

Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit.

SAYING *VERSUS* DOING.

A Sermon

INTENDED FOR READING ON LORD'S-DAY, OCTOBER 6TH, 1901,

DELIVERED BY

C. H. SPURGEON,

AT THE METROPOLITAN TABERNACLE, NEWINGTON,

On Thursday Evening, May 1st, 1879.

"A certain man had two sons; and he came to the first, and said, Son, go work to day in my vineyard. He answered and said, I will not: but afterward he repented, and went. And he came to the second, and said likewise. And he answered and said, I go, sir: and went not."—Matthew xxi. 28—30.

THE father had a right to the services of both his sons, for they were, according to the strict rendering of the word, children, or young men under age. They depended upon him for everything, so they were bound to obey his commands. He did not lay upon them any very heavy tax. He simply asked that they should set to work in his vineyard, and go at once, seeing that, probably, there was need for the vines there and then to have their earnest attention. "Son," said he to the first, "'go work to-day in my vineyard,'—do not toil for a stranger, nor for some master at a distance, but work in my vineyard. You are my son, you have a share in the fruit of the vineyard, so go at once, while your services will be the most valuable, and work in my vineyard." The son replied, "I won't;" for that expression, in its bluntness and brevity, gives more nearly the sense of the Greek than even our rendering, "I will not." "I won't;" that is a straight, positive, plain refusal. Notice that there is not even the word "sir" to soften the reply. The second son said, "I go, sir;" but this first one did not say, "I will not, sir;" but just, "I won't; and there is an end of it." "But afterward," though he had thus spoken so rudely, unkindly, and wilfully against his father, "he repented, and went;" and I daresay, by his zeal and industry, he accomplished a good day's work. Though the day began so badly, it ended all right.

Now, I feel persuaded that there are here some persons like this elder son; here and there is one or another who has said, "I won't." As plainly and as rudely as they could, from their very childhood, they cast off parental restraint; and when they became more completely masters of themselves, and the gospel was preached to them,

each of them very distinctly said, "I won't." Some said, "We won't hear it." They became Sabbath-breakers. Others, who heard it, said, "We won't believe it." They became hearers only, rejectors of what they heard. Conscience came, and said to them, "You are very wrong in acting thus;" but they had, all the while, one short, straight answer, which they did not stammer in giving; they said distinctly, "We won't." There are some here who used to say this by wilful transgression. There was scarcely any sin which they did not attempt to commit if it ministered any pleasure to them. They were greedy after it; and even when there was no pleasure apart from the sin of it, they found a pleasure in the very sinfulness of the sin. They said, "We won't," most plainly; there was no hypocrisy about them; there was no mincing the matter with them; they were as bold as brass against the Most High.

But it has happened to some of us that there has come an "afterward" as it did in the case of this elder son. Thought followed upon indifference; we were led to consider our ways, and then we began to say to ourselves, "Have we treated our God rightly?" Then the Holy Spirit came—that blessed Spirit, without whom there is no right consideration,—to teach us reason, and to make our hearts to be what hearts should be,—not stony things, but hearts of flesh; and we said to ourselves, "This disobedience will never do; it is not just or right. Neither does standing idle minister any comfort to us; and, moreover, Satan has already found some mischief for our idle hands to do." We thought that we should probably slide from one sin to another, and grow gradually worse and worse; and we were startled at such a thought, so we repented. By the gracious working of the Spirit of God, we were led to cry for mercy upon our obdurate hearts, and to ask for him to renew us, crying, "Turn us, O God, and we shall be turned;" and it came to pass that we "repented and went," and happy was the day when that happened. It is a good many years with some of us since we "repented and went," but we have never repented of that repentance, nor ever wished that we had not entered the vineyard. We have begun to taste the clusters, and we have been more than repaid for all the service that we have rendered by the sweetness of the fruit, and our prayer is that we may continue labouring in that vineyard till our Heavenly Father shall call us home. We would like to have a long day of toil if it shall please him; as long as we have any degree of strength, we wish to labour in his service, for it has become perfect freedom for us now, and his yoke is easy, and even his burden is light. We have a sacred pleasure in his service; and you may guess, therefore, what pleasure we shall have in his rest.

"If life be long, I will be glad
That I may long obey:
If short,—yet why should I be sad
To soar to endless day?"

