

# Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit.

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LOVING PERSUASION.

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## A Sermon

DELIVERED ON LORD'S-DAY MORNING, JUNE 26TH, 1887, BY

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“Persuading them concerning Jesus.”—Acts xxviii. 23.

WHEREVER Paul is, he has but one errand; and whenever Paul preaches, he has but one subject. Once at Athens, when he addressed the Areopagus, he seemed to wander a little from his main point, and no special good followed, but this experience bound him all the faster to the cross; for he afterwards said to the Corinthians, “I determined not to know anything among you, save Jesus Christ, and him crucified.” The cross of Christ was his one theme. He henceforth hammered on the head of this one nail. Whatever faculty, ability, and power he had, he turned its whole current into this one channel, and cried, “God forbid that I should glory, save in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, by whom the world is crucified unto me, and I unto the world.” Brethren, we have not strength enough for a dozen things, we have not even strength enough for two. What little vigour we have, let us use it all in one direction; let us say, “For me to live is Christ.” You could not have dropped into Paul’s lodging at any time during the two years that he was at Rome before the emperor liberated him, without hearing him preach of the “things which concern the Lord Jesus Christ. Every arrow in his quiver was aimed at the one target; and he knew how to hit the white of it each time. “This one thing I do,” said he. His motto was—All for Jesus, and for Jesus only.

The one topic the apostle brought forward in different ways. When addressing the chief men of the Jews in Rome, observe that he expounded, and testified, and persuaded. These three methods were needful among the people of those days; and they are the wisest that can be adopted to bring men to Christ even now. We must *expound*, set forth, explain, make clear the gospel. We must tell men what the Word of God means, in the plainest possible language; for they need to know what it is that the revelation from heaven has really declared. The more of true exposition the better. We must also *testify*. We must bear witness to the effect which the gospel has had upon our heart and life. The telling out of our personal experience is a means of grace to our hearers. Paul was wont to describe his own conversion. He

told the story of how the Lord appeared unto him in the way to Damascus ; and he did this so often, that Luke and others, who were his companions, must have heard it several times. Indeed, it was a tale so worth the telling that none could weary of hearing it. Paul knew that personal witness-bearing has a great weight upon the minds of men ; and, therefore, he was not afraid of being accused of egotism, for he knew that he did not preach himself, but Christ Jesus the Lord ; and the narrative of his conversion was not intended at all to honour himself, but to glorify that blessed Christ, who out of heaven had spoken to him, and called him to be a chosen vessel to bear his word to the Gentiles. There is much force in such a personal testimony. Oh, that you and I, after having explained the gospel, may always be able to tell out something from our own experience which will prove it ! Men love, when they hear of a medicine, to meet with a case of cure ; and, in the same way, when they hear of religion, they desire to hear from persons like themselves what that religion has done for them. Brethren, we should speak of Jesus in a happy, grateful, earnest manner, and commend him as a Saviour to our fellow-sinners. Yet this was not all, our apostle was not satisfied simply to expound and testify ; his heart was full of love to his countrymen ; and, therefore, he *persuaded* them. He entreated, he besought, he implored his hearers to turn to the Lord Jesus Christ.

As Paul was speaking to Jews, he fetched the arguments of his persuasion from their own holy books. I have no doubt that he had spread out on the table before him the books of Moses, and the various rolls of the prophets : to these he continually referred his Jewish friends. We cannot this morning go into that argument, neither is there need ; for you are not Israelites, and you are already well acquainted with that mode of argument. Paul must have been a master in that line of things. I think I hear him now explaining to them concerning Jesus as he appeared in Melchisedec ; here was a wide subject. Hear him open up to them the justification of Abraham by faith ; and then the allegory of Sarah and Hagar, and the two covenants. I should have liked to have heard him speak of Isaac and Ishmael, and of Jacob and Esau, and the electing love of God as seen in those memorable instances. With what rapture would Paul speak of the sacrifices, reminding them that "without shedding of blood there is no remission," and pointing them to the blood of sprinkling, which speaketh better things than that of Abel ! How he would then open up to them the meaning of the daily offerings, the mystery of the day of atonement, the sacred teaching of the entering in of the high priest within the veil ! How earnestly would he remind his brethren that the continual repetition of the sacrifices was a sure evidence that they had not made the consciences of the offerers clean from a sense of sin, or they would have ceased to be offered ! How heartily would he direct their minds to that one sacrifice which Jesus presented once for all when he bowed his head in death ! I think I can hear him turning to that memorable passage in Isaiah which so much engaged the attention of the Ethiopian eunuch, and opening up to his audience the person and suffering of the Lord Jesus, who was led as a lamb to the slaughter for our sakes, and for us was stricken, smitten, and afflicted. With such arguments

