

Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit.

ZEDEKIAH; OR, THE MAN WHO CANNOT SAY "NO."

A Sermon

INTENDED FOR READING ON LORD'S-DAY, DECEMBER 21ST, 1890,

DELIVERED BY

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"Then Zedekiah the king said, Behold, he is in your hand: for the king is not he that can do any thing against you."—Jeremiah xxxviii. 5.

"PUT not your trust in princes." Zedekiah professed to be a friend to Jeremiah; but when the princes sought permission to put the prophet to death, Zedekiah's friendship was not worth much. He said, "He is in your hand: for the king is not he that can do any thing against you." Instead of protecting his friend and adviser, he gave him over at once, and left him as a lamb at the mercy of wolves.

It seems very natural for men to trust in men; and yet the Scripture warns us that, "Cursed is the man that trusteth in man, and maketh flesh his arm." He that makes a mortal man his confidence, will find that his anchor has no grip. Even good men are but broken reeds, and cannot bear the strain of the day of trouble; while the bad are like sharp spears, that prick the man who dares to lean upon them. But, if we cannot trust in men, we think that surely we may trust in *princes*. If honour were banished from all the rest of the world, it ought to find a home in the breasts of kings. Great men, noble men, men of renown, men of high standing—may we not trust in them? Brethren, "It is better to trust in the Lord than to put confidence in princes"; for princes are but men, and sometimes hardly that. Princes are not always the truest of men: they are seldom the best of men to trust to. Many have had to say at the end of life what Wolsey is represented as saying to Sir William Kingston, "Had I but served my God with half the zeal I served my king, he would not in mine age have left me naked to mine enemies." If "uneasy lies the head that wears the crown," certainly, uneasy is the heart which rests on the wearer of a diadem. Trust you in God, and you have trusted in the true King, "the King immortal, invisible." Trust you in the Christ of God, and you have trusted in the only prince who

can never falter, fail, or forget. I think that is clearly a lesson of the text. We all know some one who to us is as a prince; let us not rest too much on wealthy uncle, or generous friend, or capable patron; but let our trust be ever in the Lord alone. Had Jeremiah been trusting in Zedekiah, he would have been sorrowfully deceived. Yet this is not the lesson that I am going to teach at this time.

Zedekiah was a gentleman of a sort wonderfully common nowadays. A good-natured, easy man; his nobles could get anything they liked from him. He would not act amiss of his own self, but he would follow the lead of others, wherever that might lead him. He had a great respect for the prophet; he liked to visit him, and know what message he had received from God. He did not wish to have it known that he did consult him; but still he liked to steal away in private, and have a talk with the man of God. He much respected the man so sorrowful, and yet so heroic. But when the princes came round him, though he was an autocratic king, and could have snuffed out those gentlemen at once, yet half-a-dozen of them, all very glib of speech, most easily persuaded him. He did not want to have any bother: he would do anything for a quiet life. "The king is not he that can do any thing against you." As much as to say: "I cannot say 'No' to you, if you wish it. I am sorry: I think you are wrong, but I will not insist upon my own idea. If you wish it, although I am a king, and perhaps ought not to be so yielding, yet I so much wish to please everybody that I cannot refuse you anything. You may take the prophet and, if you like, you may put him into a dungeon, where he will die. I think you are too hard on a good man, for whom I have a great respect; but at the same time, gentlemen, I am not a man that can stand out against you; and so take him, and do as you please." This is that king Zedekiah: he does not rule, but is ruled by the princes whom he ought to command. "Oh," says one, "you do not mean to insinuate that we have any Zedekiahs about now?" I shall not insinuate anything, but boldly declare that these soft, molluscous beings make up a large proportion of the population, and I think it is highly probable that some of them are here now. I shall be very glad if what I say should make them feel much ashamed, and should cause them to cry to God to give them new hearts and right spirits. It shall not be my fault if they do not feel their seat grow hard, and the house grow warm. I would fain make them pray to God to put some kind of moral backbone into them; so that, when they know the right, they may stand up for it, and may not weakly yield to the persuasions of those who tempt them. May the Holy Spirit be here to convince men of sin in this matter!