Now we are moved to great anxiety concerning some of our fellow-men who talk as we used to do. I must confess that I do not at

all look with despair upon a man who says, "I won't." I am sorry that he should be so hard of heart, but I am somewhat glad that he does not try hypocritically to put on the appearance of sensitiveness and of obedience. I do not quite agree with the Quaker, who, when he heard a man swearing, said to him, "Swear away, friend, swear it all out of thee, for thou canst never go to heaven while there is any of that in thee." I am afraid that the swearing process does not get the evil out of a man, but rather increases the quantity that is in him. That which comes out of a man defiles him, and makes him even worse than he was before. Such open sin can never be a good thing; still, I could almost wish that some people, when they do reject the Saviour, would do it openly. I could almost wish that I could bring them to a point where they must avow their decision, so that they would have to say, either "I won't," or "I will;" for, peradventure, the very echo of their rebellious voice might be blessed by the Spirit of God to their awakening. It might seem to them, though it really is not, but it might seem to them a more solemn thing to say, "I won't," than it is not to go; for, often, the actual doing of a wrong thing is easy to a man, but the saying that he means to do it, or even the confession that he has done it, is not quite so easy. The ear does not so soon get accustomed to the declaration concerning sinning as the heart does to the existence of the sin itself.

Now, my brother, you have said, "I won't." Let me ask you to stop and consider a little. Do you not know that many an one, who at first said, "I won't," has afterwards come to Christ? If it were a proper thing to do, I could point out, with my finger, numbers of persons, who are sitting here, who often vowed that they would never enter this place; but here they are, and they often come. There are others, who had a most contemptuous opinion of the preacher, for whom, at this moment, they have the greatest affection. They said they would never be found amongst those whom they called "canting Methodists." Well, they are exactly where they said they never would be, though we do not cant, and we are not Methodists; and others are now describing them by that very name which once they abhorred. I have heard it said, though I do not think it can be so, that almost all true love begins with a little aversion; but this I know, that true love to Christ often springs up in the hearts of men who had a very great deal of aversion to him.

If I can get a man to think enough about Christ distinctly to avow that he will not yield to him, I have much more hope of him than of that man who will not think at all,—I mean the one who passes Christ by with even greater disdain, and who says there is nothing in him that is worthy of his consideration. Ah, my dear friend! I should like to hear you when you stand up to preach the gospel,—you who now deny the cardinal truths of the gospel. When the Lord brings you out of your present sinful state, oh, how boldly you will declare his saving grace, and his wondrous power! I should like also to hear you preach, my friend,—you who now find all your delight in sensuality, and who ridicule the very thought of righteousness. What a miracle of mercy you will be, and how

sweetly you will tell to others how the Lord passeth by iniquity, transgression, and sin! I know you think it will never be the case with you; but I trust it will be; and, in order that it may be, I pray the Holy Spirit to lead you to reconsider that ignorant determination of yours,—for I venture to call it so,—that foolish resolution, which sprang from your old corrupt nature; that you may afterwards repent, and do the Lord's will.

I have not any more to say upon that part of my text, for I am going to spend the rest of the time allotted for discourse in dealing with the other character. The father afterwards went to his second son, and said to him what he had said to his brother; "and he answered and said, I go, sir: and went not."

You will notice, in your Bibles, that the word "go" is printed in italics, to show that it is not in the Greek. It was very properly supplied, by the translators, to give the sense of the original; but I can give you the meaning without that word. His father says to him, "Son, go work to-day in my vineyard;" and his answer is, "I, sir;" as much as to say, "Even if nobody else goes, I will; I am your man." You know how we commonly put it, "I'll be there, sir. Oh, yes! you bid me go; just so; I'll go." You scarcely need to say the word "go," but just, "I, I, sir; I am your man; you may depend upon me."

And you will also notice that the second son used the word "sir" by way of respect. There was very little respect in his heart, but there was a good deal on his lip. He said, "I, sir," as if he was so prompt that he had not time to put all the words together, and so deferential that, even when he was in a haste to speak, he did not leave out the term denoting respect, but said, "I, *sir*." Now, as soon as you heard him speak so cheerfully, so promptly, so respectfully, you expected to see him shoulder his tools, and get away among the vines; you are sorely disappointed to find that, although he said, "I, sir," he "went not."