men who believed those books to be inspired ought to have been convinced. It is clear that Jesus of Nazareth is the Messiah predicted in the Old Testament. Had not their hearts been so gross, their eyes so blind, and their ears so dull, they must have believed in Jesus ; but as it was, many of the Jewish leaders went away in a pet, quarrelling with those who believed, and angry with Paul. None are such bitter enemies of the cross as those who, by a firm resolve, determine to be blind to its glory and dead to its power.

Thus Paul, you see, in his pleading, adapted himself to his audience. He had acquired the knack of being all things to all men, that he might save some. In pleading with Israel, for whose salvation his heart's desire and prayer ever rose to heaven, he followed the wisest and most hopeful course. He argued from what they did believe : he urged the truth they already knew as a reason why they should admit another truth ; or, rather, let me say, he showed them that the gospel of Jesus was involved and contained within those truths which were assuredly accepted among them. He spent the whole day at this ; but at this time I shall not pursue his line of reasoning, because it is not needed among you, and you have need of persuasion of another sort. It would ill become me to beat the air, or exhibit before you a mimic combat with an absent adversary. No, my friends, I have before me another sort of people, whose condition needs another treatment. I long for your immediate conversion. With earnest prayer have I come hither, seeking with tears and entreaties to win men from destruction. Others have joined me in supplication, and therefore I look to the Holy Spirit for his gracious work, that my hearers may be convinced of sin and led to Jesus.

I. LET ME FIRST DESCRIBE THOSE WHOM WE WOULD PERSUADE. I will so picture you that some of you will see yourselves as in a looking-glass. I shall not talk to a people far away, but to you who sit before me this day.

*I would persuade those persons who believe the truth notionally, and yet do not receive it in their hearts.* It seems a strange thing that men should believe, and yet not believe. This peculiar form of unbelief is current among us at this day. It is strange that men believe the Bible, and even profess to believe it all, and yet they act as if it were all a dream. If we preach the deity of Christ, it is an easy task ; for they never thought of questioning it. If we proclaim the need of the Holy Spirit in regeneration, they are agreed ; for they never doubted it. Whatever doctrine it is that we can prove by the Word of God, they bow before it. They are not guilty of scepticism. Alas ! they hardly give the matter thought enough to observe any difficulties. Avoiding the whirlpool of questioning, they run upon the rock of indifference. Their belief holds the truth as spices and linen preserve a mummy. The gospel is to them a dead monarch, honourably interred in the sarcophagus of their reverence. It has no more power over them than if they disbelieved it. As a medicine retained upon the druggist's shelf has no effect upon the body, so is the gospel stowed away in the minds of many so as to have no result in their lives. This must be a sad misuse of a divine revelation. It cannot have been sent to us to be without effect. O my hearers, if you believe that Jesus is the Saviour,

