

Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit.

A BAD EXCUSE IS WORSE THAN NONE.

A Sermon

DELIVERED ON SUNDAY MORNING, JULY 3RD, 1864, BY THE

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AT BAYSWATER.

“And they all with one consent began to make excuse.”—Luke xiv. 18.

THE provisions of the gospel of Christ may well be compared to a *supper*, provided, as they were, in the evening of the world—“in these last days.” The description, “*a great supper*,” is well borne out if we consider the greatness of the provision; how much of love and mercy God has displayed towards the sons of men in the person of Christ Jesus; how much of power and of gracious working he has shown by his Holy Spirit. A great supper it is if we think of the richness and sweetness of the provision—it is a feast worthy of the great King. The flesh of Jesus is our spiritual meat, and his blood our choicest wine. Our souls are satisfied with covenant mercies, most fitly set forth as “A feast of fat things, a feast of wines on the lees, of fat things full of marrow, or wines on the lees well refined.” A great supper it is, moreover, when we consider the number of guests invited. “Go ye into all the world, and preach the gospel to every creature.” The call of the gospel comes to every man and woman of Adam born, within hearing of the ministers of God.

“None are excluded thence, but those
Who do themselves exclude;
Welcome the learned and polite,
The ignorant and rude.”

No other king ever sent out an invitation so broad as this. But wisdom “crieth at the gates, at the entry of the city, at the coming in at the doors. Unto you, O men, I call; and my voice is to the sons of man.”

Is it not strange that when the householder made so great a supper, when he offered it without money and without price, that all his neighbours should with one consent begin to make excuse? He did not call them to prison or to misery; how then came they to be so unwilling to obey the summons? Whence this unanimity in the rejection? We find good men differing, how is it that evil men can hold together so well? What! not one who has respect enough to his generous

friend to sit at his table and receive his bounty? Not one. Truly, here, brethren, we have a picture of the universal depravity of man. All men are thus vile, and refuse the mercy of God. We never know how bad man is till the gospel is preached to him. The gospel acts as a white back-ground to set forth the blackness of man's heart. Here human nature reaches to the greatest height of sin's enormity. Spitting forth his venom against the Lord of infinite love, man proves himself truly to be of the serpent's brood. The gospel is preached to thousands, and do all make excuse? So the parable hath it, and truly so the fact proves it. What! is there not one whose free-will is inclined towards Christ? Is there not one of so good a natural disposition that he will come to Jesus? Nay, the text says, not one: "They *all* with one consent began to make excuse." How thoroughly hath father Adam ruined our understandings! What fools as well as rebels we are to refuse to partake of the banquet of love. We are altogether become unprofitable; there is not one who seeketh after God. You will, perhaps, remind me that there were other men besides those who made excuse. Most true; but these were in the highways and hedges, or in the streets and lanes of the city; and so those who do not hear the gospel, and therefore are not guilty of rejecting it, yet nevertheless are far off from God by wicked works, and strangers to the commonwealth of Israel. Thus, taking the two characters to represent all mankind, we find all to be enemies of God. Those in the highways need to be "compelled" to come in; they had a natural reluctance to feast at the good man's table; and so all sorts of men are averse to the gospel. They are perfectly willing to sin—content even to perish in sin, but to come to Christ, to accept the great atonement, to put their trust in Jesus, this is a thing they care not for, and with one consent, when they hear the gospel they begin to make excuse.

We fear that there are many in this meeting-house, this morning, who have been blessed with hearing the gospel for years, but hitherto, the only treatment they have given to the gracious message is to make excuses about it. I hope to deal with such very simply and very affectionately, earnestly desiring that they make their last excuse this morning, and that it may meet with its death-blow. O that they may come to the feast which they have long rejected, and rejoice in the mercy of God in Christ Jesus.

Why did they make an excuse? Let us, first, try to *account* for their conduct; secondly, *what excuses do they make?*—let us *recount* them; and thirdly, *how foolish thus to make excuses!*—here let us *encounter* them.