I am going to speak, first, about a *nominal consent to the gospel*; secondly, about *that actual disobedience which spoils the nominal consent*; and then, thirdly, about *the special danger to which people of this sort are exposed*, those who so readily say, "I go, sir," yet who go not. I feel sure that there are some here who belong to that class of persons, and therefore I would like to speak very plainly and very personally, because I want you to be converted by God's eternal Spirit. I pray that he may, this very hour, turn you from merely saying "I go," and make you to become one of those who really do go to work heartily in the vineyard of the Lord.

I. Why did this second son say, "I go, sir," and give **THIS NOMINAL CONSENT**? What did it mean in his case, and what does it mean when we get that kind of consent from so many of our hearers?

I suspect, in their case, it means, first, that *they admit that the Word which is spoken to them is quite right*. Sin is set before them in its real character, they are reminded of its heinousness, and they say, "Yes, that is true." They do not wish to dispute that point. They are then reminded that repentance must be found in any heart that expects forgiveness, and they say, "Yes, that is quite

correct, and very proper." Then they are told that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners, and they are glad to hear it; they are reminded that they must look to Jesus as the poor serpent-bitten Israelites looked to the brazen serpent, and lived. They are told how simple the plan of salvation is, how very plain it is, that—

"There is life for a look at the Crucified One,"—

and they say, "Yes, that is very delightful, very blessed news, and we are glad to hear it." They do not dispute about it, but agree with all we say. Then they are told, "Ye must be born again;" and it is explained to them that the whole life must be altered, that the principles which rule and govern that life must be entirely changed, and that there must be imparted to them a new creation from the Holy Spirit; and they bow the head, and say, "Yes, yes; that is quite orthodox, it is very sound, it is very proper; we quite agree to that." There is no cavilling as they go down the aisle, no disputing when they get home. They let it all in at one ear, and they let it all out at the other, by way of letting the gospel have free course, I suppose; but nothing comes of it all. Having said, "I go, sir," there the matter ends, for with all their apparent agreement, they go not.

Sometimes, however, they go a stage further than that, and *promise consideration in the future*. While the preacher has been setting before them life and death, eternal joy and everlasting misery, and has been entreating the Holy Spirit to decide them for Christ and for salvation, they have said within themselves, "These things are very important, and ought to be attended to; and with the blessing of God, they shall be attended to by us." A hearer of this sort begins to say to himself, "I feel very uneasy in my present position; it is high time that I should get out of this condition, and seek to become a new man altogether, renewed in Christ Jesus. I must think of this matter; when shall it be? I do not think it is convenient just now; but, some time or other, when it is, I will think this matter out. I begin to get concerned, because I am over forty now; so I am getting on in life. I have been a hearer of the gospel these twenty or thirty years, and still I am not saved; it is time that I should sit down, and consider these things seriously, and be decided one way or the other; and, please God, I hope that shall be the case with me. It is right that the preacher should be so earnest about me; I feel it to be a most important matter. I pray that I may continue to feel it; and when I get home, I will seek God's face. Well,—perhaps I had better not say I will do so when I get home, for I have an engagement that I must fulfil first. So, not perhaps to-day, but one of these days I will seek the Lord."

Now, if that person could be informed that he would live twenty years more, and at the end of those twenty years he would not be one solitary inch nearer salvation than he is now, but would still be resolving, and promising, and that the whole of his resolves and promises would come to nothing, he would be astonished, and would say, "Oh, no! I do not mean to act like that. When I speak of

a convenient season, I mean in a very short time; I do indeed. Not, of course, just now, as I have said; there is that gay party I want to attend; then I have a ticket for the theatre, and I must use that; but I do intend to be a Christian, though not just now. Still, I am not going to put it off for twenty years; oh, dear no! I could not run such a risk as that." Well, now, this is another case of a person saying, "'I go, sir; ' oh! believe me, I am resolved to go. I pray you do not doubt it. There are strong desires within my spirit towards that which is right and good; it must be, and it shall be so, though not just now.'" Yes, "I go, sir," and he "went not."

