

Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit

GOD'S WORD NOT TO BE REFUSED.

A Sermon

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DELIVERED BY

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"See that ye refuse not him that speaketh. For if they escaped not who refused him that spake on earth, much more shall not we escape, if we turn away from him that speaketh from heaven."—Hebrews xii. 25.

We are not a cowering multitude gathered in trembling fear around the smoking mount of Horeb; we have come where the great central figure is the mercy of God in Christ Jesus. We have gathered virtually in the outer circle of which the saints above and holy angels make the inner ring. And now to-night Jesus speaks to us in the gospel. So far as his gospel shall be preached by us here, it shall not be the word of man, but the word of God; and although it comes to you through a feeble tongue, yet the truth itself is not feeble, nor is it any less divine than if Christ himself should speak it with his own lips. "See that ye refuse not him that speaketh." The text contains:—

I. AN EXHORTATION OF A VERY SOLEMN, EARNEST KIND.

It does not say, "*Refuse* not him that speaketh," but "*See* that ye refuse not him that speaketh"—that is, "be very circumspect that by no means, accidental or otherwise, you do refuse the Christ of God, who now in the gospel speaks to you. Be watchful, be earnest, lest even through inadvertence ye should refuse the prophet of the gospel dispensation—Jesus Christ, the Son of God, who speaks in the gospel from heaven to the sons of men." It means, "Give earnest heed and careful attention, that by no means, and in no way you refuse him that speaketh." My object to-night will be to help you, beloved friends, especially you that have not laid hold on Christ, who are not the children of Zion, who are joyful in their king—to help you to-night, that you may see to it.

And to go to our point at once, we shall have many things to say, and we shall speak them in brief sentences, hoping that the thoughts as they arise may be accepted by your mind, and may, by God's Spirit, work upon your hearts and conscience. There is great need of this exhortation from many considerations not mentioned in the text. A few of these we will hint at first.

First, from *the excellency of the Word of God itself*. "See that ye refuse not him that speaketh." That which Jesus speaks concerns your soul, concerns your everlasting destiny; it is God's wisdom; God's way of mercy; God's plan by which you may be saved. If this were a secondary matter, ye need not be so earnest about receiving it, but of all things under heaven, nothing so concerns you as the gospel. See, then, that ye refuse not this precious Word, more precious than gold or rubies—which alone can save your souls.

See to this, again, because *there is an enemy of yours who will do all he can that you may refuse him that speaketh*. Satan is always busiest where the gospel is most earnestly preached. Let the sower scatter handfuls of seeds, and birds will find out the seeds and soon devour them. Let the gospel be preached, and these birds of the air, fiends of hell, will soon by some means try to remove these truths from your hearts, lest they should take root in your hearts and bring forth fruit unto repentance.

Give earnest heed, again, "that ye refuse not him that speaketh," because *the tendency of your own mind* will be to refuse Christ. Oh! sirs, ye are fallen through your first father, Adam, and the tendencies now of your souls are towards evil, and not towards the right, and when the Lord comes from heaven to you, you will reject him if left to yourselves. Watch, then, I say; see that ye refuse not, stir up your souls, awaken your minds, lest this delirious tendency of sin should make you angry with your best friend, and constrain you to thrust from you that which is your only hope for the hereafter. When a man knows that he has a bad tendency which may injure him, if he be wise he watches against it. So, knowing this, which God's Word tells you, watch, I pray you, lest ye refuse him that speaketh.

Bethink you well, too, that you have need to see to this, because *some of you have rejected Christ long enough already*. He has spoken to you from this pulpit, from other pulpits, from the Bible, from the sick-bed. He spoke to you lately in the funeral knell of your buried friend—many voices, but all with this one note, "Come to me, repent, be saved"; but until now ye have refused "him that speaketh." Will not the time past suffice to have played this mischievous game? Will not the years that have rolled into eternity bear enough witness against you? Must ye add to all this weight by again refusing? Oh! I implore you to see to it that ye do not again "refuse him that speaketh from heaven," for there is not a word of that which he speaks, but what is love to your souls. Jesus Christ, the Son of God, came not armed with terrors