I. Let us try to *ACCOUNT for the fact, the sad fact, that men are so ready to make excuses rather than to receive the Word of God.*

We account for it in the first place by the fact that *they had no heart at all to accept the feast.* Had they spoken the truth plainly, they would have said, "We do not wish to come, nor do we intend to do so." If man's heart were not so deceitful, it would not make excuses, but it would say, outright, "'We will not have this man to reign over us:' we do not feel our sinfulness, we will not therefore accept pardon: we believe that we can work out our own salvation with our own doings; or, if not, we are content to take our chance. If it shall go ill with us,

it will go ill with a great many people. We will run all risks: we do not want salvation: we choose rather to have our full swing of carnal delights: your religion involves too much self-sacrifice; it is altogether contrary to the lustings of our minds, and therefore we decline it." This is at the bottom of it. Some of you, my hearers, have often been impressed, and partially convinced of sin, but you have put off Christ with excuses. Will you bear with me while I solemnly assure you, that at its core your heart is at enmity to God. Your excuse may look very pretty, but it is as flimsy as it is fair. If you were honest with your own soul, you would say at once, "I do not love Christ; I do not want his salvation." Your put-offs, your false promises, your excuses are worthless; any one with half an eye can see through them—they are so transparent. You are an enemy to God; you are unreconciled, and you are content to be so. This truth may be unpalatable, but it is nevertheless most certain. May God help you to feel this, and may it humble you before his presence.

Still, if they would not come to the good man's feast, why did not they say so? If the real secret of it was that they hated him and despised his provisions, is it not melancholy that *they were not honest enough to give him a "nay" at once?* Well, they certainly were not, and one reason might be because *they wished to be upon good terms with their conscience.* They felt they ought to go. He was one who had a claim upon their courtesy, if not their gratitude, and therefore feeling that they ought to go, and yet not intending to go, they sought to compromise by an excuse. Conscience is a very unamiable neighbour to men who live in sin. It is said of David, "David's heart smote him," and it is a very hard blow which the heart is able to give. In order to parry the blow, men hold up a shield of excuses. You cannot quite extinguish your conscience, which is the candle of the Lord, and therefore you put it under the bushel of an excuse. The thief fears the watch-dog, and therefore throws him a sop to keep him quiet—that sop is made of excuses. John Bunyan tells us that Mr. Recorder Conscience, when the town of Mansoul was in the keeping of Diabolus, used sometimes to cry out at such a rate that he made all the inhabitants afraid, and so they put him in a very dark place, and tried to put a gag into his mouth to keep him quiet, but for all that, sometimes when his fits came on, he made the town feel very uneasy. I know what conscience tells some of you: it says to you, "How is it you can forget divine things? How can you trifle with the world to come? How can you live as if you never meant to die? What will you do when you come to die, without an interest in the Lord Jesus Christ?" So, that conscience may be quiet awhile, you make an excuse, and persevere in refusing to come to the feast.

It may be that you make this excuse *to satisfy custom.* It is not the custom of this present age to fly immediately in the face of Christ. There are not many men of your acquaintance or mine, who ostensibly oppose religion. Your father fears God; your mother is a woman of great devotion; your friends go to the house of God and speak experimentally of divine things: you do not like therefore to say to them, "I will never be a Christian; I dislike the ways of God; I do not choose the plan of sovereign grace;" and therefore to spare their feelings you make

an excuse. You do not want to grieve dear friends, you are afraid if you spoke out honestly what your soul feels, that it might bring your mother with grey hairs to the grave, or make your father's heart to break, and so you make the excuse, that they may entertain a comfortable hope whereas, while you make excuses, there is no hope for you at all. For my part, I would rather you would speak outright and say what you mean. I would that you would say, "I am an enemy of Christ; I do not believe his gospel; I will not serve him." This might sound very badly, but it would show, at least, that there was some sincerity in you, and we would hope that, ere long, you might be bowed to the will of Christ. Excuses are curses, and when you have no excuses left there will be hope for you.