I. I am going, first of all, to DESCRIBE THE LIKE OF THIS MAN ZEDEKIAH; that I may deal plainly with such.

This softness of character takes different shapes, but it is the same base metal, the same worthless dross, in every case.

In some it takes the form of *enquiring into what religion is fashionable when they settle down in a district*. They have a pretty good idea of what truth is. They were taught it by their parents; they have read it in God's Word; they have made up their minds with some distinctness as to what is the correct thing according to Holy Scripture; but

they waive their judgment, and prepare to compromise. You see, if you want to get on in business, the best thing is to join with those religious people who are the wealthiest, and most respectable, and fashionable. If you have prospered in business, and have saved money—well, the girls want to be married, and the family requires to get into "society," whatever that may mean; so the best thing is not to enquire, "Who preaches the gospel in this district?" but, "Where will it be most for our commercial advantage, or best for our position in society, and most eligible for the girls?" and there let us go. Children of Judas, thus you sell your Master for forty pieces of silver, and perhaps for less! Iscariot's tribe is a large one. Not that they want to be wrong, they would prefer to be right: not that they wish to take up with false doctrine, they would much rather take up with right doctrine: but, you see, they must be "respectable." Sound doctrine in preference, but good society at any price. They cannot be expected to go with the poorest and the least educated class of people, they must be respectable; and so, when they are asked to worship in a fine architectural erection, though they know that it is not where their souls will profit, they will make no bones about doctrine or practice, but go at once. By their conduct they say, "I am by no means so bound up with any religious views as to lose anything for their sake. I am not one that can refuse a kind invitation from people of fashion." Did you never meet with such folk? I have met them frequently. I know that soft fellow, Zedekiah: I have seen him a great many times, and I have no very great liking for him. Is he here before me? My dear sir, be not offended with your own portrait.

Another one is of this kind. He is a Christian: at least he hopes that he is; and, on examining his own heart, he trusts that he is; but *he has never made any profession*: he never intends to do so, because, you see, if you make a profession, then you are distinctly coming out from the world, and declaring yourself to be on the side of Christ and holiness, and a great deal will be expected of you. This may involve you in a good deal of trouble. Is there not an easier path than this? The strait way, the narrow way, is described in the Word of God as "the way which leadeth unto life"; but can you not keep as near the way as possible without going into it? Can you not travel along on the other side of the hedge? The grass is very nice there. The primroses are coming up. You can look over the fence, and keep the high road in view, so as not to wander far from the track? Why should you choose an unpopular way, which will cost you many a friendship, and a good deal of enjoyable company? If you openly follow the narrow way, you will be pointed at: people will expect you to be so very careful and so very holy, and this will cost a deal of painful self-denial. Why should you expose yourself to all that trouble, when there are so many friends on the sheltered side of the hedge who assure you that their path will lead to the same end? It is not quite what it ought to be; still, God is very merciful, and you may hope to come out right in the long run, if you are careful to pick your way, and do not get into the worst of the ditches. Is it not always a good thing to take a short cut? Well, I used to think so once; but now, whenever I am in the country, I always

scrupulously avoid short cuts; for they almost always get you up to your ankles in mud, and often land you further off than you were when you started. And you may depend upon it that, in this life, the man who thinks that he is not going to make a profession, but will go to heaven secretly by the new cut, will find himself, before long, much farther off from God and Christ than he ever thought to be. The way to heaven, according to Scripture, is, "With the heart man believeth unto righteousness; and with the mouth confession is made unto salvation"; and "What God hath joined together let no man put asunder." It is written, "He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved." The inward faith, and the public avowal of it, must never be divided. Do you dare to remove even a linch-pin from the gospel chariot? Mind what you are at! O ye cowards, ye think to make a new way to heaven—to make the walk more pleasing to your taste, and more gratifying to your pride; but you will ruin your souls. Do you hope to be allowed to sneak into heaven by a back door! Take heed to yourselves, lest you be deceived in this. This Zedekiah—I know that he is here to-night—means to join the church any time within the next sixty years; and he has always meant that for the last thirty years that I have known him. I wonder whether he will live till the time comes! I am in great fear about him, and I pray him to consider what is now said, and no longer be ashamed of Christ.

