

Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit.

THREE DECISIVE STEPS.

A Sermon

INTENDED FOR READING ON LORD'S-DAY, SEPTEMBER 6TH, 1891,

DELIVERED BY

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“And it came to pass, while the ark abode in Kirjath-jearim, that the time was long; for it was twenty years: and all the house of Israel lamented after the Lord. And Samuel spake unto all the house of Israel, saying, If ye do return unto the Lord with all your hearts, then put away the strange gods and Ashtaroth from among you, and prepare your hearts unto the Lord, and serve him only: and he will deliver you out of the hand of the Philistines. Then the children of Israel did put away Baalim and Ashtaroth, and served the Lord only. And Samuel said, Gather all Israel to Mizpeh, and I will pray for you unto the Lord.”—1 Samuel vii. 2—5.

Two enemies held Israel in subjection. The Philistines had fought against them, and defeated them, even though they sent to Shiloh, and brought the ark of the covenant, the symbol of Jehovah's presence, into their camp. The Lord was not with them, so they were smitten with a great slaughter. The crowning disaster of the day was: “the ark of God was taken.” The Philistines carried it away to Ashdod, and set it in the house of Dagon, their idol. You remember how God, jealous for his honour and glory, there worked mighty wonders, causing Dagon to fall, and inflicting punishment on every city whither the ark came, until at length the Philistines, wearied with their trials, sent the ark back to the people on whose behalf Jehovah had shown himself so strong. Twenty years the ark abode at Kirjath-jearim, and during all that time Israel was under the hand of the Philistines. But a worse enemy than the Philistines held sway over the land. Though the ark had returned, the people had gone away from their God, and had set up the abominable worship of Baal and Astarte, the idols of the Phœnicians and other heathen nations by whom they were surrounded. I will not stay to explain to you about these gods. Suffice it to say, that the Baalim were the male gods, and the Ashtaroth the female, and that the worship of these idols was attended with the greatest lewdness and filthiness; in fact, the holy things of Baal and Astarte we should call obscene and degrading. The people were thus in double bondage; the heavy yoke of the Philistines was

upon them, because the heavier burden of a false worship crushed out the life of their hearts.

It may very naturally be asked, "Where was Samuel all that time?" I know not what he was doing during those twenty years; but I have a suspicion, I may say, I have a firm persuasion, that he was going from place to place, preaching in quiet spots wherever he could gather an audience; warning the people of their sin, and stirring them up to seek Jehovah, thus endeavouring to infuse some spirituality into their national life. But "the time was long." He ploughed, and seemed to plough a rock. For twenty years the good man spoke. For twenty years he acted like a battering-ram upon a wall that did not seem to tremble beneath his strokes. For twenty years he went up and down, fleeing for his life from the Philistines, but venturing out, whenever he had an opportunity, to warn a household or a village group, or, perhaps, a township, that they could only be delivered from the Philistines by seeking God; that they had come into their present evil case by forsaking Jehovah; and that, unless they came back to the worship of the only true God, they would never have their liberties again. "The time was long," very long, for him to keep on speaking, warning a people who did not seem to care for his message. But constant dripping wears away stones; and at last the inert mass, against which he had battered, began to move, and there arose a general feeling of enquiry all over the country: "all the house of Israel lamented after the Lord." Then was Samuel's time to strike, while the iron was hot: he had spent twenty years in getting it hot, and he did not miss the opportunity when at last it came; but he pleaded with the people, and showed them plainly the only way in which they could expect help, namely, by putting away their false gods, and returning with prepared hearts to the service of Jehovah.

That the continual prayers and efforts of Samuel were crowned with success, should encourage all those who, in days of unfaithfulness and apostasy, still lift up their voices for the truth. Keep pegging away, my brethren: though the people may seem to be indifferent to your message, or stiffen their necks against it; though in the service of the base idols they seem wholly to forget God, yet will the Lord arise in his own good time, and his cause shall triumph. Prepare a way for him, of whom it is written, "Thy people shall be willing in the day of thy power." Now, I believe that my case, with regard to some to whom I am speaking, is something like that of Samuel. I have, at least, the same message to deliver.

I hope to be able to make this plain by showing you, first, that *these people were in a very hopeful condition*; that, secondly, *they were called upon to take very decided steps*; and, thirdly, that *they were helped to do so by faith*. True, it was faith in Samuel; but you get much more help if you have faith in a greater than Samuel, who is here among us still, even our Lord and Saviour, Jesus Christ.