It may be you make these excuses because *you have had convictions* which so haunt you at times that you dare not oppose Christ to his face. You have gone home from the services to weep. That little chamber of yours is a witness that you cannot live altogether without prayer. The other day when you went to a funeral, you came home with your mind very solemn, and you thought then that certainly you would yield to the commands of Jesus. When you were sick, and had that week or two upstairs alone, then you vowed and resolved; but your resolves melted into thin air. The tear starts to your eye, you are almost persuaded to be a Christian; you breathe a prayer, but ah! some ill companion tempts you the next morning, and according to the old proverb, "The dog hath returned to his vomit, and the sow that was washed to her wallowing in the mire." Ah! how many times did I have convictions of sin, and terrible ones, too, and yet I said, like Felix to Paul, "Go thy way for this time; when I have a convenient season, I will call for thee;" but I could not quench these convictions by downright opposition to Christ; I knew too much, and felt too much to do that, and so I tried to patch up a truce between my soul and my convictions.

Satan is always ready to help men with excuses. This is a trade of which there is no end. It certainly commenced very early, for after our first parents had sinned, one of the first occupations upon which they entered was to make themselves aprons of fig-leaves to hide their nakedness. Read the Scriptures through, and you will find that excuse-making has been a habit in all ages and among all classes of people; and till the last sinner shall be saved by sovereign grace, I suppose men will still be setting up their vain excuses in the temple of God. If you will fire the gun, Satan will always keep you supplied with ammunition. When he thinks that a truth is about to come home to you, if you cannot frame an excuse, he will do it for you; he will run between you and the cannon-shot of God's Word to prevent your being wounded by it. If the preacher's sword should be too sharp for you, and make your conscience bleed, the evil one has a Satanic plaister with which he very soon binds up the wound.

The natural self-righteousness of man prompts him to frame apologies. We are all the best men in the world according to our own gauge and measure. If we could sit as judges upon ourselves, the verdict would always be "Not guilty." Sin, which would be very shocking in another, is very venial in us; nay, what would be abominable in other men, becomes almost commendable in ourselves, so par-

tially do we judge our own case. Since the sinner cannot think it quite right for himself to be an unbeliever in Christ, since his enlightened conscience will not let him say that he is quite safe while he refuses to fly to the wounds of Jesus, he runs to excuses in order that he may still say, "I am rich and increased in goods," and not be driven to the unhappy necessity of crying, "I am naked and poor and miserable." Sinful self is hard to conquer, but righteous self is the worst enemy of the two. When we can make men plead guilty, then God pronounces absolution upon them; but while men will interpose their extenuations, there is little or no hope for them. O great God, our Master, rend away the excuses from every sinner here, and make him stand guilty before thy bar in his own consciousness, that he may cry, "God be merciful to me, a sinner," and find pardon through the blood of Jesus Christ. Take heed, O ye ungodly ones, lest ye go on excusing, and excusing, and excusing, until ye excuse yourselves down to the pit of hell; for this know, ye will never be able to excuse yourselves out again.

II. We come to RECOUNT *these excuses*.

Many will not come to the great supper—will not be Christians on the same ground as those in the parable—*they are too busy*. They have a large family, and it takes all their time to earn bread and cheese for those little mouths. They have a very large business—many servants in their employ, and from the first thing in the morning to the last thing at night, if they do not see after business, their affairs must go wrong. Or else, if they have no business, yet they have so many pleasures, and these require so much time—their butterfly visits during the morning take up so many hours—the dropping of their small pieces of pasteboard at other people's doors occupy all their leisure, and they really have no opportunity to think about matters so unpalatable as death and eternity. This excuse scarcely needs a word from me to answer it, because every man knows that it is grossly false. Nobody goes starving because he has not time to eat. Now, if God has given time for us to support our natural frame, much more has he given us time for the soul to feed. I do not find my friends in the street half dressed; but I find some of them spend many a half-hour over that other pin, and that other ribbon. Now, surely if they have time to dress the body, they must have had time given them in which to put on the robe of righteousness and array the soul. If you have not the time, God gave it to you, and you must have misspent it. God gives you time as a steward, and if you say to your Master, "I have it not," he will reply to you, "I entrusted it to you; you must have spent it on yourself; you have robbed God." A little earlier rising, a little less time at the table—either of these might give you time enough. You know you have the time, and when you say you have it not, the lie is too thin; you can see through it. O soul! O soul! when holy men can find hours for prayer; when such a man as Martin Luther, when he was very busy, used to say, "I must have three hours prayer to-day at least, or else I cannot get through my business," do not tell me that you have not time to seek the Lord. Besides, it is not an affair of time. Salvation may be wrought in an instant. There is life in a look at the crucified One; there is life at this moment for thee; and