Another form of Zedekiah is not uncommon. *It is the man who is on both sides.* A Christian? Yes, by all means. He takes a class in the Sunday-school. "Certainly, sir. Would you not have me active in the cause of Christ?" Of course. He talks to others about the necessity of being found in Christ, and of the excellence of Christian endeavour. We like this young man. But to-morrow night there will be an entertainment of a loose character, and he will be asked to go. Will our virtuous young gentleman yield to the invitations of his worldly friends? Assuredly he will; for he is like putty, and you can mould him at will. "Well," he says, "you know we must not be too strict"; and he goes. Another time there will be sung, in his presence, a song which is a little lewd; and others laugh, and he laughs, too. He says that he did not quite like it; yet I do not hear any difference between his laugh and the laugh of others. He is a gentleman who is "Hail fellow, well met!" with any company that he gets into. A most genial man, is he not? He never raises questions: he is far from squeamish, for that might land him in difficulties. "The king is not he that can do any thing against you": he will do everything for you. He holds with the hare. Poor thing, it is a shame to hunt so timid a creature! But his sympathy is not worth much, for he runs with the hounds as fast as any dog among them, and he would be glad to get the hare by the nape of the neck if he could do it and not be seen. Do you not know the gentleman? You know him, but you do not esteem him. Who could? To me he is a frequent sorrow. God deliver us from duplicity! Of all things that must be accursed in his sight, the chief must be this—to pretend respect to our holy faith, and then to live in constant opposition to it. "If the Lord be God, follow him: but if Baal, then follow him"; but do not attempt to worship Jehovah and Baal at the same altar,

and bring them the same sacrifice; for this must not be. No man can serve two masters.

Then, we have another class of Zedekiahs who are of a better sort, but none too good. I trust that they wish to be true at heart, but *they are very weak, and apt to yield*. If they live in a godly family they will be pleased to be there, and they will be happy and develop into something very good in its way. But if, in the order of providence, they should be cast in a family where there is no religion, certainly they will not attempt to alter the state of things, except it be in the mildest half-hearted manner. The family will be still without religion though they are there. And if they happen to move to a circle openly opposed to godliness—well, it will grieve them very much at first, and they will be rather restless. It will not grieve them quite so much by-and-by; and after a while they will themselves become as much opposed to the thing they now admire as the rest of the folks. O dear friends, we have a number of Christians—I will not condemn them—but they are very feeble. They give way in the day of temptation. They cannot stand alone: false doctrine, cleverly spoken, carries them clean away. These are the prey of wolves in sheep's clothing. They have no stamina, no backbone, no inward root. Be you not of this sort. Oh, pray every morning, "Lead us not into temptation"; and when you have breathed that prayer to God, add the other, "But deliver us from evil." If we must be tempted, let us not fall under the temptation. In these perilous days we want men who have put on the whole armour of God. It is not every child that can wear armour. We want men strong in the Lord, and in the power of his might, who, having put on armour, are not afraid to come to the front of the battle where the arrows fly thickest; for they know that their armour is mail of proof, and will throw off all the poisoned darts of the enemy. But, alas! we have many whom we love, and for whom we pray, who are so apt to yield, so ready to give way, that they fall in battle at the very first assault of the deceiver. They get with persons of cunning character and commanding mind, and they fly like feathers in the wind, having no power to resist even the breath of a childish foe.