I. First, then, THESE PEOPLE WERE IN A VERY HOPEFUL CONDITION. "All the house of Israel lamented after the Lord." What does it mean?

It means, first, that they were *greatly oppressed*. Their goods were taken from them. They were beaten. They saw their children slain. They were the slaves of the Philistines, and hence they began to say,

“Why should we not return unto our God? When we were true to Jehovah, there were no Philistines to trouble us. They were put to rout when we served God. It was better with us then than now. Samson, when the Spirit of the Lord came mightily upon him, slew a thousand of them with the jawbone of an ass. Oh, for a day of Samson back again! Oh, for a day of God back again!” Their oppressions made them think of God. Do I not address some whose many troubles are compelling them to think of God? All went well with you once, and then you were an atheist. Troubles are multiplying now, and atheism does not suit you. You have buried those you loved. Ah! the grass has not yet grown on that newly-formed grave, and your heart is aching after something, you scarcely know what. There were days with you, perhaps, in your youth, when you knelt at your mother’s knee; and in your early manhood, when you went to the house of God, and seemed to be one of God’s people. You sigh as you think of happier days; but all goes wrong with you now, and a voice seems to say to you, especially in the still of night, “Return, return, return.” You have wandered, like a sheep, from the pasture to the desert, from the shepherd’s care into danger from the wolf. May God grant that you may, in this way, begin to lament after the Lord!

I think that, by the house of Israel lamenting after the Lord, is meant, next, that they began to be *inwardly convinced that nobody could help them but the Lord*. “Ah!” said one, “would God these Philistines were driven away!” “Ah!” said his companion, “nobody can do it but Jehovah.” And then the first one answered, “Then, would that Jehovah were here! Oh, for his mighty hand, and his terrible power, to drive away our enemies!” “Israel lamented after the Lord.” Samuel had taught them to some purpose, seeing that, when they saw their need, they did not look for help to him, but to his Master. Some teachers attract attention to themselves, and are like the moon; when it shines everybody says, “What a beautiful moon!” The true prophet of God shines like the sun, and people do not say, “What a beautiful sun!” but “How lovely is the landscape!” Let it be your ambition so to declare the Word of God, that people will not say, “What a splendid preacher!” but, “How glorious is his Christ!” No man must come between the seeker and God, for the best of men are but men at their best. Not even the ordinances of religion can meet the need of the people, though they be God-appointed; they were meant to lead us to God, and not to be a substitute for him. When the Philistines triumphed, as we read in the fourth chapter, the elders of Israel said, “Let us fetch the ark of the covenant of the Lord out of Shiloh unto us, that, when *it* cometh among us, *it* may save us out of the hand of our enemies.” And lo! when *it* came, it did not save them. When people trust in the religious symbol instead of the spiritual power, they are idolaters in heart, and court disaster. But the house of Israel did not lament after the ark, they lamented after the Lord, without whose glory, shining between the cherubim, even the ark was void and valueless. Am I speaking to one who has come to this conviction—“Nobody can help me but God. I am so down at the heel, so broken in spirit, I am brought into such a condition, that unless the heavens are rent, and the right hand of God appears, there is no

rescue for me"? I am right glad you are brought into that condition. There is much gained when you look away from all others, and from all else, to God. Say now, "I will lift up mine eyes unto the hills, from whence cometh my help. My help cometh from the Lord, which made heaven and earth." And if your soul still sighs, "Oh, that he would help me! Oh, that it were true that he did hear me, and would come to my rescue!" remember his word, "Call upon me in the day of trouble: I will deliver thee, and thou shalt glorify me."

In some such case were the people of Israel; and when it says that they "lamented after the Lord", it seems to me that, while they desired him, *they were afraid that he would not deliver them*. They prayed after a fashion, but there was a dash of doubt about it. So have I known many go up to their closet to pray, and they have said, "O God, if so vile a sinner can be forgiven, if there be such a thing as salvation for a backslider, if sins like mine can be washed away, oh, that I might be saved!" They have prayed with an "if" and a "peradventure" and a "may be", lamenting after the Lord with many a moan, and sigh, and cry of despair, and then just a little drop or two of hope. Lamenting after the Lord—I do not quite know how to describe it, but I know the distressing condition very well; that state in which the soul feels it wants God, and would give anything to be saved; is willing to submit to him, and is anxious to be forgiven; but always is haunted with the dark thought—"It is not for you. He will never stretch his arm of mercy so far as to reach you. You are outside the covenant. You are past hope." Still, even though this is a very dark state of mind to be in, it is a hopeful state of mind. It is much better than presumption, or carelessness.

