

Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit.

ICONOCLAST.

A Sermon

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“He removed the high places, and brake the images, and cut down the groves, and brake in pieces the brasen serpent that Moses had made: for unto those days the children of Israel did burn incense to it; and he called it Nehushtan. He trusted in the Lord God of Israel; so that after him was none like him among all the kings of Judah, nor any that were before him.”—2 Kings xviii. 4, 5.

THE first commandment instructs us that there is but one God, who alone is to be worshipped; and the second commandment teaches that no attempt is to be made to represent the Lord, neither are we to bow down before any form of sacred similitude. “Thou shalt not make unto thee any graven image, or any likeness of any thing that is in heaven above, or that is in the earth beneath, or that is in the water under the earth: thou shalt not bow down thyself to them, nor serve them.” The two commandments thus make a full sweep of idolatry. We are not to worship any other god; we are not to worship the true God by the use of representative symbols. He is a Spirit, and is to be worshipped in spirit and in truth, and not by the use of visible imagery. It seems clear that the human mind since the fall finds it hard to keep to this. All over the world men set up images and idols, not at first with the view of worshipping the wood or stone, but with the intention of being helped to worship the Deity by having some outward symbol of his presence. After awhile the evil heart falls into something even more debasing, and the image itself is adored. Even the people of God, the children of Israel, who so peculiarly enjoyed the Lord's presence in their midst, and who were taught to worship him by lawgivers and prophets inspired of the Most High, could not keep to pure and spiritual worship. Though their weakness was somewhat helped to the understanding of truth by a system of types, they were not content with these because they contained no similitude of God. The religion of pious Jews was mainly spiritual, for only at the one appointed spot at Jerusalem was sacrifice allowed, and there the sacred vessels of ceremonial worship were in secret places, and seldom if ever seen by the people. A worship so little outward was too spiritual for unregenerate Israel; the people wanted an outward ritual for other places beside Jerusalem; and wherever there was a rock or lofty hill there they put up

an altar to God, and it was called one of the "high places" of the land; wherever a grove of ancient trees could be discovered, they set that apart also; to the true God, mark you—but still without divine sanction, and contrary to his law, seeing that he had not appointed that there should be any groves or places sacred to himself, except the one chosen spot at Mount Zion.. Then they came to the use of teraphim, symbolical forms, statues, "images," as our English translation puts it; not that they actually worshipped these as God, but used them, as they said, to help them to worship God. This was all contrary to the divine law, and led to a forgetfulness of God himself, robbing him of his worship and giving it to dumb idols. As soon as good Hezekiah had come to the throne and taken possession of its power, he set to work to cut down all the groves, to break the images, and as far as he could, as governor of the land, to bring back Israel to her allegiance to the great invisible Jehovah, and to the spiritual worship in which he delights, restraining the outward worship with sacrifice and offering to the one temple at Jerusalem. Among the various objects of Israel's degenerate worship was one which it would have seemed natural even for a reformer to spare, it was the famous serpent of brass which had been made by Moses in the wilderness, and had been lifted up upon a pole, by looking to which thousands had been cured of the poisonous bites of fiery serpents. This had been carefully preserved, but seeing that it had become an object of superstitious reverence, Hezekiah destroyed it; according to some, he ground it to powder, and he called it by an opprobrious epithet, Nehushtan. The margin has the translation, "a piece of brass." It might be read, "filth," or "verdigris," or "a piece of copper." The king gave it a name which would show that he protested against the idolatrous reverence shown to it. Although it was an interesting memorial, it must be utterly destroyed, because it presented a temptation to idolatry. Here if ever in this world was a relic of high antiquity, of undoubted authenticity, a relic which had seen its hundreds of years, about which there was no question as to its being indisputably the very serpent which Moses made; and it was moreover a relic which had formerly possessed miraculous power—for in the wilderness the looking at it had saved the dying. Yet it must be broken in pieces, because Israel burned incense to it. Away with it, it is a defiled thing; call it by an ill name; dash it to atoms; make Israel to despise it and to forget it. If the brazen serpent be put to a wrong use and made into an idol, it must not be spared. Put the piece of verdigris away; let the coppery reptile be ground to powder, if it be once set up as a rival to Jehovah, or as a sharer in the veneration which is due to him only.

