusted not in the Lord; she drew not near to God,"—what then? Why, "*woe unto her.*" Read the first verse of the chapter, and there you have it. As I was coming here that word "woe," "woe," "woe" seemed to ring in my ears, and I

wondered where it came from. I will tell you. It is a word that goes to be made into a worse word. Let me pronounce it for you—woe; and that leads to something woe-er-se—worse; and to the woe-erst—the worst of all. It is bad, lamentable, destructive, ruinous, painful, wretched, miserable woe, worse, worst. I wish I could pronounce the word as my Master did when he said, “Woe unto thee, Bethsaida; woe unto thee, Chorasin; woe unto thee, Capernaum.” I should hardly like to say as he did, for he had a right to judge which I have not—“Woe unto you scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites,” and so on. But that “woe” as he pronounced it must have sounded terribly, softly, sadly, sternly piercing to the heart. Ah, how will the angels sound it at the last? Hear it now, lest ye hear it at the last. “One woe is past, and behold another woe cometh,” when the Judge of all the earth shall break the seals and pour out the vials, and the ungodly sons of men shall see the star Wormwood, and shall drink of the bitterness of the wrath of God. Woe. It means sorrow here! No rest! No satisfaction! Woe, woe, even at this day unto the man that trusteth not in God. But what it meaneth in the next world—to be driven from the face of Christ, to be followed with a “woe” which shall have eternal echoes, Woe, woe, woe! I could fain stop and cry with Mr. Whitefield, “The wrath to come! The wrath to come!” Escape from it while yet life lasts and Jesus pleads with you, for otherwise this shall fall like a thunderbolt from the hand of the angry Judge,—“Woe to her. She obeyed not the voice, she received not correction, she trusted not in the Lord, she drew not near to God.” Then all this will turn to woe, the voice disregarded will ring again, “Son, remember! Son, remember! Woe, woe.” As for the correction which was disregarded, oh how light and gentle it will seem compared with the strokes that will then fall upon the rejecters of Christ! Every correction will then turn to woe. And the not trusting in the Saviour, the unbelief, what woe that will bring! The not drawing near to God, what woe that will cost, when we shall see ourselves afar off, and between us and God a great gulf fixed, so that none can come to us, no, not so much as to bring a drop of water to cool our tongue, neither can any go from us, or escape from the place of woe.

II. To help any who would escape from this woe, I shall spend a minute in noticing THE FOUR HIDDEN CONSOLATIONS WHICH LIE IN THIS TEXT.

I do not intend to enlarge upon them, because I want the previous part of this discourse to abide in your mind: but there are four hidden consolations. The first is, if I have not obeyed his voice yet, it is plain *he does speak*, he speaks to me. My soul, my soul, God is not dumb; canst thou be deaf? Still doth he invite thee, still doth he call thee, still doth his good Spirit strive with thee. This voice of mine to-night I hope will be God's voice to some of you. Be encouraged; he has not given you up, but still calls. When the sentence of death is pronounced there are no warnings given, and since you are having another call, I would encourage you to hope.

The next is, “She received not correction,” then *all my troubles and afflictions are meant to bring me to Christ*. They are all sent in love to my soul, and I ought to look at them as such. My friend, where are you? I do not know where you are, or to whom I am speaking, but

I do pray you see that God, who seemeth to have dealt very hardly with you, is only driving you to mercy. His voice has been harsh, and his hand has been heavy, but in love he corrects you. Oh listen to him, come to him. A judge does not correct a criminal doomed to die. God does not correct a soul, with a view to its reclamation, if he has given it up altogether.

Notice the next sentence. "She trusted not in the Lord." Is it a crime, then, that I did not trust in the Lord? *Then I may trust him,* and I *will*, for that which it is a sin not to do I must have a right to do, and if it be laid to my charge, "She trusteth not in the Lord," oh, sweet mercy, sweet mercy, I may trust! This is why the Scripture saith, "He that believeth not shall be damned," as if to assure you that you certainly *may* believe, because you will be damned if you do not. Come, then, and let even the black side of the text wear a smile to you, and lead you to trust your God, since he blames you for not doing so.

Then there was the last crime. "She drew not near to God." What, then, does God make it a fault, that I do not draw near to him? Oh, I wish the Spirit of God would put it into your heart to say, "That shall not be my fault any longer."

"I'll to the gracious King approach,  
Whose sceptre pardon gives;  
Perhaps he may command my touch,  
And then the suppliant lives."

"I thought I might not come," but now I see I am condemned for not coming; then I will come. I will delay no longer, I will come to Jesus, determined that if I perish I will perish at his feet. Have hope, my friend, for none did ever perish there. May God set his seal to this word of expostulation, for Jesus' sake. Amen.

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PORTION OF SCRIPTURE READ BEFORE SERMON—Zephaniah iii.

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HYMNS FROM "OUR OWN HYMN BOOK"—515, 509, 514.