Moreover, *these people had very little hope, but they had very much desire*. "They lamented after the Lord." I suppose their lamentation after the Lord was in this fashion: "Oh, that God would be our God! but then he never will be. Oh, that he would deliver us from the Philistines! but then he never will." Their prayer was damp for want of faith; their tinder would not burn. They did not rejoice to believe in the Lord, but they "lamented" after him: they kept sorrowing and sighing, moaning and crying; wanting him, but never coming at him. I know that I address some now who have regularly attended the preaching of the gospel for years. You are not without a sense of sin; you are not without anxious desires; you are not without very anxious feelings at times. Sometimes you would give your eyes that you might know Christ; and you feel as if you could die willingly if you could but know that you were saved. But, still, you cannot believe it possible; and that doubt still hangs over you. But it *is* possible; it is more than possible; it is absolutely certain, that he that believeth in Christ hath everlasting life, and him that cometh to him he will in no wise cast out. He is ready to forgive. He delighteth in mercy. He overflows with compassion. "If thou seek him, he will be found of thee." Thy lamentations after the Lord may be sweetened with a good hope that, coming to him, he will accept thee.

If you read the third verse, you will see that, all this while, *they had not parted with their idols*. They lamented after the Lord, but they did not get the Lord, because they wanted to have the Lord and to have

their idols, too. There are men in the world who want to go to heaven; but they want to keep on the road to hell, and yet get to heaven. They would get to the north by travelling to the south. There are some who would go home to their Father; but they would like to take the swine, and the swine-troughs, and the husks with them. A pretty sight that prodigal would have been, would he not, driving the hogs, and carrying the hog-troughs on his back, to his father's house? Such a picture is not to be imagined. It never existed in fact, and never can. John Bunyan tells us that, when he was playing at the game of "cat" one Sunday, on Elstow Green, as he was going to strike the cat with his stick, he thought he heard a voice, crying, "Wilt thou keep thy sins, and go to hell; or wilt thou give up thy sins, and go to heaven?" That question, without an angel's voice, you may hear at this moment. I put it now to some of you who would like to keep your sins, and yet go to heaven. You lament after the Lord. You would be a saint; but then you want to be a sinner, too. You would be a child of God; but then you would not like to turn out of the devil's family. You would not like to be ridiculed by the world. No, you want the crown without the cross. You want the end without the way. You want heaven without holiness, and forgiveness without repentance; and this can never be. It is useless lamenting after the Lord, if it does not lead you to give up your idols.

One thing, however, was meant by this lamenting after the Lord. It meant that *they could never rest till God returned*. Some of you have tried many ways to get rest. Some years ago you got harpooned at a meeting; and though, like a big whale, you have dragged out miles of line, and gone to the bottom of the sea of sin, the harpoon sticks in you still. I know what you have been doing to get rest. You have tried the world, and now there is nothing there that pleases you. You have tried sticking to business; but you are unsatisfied. You have made money; but you are a poorer man than you were when you began business; poorer, really, than when you had not a penny to bless yourself with. In fact, you have not a penny that does bless you; all your pennies seem curses as they come in. And then you have tried philosophy. Oh, you are a wonderfully wise man, especially when you have just read a book full of infidelity! Then you are wiser than two Solomons rolled into one; and yet you are a fool, and you know you are; for you cannot get any peace by that means. You try sometimes to talk big blasphemies, and that is because you are afraid; as boys will whistle when they go through the churchyard, and are afraid of ghosts. They whistle to keep their courage up; and some people talk very big things just to keep up their confidence, a confidence which they really do not possess; for they are dreadful cowards when they come to die. I wonder what you will try next. Will you try dissipation? Will you try drunkenness? Will you try the use of drugs? Well, well; if God means to save you, you will never rest till you are anchored in the port of Christ's atoning sacrifice. Until you come to God by Jesus Christ you shall never rest. You shall be weary of foot; you shall be weary of brain; you shall be sick at heart; you shall feel that life is not worth living; you shall feel darkness over all your