Thus I have described Zedekiah in four of the forms which he commonly takes. If the cap fits any one of you, pray wear it. If I have made a photograph of you, put it in the album of your meditation, and look at it till you loathe your own likeness.

II. Now, very briefly, let me SEARCH OUT THE CAUSE OF THIS ERROR, which spoils the character of Zedekiah. May be, we may put our finger on an evil which may be cured by grace.

It is not always the same in everybody, but *with some there is a general softness of character*. I do not say that they have a soft place in their head. Possibly I may not say the whole truth if I suggest that they have a soft place in their heart; but they are soft altogether: fine material for a potter to work upon. You can cast them into any shape you choose. Remember one whom Mr. Bunyan graphically describes. His name was Pliable. Evangelist and Christian told him about the Celestial City. "Yes, yes," Pliable said. Oh, yes, he would go to the Celestial City. Of course he would go to the Celestial City.

He liked the idea. It was a beautiful thing to start for heaven and glory, and escape from the City of Destruction, which was to be burned up. Of course, he quite agreed with his friends, and he would start with them on pilgrimage. He went on with his companion, Christian, till they came to the Slough of Despond. Suddenly in they went, up to their necks in the mire. Christian made desperate efforts to get out on the farther shore, nearest to the city that he sought; but Pliable had never reckoned upon any such floundering: if there was to be a slough, he thought it would not be so deep as this one, and that the mud would not be quite so foul. Finding it to be a horrible bog, he turned round, and as he was not very far from the spot at which he entered, he scrambled out on the side nearest home; and as he climbed the bank, he said that, as far as he was concerned, whoever liked might have the Celestial City; but he would not venture again into such a slough, even though fifty Celestial Cities should tempt him before, and fifty Destructions should threaten him behind. So we have people about that are fluid: nothing in their character is substantial. I will tell you what has often happened in this Tabernacle. A man has come into this place and stood in the aisle, hating the very thought of true religion, with a heart like a flint; and when I have been busy with my hammer, by God's grace I have come down on that flint, and the flint has gone to pieces in a minute, broken to shivers. But others are here who are india-rubber men, and when I am hammering they yield to each blow. I can mould them as I please; but when the sermon is done, they always get back into the old shape. There is a vast difference between the honest obstinacy of the one, and the trivial submission of the other. Without any gracious yielding of the heart to the force of divine truth many encourage us for a time, but deceive us in the end. Zedekiah talks very pleasantly and hopefully, but betrays those who seek his good, for he is unstable, and not to be depended on.

Another reason for this softness is *a selfish love of ease*. Sluggards are by no means an extinct race. Many will pay any tax if they may but dwell at ease. Beware of this in your personal character. A man says, "I admit that I ought to have spoken right out, and denounced evil." "Why did you not?" "Well, I did not like." The next time that he is asked to do a wrong thing, he will yield, and turn with his company like a vane in the wind. He knows that he ought to resist, but he does not; and why not? "Well, you see, I do not like offending people." Lazy, lazy lover of yourself! That is all it comes to. His wish to please his fellows is only a phase of his desire to please himself. The coward wishes to save his precious carcase from trouble, and let himself go sauntering along the road of pleasure without distressing exertion, so he says, "Yes, sir. Yes, sir. Well, yes, sir," to everybody. He destroys his soul for the sake of taking things easy. Do I not speak to a great many here who are of this kind? Some are sharp, decisive—too sharp, perhaps; but they have minds, and mean what they say. Others are always afraid to speak the truth unless it is popular. Contending for the truth is a thing they cannot endure, for it involves too much effort. They are especially afraid to say that little word "No," a word which I strongly

recommend to every young man. "No" is one of the most useful words in the world. A man is more than half-educated when he can say "No" distinctly. He has not much more to learn after that. There are great men and wise men, so called, who cannot say, "No." They say, "N—n—no," perhaps. They get the word out without meaning it; or, possibly, in the middle of their attempt at saying it, they break down, and end with the admission, "I am not one that can say you nay." Thus they copy Zedekiah when he said, "The king is not he that can do any thing against you." Dear friends, peace at any price is peace bought too dearly. Will you fling away your souls, your heaven, your all, for the sake of ease? Selfish love of a quiet life, what a folly thou art!