Perhaps I may have already described what has passed through some of your minds, but I have known some get further,—I am grieved to say, much further, and yet really go further back,—for *they have made a profession of having gone into the vineyard*. They have come forward, and have said, perhaps not quite what was a deliberate lie; but, still, what was not actually true,—that they were believers in Jesus Christ. I mean that it was not an intentional lie, for they had some sort of hope of salvation; yet, they had no solid ground for that hope, so their profession was a false one. They said that they were renewed in heart, but those who saw them at home could not think that it was so, for their lives did not show that the spirit of Christ was in them. Some of them were baptized, for they said that they were dead to the world; but it was a very lively kind of death. They came to the communion table, and they said that they had fellowship with Christ there; but their temper at home, and their general spirit did not betoken any real fellowship with him; one would never have imagined that they had been with Jesus, and had learnt of him.

It is very dreadful to reflect that there should be such persons, no doubt, in all churches, either self-deceived, or else having some sort of pretence and likeness to the right thing, and misled by that glittering appearance without really meaning to deceive themselves. I am greatly afraid for any of you who manage to get into the church without being converted. You are much worse off than you were outside, because the tendency with you is, when there is a searching truth that ought to come home to you, to say, "It does not refer to me, for I am a church-member." Yes, and so was Judas; he was even an apostle, yet you know how terrible was his end. When I am reading one of the stern passages of Scripture, I always like to pray to God to let it come right home to my heart, because the devil says to me, "Why! you are a minister of the gospel, and you have brought hundreds and even thousands to Christ; you cannot be mistaken." Ah! but I may be; at least, I am bound to continue self-examination, and still to come to Jesus as a poor sinner resting alone in him. That must be the case also with you who have been church-members for years; or else it may turn out that you not only said, "I go, sir," but that you even said, "I have gone," and yet, all the while, you never went at all. It will be an awful thing for a soul to stand at God's judgment-bar with its mask taken off, and to have Christ's eyes of fire reading it through and through, and reading out this sentence, "Thou hadst

a name to live, but thou wast dead ; thou hadst a form of godliness, but didst deny the power thereof." God help us all to be clear of this terrible evil !

"Searcher of hearts, before thy face,
I all my soul display :
And, conscious of its innate arts,
Entreat thy strict survey.

"To humble penitence and prayer
Be gentle pity given ;
Speak ample pardon to my heart,
And seal its claim to heaven."

Another phase of this same very sad and dangerous character is the way in which *many people occupy themselves with spiritual day-dreaming*. I think you know what I mean. They picture to themselves what they ought to be, or what they would like to be. They assent to the precepts of the gospel that they are good ; they read the biography of some eminent person, and they wish that they bore his name ; or, at any rate, they rehearse his character, and they say to themselves, "Now that is just what we should be, if we were in similar circumstances." Of course, they are not in such circumstances, so it is very easy to dream what they would be. Many young people spend a great deal of time in speculating on all the wonderful things they will do when they reach a certain age or position, and many poor people think of what they would do if they had a heap of money. Probably they would not do anything of the sort ; but, still, they dream about it ; and it is a very curious fact that you can dream over what you would do till you imagine you have done it, and you pat yourself on the back, and say, "That is well done, my good fellow ; that is a first-rate thing ;" yet all the while it has been nothing but a dream. But you may so delude yourself that, as you go down the street, you may half wonder that the people do not say, "Look at that generous man ; at least, he would be generous if he had ten thousand a year. Look at that noble confessor of Christ ; he would stand and preach to crowds if he had only got a voice. Look at that excellent woman ; what a splendid mother she would be ! How she would bring up her children in the fear of God, only she has no children ! What an excellent mistress she would be if she had any servants ! What a splendid employer of labour such-and-such a man would be, only he does not happen to be an employer, for he is only a servant !" Many of us wish that we were in somebody else's shoes. Ah, then we could run ! If we had somebody else's armour on, then we could fight ; but as we have only our own armour, and our own shoes, and our own feet, we cannot do what we would like to do ; and, often, we do not do anything at all ; but, still, we make up for that by dreaming beautiful day-dreams.