why is he not *your* Saviour? If you believe that repentance and faith bring salvation, why have *you* not repented and believed? If you believe that there is a God that heareth prayer, why do you not pray? If you know that you must be born again, how is it you are content without the new birth? How is it that with regard to the hearing of the word you come and you go, not once nor twice, but year after year, and yet you are unmoved and unchanged? Age steals over some of you, and finds you not an inch in advance of what you were in your youth. If you did not believe the Word of God, I could understand your conduct; but if you do believe it, why do you not receive it practically into your hearts? If you were awakened by a cry of fire, and you were sure that your own house was burning, I should expect to see you hurrying from the flame. I could understand you keeping to your bed if you were persuaded that the cry was the mere idle noise of boys in the street; but if you believed it to be a real alarm, I should be perplexed if I saw you seeking a little more sleep. If you were told that you had a disease about you which would soon bring you to your grave, and that a certain physician could work a speedy cure; if you did not believe the report, I should expect that you would suffer in the patience of despair; but if you did believe in the repute of the physician, and in the cures which he had wrought, I should not be able to understand you if you did not go to him, and seek relief. O sirs, how is it that you are willing to continue in sin when Jesus is able to save unto the uttermost? How strangely you act! Alas! human nature has become monstrous: it is false to its own instinct of self-preservation, and acts in a suicidal manner. Oh that you were wise! If Jesus tells you the truth, why do you not believe him? If Jesus be himself the truth, why do you not receive him? Why do you need persuading to a course so proper, so reasonable?

*Many need persuading, who intend soon to practise what they have believed, but the time has not fully come.* You have a resolve in your heart that before long you will turn to Christ; but the unhappy thing is, that you have for many a day retained this resolve, and it has grown mouldy within your bosoms. When we met you as a child you meant to love the Lord. When we conversed with you as young men and women you were very hopeful, and your parents felt that their prayers would soon be heard. You seemed so thoughtful and impressible, and you had such good intentions, that we all reckoned upon your speedily being decided. You are much older now, but you are not more advanced: still with you it is all intentions and intentions. I wish there could be a time fixed in your mind when it should be either "yes" or "no." "How long halt ye between two opinions?" How long shall Jesus be put off, and the world be served? Some of you are not a whit more hopeful than you were twenty years ago. Let me recall the expression: you are a deal more hopeless, for you are becoming gospel-hardened. Appeals which once pierced your hearts do not even wound you now. As water rolls down a marble slab and leaves nothing behind, so it is now with what you hear. The sword of the Spirit is as sharp as ever, but your heart has hardened like steel in the annealing. Oh, you that are for ever resolving and resolving, and yet abide where you are—you are the people whom at this time I would persuade to decision!

Some have gone further still ; for they are *earnestly seeking salvation, but they have chosen a wrong method of search, which can only end in disappointment.* I would fain persuade them to leave off seeking the living among the dead. Salvation is by immediate trust in Jesus ; but you want to feel up to a certain degree of anguish, or you want to change yourselves up to a certain point of excellence ; in a word, you want to save yourselves first, and then come to Jesus. You are trying to make the lantern shine before a candle is put within it. You want to renew your own nature, and then to come to Christ for a new heart : you are not content to come to Jesus as sinners. All will be done for you if you will but put your trust in the Lord Jesus Christ ; but this you fail to do. If I knew how to put the gospel more plainly than I do, God knows I would not be slack to do so ; but yet, with all the plainness of our preaching, our hearers will persist in going about after this and that hope of their own, instead of at once accepting salvation by Jesus Christ. Oh, that you were so persuaded of the things concerning Jesus, as to lay hold of them at once ! You need to be led to see that salvation is all finished, and that you have but to take it as a free gift. "Christ hath died," and in that expression lies your life. Believing in Jesus, you have eternal life the moment you believe. You need to be persuaded to accept this as the present truth, the most precious truth you can ever hear. If you will receive it, happy will it be with you ; but if you continue running hither and thither after salvation, and neglecting the Lord Jesus, you shall perish in your sins. Why will you pursue the will-o'-the-wisp, and shut your eyes to the day-star ? Why will you follow the mirage, and leave the lone well in the desert whose sweet waters will for ever remove your thirst ? Oh, that you were rightly persuaded at this very moment !