This leads me to the following remark. After all, our reformers acted well, and after a scriptural model, when they poured contempt upon the idols of Rome, and made a mockery of her saints, relics, images, masses, and priests. They were more than justified in exposing the idolatries of Popery, and subjecting the objects formerly revered to the utmost contempt. There was a deep meaning in their breaking of crosses and the burning of holy rods. The white linen of priestly amices served well for under garments for the poor, and altar stones made admirable backs for stoves, but they meant more than utility, they were a protest against superstition. Holy water vats were in those

practical times frequently given to the country people to be turned into troughs for swine, the little sacring bells which had formerly been rung at the elevation of the host were hung around horses' necks, and the box which contained the detestable mockery of our incarnate God, which the Papists most adored, was broken in pieces. No contempt could be greater than these idols deserved. The iconoclasts of that age did not go one bit too far. I could wish they had been even less lenient than they were, and that not a single thing ever worshipped by man had been spared for a moment. Call it god! then break it up, though art itself perish with it. Adore it as a holy thing! then away with it, though it be made of gold and inlaid with gems. What God abhors, what his anger smokes against, it is not for us to spare from motives of tenderness to other people's feelings, or because the canons of taste would say, "Let the idol be preserved."

Our sires, the Nonconformists, when they left the state-created religion to maintain a spiritual worship, and gathered themselves together as the servants of God, did well in bearing their protest against the less glaring idolatries of their age. In their day, as now, there existed the very common idolatry of superstitious reverence of buildings. Certain piles of stone, brick and timber, are regarded as holy places. It is thought that inside certain walls God is more peculiarly present than outside, where the trees are growing and the birds singing. Our forefathers protested against this by never calling their buildings churches. They knew they could not be; they knew that churches mean companies of faithful men and women. They called the places of their usual worship "meeting-houses;" that is what they were, and nothing more. The veneration of building materials, pulpits, altars, pews, cushions, tables, candlesticks, organs, cups, plates, etc., is sheer, clear idolatry. "*Worship God*" is a command which needs to be spoken in these days in tones of thunder. There is none holy save the Lord. "God that made the world and all things therein, seeing that he is Lord of heaven and earth, dwelleth not in temples made with hands; neither is worshipped with men's hands, as though he needed anything, seeing he giveth to all life, and breath, and all things." Hear ye the Lord's own words: "Heaven is my throne, and earth is my footstool: what house will ye build me? saith the Lord: or what is the place of my rest? Hath not my hand made all these things?"

Our sires also stood out against another idolatry which still survives in England; namely, the observing of days and months. Certain days are set apart as holy, and observed with great reverence by those calling themselves Christians. Not content with the Sabbath as the day appointed of God for his worship, they have like Israel of old, when under legal bondage, new moons, and appointed feasts, for which they claim great respect, but to which none whatever is due. Our sires said, "This is not of Scripture, therefore it is of man, therefore it is will-worship, and idolatrous;" and they showed their contempt of the commandments of men by an open disregard of holy days, and we shall do well in this respect and in all others to maintain their pure testimony. Whenever we see superstition in any shape, we must not flatter the folly, but according to our ability act the iconoclast's part and denounce it. In this matter too many do the work of the Lord deceitfully, and

bow in the house of Rimmon, instead of maintaining inviolate the spiritual worship of the great I AM.

But let this suffice on such themes, we have other thoughts in our minds. I intend, this morning, first to apportion a share of image-breaking work *to believers*; and, secondly, we shall prescribe another form of this same work for *seeking souls*.

I. We have much IDOL BREAKING FOR CHRISTIANS TO DO. There is much to be done in the church of God, there is much more to be done in our own hearts.