brightness, and you shall taste bitterness in all your sweets. If God means to save you, he will make you lament after him. He has lamented after you: you cost your Saviour many a tear. You cost your Saviour nailed hands and feet. You cost your Saviour bloody sweat. You cost him his death, and he will not have you trifle where he is so in earnest; and if you will not come without strong measures, he will make you come. You shall be like Noah's dove. The raven rested on the corpses; but the dove could not. For her there was no resting-place; she must drop into the water and drown; but her weary wing at last bears her back to the ark, and Noah opens the window, puts out his hand, takes her in his grasp, and pulls her in unto him into the ark. Then was she peaceful and quiet. She had found her Noah; she had found her rest. And it is to be so with some of you now. You may stand out against my Master; but he means to have you. I sometimes hear of persons getting very angry after a gospel sermon, and I say to myself, "I am not sorry for it." Sometimes when we are fishing, the fish gets the hook into his mouth. He pulls hard at the line: if he were dead, he would not; but he is a live fish, worth the getting; and though he runs away for a while, with the hook in his jaws, he cannot escape. His very wriggling and his anger show that he has got the hook, and the hook has got him. Have the landing-net ready; we shall land him by-and-by. Give him more line; let him spend his strength, and then we will land him, and he shall belong to Christ for ever.

Some of you know well what all this means, so I need say no more upon this point.

II. Let us notice, next, that THESE PEOPLE WERE CALLED UPON TO TAKE THREE VERY DECIDED STEPS. See how plainly and decidedly Samuel puts the matter: "If ye do return unto the Lord with all your hearts, then put away the strange gods and Ashtaroth from among you, and prepare your hearts unto the Lord, and serve him only."

The first thing that they were to do was to "*put away the strange gods.*" They were to go home, and break the images of Baal, tear down the vile statues of Astarte, and smash them to pieces, whether they were private images, or public ones. They were to clear out the whole tribe of idols. Now, if we would come back to God, we must get rid of all our false confidences.

"The dearest idol I have known,
Whate'er that idol be,
Help me to tear it from thy throne,
And worship only thee."

Every man seems to have a different idol. One has pride: he is so wonderfully good, so self-righteous; he has never done anything wrong. He is quite as good as a Christian, and rather better. An excellent character he gives himself; he could not have a better. If it were not for the name at the bottom, which is his own, he could get any situation with such a character as he has. But then, you see, he has given it to himself. You will have to give up that nonsense, for you have not a good character after all; and when you stand in the light of God, you will see yourself to be defiled from head to foot.

Another man's god is his self-confidence. Hear him talk. He understands everything; he does not need to be taught anything; and if there is anything in the Bible that he does not understand, why, then he does not believe it. He knows better than God Almighty and the Holy Spirit. He can judge of the Scriptures, and tell you what they ought to be; and he could have written a better book himself. So he says, sometimes, in his talk; or so he thinks. Ah, poor soul! you will have to break that image of pride; or it will be your ruin. Self-confidence, in all its shapes and shades, must be hurled down, if God is to be set up in the heart.

Alas! there are some that have the images of Baal and Ashtaroth in the form of lust. Ah, you cannot keep your sin and go to heaven! Unchastity, fornication, adultery, uncleanness of body—these must be given up. God is ready to forgive the harlot and the fornicator; but they must quit their sins, once for all, and for ever. You cannot lie in the sty, and yet go home to your Father. This abominable thing must be totally given up, and never thought of again, if you would be forgiven and saved.

Others, who are more respectable, have the god of covetousness. To make money, to save money, to grab, to grasp; for this they will grind the workman in his wages; for this they will cheat in the quantity or the quality of their goods. All sorts of tricks in trade will be performed that they may get rich. Now, covetousness is idolatry. If you worship a god of gold, you will perish as much as if you worshipped a god of mud. Oh, that we might have this god driven out of us, and have a living, generous spirit implanted instead!

How many do I know, too, who have for an idol the god of drink! Old Bacchus sits astride not only of the wine-cask, but of many a man's heart. The man when sober, and "all right", is what everybody calls "a good fellow"; but he must drink, and when once he is drunk, then he is by no means a good fellow; but foul and vile in language, and one knows not what he may do. Sir, you must quit strong drink if you would be saved. No drunkard has any inheritance in the kingdom of God, and drunkenness must be given up, and chambering, and wantonness, and gluttony, and all the sins of the flesh. These gods must be broken. "Put away the strange gods from among you."