One other class I should like to deal with this morning : I would fain persuade *those who have tried a long time to do their best, and, having never succeeded, are falling into a state of despair.* Theirs is not a painful despair ; I wish it were so ; but, alas ! they have fallen into a lethargy, a paralysis of the mind with regard to heavenly things. "It is no good," they say, "I cannot get peace, I shall never find pardon. A child of God I cannot hope to be ; I might as well expect to be a peer of the realm !" Therefore they sit down in sullen hopelessness. They mutter that if it is to be it will be, and it is of no use caring. They are rendered insensible by the frost-bite of their horrible idea of fate. Oh, that they had been warmed by the sunlight of belief in a gracious predestination ! Men die by insensibility as surely as by passion. I fear that some of you will never awake until in hell you lift up your eyes. I have had you laid on my heart, and the thought of your danger presses me down into the dust at this time. I feel but little joy, even in these jubilee times, when I think about those of you who are so near to the kingdom, and yet are aliens from it. I must persuade you with all my heart to come to Jesus, for if you perish in the light, you will perish with a vengeance. If you go down to destruction from the borders of salvation, it will be sevenfold destruction. If you die with Jesus weeping over you, as he did over Jerusalem, you will die horribly. If you sink down to hell with that word in your ears, "How often would I have gathered you, as a hen gathereth her chickens

under her wings, and ye would not!" your sinking will be like that of a millstone in the sea. If you perish under a gospel ministry, it were better for you that you had never been born.

These are the people I long to persuade. O Divine Spirit, work through me at this time, and let the eternal purposes of love be fulfilled! O my brethren in Christ, I entreat you, by the love of Jesus, strive together with me in your prayers for this blessing!

II. Our second point shall be: LET US PERSUADE THEM. But are we right trying to persuade men? Are not human hearts too hard to be broken by so feeble a hammer as our persuasion? Yes, I most solemnly believe they are: but that is not the question. "What is the use of persuading them, if you know that they will not be won by your persuasion in and of itself?" Well, brethren, I feel safe in doing what Paul did. I will not stop to solve difficulties, but merely say, Paul persuaded, and so will I. "Knowing therefore the terror of the Lord, we persuade men." "Oh," says one, "we may persuade awakened sinners, but not dead sinners!" But I reply that Paul persuaded these chief men of the Jews, some of whom never believed in Jesus, for their hearts were gross, and their eyes were blinded. Paul persuaded them, though they were judicially blinded. He knew that they were living men, and that they were possessed of reason, even though they had no grace; and so he appealed to what remained in them, and he persuaded them. Again I say, I will do what Paul did. But I know, as Paul also knew, that all the human persuasion in the world will fall short of the mark without divine power. I never dreamed that my persuasion was of the slightest avail without the Holy Ghost. If the Holy Spirit will cause the persuasion to reach the inward ear, then it will prevail, and not else: if he will drive home the persuasion, so that it touches the heart which is encased in the fat of worldly pleasure, indifference, prejudice, and pride, then men will yield, and men will be persuaded indeed. But the Holy Spirit will do this! He has done it; he is doing it; he will do it; and therefore we persuade. Brothers, why should we not expect the Holy Spirit to display his power? We have sought it with fervent prayer. The preacher comes on this platform neither without his own prayers, nor without your prayers; and so we are persuaded that we shall have divine help. Therefore, O sinners, "as though God did beseech you by us, we pray you in Christ's stead, be ye reconciled to God"!

Once more, in the name of God, I return to the work to which God has ordained me. I would persuade you concerning Jesus. *To what shall I persuade you?* My dear hearers, I would persuade some of you to think of Christ, the Lord's anointed; to think of Jesus, the Saviour. I would have you read about him, and study his person, work, and character. Turn to the four evangelists, and see what he was, and what he did. Read carefully and reverently the inspired lives of Jesus. Faith often comes to men when they are thinking about Christ. The cross not only claims faith, but it creates it. To sit and see the Son of God die on the cross, is the way to get faith. Some of you, perhaps, have been sitting still, and trying to believe. That is a very absurd thing to do, for faith is not a first effort of the mind, but it follows upon other states. Know what is to be believed, and why you are to believe it. Know who he is in whom you are to put your trust, and why he deserves

to be trusted. Shut yourselves up a bit: read the Bible carefully, and then meditate, and meditate, and meditate. This is the way in which faith grows up in the soul, even as plants spring from seed sown and watered. Faith cometh by hearing or reading—the hearing or reading of the Word of God. “Incline your ear,” saith the Lord God, “and come unto me: hear, and your soul shall live.” May I not persuade you to think seriously and often about the way of salvation by Jesus Christ?