First of all, *there is much idol breaking to be done in the church of God*. Let me mention some of the things against which you and I must always bear our personal and earnest protest. We are all too apt as Christians to place some degree of reliance upon men whom God in his infinite mercy raises up to be leaders in the Christian church. We ought to be thankful for the Paul who plants so well, and the Apollos who waters so ably; we are never to look with contempt or with slighting upon those precious gifts which Christ received when he ascended up on high, and which he continues to give to his church, namely, apostles, teachers, preachers, evangelists, and the like. A man is more precious than a wedge of the gold of Ophir. When God gives a man to the church fitted for her enlargement, for her establishment, and her confirmation, he gives to her one of the richest blessings of the covenant of grace; but the danger is lest we place the man in the wrong position, and look to him not only with the respect which is due to him as God's ambassador, but with some degree of—I must call it so—superstitious reliance upon his authority and ability. Brethren, we have discarded saints, we abhor the idea of worshipping them, and yet by slow degrees we may gradually fall into canonisation, and virtually set up among ourselves another set of saints. Is it not true that some almost worship St. Calvin, and St. Luther? Beyond their teachings they cannot go. Over others St. John Wesley, or St. Charles Simeon sway an awe-commanding sceptre; and to far more, the minister under whom they sit, and whose teachings they constantly receive, is the reason and basis of their faith. I am afraid that some of the conversions wrought in the Christian church are rather the work of the preacher than of the Spirit of God, and therefore when the minister who was the instrument of them happens to be removed, the faith which was built upon the wisdom or the earnestness of man is removed too. The point I want to bring you to is this, receive truth from us if we give it to you purely, and are truly God's mouth to you, but accept it not because *we* say it is so. Go to the fountain head of truth, search the Scriptures for yourselves, and see whether these things be so. Let nothing be to you a spiritual truth unless it be taught of the Spirit of God in the Scriptures. Do not be content to hear with the outer ear and say, "That is true, for such-and-such a man of God has said it;" ask to hear with the heart so as to feel, "That is true, for God has said it in his word, and his holy Spirit has also written it over again in my consciousness and experience." We must get beyond men, or else we shall be very babes in grace. If we overvalue the blessings which God gives us in our teachers and preachers, he may remove them from us. We are to exalt not the pipes but the fountain

head ; not the windows but the sun must we thank for light ; not the basket which holds the food or the lad who brings the loaves and fishes must we reverence, but the divine Master who blesses and multiplies the bread and feeds the multitude. To Jesus must all adoring eyes be turned, and to the Holy Spirit the revealer of the truth, and to our Father who is in heaven ; and we must receive the gospel not as the word of man, but as it is in truth, the word of God. Love the ministers of Christ, but fall not into that form of brazen serpent worship which will degrade you into the servants of men.

In the Christian church there is, I am afraid, at this moment too much exaltation of talent and dependence upon education, I mean especially in reference to ministers. I do not believe that a man of God who is called constantly to preach to the same people can be too thoroughly educated, neither do I believe that the highest degree of mental culture should be any injury to the Christian minister, but rather should be very helpful to him. By all means let the religious teacher intermeddle with all knowledge, let him give himself unto reading and be able mentally as well as spiritually to take the lead, but, O church of God, never set thou up human learning in the place of the Eternal Spirit, for "it is not by might nor by power, but by my Spirit, saith the Lord." The great wonders of apostolic times were mainly wrought by men who were illiterate in the world's judgment ; they had been taught of Christ and so had received the noblest education, but in classical studies and in philosophical speculations they were but little versed, with the exception of the apostle Paul, and he came not with excellency of speech or of wisdom. Yet the apostles and their followers preached with such power, that the world soon felt their presence. On the slabs of stone which mark the burial places of the early Christians in the catacombs of Rome, the inscriptions are nearly all ill spelt, many of them have here a letter in Greek and there a letter in Latin, grammar is forgotten, and orthography is violated, a proof that the early Christians who thus commemorated the martyred dead were many of them uneducated persons : but for all that they crushed the wisdom of the sages and smote the gods of classic lands. They smote Jupiter and Saturn, until they were broken in pieces, and Venus and Diana fell from their seats of power. Their conquests were not by the learning of the schools ; that hindered them—the Gnostic heresy, the heresy of pretended knowledge hindered but never helped the church of God. Even thus at this hour the culture so much vaunted in certain places is opposed to the simplicity of the gospel. Therefore I say we do not despise true learning, but we dare not depend upon it. We believe that God can bless and does bless thousands by very simple and humble testimonies ; we are none of us to hold our tongues for Christ, because we cannot speak as the learned ; we are none of us to refuse the Lord's message to ourselves because it is spoken by an unlettered messenger. We are not to select our pastors simply because of their talents and acquirements ; we must regard their unction, we must look at their call, and see whether the Spirit of God is with them ; if not, we shall make learning to be our brazen serpent, and it will need to be broken in pieces.