I have known many young men who might have done something if they had given up dreaming of what they would do if,—oh, that "if" ! He who does not serve God where he is would not serve God

anywhere else. "My soul is among lions," says one; "how can I serve God?" What did Daniel do when he was in that position? "Oh! but I am as poor as poverty can make me," says one; "what can I do?" What did Job do when he was in that condition? "Oh! but I seem to be cast out from my own family, and to be persecuted or neglected by everybody." What did Joseph do when that happened to him? "Oh! but I am despised and rejected." What did our Lord Jesus do when he was in that condition? It is where you are that you are to fight the battle of life,—not somewhere else; and it is as you are, the very man that you are, and just now, this very hour, that God calls you to work in his vineyard.

But if you say, "I could work in the vineyard if it was cooler weather;" or if you say, "I could work in the vineyard if the sun was shining, and it did not rain; I could work in the vineyard; but, you see, my knife is so blunt, my spade is not the right kind of tool for me to use;" I know what is the matter with you. Lazy people always find fault with their tools, and those who do not intend to work always find some excuse or other; and then they make up for their laziness by having a delicious spiritual dream. Half the nominally Christian people about us are dreaming; and they consider that they are thus doing the work of the Lord. They are only doing it deceitfully by putting dreaming into the place of real service.

There are others who say, "I go, sir," and yet they go not, because *they attend to all the externals of religion, but their heart is not right with God.* They say, "I attend twice on a Sunday at public worship; I take a class in the Sunday-school; I go to the prayer-meeting, and the week-night lecture; I am always ready with my contribution for every good cause; in fact, there is nothing possible to me that I do not do." Yes, but all these things are mere shells; have you the kernel? These things are excellent cups and platters, washed on the outside; but is the inside of the cup and the platter washed, too? The children's hymn puts a solemn question,—

"I often say my prayers,
But do I ever pray?"

I often sing a hymn, but do I really praise? I mingle with the worshippers within the house of prayer, but do I worship God in spirit and in truth? I talk of Christ, and hear of him; but do I truly trust him? Do I love him? Is my heart really his? For, if not, I am only offering to God the external service which he abhors, and my prayer will be an abomination in his sight. My heart must go with all I do, or else I say, "I go, sir," yet I go not.

I may put all these things together, and say that very many, who hear the gospel, *are in a most delightful state of mind*; they are worked up into such a condition that, if anybody were to look them in the face, and venture upon a description of them, it would certainly be, "Surely, those people are converted." Perhaps they are almost persuaded to be Christians; possibly they are not far from the kingdom of God; yet there they linger, shivering on the brink, on the wrong side of the line that divides saint and sinner,—

dead in sins still, and yet looking as if they really were possessors of eternal life.

What is the reason why they go so far as to give this nominal consent to religion, and yet do not actually trust Christ? I suppose, with some it is because they are naturally plastic. There are many members of the Pliable family still living, and some of the Obstinate family. Obstinate does not pretend to go on pilgrimage, he scorns the idea; but Pliable says that he will go with Christian, and he actually starts with him, but he turns back as soon as they get to the first difficulty. He is ready for anything; you can twist and mould him any way you please; but I bid you to beware of Mr. Pliable, lest you should become like him.

Then there are others who are anxious to please. Their dear friends are concerned about them. Their minister is in earnest about their salvation, and they wish to please him, so they consent to the gospel that it is good, and they go a considerable way in the right direction; but their heart does not go, so they are still unsaved. Some do not like to give themselves trouble. If to be saved were just a matter of giving what they have, they would part with their last garment for it; but to have to consider, to repent, to forsake favourite sins, to trust alone in Jesus,—such things are too spiritual for them. If it were some outward performance,—“taking the sacrament,” or being baptized,—they would not mind that; but to give up sin, to consider their ways, and think upon their heart’s condition in the sight of God, to repent of sin, and believe in Jesus,—this is too much trouble for them. The last thing that some people will do is to think; they would rather have a day’s hard work on the treadmill than ten minutes’ solitary, serious thought.

Then there are some who partly yield to the claims of the gospel, because it quiets their conscience. If they were to say, when the sermon is over, “I will not have this Man to reign over me. I will not be washed in the blood of Jesus;” if they were to say that outright, their conscience would say, “What are you at? what are you at?” and they would not be able to sleep at night; so they say, “Conscience, be quiet; I believe it all, and I will attend to it by-and-by. Mr. Conscience, do not roar like a lion; do be quiet; you are bringing me to my knees, you are making me shed tears; come now, do not be so uproarious; do be still. I will listen to you by-and-by; go thy way for this time; when I have a convenient season, I will send for thee.” So they say, “I go, sir,” because it quiets conscience for a time, and they can go on sinning as before.