Some others, I must say, are, if possible, even more contemptible than these. *They are cowards.* I will not run the risk of being attacked by an angry hearer, when the sermon is over, for calling him a coward; but I do believe that such people are about, and that some of them are here. Men that would face a dragon, or go up to the cannon's mouth, I have known to be afraid of a woman, or of some idle reprobate whose opinion was not worth the breath he used in speaking it. You remember how Peter was terribly put out because a maid said to him, "Thou also wast with Jesus of Galilee." A maid! What was it to Peter what that maidservant thought about him? But poor Peter was all in a heat, and was so frightened that he denied that he even knew his Lord. Do not condemn *his* weakness, but remember your own. Have not some of you been frightened by a silly maid, or by a foolish boy? Are there not some here that have thought about eternal life, and would long ago have given serious consideration to their soul's affairs, but they are afraid of—well, I will not mention him; you know who it is that you are afraid of? But so it is the world over. I have known a man afraid of his daughter; I have known many more daughters afraid of their father; many a wife afraid of her husband, and some husbands afraid of their wives, their employers, their brothers, their friends. Soldiers in the barrack-room are often fearful of their messmates; and workmen down at the shop are alarmed because there is one sharp fellow in the room who is an infidel, and would give them no peace if they made an avowal of their faith. It would demean a great many if we were to expose their petty cowardices. Are you not ashamed of yourselves, if it be so?

The bottom of all is, however, that when a man is thus timid about doing right, and can be easily persuaded to do wrong, there is *a want of the fear of God in him.* He that fears God is under no necessity to fear anybody else. True godliness infuses courage into the heart: in this respect also "perfect love casteth out fear." If you have learned to tremble before the great, almighty, living God, you have ceased to tremble before a living man: I must correct myself—before a *dying* man; for in very truth life is in God, but man is a creature that will die and perish like the moth. "Who art thou, that thou shouldst be afraid of a man that shall die, and of the son of man which shall be made as grass; and forgettest the Lord thy maker?" If we had a sense of God's presence everywhere, we should not dare consent to sin, whoever it was that bade us do so. We should be like

the three holy children who stood for God. "Do you see that burning fiery furnace?" "Yes, we see it; but we also see the living God." "It shall be heated seven times hotter," said Nebuchadnezzar. "Do you hear that?" They hear the furious threat of the despot, but they also hear a voice which Nebuchadnezzar did not hear—the voice of God bidding them serve him, and strengthening them to do so. I remember in the life of my dear friend, Mr. Oncken, of Hamburg, when he began to baptize people in the Alster contrary to the law. He was brought up before the burgomaster, and that worthy magistrate put him several times in prison. At last Mr. Burgomaster said, "I tell you what it is, Mr. Oncken; the law must be obeyed. Do you see that little finger of mine? As long as that little finger will move, I will put you down in your illegal baptisms." "Well," said my brave old friend, "Mr. Burgomaster, with all respect to you, I do see that little finger of yours; but do you see that great hand of God? I am afraid that you do not see it as I do. But, as long as that great hand of God is with me, you cannot put me down." I opened Mr. Oncken's chapel in Hamburg some years afterwards, and I had a most respectable audience gathered together to hear me preach the gospel, and in the centre of that audience sat the Burgomaster. He was far more rejoiced to be there than to be carrying out an oppressive law. His little finger had ceased its movements against the Baptist, and there he sat to show what the power of God's right arm could do; for he was listening to the Word of God from a Baptist preacher, in a meeting-house built by the man whom he had been called upon to put down. Oh, why are we afraid of men? Six feet or less of bone, and blood, and flesh; and you are afraid of it! Yet, yonder is the eternal God that filleth all things, and you are so little afraid of him, that you disobey him, though he can cast both body and soul into hell. "I say unto you," said Christ, "fear him." So say I, his unworthy servant; and when you once fear him, you will lose the Zedekiah weakness, and become strong for God.