Just the same also may be said of human eloquence. It is a good

thing when a man can speak well, and his words flow from his soul like a torrent, sweeping everything before them, when his heart burns and flashes with a divine enthusiasm when he speaks what he believes and feels to be of the weightiest importance; but after all, conversions wrought by carnal rhetoric, what are they? Conversions wrought by human logic, what are they? "That which is born of the flesh is flesh." Let the men speak well—the truth ought to be delivered in the best of sentences, but the noblest language ever uttered by man never convinced a soul of sin, or bound up a wounded conscience, or raised a sinner from his death in sin. We must in prayer cry for the Spirit of God, and all our confidence must be placed in him; for oratory is but a sounding brass and a tinkling cymbal if the Holy Ghost be not there.

Continuing still our remarks with regard to the Christian church, I will further remark that much superstition may require to be broken down amongst us in reference to a *rigid adhesion to certain modes of Christian service*. We have tried to propagate the truth in a certain way, and the Lord has blessed us in it, and therefore we venerate the mode and the plan, and forget that the Holy Spirit is a free Spirit. There are persons in our churches who object very seriously to any attempt to do good in a way which they have not seen tried before. For them custom has all the force of authority: the traditions of the fathers are their law. Bold measures of evangelisation shock them as innovations, as if anything could be an innovation where all is free! I know Dissenting congregations which are as conservative of their do-nothing plans as if they had received them direct from heaven. Their life is fossilized, their order is funereal, their orthodoxy is sepulchral. "As it was in the beginning, is now, and ever shall be, world without end, Amen," seems to be the chant of many good, but mistaken Christians amongst us who cannot think a thing ought to be done if it never has been done. If there be anything clear in the teaching of our Lord and his apostles, it is this, that we are not under law, rubric, and tradition, but are brought into the liberty of the children of God, so that we are led by the Spirit, and in the service of God are not to hunt for precedents or wait for regulations, but follow the great principles of the word, and the guidance of the Spirit, and "by any means save some." I have known brethren frightened at open-air preaching, and yet what sort of preaching used there to be in Christ's days but open-air preaching? I have known others quite alarmed at the idea of Christ's name being mentioned in a place that had been put to commoner uses, as if in the olden times Christ could have been preached anywhere if it had been necessary to have a place consecrated to Christian worship! There is a class of persons who object to every holy project for evangelisation, however right and judicious, if it happens to be novel, and they will continue to object till the work has been long in action, and has placed itself beyond fear of their opposition or need of their assistance. We shall degenerate into a race of Scribes and Pharisees if we give way to this spirit. We shall again be slaves to traditions, legends, and old wives' fables, as bad as those which polluted Judaism. In the name of everything that is Christlike, away with all that checks the vital action of the body of Christ. Fetters are

none the less burdensome for being antique. Let the brazen serpent be broken if it become a barrier to the onward progress of the cross. If any endeavour to force upon us the yoke of habit, let us resist them in the spirit of Paul, who, speaking of those who came in privily to spy out his liberty in Christ Jesus that they might bring him into bondage, declares "to whom we gave place for subjection, no, not for an hour."

So it is with the *forms of divine worship*. I have frequently, especially in our country churches, met with the most determined protests against the most trivial alteration of the routine of their worship. You must sing at such a time, for they always have sung at such a point in the service; you must pray at such a moment, they always have prayed at that part of the worship; and if you can keep to the same quantity of minutes usually occupied so much the better. The whole service, though not in a book—for our sturdy brethren would rise in revolt against the use of a book—yet is quite as stereotyped as if it were taken from the Common Prayer. Now, I believe that in public worship we should do well to be bound by no human rules, and constrained by no stereotyped order. I like, and we have often done it, to have an interval of silence sometimes. Why not? Why should it be all vocal worship? And why not begin with the sermon occasionally? You who come in late would probably mend your manners in such a case. And then why should we not sing when we have been accustomed to pray, and pray when we have been accustomed to sing? We are under the dispensation of the Spirit, and as far as I know, the Spirit of God has not inspired those cards which I see sometimes nailed up in pulpits—"begin with short prayer, sing, read, pray, preach," and so on. A legality of form is growing up among us, and I enter my heart's protest against it. Not that you and I may have been affected by this Dissenting ritualism, but practices good in themselves are to be protested against if they gender to bondage, for the Spirit of God bloweth where he listeth, and if we worship God according to his guidance, the worship cannot invariably take the same form.

2. Thus we have done a little image breaking in the church. Now let us turn to the *temple of our own hearts*, and we shall find much work to be done there.