between now and the time when this service shall have gone, there is time enough for thee to have laid hold upon eternal life, and to have received Christ Jesus to thy soul's salvation. That excuse will not do.

But then they fly to another. *They are too good.* When I have preached free grace and a full Christ, I have heard some say, "That is a good sermon for the crowd in a theatre, for ignorant, low-lived people; but we respectable people do not require such salvation. To offer a free salvation to men who are neither drunkards nor swearers, why the thing is ridiculous. The sermon was very good for Magdalens, for thieves, and such like, but not for us." No, you are *too good* to be saved. You need not a physician, because you are whole. Your own table has enough upon it, you do not need to come to this feast. But bethink you, I pray you, whether this be not all a mistake. In what are you better than other men, after all? What if you do not indulge in open sins, does not your heart often go a-lusting towards evil? Does your tongue always speak that which is right and true? If you cannot remember sins of commission, what about the sins of omission? Have you fed the hungry? Have you clothed the naked? Have you taught the ignorant? Have you loved God with all your heart, and soul, and strength? Have you given him all that he demands of you? Why you cannot say this. Now the perfection, the holiness, which God demands in order to salvation must be like a perfect alabaster vase: if there be a single crack or spot on it, all is spoiled. You may say, "Well, it is not much broken; we have not seriously damaged it;" nay, but God requires it to be perfect, and no matter how slight the damage it may have sustained, you cannot enter heaven upon the footing of your good works—you are cast out for ever. Hear these words, "By the deeds of the law there shall no flesh be justified in his sight." "Cursed is every one that continueth not in all things which are written in the book of the law to do them," and "As many as are of the works of the law, are under the curse." God save you from that false excuse.

Another class say, "*We are too bad to be saved.*" The gospel cries, 'Believe in Jesus Christ and live,' but it cannot mean me; I have been too gross an offender. When I was but young I went into evil, and since then I have gone from bad to worse. O sir, I have cursed God to his face; I have sinned against light and knowledge, against a mother's prayers and tears. I have spoken evil of God's Word; I have laughed at the very name of his Son Jesus Christ. I am too evil to be saved." Here is another bad excuse. You *know*, sinner, if you have been a hearer of the gospel, that this is not true, for bad as you are, no man is excluded from Christ on account of his vileness. "All manner of sin and of blasphemy shall be forgiven unto men." The invitations of the gospel do not stop at a certain point of sin, but on the contrary, they seem to select the worst sinners first. What did the Saviour say? "Begin at Jerusalem." But, Lord, the men live there who crucified thee. "Begin at Jerusalem." But, Lord, it was in Jerusalem that they shed thy blood, and thrust out the tongue and laughed at thee, and made a mockery of thy prayers. "Begin at Jerusalem"—the worst first. Just as the surgeon in a battle is wont to look to the worst cases first. Here is a man who has lost

his finger. Ah? well, let him bide awhile, we will see to that. But here is another who has lost a limb, and he is bleeding fast, and if the blood be not stopped, his life will ooze out. The surgeon gives him the first turn. O you great sinners, you who feel yourselves to have been notorious offenders, I pray you be not so guilty as to make this an excuse for not coming to Christ; on the contrary, use it as a reason why you should fly to him at once. The more filth, the more need of washing; the more sick, the more need of a physician; the more hungry, the more welcome to the table. Come to Jesus just as you are, with all your sins: "Though they be as scarlet, they shall be as white as snow;" though they be red like crimson, they shall be as wool." No form of sin, imaginable or unimaginable, can by any possibility, be a bar to any man's salvation, if he will but believe on the Lord Jesus Christ.