There are others I know whose strange god is malice. They cannot forgive. Perhaps even while sitting in the house of God they are saying, "Well, I can forgive everybody except my brother. He served me a very bad turn; I never can forgive him." Or, possibly, some are like the man who, when dying, told the priest that he forgave So-and-so for all the wrong he had done him: "that is," said he, "if I die; but if I get up again, I'll make him rue it." Are there not many whose forgiveness of injuries is of that kind? It is a mere sham. But there is no going to heaven unless, frankly and unreservedly, you can forgive others their offences. Why, you cannot even pray the Lord's Prayer unless you do so. "Forgive us our sins; for we also forgive everyone that is indebted to us." You cannot get through that prayer, much less get through the narrow gate, so long as malice is in your heart.

But I must not stay to enlarge here. Every man must look out his

own idol, whatever it may be. And now let me most solemnly put it to each one of you: "If thou wilt return unto the Lord with all thy heart, then put away the strange gods that have ruled over you, and turn unto the Lord." That is the first decided step.

Are you saying, "Well, I will put away these evil things; I will give up these sins"? I am glad you have come to that; but when? Can you put them away now, just now, think you? "I was thinking," says one, "I have an engagement to-morrow that will be rather bad." Cannot you put the thing away to-night? "Well, I should like to have one indulgence of the flesh." Ah, sir, you will never put these sins away till you go and do it straight away! That prodigal son got back to his father because he went off directly. He ran away. I do not know upon what terms his master had engaged him, whether it was by the quarter, or by the week; but this I know—he no sooner came to his senses than off he started, and never stopped: he ran off instantly. You must run away from your old master without giving him any notice; for if you give him any warning, you will never get away at all. God help us to break the images here and now! Down with them, whatever they may be, and turn at once to the Lord!

Now, notice the next step of decision: "Put away the strange gods, and *prepare your hearts unto the Lord.*" The mere outward reformation was not enough. They might have torn down every idol in the land, and have been no nearer God for that. See, in France to-day, how the people, who have for so long bent the knee in superstition and idolatry, have, many of them, flung away their vain worship, only to sink into infidelity. What better are they, when they exalt the "Goddess of Reason" where before stood the altars of the Papacy, when the heart is untouched, and God is not in all their thoughts? Still, there are many in that land, as, I trust, there are many here, who are lamenting after God, and only await the preparation of the heart, which comes from him, to bow in allegiance before his throne. What, then, is the way to prepare the heart?

The first thing is, confession of sin. The people said, "We have sinned against the Lord." Go and confess your sin unto God. The more particular you can be in that confession, the better. Go and acknowledge your iniquity with many sighs and tears, and with deep regret that you should have sinned as you have done. Lay every secret bare, and let the light of God explore every hidden corner. The surgeon who means to cure must first expose the wound, and probe it to the bottom; and ere we can be forgiven, we must make a clean breast of our guilt, calling a spade a spade, and not trying to excuse ourselves, or cover up the evil.

Then resolve in your soul that you will quit these sins. No half measures will do: chronic diseases require thorough cures. You remember when Augustine, after a life of sin, heard what seemed to him a voice bidding him "Take, read," he went to his New Testament, and his eye lighted on the passage, "Put ye on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make not provision for the flesh, to fulfil the lusts thereof." Then and there he determined to leave all his former lusts, and, in the strength of Christ, to live a new life. It was the hour of his conversion; the axe was laid to the root of the tree, and the old

profligate life was utterly renounced. The sinner became a saint, who led others in the way of holiness; and when he died, he left behind him a rich legacy of experience and instruction for the people of God. Whatever the sin is, it must go.

"Repentance is to leave
The sins we loved before,
And show that we in earnest grieve,
By doing so no more."

Then there must be much prayer; for so it was with these people. Cry mightily unto God: "Lord, save me!" Cry again and again unto him, and make this to be your one cry; "Give me Christ, or else I die!" Nothing so prepares the heart for God as crying out after him. The water-brooks are sweeter to the hart that has panted after them; the blessing is twice valued that has been won by intercession. I have heard it said that a man who wins his wife too easily treats her too lightly; whether it is true, I cannot say; but I am sure that the richest blessings of God come to those who urge their suit again and again, and who will not be denied the grace they seek. May the Holy Ghost give you this preparation of heart by a full confession, a strong resolve, and a mighty prayer!