Beloved brethren and sisters, exercise self-examination now for the next five minutes or so. How about your present position as a Christian? You feel, probably, after ten, twelve, twenty, or thirty years of profession, very considerably in advance of what you were when you first came to Christ. Do you feel that you are? You can now see the imprudences of your early zeal, and you can look down with unmeasured pity upon those young people who know so little about the road to heaven, of which you know so much, and who have so little strength, of which you now have a very considerable share, who are so little aware of the devices of Satan, against which you guard yourself so ably. Dear brother, are you thus really congratulating yourself upon your advanced position? Are you? Then permit a little image breaking there, for rest assured if we, any of us, come to put much value upon our attainments we shall be very near to sliding into self-confidence, carnal security, and I know not what of mischievous pride. Beloved, are

you stronger than you were? But does your strength lie anywhere else than where it used to lie, even in Christ? Are you wiser than you were? But have you any wisdom except that Christ is made unto you wisdom? Do you really think that twenty years' experience has changed your corruptions, that your passions have become extinct, that your tendencies to sin are not so strong as they were, that in fact you have less need to watch, less need to depend simply upon the merit of Christ and the work of his Spirit? Do you think so? Do you think so? "Let him that thinketh he standeth take heed lest he fall." I have heard that more horses fall at the bottom of a hill than almost anywhere else, and I know that more professors make shipwreck towards the close of life than at any other time. As I have often told you, the falls recorded in the Old and New Testament are the falls, not of young men in the heat of passion, but of old or middle-aged men. Lot was no boy when he disgraced himself. David was no young man when he transgressed with Bathsheba. Peter was no child when he denied his Lord. These were men of experience and knowledge and attainments. Your attainments, my brother! Oh, brave word for a poor thing! Your attainments! Your attainments, poor sinner! Apart from what you have in Christ, how absurd the language! Better still to say, "Having nothing and yet possessing all things, God forbid that I should glory, save in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ." Do I then despise Christian attainments? By no manner of means, only when they are idolised and hide the Saviour, then I call them Nehushtan, and would fain break them in pieces.

Again, dear brother, it may be that you are enjoying very near fellowship with Christ. How delightful it is when you know by assurance that you are the Beloved's and that the Beloved is yours; when all doubts and fears have fled away and you are walking in the light of his countenance! When we are in such a condition we are like Peter, and would fain build three tabernacles, for we say, "Master, it is good to be here." But we must mind lest we elevate our enjoyments into the place of our Master. We may even make our communion with Christ an idol, by putting it before Christ himself. I am not saved and safe because I am greatly rejoicing. Not my enjoyment, but Jesus saves me—*he* alone saves me. If my communion were interrupted, I should still be secure in him, and now I enjoy it sweetly it does not add to my actual security or acceptance before God. An old Puritan quaintly says, suppose a loving husband were to give to his wife many rings and jewels out of love to her, and she should come to think so highly of the love-tokens that she sat and looked at them, and admired them, and forgot her husband, would he not be rather inclined to take these things away to turn her love once again to himself? So with our graces and our enjoyments; if we think too much of them the iconoclastic hammer will come in, and these things will vanish because they have provoked the Lord to jealousy.

Further, we have a little more work to do. You have, and you thank God for it, some good friends in this world, dear friends, Christian friends, reliable friends. Hold them fast; but it is not always easy to keep these friends where they should be. There is a text that might save us a thousand sorrows if we thought more of it: "Cursed

be the man that trusteth in man, and maketh flesh his arm : but blessed is the man that trusteth in the Lord, and whose hope the Lord is." And there is another text of the same tone : " Cease ye from man whose breath is in his nostrils : for wherein is he to be accounted of ? " Friendship by all means, and confidence in those who deserve it by all means, but pass not the bound which God hath set, think not that to be immutable which is but clay, and fancy not that to be faithful which is but flesh. Changing circumstances have changed many hearts, and altered positions and conditions have made sad havoc among friendships which seemed to be eternal. Lean on thy friends, but not with all thy weight ; trust and be confident as thou mayest, but let thine inmost reliance, thy deepest faith, lean on that arm which thou canst not see, but which arm nevertheless upholds the universe.