Then comes another excuse, "Sir, I would trust Christ with my soul this morning, but *I do not feel in a fit state to trust Christ*. I have not that sense of sin which I think to be a fit preparation for coming to Christ—

" 'If aught is felt, 'tis only pain
To find I cannot feel.' "

Ah! my dear hearer, this is an excuse which looks like a very good one, but it has no truth in it. There is no fitness wanted before you may trust in Christ. Whatever may be your present condition, if you trust Jesus Christ with your soul, you are saved on the spot; your sins are forgiven you; you are made a child of God; you are accepted in the Beloved. Where do you read of fitness for Christ in the Scriptures? Were the dead whom Jesus restored, fit to be raised think you? Why, Martha said of her brother, "Lord, by this time he stinketh, for he hath been dead four days;" was there any fitness in Lazarus for a resurrection? And yet Jesus said, "Lazarus, come forth!" Does the gospel say, "He who is in a certain state, and then believeth, shall be saved;" no, but, "He that believeth and is baptized, shall be saved." How am I bidden to preach to you? Am I to say, "Whosoever feels this is to come?" no, but, "Whosoever will, let him come and take the water of life freely." Are you willing to have Christ? Then you may have him, for Christ is as free to every needy sinner as the drinking-fountain in the street is free to every thirsty passer-by. Trust Jesus, even if your heart be hard as granite—he can soften it. Trust him, though conscience be asleep; though all the mental faculties be perverted—trust him. It is his business to make you holy, not your business—trust him to do it all. He is called Jesus because he saves his people from their sins. Trust him to overcome your corruptions, to kill your evil temper, to subdue your will, to soften your heart, to enlighten your conscience, to inflame your love—trust him to do it all. O, be not so foolish as to say, "I am too ill to send for a doctor: when I get better, when I feel better, then I will send for him." Do not say, "I am so black; if I felt more clean, I would wash;" no, but wash *because* thou art black; wash *because* thou hast nothing but filth about thee; send for the great Physician *because* there is no health in thee. There is nothing in thee but wounds, bruises, and putrefying sores; therefore, let thy faith entrust thy healing entirely to him.

Here comes another, "O sir, I would trust Christ with my soul, but *it seems too good to be true*, that God should save me on the spot, this morning. You little know where I was last night, or what I did yester-

day; you cannot tell who I am, nor how bad I have been, and you tell me that if I trust Jesus Christ, I shall be saved. Sir, it is too good to be true, I cannot imagine it." My dear friend, dost thou measure God's corn with thy bushel? Because the thing seems an amazing thing to thee, should it therefore be amazing unto him? What if his thoughts should be as high above thy thoughts as the heavens are above the earth? Is not this just what he has said in Scripture? I know you find it hard to forgive your fellow-man, but my Father, my God, can readily forgive you.

"Crimes of such horror to forgive,
Such guilty daring worms to spare:
This is thy grand prerogative,
And none shall in the honour share."

He *creates* like a God; he does not make a few insects, or here and there a star, but this great world he fashioned, and he scattered the starry orbs about with both his hands. So when the Lord comes to pardon, he does not pardon some small offences and wink at trifles, but the whole mass of sin he cleanseth away in a moment, and all manner of sin and blasphemy, in an instant, he casteth behind his back. Do believe that God is God and not such a one as thou art; do think that he is capable of doing greater things than thou canst dream of. Trust him, trust him now, and however good the things are, thou shalt find them true; however great, they shall be thine.

I think I hear one say, "*It is too soon for me to come*: let me have a little look at the world first. I am scarce fifteen or sixteen. There is plenty of time for me." You have been to the graveyard. Are there not there the records of those who have found fifteen or sixteen none too soon, for lo, at that age, they were taken away to their last account. Too soon! Is it ever too soon to be happy? If religion made you miserable, I might advise you to put it off to the last, but inasmuch as to be in Christ is to be happy, you cannot be in him too soon. I have sat by many death-beds, and heard many regrets, but never did I hear a Christian regret that he was converted too soon. I have received many young converts into Church-fellowship, but I never heard any one of them say they were sorry to be called by grace so early. If I were condemned to die, and anyone should bring me a pardon, I should not think I received it too soon. The wrath of God abideth on you—can it be too soon to escape from it? You are the subject of daily temptations, and daily add to your sins—can it be too soon to have a new heart and a right spirit?