Remember, too, that there must be trust, or else the heart is not rightly prepared. We must get beyond the stage of "lamenting", and begin the act of "consenting." Not only wish and pray for the blessing, but rely on the Lord to send it. He who smote Egypt in his firstborn, and with a strong hand and mighty arm brought their fathers out of the house of bondage, could easily deliver them. He who gave them at first the land for a possession, could still scatter their enemies. Why should they not expect him to work a work in their day? By the memory of what God did for your forefathers, I exhort you to trust in my Saviour. "We have heard with our ears, O God, our fathers have told us, what work thou didst in their days, in the times of old." Therefore, O thou great Jehovah, will we trust in thee in this our day!

Then, break away from the world. These people of Israel went home, and smashed their idols, and then they gathered at Mizpeh, once more a separated people. It was like a declaration of war. Declare war at once with evil of every shape. Now, come, and enlist beneath the blood-stained banner of the cross, and say, "I am a follower of the Lamb, and I will not parley with iniquity. Let the Philistines come, if they will; I will not submit to them again. I will break loose from the world, God helping me." Perhaps you say, this is not the preparation of the heart, but the beginning of the battle. I know it; but any old soldier who has been in the wars will tell you that the best preparation for the strife is the first encounter with the enemy: after the first shot or two, the coward heart becomes brave, and the trembling nerves are strung for action. Many a timid soul is kept from the joy of God's salvation simply for the want of a bold separation from the world. A little moral courage is all that is lacking in the case of some of you. Come out boldly, and declare your desire and decision. Difficulties will vanish in the act. The first confession of Christ is the best possible preparation for the next one.

This matter of heart-preparation is most important. It is God's work; and yet, as his Spirit is ever present to help our infirmities, it is also ours. You remember how Solomon, in the Proverbs, says to his son: "Keep thy heart with all diligence; for out of it are the issues of life." If the heart be divided, the life can never be true. You will notice how Samuel put before the people the necessity of being thorough in their decision: "Return unto the Lord with all your hearts," was his clarion call. If we expect God to be wholly for us, we must be wholly for him, and keep back nothing from his control. The Thessalonians "turned to God from idols, to serve the living and true God," and in like manner this preparation of heart, on the part of Israel, came between the two acts of turning from idols, and serving God, and was the spring of both.

That is the next step, *the service of God*: "Serve him only," said Samuel. "Then the children of Israel did put away Baalim and Ash-taroth, and served the Lord only." It is not enough to give up serving evil; you must come and serve the Lord. That is to say, from this time forth your great aim must be to glorify God. If you would be saved, you must give up every object in life, as a guiding star to you, except serving God. Whatever he bids you do, you are to do. His will must be your law. Christ will save you, but he will have you take upon you his yoke, and wear it; and as he is meek and lowly in heart, he would have you learn to be so, too; and then you shall find rest unto your soul. This is Christ's way; that where he comes to save, he comes to sanctify, and make us obey his will, and live to his praise. His smile is reward great enough for the poor service we can render him; his "Well done" at last will be heaven to the heart that loves him. Oh, that many here would say, "Yes, I wish to serve the Lord, and serve the Lord only. Too long have I drawn near to him with my lip, while my heart was far from him. 'O Lord our God, other lords beside thee have had dominion over us: but by thee only will we make mention of thy name.'"

III. Now, I think that I hear one say, "But these three steps are pretty stiff ones: give up the idols, prepare the heart, serve the Lord only." Yes, they are; and I do not believe that these people could ever have taken these three steps if it had not been for my third point, namely, that THEY WERE HELPED TO DO ALL THIS BY HAVING FAITH. It was faith in Samuel, as we have already noticed. You can be much more helped, yea, graciously enabled, if you have faith in Christ.

They believed *Samuel's word*. He had spoken to them, and they said to one another, "Samuel says that God will deliver us from the Philistines if we trust him. Samuel speaks the truth." Well, now, God has sent a greater than Samuel—his Only-begotten Son; and he says to you that, "Whosoever believeth in him shall not perish, but have everlasting life." You need have no doubt about it; the word he has spoken shall never be broken. He means what he promises, and not one jot or tittle of his word shall pass away till all be fulfilled. Believe what Christ says, that there is salvation for everyone who puts his trust in him. Believe that, and take hope; and, getting that hope, be bold to strike the decisive blow to-night, and give up the idols, and turn to God.