to work wrath among the sons of men; all was mercy, all was grace, and to those who listen to him he has nothing to speak but tenderness and loving-kindness; your sins shall be forgiven you; the time of your ignorances God will wink at; your transgressions shall be cast into the depths of the sea; for you there shall be happiness on earth, and glory hereafter. Who would not listen when it is good news to be heard? Who would not listen when the best tidings that God himself ever sent forth from the excellent glory is proclaimed by the noblest Ambassador that ever spake to men, namely, God's own Son, Jesus, the once crucified, but now exalted Saviour? For these reasons, then, at the very outset I press upon you this exhortation, "See that ye refuse not him that speaketh such precious truth", which the enemy would fain take out of your minds: truth which you yourselves have refused long enough already, and truth which is sweet, and will be exceedingly precious to your souls if you receive it. But now the text gives us:

II. SOME FURTHER REASONS for seeing to it that we do not "refuse him that speaketh." One reason I see in the text is this: see to this because *there are many ways of refusing him that speaketh*, and you may have fallen into one or other of these. See to it; pass over in examination your own state and conduct, lest you may have been refusing Christ. *Some refuse the Saviour by not hearing of him.* In his day there were some that would not listen, and there are such now. The Sabbath days of some of you are not days of listening to the gospel. Where were you this morning? Where are you usually all the Lord's Day long? Remember, you cannot live in London, where the gospel is preached, and be without responsibility. Though you will not come to the house of God to hear of it, yet be sure of this, the kingdom of God hath come nigh unto you. You may close your ears to the invitation of the gospel, but at last you will not be able to close your ear to the denunciation of wrath. If you will not come and hear of Christ on the cross, you must one day see for yourselves Christ on his throne. "See that ye refuse not him that speaks to you from heaven" by refusing to be found where his gospel is proclaimed.

Many come to hear it, and yet refuse him that speaketh, for *they hear listlessly.* In many congregations—I will not judge this—a very large proportion of hearers are listless hearers. It little matters to them what is the subject in hand: they hear the sentences and phrases that come from the speaker's tongue, but these penetrate the ear only, and never reach their heart. Oh! how sad it is that this should be the case with almost all who have heard the gospel long, and who are not converted! They get used to it; no form of alarm could reach them, and perhaps no form of invitation could move them to penitence. The preacher may exhaust his art. They are like the adder that is deaf. He may know how to charm others, but these he cannot charm, charm he never so wisely. Oh! see ye gospel hearers up yonder, and ye

below here, that have been hearing Christ these many years, see that ye refuse not him that day by day during so long a time has spoken to you in the preaching of the gospel out of heaven.

But there are some who do hear, and have a very intelligent idea of what they hear, but who *actually refuse to believe it*. For divers reasons best known to themselves they reject the testimony of the incarnate God. They hear that God the Word was made flesh and dwelt among us, and he hath borne testimony that whosoever believeth in him is not condemned. They know but they will not believe in him. They will give you first one excuse, and then another, but all the excuses put together will never mitigate the fact that they do not believe the testimony of God concerning his Son, Jesus Christ, and so they "refuse him that speaketh." How many, how many here are by their unbelief refusing the Christ that speaks out of heaven?

Some are even *offended at the gospel*, as in Christ's day. When he came to a tender point in his preaching they went back and walked no more with him. Such there are to be found in our assemblies. The gospel galls them; there is some point that touches their prejudices, something that touches their favourite sin, and they are vexed and irritable. They ought to be angry—angry with their sin—but they are angry with Christ instead. They ought to denounce themselves, and patiently seek mercy, but this is not palatable to them; they would rather denounce the preacher, or denounce the preacher's Master.