Others will row in the opposite direction, pleading, "*Alas! it is too late*." The devil first puts the clock back and tells you it is too soon, and when this does not serve his turn, he puts it on and says, "The hour is passed, the day of grace is over; mercy's gate is bolted, you can never enter it." Let us answer this at once. It is never too late for a man to believe in Jesus while he is out of his grave. While the lamp of life continues to burn, the vilest sinner who returns shall find Christ ready to receive him. There have been men converted at a hundred years of age; we have instances on record of persons who have even passed the century and become children of Christ Jesus? How old are you? Are you in the sere and yellow leaf of eighty? Ah! thou hast many sins, but what a triumph of grace it will be when eighty

years of sin shall all be washed away in a moment! I tell you, that if you were as old as Methuselah, and in every year of that long life you had as many sins as you have already committed in the whole eighty years, yet the grace of Jesus Christ is sufficient to put all this away. Your sins may mount up like mountains, but the love of Christ, like Noah's flood, can go twenty cubits upwards, and the tops of the mountains shall be covered. It is not too soon; it is not too late; neither of these reasons are of any value though they delude many.

"Well," says another, "I would believe in Christ, but *I do not know whether I am one of God's elect or not.* Sir, that doctrine of election troubles me and staggers me. If I knew I was one of the elect, I would trust Christ." That is—if God will show you his secrets, then you will do God's will, and so the Almighty is to bend to your conditions, and then you will do as he bids you! You will come to feast at the man's table, if he will take you into his secret closet, and show you all his treasure! He will do nothing of the kind. How foolish this talk is about election! The doctrine of election is a great and precious truth, but it never can be a valid reason for a man's not believing in Christ. You are ill to-day, and the doctor comes, "There," says he, "there is the medicine, I will guarantee if you take it, it will heal you." You say, "Sir, I would take it at once, but I do not know whether I am predestinated to get over this fever. If I am predestinated to live, why then, sir, I will take the medicine, but I must know first." "Ah!" says the doctor, "I tell you what, if you do not take it, you are predestinated to die." And I will tell you this, if you will not believe in Jesus Christ, you will be damned, be you who you may, but you will not be able to lay it at predestination's door; it will lie at your own. A man has fallen overboard; a rope is thrown to him, but he says, "I should like to grasp that rope, only I do not know whether I am predestinated to be drowned." Fool! he will go down to the bottom with a lie in his mouth. We do not say, "I would sit down to dinner to-day, but I will not eat, because I do not know whether I am predestinated to have any dinner to-day." We do not talk so foolishly in common things, why then do we so in religion? When men are hard-up for an excuse, they are glad to run to the mysteries of God to use them as a veil to cover their faces. O my dear friends, you must know that though God has a chosen people, yet when he commands you to believe in Christ, his having a chosen people, or not having a chosen people cannot excuse you from obedience to the divine command: "Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved." I could not attempt to go through all these excuses, and therefore after handling two more, I will have done.

"Well," says one, "if I were to believe in Christ *I should be as bad after a short time as I used to be.* I might be a little better for a time, but I should go back again; so it is of no use trusting Christ." That is to say, dear friend, *Jesus Christ* says if you trust him, he will save you: *you* say if you trust him, he will not save you. That is what it comes to. Jesus Christ promises that if you trust him, he will save you from your sins: you say, "No, I should go back to my sins and be as bad as before." Which am I to believe—your excuse, or his promise? Why, Christ's promise, surely! "But I tried once before," says one. Very likely *you* did, but *Christ* never tried, for if *he* had tried, *he* would have

succeeded. "Well, but, I did hold on a certain length of time." I dare say you did—you held on; but if Christ had hold of you, he would never have let you go. When *you* get hold of Christ you may soon drop him, but when Jesus gets hold of you, he says, "I give unto my sheep eternal life, and they shall never perish, neither shall any man pluck them out of my hand." If you had greatly trusted Christ, he would not have suffered you to become what you used to be.