II. Now, secondly, just a few words upon THEIR ACTUAL REFUSAL.

The second son said, “I go, sir,” but he went not; and these people do not go. They talk of repenting, but they do not repent. They speak of believing, but they never believe. They think of submitting to God, but they have not submitted themselves to him yet. They say it is time they broke up the fallow ground, and sought the Lord, but they do not seek him. It all ends in a mere promise.

I suppose they consider that the promise is enough. But do not,

I beseech you, think to mock God in this way. If you were hungry, would you consider that the promise of a meal was sufficient? Do you reckon with your debtors that, when they promise to pay you, it is enough though they never meet your demands? And do you fancy that the eternal God is to be put off with these vain resolutions, and to be mocked with these idle dreamings of what you will do, when you do nothing whatsoever? Oh, may God save you from such a delusion!

I have known a man say, "I go, sir," but he has not gone, *because he would not give up some sin*. I have met with persons seriously concerned about their souls, who, nevertheless, would not give over tipping. They had fallen into that evil habit, and it was a stumbling-block in their way. I have known others deeply concerned about their souls, who would not give up certain attractive companions, who ought not to have charmed them, for the charm was poisonous and deadly to their souls, yet they would not flee from it. Sweet Sin-hold is one of the castles of the devil where he shuts up many a poor prisoner.

Then *the fear of man has kept many back*. They felt that they must confess Christ, but they dared not do it, for some fool or other would laugh at them, or give them the cold shoulder; so they have brought upon themselves the doom foretold in the Book of Revelation, "the fearful, and unbelieving, . . . shall have their part in the lake which burneth with fire and brimstone: which is the second death." O sirs, be afraid of being afraid whenever you find yourself afraid of following the Lord Jesus Christ!

Some people have said, "I go, sir," but *they put off the going from time to time*; and that is why they did not go. Oh, that fatal procrastination,—that delaying, that postponing! When a man once realizes that it must be now or never with him, then, sirs, it will be now! If any soul is brought to say, "Now or never! I will find Christ now, or I shall never find him;" he shall find Christ now. There is no promise given that, if you seek the Lord to-morrow, you shall find him. I know of no gospel invitations available for a year or a month hence; they all have to do with this present moment. "Behold, now is the accepted time; behold, now is the day of salvation." Can you look the bleeding Christ in the face, and tell him that you will not have him; can you say to him, "I won't have thee"? That will be a far more honest thing than to say, "Thou precious bleeding Lamb, I fain would be washed in thy blood; but not to-day, I must wait a little longer." Then you are not weaned from your sin; you still love it, and you want to hold it. You are not an empty sinner yet; you are not a hungry sinner yet; you are not a longing sinner yet; for when a man is hungering and thirsting, he does not say, "I am so hungry, give me bread to-morrow. I am parched with thirst; my mouth is like an oven; give me drink to-morrow." No, he does not hunger, he does not thirst, if he talks about delay. Come, then, poor hungering, thirsting ones; God help you to come, and find Jesus Christ at once! Otherwise, you will probably never come to him at all; but your apparent consent will be an actual refusal after all.

III. I might have said much more on this point, but I prefer to dilate, for the last few minutes, on the third most solemn head, namely, **THE VERY SERIOUS DANGER IN WHICH THESE PEOPLE ARE FOUND.** They say, "I go, sir," but they go not.

Observe, first, that *they are sinning against the light.* That son could not say that he did not know he ought to go into the vineyard, for he had actually said, "I go, sir." Some of you cannot say that you do not know the gospel, because you knew it so well that you promised to yield to its claims. You have already felt its power in a measure. Do you not recollect that day when you really had to struggle against conscience, and to make up your mind that you would not yield? Well, then, all that light which you resisted witnesses against you, as well as adds to your responsibility. The poor heathen, who does not know the truth,—the poor outsider, who does not understand the gospel,—has not sinned, and cannot sin, as you have done in thus mocking the Holy Spirit himself, by saying, "I go, sir," yet not going. Your danger lies, therefore, in the heaping up of your responsibilities by sinning against light and knowledge.