But I must not stay. May the good Spirit bless these searching words!

III. I want, in the next place, to show you where this kind of softness leads. When a man is like Zedekiah, who cannot say anything against the princes, but must let them have their own way, what comes of it? Certainly nothing that is good.

First, I think that such an easy-going creature *dishonours his own self*. Does yonder young man confess that he cannot say "no": that he must do as he is asked, and cannot stand out against even a wicked request? Then I am sorry for him. Is he a man? Is he not lowering himself beneath the dignity of manhood? I do not know, dear friends, what you think about the opinions of others; but I have always felt that if I could keep a good opinion of myself, so far that my conscience could not accuse me of doing wrong, I was not particularly anxious about what anybody else's opinion of me might be. "But," said one to a good man, "if you do that one pleasant thing nobody will know of it, and so you will not be disgraced in the eyes of anybody." "No," said the good man, "but I should be disgraced in my own eyes if I did it, and I have more respect for my own judgment of myself

than I have for other people's opinion of me." This is not egotism, but uprightness of heart. The world's poet makes Brutus say, "I had as lief not be, as live to be in awe of such a thing as I myself." What! creep and cringe and beg leave to do right, and crave permission to believe the truth, and speak it? Ask another man's leave, or some woman's leave to obey my God? Not I. No, let the worms eat me before it comes to that. O sirs, it is a fearful thing for a man to get into that humiliating state that he has no mind of his own. Call such a creature a spaniel, that must fetch and carry at his lady's bidding; but call him not a man. He has reduced himself to nothing. From such dishonour, great Lord, deliver us!

Again, dear friends, such trimming *brings dishonour upon one's position*. Only think of this. "The king—the king," he says, "The king is not he that can do any thing against you"; and further on we read, "Zedekiah the king said, I am afraid." Pretty king that! His kingship was defiled, his crown was stained, when he came into that condition of bondage. King! Call him "slave." Yet, remember, this also may apply to yourself. You, too, may hold a position which you degrade. You are a father, yet you fear your boys and girls! You have no family prayer: you do not know how your children might like it. You are a father; are you? Do you obey your own children, and call yourself a father? You are a master, but you never speak to your servants or your workpeople about religion. You do not know how they might take it! You are a pretty master! Names are strangely given nowadays: there is not much that is masterly about you. Poor slave! Is there not many a person in this world who labours to gain an office, and then is afraid to carry it out? God intended us, when he gave us a position in life, to live worthy of that position, and rightly to exercise the authority and influence which it brings. Think of a king saying, "I am afraid"; but that is what the French king said to Bernard Palissy, the potter. As nearly as I can remember the story, the monarch said, "Palissy, you must go to mass." "That I never will," said Palissy. "Then I am afraid that I shall have to give you up to be burnt." "There," said Palissy, "your majesty could not make me say such a word as that with all the power you have. I am no king, but only a poor potter, but nobody ever made me say, 'I am afraid.'" Oh, that fear of men, that dread of ridicule, that wishing to avoid sarcasm! How it has made a man come down from the dignity of his office, from the honour of the position which God has conferred upon him, and has made him baser than the menials about him! Will men never learn to honour themselves and their position by a dignified resolve to do the right at all costs?

Shall I tell you what this will still further lead to? Well, you will demean yourself, and degrade your position, and then the day will probably come when *you will give up all religion*. I have seen it actually done. Yes, I have seen a young man, who has been, at home, almost all that you could desire, and he has come up to London and dropped into a warehouse where there was no Christian feeling; and at first he has gone to a place of worship, and written home to his mother to tell her the text, as you are going to do to-night, Mr. John.