The next thing I would persuade you to is to *trust in him*. Trust is the essence of saving faith. Faith is not merely believing facts, but trusting to a person. God has set forth Christ to be a propitiation for sin: he becomes to me my propitiation when I trust him. Can you not trust Jesus? Is he not worth trusting? Where else can you trust? The moment you trust in him you are saved. You know that: why not prove it true by personal faith? To trust is the meaning of that text, “Look unto me, and be ye saved, all ye ends of the earth.” There is life in the glance of trust. You are living men when you look to Christ, or trust him. “But,” you say, “I do not feel——” Away with your buts! What have I said about your feelings? “Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved.” “He that believeth on him hath everlasting life.” Salvation lies in the simple act of trusting in your Saviour. Oh, that I could persuade you to trust!

And when you have trusted him, I want to persuade you concerning Jesus that you should *avow that trust*. The Lord puts it thus: “He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved.” Be baptized, therefore, in obedience to his command. Come out boldly and say, “I am on the Lord’s side.” Do not attempt to go sneaking to heaven along some back lane; come into the king’s highway; take up your cross, and follow him. He that will not confess him before men, Christ will not confess before his Father who is in heaven. What is there to be ashamed of in Jesus? If Christ be your Saviour, the very least thing you can do is to say, “I am his disciple,” and openly to declare yourself on his side. He puts it so—“He that with his heart believeth, and with his mouth maketh confession of him, shall be saved.” I would persuade you to an open confession; may God the Holy Spirit lead you at once to the doing of it!

And if I were happy enough to persuade you so far, I would persuade you to *obey Christ throughout life*. “Whatsoever he saith unto you, do it.” Seek to lead a holy, harmless, blameless life. Endeavour to avoid all sin, endeavour to copy the Son of God throughout your whole course, making him your model and your Master, your leader and your Lord. Some of you who have openly confessed Him still need to be persuaded to a closer obedience. “Without holiness no man shall see the Lord.” The way of complete obedience is the way of happiness; and many professors miss the joy of their Lord—I am half afraid they will miss his acceptance at the last, because they are not careful to walk in his ways, and to glorify his holy name by a holy life. I would persuade you then to think of Christ, to trust in Christ, to confess Christ, and to obey Christ.

*What shall be my arguments?* I can summon battalions of them from Jesus himself. He is the Son of God: therefore, trust him. He

loves with a supreme love; shall we not love him who first loved us? He died! Oh, by his agony and bloody sweat, by his cross and passion, I would persuade you to turn to him! Every drop of blood of the great Substitute, every sigh and every cry of the Redeemer, is an argument with men that they should not neglect his salvation, but should come and trust him. He is risen, and lives again: despise not the risen Saviour; come and bow before him who is proved to be the Son of God with power by his resurrection from the dead. He has gone up into his glory. He sitteth at the right hand of God: obey him, then, for all power is given to him in heaven and in earth. He will shortly come, and you and I (in how short a time!) will have to stand before his judgment-seat. Believe not those who would bid you trifle with a future state, and think little of the judgment to come. O men and women, a short time will swallow us all up in the grave, and we shall pass into another world; in little more than the twinkling of an eye we shall hear that last trumpet heralding the Judge! Then shall we hear the summons, "Come to judgment! Come to judgment! Come away!" Then I shall have to give an account of this morning's sermon. What a weight to have to preach to all of you, and to have your blood laid at my door if I preach not faithfully to you! O God Most Merciful, grant to all of us that knowing that Christ will come, and come to judgment, we may lay this fact to heart, and be persuaded to put our trust in him, who will otherwise pronounce upon us the sentence of eternal perdition!