"Well," says one, "*I cannot trust Christ, I cannot believe him.*" You talk Latin, brother; you talk Latin. "No," you say, "I do not talk Latin." Yes, you do. I will translate that word into the English for you. It means, "*I will not.*" When you say, "I cannot," it means, "I will not;" and understand, whenever the minister says, "You cannot," he means, "you will not;" for he does not mean that you have any natural inability, but that you have a moral inability caused by your love of sin—a wilful inability. "I cannot," is the Latin, but "I will not," is the English of it. A man once sent his servant to a certain town to fetch some goods; and he came back without them. "Well, sir, why did you not go there?" "Well, when I got to a certain place, I came to a river, sir, a very deep river: I cannot swim, and I had no boat; so I could not get over." A good excuse, was it not? It looked so, but it happened to be a very bad one, for the master said, "Is there not a ferry there?" "Yes, sir." "Did you ask the man to take you over?" "No, sir." Surely the excuse was a mere fiction! So there are many things with regard to our salvation which we cannot do. Granted, but then there is a ferry there! There is the Holy Spirit who is able to do all things, and you remember the text, "If ye then, being evil, know how to give good gifts unto your children, how much more shall your Father which is in heaven give good things to them that ask him?" It is true you cannot make yourself a new heart, but did you ask for a new heart with sincerity and truth? Did you seek Christ? If you say, "Yes, I did sincerely seek Christ, and Christ would not save me," why then you are excused; but there never was a soul who could in truth say that. There never was a sinner yet who perished seeking Christ, and there never will be; and if thy heart's sincere desire is after the salvation which is treasured in Christ Jesus, then heaven and earth may pass away, but Christ will never cast you out while his own word stands, "Him that cometh to me I will in no wise cast out." "Still," you say, "I cannot trust Christ." Now, I am at issue with you here—I am at issue with every awakened sinner. I agree with you, if you will let me give my own translation of the word cannot—that you *will not*, but if it is to stand as the word is generally used, I am at issue with you. Suppose that you believe me to be an honest man, would it be fair after that, to say, "Sir, I cannot believe you?" Now, if you believe me to be a liar, I can very well understand that you cannot trust me; but if you take it for granted that I am incapable of telling a falsehood, and yet do not believe what I tell you, you are a liar. Now, you believe that Christ is incapable of falsehood; you are not like those who are ignorant of the character of Christ, and therefore you know him to be incapable of untruthfulness—and then you say you cannot believe him. Seeing that Jesus Christ cannot but speak truth, it cannot be a difficult thing for

any man to believe what he speaks. If you have sufficient light given you by the Holy Spirit, to know that Christ is the truth, I believe you have sufficient power from the same source to believe what Christ says. I trace this to God's gift, but I do pray you to exercise the power which you certainly have. Tell Christ you cannot believe him! Will you tell him that to his face, when he sits upon the judgment-seat at last? Will you dare to say this when his eyes of fire shall look you through and through? "Most holy Christ, I could not trust thee! Most truthful Saviour, I could not believe thee! I suspected thee, I doubted thee!" "Wherefore didst thou doubt me then? What cause had I ever given thee? Wherefore didst thou think me a liar? In what had I ever broken my promises, or when did I err from the truth?" "He that believeth not," says John, "hath made God a liar, because he believeth not the record that God gave of his Son." O, do think of this, and never make that excuse again. Instead of saying, "I cannot believe," say "I cannot make God a liar, I must therefore believe, for I know God is no liar—I must therefore trust his Son Jesus Christ.

I have recounted a few of these excuses; perhaps you will make another batch before the evening comes on—you who determine not to be saved. It is only the mighty Spirit of God who can sweetly constrain your will to yield to Christ, and so I close with these two or three words, upon the third point.