Some will even hear the gospel, the very gospel of Christ to catch at words and pervert sentences to make play of the preacher's words which he uses, when they are honestly the best he can find, and, worse still, make play with the sense, too, with the very gospel—and find themes for loose jokes and profane and ribald words, even in the cross. Dicing, like the soldier at the cross-foot, with the blood falling on them, so some make merriment when the blood of Jesus is falling upon them to their condemnation. May it not be so with any here present, but there have been such who have even reviled the Saviour, and had hard words for God in human flesh—could not believe that he bore the guilt of sin, could not admire the love astounding that made him suffer for the guilt of his enemies—could not see anything admirable in the heroic sacrifice of the great Redeemer, but rather turned their heel against their benefactor, and poured forth venomous words on him that loved the sons of men and died saying, "Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do."

And some have practically shown they have refused him that speaketh, for they have *begun to persecute his people*; they have maltreated those that sought the glory of God, and anything that had a savour of Christ about it has been despicable and detestable to them.

Oh! dear hearers, I shall ask you, since there are all these ways of refusing Christ, to see to it that ye do not fall into any of them.

The grosser forms, perhaps, you would be too shocked at, but don't fall into the others. Do not especially fall into that indifference which has as much of insult to the Saviour almost as blasphemy. Is it nothing to you, is it nothing to you that God should come from heaven that he might be just in the salvation of men, and that, coming from heaven to be thus just, he should himself suffer that we might not suffer—the Christ of God bleed and die instead of the undeserving, hell-deserving sinners? Shall this be told you—pressed upon you—and will you refuse it? Will you refuse him who speaks himself, in his own sacrifice, and in the blood which he hath carried within the veil continues now to speak—will you, will you refuse him? Pray God you may see to it that in no form you do.

And now passing on, but keeping to the same point, striking the hammer on the head of the same nail, there are many reasons why men refuse Christ; therefore, see that for none of these reasons ye do it. Some refuse him *out of perfect indifference*; the great mass of men have not a thought above their meat and their drink. Like the cock that found the diamond on the dunghill, they turn it over and wish it were a grain of barley. What care they for heaven, or the pardon of sin? Their mind does not reach to that. See that ye—that *ye, none of you*, are so sensuous as to “refuse him that speaketh from heaven” for such a reason as this. Some reject him *because of their self-righteousness*: they are good enough. Jesus Christ speaks against them. they say; he does not applaud their righteousness, he ridicules them rather; he tells them that their prayers are long prayers, and their many good works are, after all, a poor ground for reliance.” So as the Saviour will not patronise their righteousness, neither will they have to do with him. Oh! say not ye are rich and increased in goods; ye are naked, and poor, and miserable. Say not ye can win heaven by your merits; ye have none; your merits drag you down to hell. Yet many will refuse the Saviour because of the insanity of their self-righteousness.

Some, too, reject him because of *their self-reliant wisdom*. “Why,” they say, “this is a very thoughtful age.” And everywhere I hear it dinned into my ears, “thoughtful preaching,” “thinkers,” “intellectual preaching.” And what a mass of rottenness before high heaven the whole lot is that is produced by these thinking preachers and these intellectual men! For my part I would rather say to them, “See that ye refuse not him that speaketh,” for one word of God is better than all the thoughts of all the philosophers, and one sentence from the lip of Christ I do esteem to be more precious than the whole Alexandrian library, and the Bodleian also if you will, so much as it comes from man. Nay, it is the thinking of Christ we have to think about; otherwise our thinking may prove our curse. A man, if he is drowning, if he have a rope thrown to him, had better lay hold of it than merely be there thinking about the possibilities of salvation by some other means.

While your souls are being lost, sirs, there is better employment for you than merely indulging in rhapsodies and inventions of your own supposed judgment. Take hold of this, the gospel of Jesus revealed of God, lest ye perish, and perish with a vengeance.

Some reject the Saviour from another cause: *they do not like the holiness of Christ's teaching.* They refuse him that speaketh because they think Christ's religion too strict, too precise, cuts off their pleasures, condemns their lusts. Yes, yes, it is so, but to reject Christ for such a reason is certainly to be most unreasonable, for it should be in every man a desire to be delivered from these passions and lusts, and because Christ can deliver us, shall we, therefore, reject him? God forbid that we should be led astray by such a reason.