I may summon another battalion of arguments *from your own state and need*. O sirs, you that are unconverted are yet in your sins, encrusted with years of gathered foulness! Your sins hang about you now like the white scales of leprosy: they are on your brows, and in your hearts. There is but one that can cleanse these defilements: it is Jesus. Why do you not fly to him? Moreover, remember the sinfulness of your nature. You will go on to sin; your heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked; you will not cease from sinning. Jesus alone can give you a new heart and a right spirit. He is the one physician able to cure your fatal disease. Will you not cry to him, "Jesus, Emmanuel, heal me with a touch"? Will you refuse to be made whole? I pray you do not so.

Even now you are conscious of a wearisome restlessness: you are not happy, you have forebodings of an awful future. You know you are not at peace. From all the gay and gallant sights you have seen this week you have turned away sick at heart; you need something better, and more substantial. Be assured there is no rest for you but in Christ: he saith to you, "Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest." Turn not away from the one and only rest of your souls; but this day accept him; take his yoke upon you, and learn of him, and you shall find rest unto your souls. As you love your souls, as you desire happiness here, as you desire blessedness hereafter, I beseech you to lay hold on eternal life in Jesus.

If I wanted more arguments there are many quarters from which they would come at my bidding. I would try to find them *in your hopes and fears*. I do not know to whom I may be speaking now; but, my friend, there is a glorious future before you if Christ becomes yours.

Burdened sinner, there is a peace which passeth all understanding if you will look to Jesus! O distracted, tempest-tossed soul, there is a haven of rest for you if you steer to Christ! I would fain persuade you now to come to him whose gift is heaven below and then heaven above. I myself have tried him. Blessed was the day in which I fell into his arms. O happy hour in which I looked to him and was lightened! Truly, my face is not ashamed, nor is my tongue ashamed of my Lord, nor is my understanding ashamed to believe his gospel, though all men should cast doubt upon it. I have no other hope under heaven, no other joy in heaven, but my Saviour and his infallible word. If you knew the comfort which my soul finds in Jesus you could not desire a better. O you young people, I would especially say to you—come early to Jesus, for they that seek him early shall find him with supreme delight! You will come to die soon; here is the antidote of death. The strongest and youngest will one day have to go upstairs and gather up his feet in the bed. Oh, what a comfort and joy it gives you in that hour to have the presence of your Lord! After death comes the for ever and ever. What bliss to be “for ever with the Lord”! That endless fellowship with Jesus means an immeasurable weight of glory. Surely these arguments ought to prevail with you. They will, if your reason is made reasonable.

*How ought I to plead with you* when I have told you these arguments? I ought to plead with you in a manner far superior to that which I have yet reached. Alas! I cannot persuade you as I would. I think the preacher should feel a burning desire for his hearers' conversion, and even an intense anguish of heart for the immediate salvation of those to whom he speaks. To this I have attained: I long for your salvation most vehemently. I would say anything, and say it anyhow, if I could but win you to immediate faith in the Lord Jesus. The desire is so strong upon me that should I not succeed on this occasion, I will try again; and if, unhappily, I should fail again, I will continue at the work as long as you live and I am able to reach you. O my hearers, I cannot endure that you should die in your sins! I will go before God in secret, and lay your case before him, and beg him to interpose. We cannot let you be damned, my hearers. It is too dreadful. We cannot stand by and see you lost. If you are so insane as to refuse the Saviour, those who have sober judgments will still continue to pray for you, and to weep in secret places because of your sins. If we cannot prevail with you for God, we will endeavour to prevail with God for you. I would have every person in this place act reasonably, righteously, truthfully, honestly to his own soul; and if he does so, he will be persuaded this day to believe in Jesus Christ the Son of God, and cast himself at his pierced feet.