Now a word that may cut more keenly still, and it concerns our dear relationships in the family circle. The last should I be to speak against the love that is due to husband, and wife, and child, and brethren. Christianity fosters all the domestic loves. We love none the less our dear ones below because our heart still loves our Saviour above all. But, beloved, there is such a thing as putting child or wife or husband into Jesus' place. The beloved one was meant to be loved, but not to be worshipped. That little gem was given to be prized, but not to be valued beyond the pearl of great price. Beware of desecrating your earthly love into idolatry ; rather consecrate it by seeking God's glory in it, and it shall be well with you ; for if you are a child of God, whatever idol you worship, God's great hammer will be lifted up against it. You will lose the child, or it may live to prove your curse ; you will lose the love you think so precious, or you may have it, but it will lead you astray. Beloved, I know there is work to be done in many of our hearts in this respect.

And so there is yet further in the pursuits of our minds. I do not see why a Christian man should not have for a pursuit the attainment of eminence in learning, proficiency in science, or success in business ; if he does not do so he is not likely to distinguish himself, and there can be no reason why a Christian should be always in the rear ; but these lawful worldly aims must be kept in their place and be subservient to higher ends, or else what is right in itself will get to be wrong through being put in the wrong place. You may pursue that branch of knowledge, young man, but seek first the kingdom of God. Do you desire to be an artist and rank with Landseer and Millais ? I would not discourage you for a moment ; in the skilful use of that pencil may you rise to the highest position in your art ; but for all that do not worship the palette, do not bow down before the outspread canvas : there is something better to live for than to paint. Student, I do not wonder at your desire to excel. Why should not Christian men be first in all departments of learning ? But after all, there are higher objects than zoology, geology, mechanics, or astronomy. Do then, I pray you, guard against putting anything where Christ should be. Seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness. Ever God first, and then the rest that you may glorify God by what of ability or influence you have obtained such means. I charge you look to this on pain of seeing idols broken, and aspirations destroyed.

Thus have we gone into the temple of your hearts, and used the hammer a little there.

II. Now I desire for awhile to speak with those who are **SEEKERS OF JESUS**. There is some idol breaking to be done for them. I pray God the Holy Spirit to do it.

The way of salvation lies in coming to Christ, in trusting in Jesus Christ alone. Why is it that so many refuse to do this, and remain in the border land of desire unsaved? Many think that they ought to be much better than they are: they have faults to be corrected, their minds are in a wrong condition, they must be put right, and they are trying to do this with the intention when they feel better to put their trust in Jesus. O that my hammer might smash all that to pieces! My friend, you ought to be better, your mind ought to be in a better state; I grant all that; but if you put this improvement of yours in the place of the work of Christ, you are going the sure way to destruction. *Your* righteousness is not what is needed, but Christ's righteousness, and if you conceive that you must fit yourself for him, you know not the gospel. Come to Jesus as you are. Your conscious sinfulness and imperfections will but enable you to prize his perfection and his power to save. Do not look to yourself for a part of your salvation; if you do I must call your goodness "*Nehushtan*," and compare it to dross and dung! Look to Jesus, and Jesus only, all else will deceive you. Do see how he carried sin, and was punished for it, and how his righteousness avails with the Father, and look not to any preparations or fitnesses which you may conceive to be in yourself.

With some the *Nehushtan* which they set up is their sense of sin, either they do not feel their need of Christ as they ought, or else they do feel their need, and therefore think they are in a fair condition. Now, believe me, you often misunderstand the promises of Christ. That matchless promise, "Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden," is thought to be a promise made to those who labour and are heavy laden. My brethren, the promise is not made to labouring nor to being heavy laden. "What is it made to?" say you. The promise is made to coming to Christ, "Come unto me, and I will give you rest." You may be weary and heavy laden as long as you will, but you will not get rest by labouring, it is coming to Christ that gives rest. Do not think that feeling your need of Christ is salvation; it is coming to Christ, depending, relying upon him alone, that brings you to the blessing. Do not delay, then. The most proper sense of sin, though it may be commendable as the brazen serpent, if you rest in it must be broken in pieces, for it is an antichrist.

Many persons are resting in their fear of self-deception. "I would fain trust in Christ," says one, "but I am so afraid of being self-deceived." And do you think that your being afraid of presumption is a better thing than believing God's testimony concerning his Son? You must think so or else you would not keep it in preference to believing. To believe in Jesus Christ—that is, to rest upon God's own Son, who was put to death because our sin was laid upon him—to believe in him simply with a childish confidence is the way of salvation; but you prefer not to do it on the ground that you are afraid of being self-deceived; you prefer tarrying in a state of caution to advancing

to faith. Away with your idolised brazen serpent—away with it. Give up the fear or keep it, which you will, but come to Jesus.