But after a while he has gone wandering out for a little excursion on the Sabbath, and by-and-by he has become a ringleader among those who dare to laugh at sacred things. One has a tower of observation here, and sees sad sights perpetually. Little by little every gracious habit is trampled on through fear of man. The weak young man slides down, down, down. By easy descents his life-vessel has glided down the rapids with the current, till at last, he that bade fair for heaven, shoots over the dread Niagara of everlasting ruin. I am afraid, young man, that your easy compliance with bad companions will ultimately lead to your giving up all religion. I pray you, pause.

Then *it will come to your doing injustice to God and good men.* The king did not like it, but he gave Jeremiah over to the cruel princes. "He is in your hand." You do not believe that you could ever come to treat God's minister with derision, and God's cause with contumely. I think I hear you say, "Is thy servant a dog that he should do this great thing?" Nay, if you were a dog you would not do it; but, being something worse than a dog, if left to yourself, you will do it. If you have not courage to stand fast now, and say, "I will serve the Lord," you will drift and drift till you will become an enemy of the cause of Christ. If Jeremiah had died in that dungeon, Zedekiah would have been an accomplice in his murder. So it has happened with young men and young women who were once, apparently, godly, and inclined to better things: they have gradually gone aside through the softness of their character, till they have become foes of Christ, and have dared defy the God whom they once feared.

At last, it gets to this, that men who trifle with their consciences, as Zedekiah did, *are unable to get any good out of God's prophets any more.* Zedekiah was well admonished and advised by the prophet, but nothing came of it. I am sadly fearful that you, dear friends, who are not converted, who have heard me a long time, will soon be unable to get any blessing out of anything I say. I may even become a savour of death unto death to you. I am told that the good people in the valley of Ohio, whose houses have been swept away by the tornado, had a warning that the storm was coming. The storm-drums were out, and the newspapers announced that a great depression was coming their way. They did not take any notice of that information; it did not seem very threatening, for they had grown used to paragraphs about the weather. If it was only once in a year that the weather could be fairly predicted, we should be wanting to buy the Gazette; but now, as we get it every morning, we do not take any particular or practical notice of it. These poor Ohio friends, therefore, took no warning, and were by no means prepared for the hurricane. Familiarity breeds neglect. People live close under the big bells of the cathedral, and sleep well at night; and people who have houses where the train passes just under the bedroom window, seldom trouble themselves about the whistling or the rumble, but sleep right on. You may continue to listen to the earnest warnings which I endeavour to give; and after hearing me for years, your hearing will come to nothing, if you get to be good, easy people, who say, "Yes, yes, yes," to everything, and there let it end. I endeavour to be earnest, and

to give striking calls to repentance, but I fear lest you should grow so used to me that you will take no more notice of me than of a noise in the street. You may look on the sun till you become blind, and hear the gospel till you grow deaf to it. God save you from that, and save you at once, on the spot, beyond all fear of such a calamity! Oh, that the Lord would grant me my request, and by his mighty grace bring you at once to his Son Jesus!

IV. I will finish with this. I would LABOUR TO FREE MEN FROM THIS COMPLAINT. I would labour to free them from it by the grace of God.

First, I would say to you, remember, dear friend, if you continue in this undecided, yielding condition, you will miss your way altogether. You must grow firm, for *without it you cannot be a Christian*. It is necessary, in order to obey Christ, that you should take up your cross and follow him. He will never number you amongst his disciples if you say "yea," and yet do "nay"—if you call him Master and Lord, and yet try to please the world. "If any man love the world, the love of the Father is not in him." You must come out on the Lord's side. The promise is, "Come out from among them, and be ye separate, saith the Lord, and touch not the unclean thing; and I will receive you, and will be a Father unto you, and ye shall be my sons and daughters, saith the Lord Almighty." You cannot be Christians without being decided, without having your minds made up for righteousness and faith in Christ. Therefore, hesitate no longer. "How long halt ye between two opinions?" How long will ye be in this fluid state, taking no permanent impression? May God himself in mercy make you to believe in Christ, and become his faithful followers! May his Holy Spirit work in you to this end!