III. Now I have to speak a few words upon another subject, with the same object. It is this—LET US LAMENT THE FACT THAT OUR PERSUASIONS FAIL IN CERTAIN CASES. Paul found it so; and where this chief of apostles was baffled, can I wonder if I fail? The sower went forth to sow; he was a model sower; the Master put him in his parable as a pattern: he could not have sown better seed, nor have sown it better, and yet some of his seed fell on stony places, some fell by the wayside, and yet a third fell among thorns. Only one portion of what

he sowed appears to have fallen upon good soil. Let me speak to those of you who will, I fear, be our failures. I grieve to think there should be any such. It is a sad business *in the present* for a man to be living without Christ. We pity abject poverty; but this is worse than the worst poverty. We are sorry for the friendless; but none are so forlorn as those who have not Jesus for a friend. No ignorance is so terrible as ignorance of the Saviour; no blindness so deplorable as blindness towards the Lord Jesus. To live without Christ is not life, but a breathing death. You are in the heyday of your youth, perhaps, and think that you are enjoying pleasure; but indeed it is not worth the name. You are eating husks and missing the kernels. Your mirth is as the crackling of thorns under a pot: it flares, and blazes up, but there is no heat in it; it dies down in a moment, and leaves nothing but a few ashes. If I had to die like a dog I should still wish to live the life of a Christian. Faith is good for this life. There is more solid joy in five minutes' fellowship with Christ than in a thousand years of revelling in the palaces of kings. You are a loser in a thousand ways by remaining an hour without Christ. It is a wretched business to be God's enemy, to miss rest of heart, and to be a stranger to the Holy Spirit.

It is a wretched business to be now neglecting the great salvation; but this is not all: your present hardness of heart reveals a good deal as to *your past life*. If you will not be persuaded of the things concerning Jesus, it shows that your heart and conscience have been injured by years of wilful resistance to the power of truth. You have been stopping up your ears, and that is why you are so deaf. You have been sealing up your eyes, or you would not be so utterly blind. You have been hardening your heart against gracious appeals, or else you would not now be made of such hardened steel. Remember those years of broken Sabbaths, and see what they have done for you; they have blinded and hardened you. Remember the neglected house of God, and see how callous you have now become. Think of the times in which you have heard the gospel, and refused its tender warnings, instructions, and invitations, and see what has come of those refusals. You are now wellnigh insensible. Oh, that black, black past!

We are also fearful about you, because your past and present foretell *a future* of continued and increasing blindness, deafness, and insensibility. I fear for some of you that you have been judicially hardened by the withdrawal of the Holy Ghost, that you are also hardened by the terrible influence of Satan, and that you have also allowed the suicidal influence of self-will to sear your conscience, as with a hot iron. You are such a trifler that it is hard to get a serious thought into your mind; you are so fickle that none of our hopes concerning you are ever realized; you are so superficial that it is difficult to make any deep impression upon you. You crush beneath your feet the eggs of better things: you stifle the good thoughts which sometimes are born within you. Holy teachings fall upon your mind as sparks which drop into a pool of water. You have almost come to a condition of mind in which you are like a man covered with armour, from which the sharpest arrows glance off. O God, let it not be quite so, we beseech thee, with anyone here!

This is all the sadder because it suggests such tremendous sin, and such overwhelming punishment. I cannot tell you what must be the doom of Sodom and Gomorrha, neither can you yourselves conceive its full horror. They gave themselves up unto unmentionable lusts, until at last God was so provoked that he would bear it no longer, and he resolved to destroy the filthy ones, and the place which they had polluted. He pulled up the sluices of his wrath, and cataracts of fire poured down from heaven upon the unclean ones. Heaven sent down fire and brimstone instead of silver showers. Then were the sinners burned up on a sudden, and not a wreck, either of the Sodomites or of their city, was left. This was an unparalleled instance of divine justice, for their sin had broken all bounds. What their doom must be in the day of judgment I leave you to imagine; but remember these words and weigh them well—"It shall be more tolerable for Sodom and Gomorrha in the day of judgment than for you." Dear boy that you were upon your mother's knee, fair girl that you were in the Sunday-school class, speaking so hopefully in your younger days, you will have to give an account for the delays which are ruining you. Hearer as you were, and as you are this morning, listening respectfully to God's ambassador—if you refuse the monitions of infinite love, what must become of you? Those were not my lips, remember, which first spoke those dagger-like words; but they fell from the lips of the Prince of love who died for men. It is Christ himself who said to those who heard his word and saw his mighty works, and yet refused to repent, "Woe unto you, it shall be more tolerable for Sodom and Gomorrha than for you."