These people believed chiefly in *Samuel's prayers*. He was a mighty man in prayer; and when the Philistines came, the children of Israel cried to him, saying, "Cease not to cry unto the Lord our God for us." How much greater faith should we put in the Lord Jesus, who died, and rose again, and ever lives to plead for us! "Wherefore he is able also to save them to the uttermost that come unto God by him, seeing he ever liveth to make intercession for them." Sinners, Christ is praying for you. If you trust him, his prayers will help you to break the fetters of sin.

"The Lion of Judah shall break every chain,
And give us the victory again and again."

The people had faith in *Samuel's sacrifice*; for Samuel took a lamb, and burnt it whole upon the altar; and our glorious Christ has made himself the Lamb of God, and he has been wholly consumed as an offering unto God. Trust in his word. Trust in his prayers. Trust in his sacrifice. Believe that the precious blood can make you white. Believe that there is virtue enough in the death of Christ to make atonement for all the sin that is confessed and laid before him. If thou believest, the blood of Jesus Christ his Son has cleansed thee. If thou wilt trust him, thy sin is put away. This is the very errand on which he came, "To put away sin by the sacrifice of himself." Hear what the Lord hath said by the prophet: "I, even I, am he that blotteth out thy transgressions for mine own sake, and will not remember thy sins." "I have blotted out, as a thick cloud, thy transgressions, and, as a cloud, thy sins: return unto me; for I have redeemed thee." Believe this, and, believing it, thou shalt be helped to break the idols, helped to prepare the heart, helped to come and serve the Lord only. Let the prayer go up from your heart to him who poured out his soul on Calvary, but who is now alive, and attentive to the voice of our cry: "O Lord, I trust in thy sacrifice, I rely on thy blood, save me for thy name's sake, and cleanse me from my sin."

"Lord Jesus, I long to be perfectly whole,
I want thee for ever to live in my soul;
Break down every idol, cast out every foe—
Now wash me, and I shall be whiter than snow."

Israel also accepted *Samuel's rule*: "Samuel judged Israel all the days of his life. And he went from year to year in circuit to Beth-el, and Gilgal, and Mizpeh, and judged Israel in all those places." You see, salvation means being delivered from the power of sin. Salvation means being made a new man—an honest man, a holy man, a gracious man; it means that Christ, who saves the soul, begins to govern the life; and this salvation is to be gained through faith in Jesus Christ. The Lord help you to believe in God incarnate, in God making sacrifice for sin, in Jesus dead, buried, risen, ascended, sitting at the right hand of God, and soon to come in glory! Let him enter your life, and dwelling in your heart, judge your every action, and rule over your entire life.

I trust that none of you will say, "We will keep our idols." Ah,

if you do so, you will not keep them long! If your idols are not taken away from you, you will be taken away from your idols. What will some of you do in the next world, when there is no gold to hoard, and no revelry in which to indulge, when you will have no occupation but to gnash your teeth upon yourself, because you committed everlasting suicide, and refused and rejected Christ for a few days' pleasure, or a few years' gain? Will any of you be mad enough to let eternity go, and let heaven go, and let God go for the paltry lusts of the flesh, for the fleeting gains of the hour? As I shall confront you at the bar of God, I charge you, seek him! Put away your idols, prepare your hearts, trust in Jesus, and serve the Lord only. God grant that it may be so, for his name's sake! Amen.

PORTION OF SCRIPTURE READ BEFORE SERMON—1 Samuel vii.

HYMNS FROM "OUR OWN HYMN BOOK"—331, 572, 582.

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In order to keep readers of the sermons informed as to MR. SPURGEON'S actual condition, it would be necessary to write reports daily instead of weekly; and even then it would be very difficult to convey anything like a true account of the changes through which he is constantly passing. During the early part of last week, the dear sufferer was very feeble and ill; but before the week closed he appeared to be considerably better. Then, on Monday, he was not nearly so well; while on Tuesday, when this note was written, he had again improved a little. It is clear, therefore, that he needs the prayers of the Lord's people as much as ever; and he will be very grateful for them.

While the preacher is laid aside, friends can help him to address a larger audience by increasing the circulation of the sermons and *The Sword and the Trowel*. The current sermon is one that is likely to be very useful to the undecided. Will those who love the Lord see that all such who are known to them are furnished with a copy, and will they also pray to the Lord to bless the reading of it to them?