III. HOW FOOLISH THUS TO MAKE EXCUSES. For first *remember with whom it is you are dealing*. You are not making excuses before a man who may be duped by them, but you make these excuses before the heart-searching God. My dear hearers, let me speak very solemnly, and push this point closely home. You know that God can see through all this—why then do you hang up such thin veils? Confess before him now your folly: "Lord, I have been an enemy to thee; Lord, I have been averse to thy Son Jesus Christ, and therefore have I patched up these excuses: forgive me; I see how foolish I have been; grant that I may do so no more."

Remember again, *what it is you are trifling with*. It is your own soul, the soul which can never die. You are trifling with a heaven which you will never see if you keep on with these excuses. You are trifling, sinner, with that hell which must be your never-ending portion if you continue as you are. Can you play with hell-fire? O, can you make sport of heaven? Can you laugh at the blood of Jesus? You are really doing so while you are thus halting between two opinions. Now if you must play the fool, find something cheaper to play with than this. O sirs, if you must have mirth, I pray you have it out of something else than this. To be saved! hark to heaven's music! To be lost! listen to hell's groans! Neither of these things are matters for you to play with. Say, as now you are sitting here—I pray God help you to say it before you leave this house—"Lord, I have been trifling with eternity; I have been making frivolous excuses rather than I would accept thy love in Christ; I have trifled with heaven and hell: grant, Lord, that this may be brought to an end, that I may love and trust thee this day."

Remember, again, that these excuses will look very different soon.

How will you make excuses when you come to die, as die you must? When death gets the grip of you, and the strong man faileth, and they wipe the death-sweat from your fevered brow, when the glaze of death's night is coming over your eyeballs, what will you think of these excuses then? It may be, you will rave with very fury at yourselves, that you could have played with your souls to such an extent. What will you do with your excuses when you stand at the bar of judgment? The trumpet rings, you have awakened from your grave, you stand amidst the myriads to be judged. The books are opened, and Christ proclaims your doom—"Depart, ye cursed, into everlasting fire." Will excuses comfort you then? Will you be able to say then, "Lord, it was too soon; Lord, it was too late; Lord, I was too great a sinner to believe in Jesus, or I did not need a Saviour?" Nay, when the trumpet peals, and the heavens are in a blaze; when the sun is turned into sackcloth, and the moon into blood, and the stars fall like fig-leaves from the tree, you will find other work to do than excuse-making; you will weep and wail because of sin, and when you are cast into hell, what will you make then of your excuses? Written in letters of fire, you shall see in one tremendous arch above your heads, "Ye knew your duty, but ye did it not; you heard the gospel, but you made excuses." Thundering more tremendous than the trump of resurrection, shall come these words to you, "Because I have called, and ye refused; I have stretched out my hand, and no man regarded. . . . I also will laugh at your calamity; I will mock when your fear cometh; when your fear cometh as desolation, and your destruction cometh as a whirlwind; when distress and anguish cometh upon you." O, the Lord have mercy upon you, excuse makers, and bring you to look to Jesus now. *Now*, I say, for the Scripture saith, "*To-day* is the accepted time, *to-day* is the day of salvation." The only way to end your excuses is not by praying nor resolving, but by looking to Christ. There hangs the bleeding Saviour on the cross, he dies the just for the unjust to bring us to God; he suffers there that sin may be forgiven. Look thou to him, trust thou to him, and thou shalt be saved. My hearer, I give thee now in God's name this invitation, this command, trust thy soul to Jesus, the Son of God, who suffered for sin, and thou shalt be saved. But mind you this. I may never meet you all this side the grave, but I will meet you all at God's great day, and if you receive not Christ and trust in him, I am clear of your blood. Upon my skirts your doom cannot fall. Ye have heard the gospel, ye have been told to trust Jesus as you are, you have been assured that he is able to save to the uttermost them that come to him. You have been bidden to come, and now on your own heads be your soul's ruin if ye come not. But may the Spirit of God take these things and apply them to your souls. May he be as a fire and as a hammer in your souls: as a fire to melt, or as a hammer to break; and may you *to-day* with brokenness of heart **take** Christ to be **your Saviour**, both now and for ever. Amen.