Yes, I have endeavoured to persuade you, and if I must labour in vain, I shall turn away with great reluctance, mourning that I may not be allowed to be a blessing to you. I quit you with lingering footstep, and bow regretfully before the Lord, crying, "Who hath believed my report; and to whom is the arm of the Lord revealed?" Why will you die? Why will you rush upon such a destruction? Oh, that you were wise!

IV. But now, to change my strain, that we may not finish upon so sad a note, LET ME PERSEVERE IN PERSUADING OTHERS. Notice that the apostle was not hindered in his work by sorrowing over those who rejected his persuasion, but he turned to others of whom he had better hope. Having spoken a solemn parting word, he said, "Be it known, therefore, unto you, that the salvation of God is sent unto the Gentiles, and that they will hear it." To these Gentiles for two years Paul continued "preaching the kingdom of God, and teaching those things which concern the Lord Jesus Christ." He kept to his work, but he changed his audience. We also will preach the gospel to those who have not enjoyed Christian privileges. We preach Jesus to you who were not born of godly parents, nor brought up under Christian care. We preach free grace and dying love to you who hitherto have not attended the house of prayer, nor cared to hear the word of everlasting life. If the moral refuse mercy, we declare it to the immoral. The Jews had been religious in profession; but as they refused Christ, our apostle preached him to the Gentile population in Rome, which in Paul's day was worse than London, if worse can be. Rome was an infamous

den of every villany beneath the sky; but Paul without hesitation preached Christ to all the Romans that he could reach; to soldiers, and to slaves, to Cæsar's household, and to runaways. He believed in the adaptation of the gospel to the most degraded. With no weapon but the cross, he attacked a city sunk in idolatry and vice. So we also, when repulsed by you who think yourselves exceedingly respectable, turn with hope to those who have been drunkards, swearers, thieves, harlots, and the like. To the chief of sinners we present the great salvation. To you is the word of this salvation sent. "Whosoever will, let him take of the water of life freely." "Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners." "All manner of sin and blasphemy shall be forgiven unto men."

Ye far-off ones, that dwell out of the reach of the common means of grace, the arm of mercy is stretched out to you. You who are not a people shall be made a people, and she that was not beloved shall be called the beloved of the Lord. Paul said of the Gentiles, "They will hear it"; and we have the same confidence concerning many great transgressors. I thank God that those who never heard the gospel before have heard it in this great house, and have so heard it that they have at once yielded to its demands, and accepted its provisions. Many who have been without hope, and without God, and without fear of eternal things, have heard the doctrine of free, rich, sovereign mercy, and have turned at once from their sins, and laid hold upon the hope set before them.

Oh that more would come! They will come: "They will hear it." The divine purpose is that the Lord will provoke the outwardly religious by saving those who made no pretence of godliness. Because you were invited to the feast, and would not come, therefore the master of the house, being angry, issues a wider invitation, and gives the grand command, "Go out into the highways and hedges, and as many as ye find compel them to come in." If *you* will not have salvation, others will. Christ shall not be disappointed; he shall not die in vain; his Spirit shall not strive without success. "A seed shall serve him." Jesus shall have a people saved by his precious blood. I hope that many such are brought here this morning on purpose to be blessed. I hope they will leap forward to catch at the gracious message. Oh that some of them would cry out, "I believe, I trust, I rest in Jesus"! If it be so, go your way, God has saved you. If thou believest that Jesus is the Christ, thou art born of God. Thou hast been worldly, sinful, abundantly wicked; yet, if thou wilt have Christ now, have him, and welcome. If thou art now drawn towards him, come at once, and linger not. "For the scripture saith, Whosoever believeth on him shall not be ashamed." May his sweet love persuade you in the things concerning Jesus! Amen.

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PORTION OF SCRIPTURE READ BEFORE SERMON—Acts xxviii.

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HYMNS FROM "OUR OWN HYMN BOOK"—450, 433, 385.