Christ deserves this. If he died for me, shall not I acknowledge him as my Saviour? If he has bought me with his precious blood, shall I not confess my faith in him? O dear hearer, if you have learned to stand at the foot of the cross, and say, "Jesus died for me," I am sure you will feel that if it cost you a thousand deaths, you must confess your obligations to him and declare that, living and dying, you will be his!

Do not make any mistake about it. Whatever you seem to gain in personal ease, by halting and hesitating now, *it will cost you dear in the end*. If a man takes his stand, and says, "I am a Christian," it is the best thing to do in the great battle of life. If you yield a little you will have to yield more, and, having yielded more, you will have to yield altogether. If ever the Spirit of God should fetch you out to be clear and decided, it will be awfully hard work to escape from the nets and traps which you are creating by your present yielding. To say "No," however difficult, is an easier thing than to trifle and hesitate, and almost comply. You lose even when you seem to gain, if you let the tempter have his way.

Do not think, dear friend, that you are gaining anyone's esteem by sinful compliances, for you are doing the reverse: you are lowering yourself before the Philistines. Your example is ruined; your influence is destroyed; you are doing harm, and not good. The men that the world thinks most of are the men that stand up, stand straight,

stand firm. I heard one say of a preacher the other day, "I can hear him with pleasure, for he is not an echo, but a voice." That is to say, he was not a mere copyist, a being made to be dragged like a tin-kettle at the tail of a cur; but one who had a mind of his own, and dared to express it. He wins respect who, knowing his mind, and having his mind fixed on Christ and divine truth, becomes a voice for Christ, and speaks plainly and boldly. Men despise you else. If you have no manliness, how can you have any godliness?

And oh, *what will it be in the hour of death*, to lie dying, racked with pain, and then to have conscience whispering, "You were a coward. You were afraid to come out for Christ. You hid your light under a bushel. You chose to comply with the temptations of the world"? In that dread hour, when the death-sweat is on your brow, you will have enough to think of, without having remorse to sting you—the remorse of a false and coward heart. Oh, if you can then say, not boastingly, but truly, "I did follow my Lord. I trusted in him alone, and I did not blush to confess it"—this, with God's grace, will make dying to be easy work.

In the next world, what must be the doom of the man who was ashamed of Christ, when the Lord himself will say, "I am ashamed of him! I am ashamed of him!" The Lord Jesus is not ashamed of the penitent drunkard: for he cleanses him. He is not ashamed of the repenting harlot, but permits her to wash his feet with her tears. But in that day he will be ashamed of all those who have been ashamed of him. He cannot own us if we deny him.

May God bless this word of mine! I have not so much preached the gospel as shown you your need of the grace of God to make you decide for Jesus. May that grace be sought and found at once, for his dear sake! I have worn out all my strength in pleading with you. May the Lord himself take you in hand! Amen.

PORTION OF SCRIPTURE READ BEFORE SERMON—Jeremiah xxxviii. 1—23.

HYMNS FROM "OUR OWN HYMN BOOK"—674, 671, 678.

LETTER FROM MR. SPURGEON.

DEAR FRIENDS,—Thanks for your prayers, and to the Lord, who hears them. Your preacher is free from pain, and hopes now to rest, and recover strength. This sermon will, I trust, be suitable for giving to those who are halting between two opinions; and if well salted with prayer, may prove salutary to the fickle ones, who abound around us. Is not this an occasion for looking out persons of your acquaintance, and aiming at their good by putting this discourse in their way? If one preaches, and another gives the sermon currency, the workers may yet rejoice together. Forgive any egotism which appears in this suggestion: what is worth preaching is worth scattering.

Yours, for Jesus' sake,

Menton, December 12, 1890.

C. H. SPURGEON.