Many of you, I am afraid, are resting in sermon hearing. “I shall get good one of these days,” says one, “I am always at the Tabernacle, or always at my church,” or, “I go to hear a good gospel preacher, and I shall get a blessing.” What, do you think salvation comes through merely hearing sermons? Ah! sirs, responsibility comes when the gospel is honestly preached, but nothing more, unless you believe the message which you hear. Faith is the vital point, the coming to Jesus, or else I pour ridicule on sermon hearing, and sermon preaching too, if you look to this as the groundwork of salvation. It is not the poor trumpet that makes the jubilee, it does but proclaim it. O that you would obtain the liberty which the trumpet proclaims.

But some of you may say, “I not only hear sermons, but I read the Bible regularly!” Yes, and I commend you for it, but if you imagine you are in a good and proper state because you are a Bible-reader, I must tell you that as an unbeliever you are condemned already, and, while reading the Bible, that very Bible itself condemns you. Go on with the reading of it—I am in hopes that you may get beyond that, to be a believer in Jesus; but as long as you are not a believer in Jesus, you may read your Bible as much as ever you will, it will not, cannot save you. What does our Saviour say? He says (so I read the original), “Ye search the Scriptures, for in them ye think ye have eternal life, and they are they that testify of me; but ye will not come unto me that ye may have life.” A great many in his days studied the Scriptures, but would not believe in him. You may be lost with a knowledge of Scripture as well as without it, if you tarry in the letter and go not to the spirit of the word.

There are others who are making an idol of brass out of their prayers. “I am not saved,” says one, “I have not trusted Christ, but I do pray.” Neither do I find fault with your prayers any more than I have a right to find fault with the brazen serpent in its place, but if you suppose you will be saved by praying, you are greatly mistaken. He that will not be saved by the cross shall never be saved by his closet. He that will not be saved by Christ’s wounds, shall not find salvation by his own groans and tears. There on the cross is all your hope, sinner, and if you will not have it there is no other; nay, though you hardened your knees with kneeling and blinded your eyes with weeping, you would find no gate of heaven and no hope of mercy but in the crucified Saviour. Fly to Jesus and you are saved, keep from Jesus and your prayers do but insult the Saviour, for you place them in his stead. I must break up these things—they are idols if they hide the cross of Jesus.

And so, to close, is it with all the unbelieving reasonings and rebellious considerings which some people so abound with. Seekers of Christ will some of them continually start new difficulties. If you solve one doubt they get another; if you solve that they invent a third. Their doubts, and reasonings, and questions, are like an endless chain; pull up one link and it brings up another. Their suspicions are like a chain of dredging buckets that come up all full of mire, and over they go and empty themselves but to come up full again. There is no comforting them; their soul refuseth to be comforted. If one tenth part of the ingenuity they

use in rebelling against the command of God, which bids them believe, were used in simply investigating what they are told to believe, they would come to faith, and be saved from their doubts. Do you think you are wise in trying to discover reasons why you should be damned? I can hardly conceive of a man in the condemned cell—and that is where every unbeliever is—trying to find out reasons why he should not be pardoned. There lies the pardon before him, and he is perversely searching the whole treasury of logic to find out arguments against his pardon, and reasons for his execution. Thou fool, wilt thou perish through thy reasonings? Sinner, let me say to thee, let thine artful doubts and reasonings be nailed to yonder tree where Jesus died. Crucify them. You suspect too much, you consider too much, you question too much. Here it is—receive it as a little child receives his father's word—"God was in Christ, reconciling the world unto himself, not imputing their trespasses unto them." "The Son of Man is come to seek and to save that which was lost." "Whosoever believeth in him is not condemned." "He that hath the Son of God hath life." "Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved;" for "He that believeth and is baptised shall be saved; but he that believeth not shall be damned." Here all is simplicity; do not mystify it. Here all is clear as noonday; do not shut out the light. God grant you grace to break up these idols of yours, and take your Saviour now, for Jesus' sake. Amen.

PORTIONS OF SCRIPTURE READ BEFORE SERMON—Psalms lxii. and lxiii.