It lies also in this, that *it is always a most dangerous thing to lie unto God.* Ananias and Sapphira were not bound to give any money to the apostles when they did give, and they certainly were not bound to give all that they had; but they came, and said they had given all they received for their land, and because they lied unto God, they were struck dead there and then. Take heed, take heed, I pray you, when you say unto the Lord, "I will turn unto thee," lest he smite you on the spot when you lie unto him. Yet have not some of you already lied unto him when you were sick,—when that typhus fever was upon you,—when you were at the gates of the grave? What resolutions you made! What vows you uttered,—all forgotten, all gone to the wind! Ah, friends! all is registered in heaven; it is marked down in God's book of remembrance: "On such a day, So-and-so escaped shipwreck, and afterwards broke his vow. On such a day, So-and-so was brought up from the grave, but afterwards broke his vow." You forget it, but the recording angel has fixed it where the eternal memory will hold it against you for ever, except you repent, and turn unto God. This is a dreadful thing. I wish that I could speak so that you would feel it; but if you do not for the moment, I hope you will turn it over in your mind, and that the Spirit of God will make you think of it at home.

There is this fact, too, to be remembered, that *there is going on, in your heart, all the while, a hardening of conscience.* When a man has said to God, once or twice, "I go, sir," and he does not go, he does not, by-and-by, feel inclined even to say, "I go;" and he feels easier in not going. You may very soon cover your conscience with a fatal film. Did you ever watch the process of a pond being coated with ice? I do not suppose you have ever stood long enough to see it completely done; but, at first, it is such a thin film, it does not seem like ice, but only like water asleep and still. By-and-by, there is just a glassy film, and afterwards it continues to harden

till you might drive a broad-wheeled waggon across the stream, so hard does ice become. Just so is it with men's minds. They film over gradually through the violations of conscience till they become harder than the nether millstone, and like unto adamant.

Then, in addition to that, there is this danger,—*that God may say, "I will never again bid that man go work in my vineyard."* You know how you treat people who act as this son did; you say to a man, "Now go, and do such-and-such a work." He says, "Yes, sir; certainly, sir." If you find that he has neglected it, possibly you try him another time, and when you go to look, and see that he has done nothing, you say to yourself, "I shall never ask him any more, for there is no reliance to be placed upon him." Now suppose the Lord should say, "Let that young woman alone; she has so often broke her word to me. Let that young man alone, he has lied unto me again and again. I will never ask him again." Then, although you should come, and sit here, no sermon will ever come home to you. Whereas you used to feel and tremble, you will say, "The preacher has lost all his power; he does not seem to stir me as he did once." The change will not be in the preacher; it will be the preacher's Master who has said concerning you, "Go, and tell this people, Hear ye indeed, but understand not; and see ye indeed, but perceive not. Make the heart of this people fat, and make their ears heavy, and shut their eyes; lest they see with their eyes, and hear with their ears, and understand with their heart, and convert, and be healed." Oh, may God save you from such a judgment as that! Yet common sense and reason teach us that such a doom as that is but natural to those who despise God's warnings.

Well, now, what then? Have I said, "I go, sir," and yet I have not gone? Then, break, my heart! Oh, break, thou rocky thing, to think that I should have lied unto my God! O wretched man that I am, that I should have dared thus to fight against my best Friend, to postpone my bliss, to reject my Saviour! May the Lord begin with you by causing you to suffer that blessed heart-break! Then, the next thing is for you to fall down at Jesu's feet, and cry, "Lord, I have broken my promises, but thou never breakest thine; and thou hast said thou wilt cast out none who come unto God by thee. I come unto thee now while I am in my pew. I may not even talk of going home, or taking a single step, lest that step should be into the bottomless pit. No; but, here and now, I yield my willing heart to thee, if thou wilt but have me. Lord, I believe; help thou mine unbelief. My wanderings, Lord, are at an end; I yield myself to thee." Oh, may the Spirit of God work that blessed decision in your mind and heart now! Not to-morrow; you may not see to-morrow; now is what I aim at, and may God the Holy Spirit grant the request that now, ere the hand of that clock shall have made another round upon its face complete, you may have sought and found the Saviour by the guidance of the Divine Spirit who delights to draw men to Jesus! The Lord give you a blessing, for Christ's sake! Amen.