Some reject him because they have *a fear of the world.* If they were Christians, they would probably be laughed at as Methodistic, Presbyterian, Puritanic, or some other name. And shall we lose our souls to escape the sneers of fools? He is not a man—call him by some other name—he is no man that flings away his soul because he is such a coward that he cannot bear to do and believe the right, and bear the frown of fashion.

There are others who refuse the Saviour *simply out of procrastination.* They have no reason for it, but they hope they shall have a more convenient season. They are young people as yet, or they are not so very old, or if they are old, yet still life will linger a little while, and so still they refuse him that speaketh.

I have not mentioned a worthy reason for refusing him that speaketh, nor do I believe there is a worthy reason. It seems to me that if it be so, that God himself has taken upon himself human form, and has come here to effect our redemption from our sin and misery, there cannot be any reason that will stand a moment's looking at for refusing him that speaketh. It must be my duty and my privilege to hear what it is that God has got to say to me: it must be my duty to lend him all my heart to try and understand what it is that he says, and then to give him all my will to do, or to be whatever he would have me to do or to be.

"But did God thus come?" says one. I always feel that the very declaration is its own proof. No heart could ever have contrived or invented this as a piece of imagination, the love, the story of the redeeming love of God in Christ Jesus. If I had no evidence but the mere statement, I think I must accept it, for it wears truth upon its very forefront. Who should conceive it? The offended God comes here to redeem his creatures from their own offence. Since he must in justice punish, he comes to bear the punishment himself, that he may be just and yet be inconceivably gracious! My soul flies into the arms of this revelation; it seems to be the best news my troubled conscience ever had—God was in Christ reconciling the world unto himself, not imputing their trespasses unto them. Oh! there cannot be a reasonable motive for rejecting the Saviour, and I, therefore, impress it upon

you, since so many unreasonable motives carry men away, see that ye refuse not him that speaketh, and may the Spirit of God grant that you may not be able to refuse. But now coming to the text again, we have:—

III. A VERY HIGH MOTIVE GIVEN for seeing that we refuse not him that speaketh. It is this—because *in refusing him, we shall be despising the highest possible authority*. When Moses spake in God's name, it was no light thing to refuse such an ambassador. Still, Moses was but a man. Though clothed with divine authority, yet he was but a man and a servant of God. But Jesus Christ is God by nature. See that ye refuse not him who is of heavenly origin, who came from heaven, who is clothed with such divine powers, that every word he speaks is virtually spoken from heaven, and who, being now in heaven, speaks through his ever living gospel directly out of the excellent glory. Regard ye this, I pray you, and remember well the parable which Jesus gave. A certain man planted a vineyard, and let it out to husbandmen, and when the time came that he should receive the fruit he sent a servant, and they stoned him. He sent another, and they beat him. He sent another, and they maltreated him. After he had thus sent many of his servants, and the dressers of the vineyard had incurred his high displeasure by the shameful way in which they had treated the servants, he sent his own son, and he said, "They will reverence my son." It was the highest degree of guilt when they said, "This is the heir; let us kill him, that the inheritance may be ours." Then they took him and killed him, and threw him out of the vineyard. You know how the Saviour was treated by the sons of men; but here is the point I aim at; it is this: to reject Jesus Christ, to refuse him, to refuse merely his gospel, if he did not speak in it, might not be so high a misdemeanour, but to refuse him!—I don't know how it is, but my heart feels very heavy, even to sinking, at the thought that any man here should be able to refuse Christ, the Son of God, the Everlasting and the ever Blessed. But I cannot speak out what I feel. It fills my soul with horror to think that any creature should refuse his God, when his God speaks, but much more when God comes down on earth in infinite, wondrous, immeasurable love, takes upon himself the form of man, and suffers, and then turns round to his rebellious creature and says, "Listen, I am ready to forgive you; I am willing to pardon you; do but listen to me." Oh! it seems monstrous that men should refuse Christ! I don't know how you feel about it, but if you have ever measured that in your thoughts, it will have seemed to be the most monstrous of all crimes. If, in order to be saved, the terms were hard and the conditions difficult, I could understand a man saying, "It mocks me," but when the gospel is nothing but this, "Turn ye, turn ye; why will ye die?"; when it is nothing but, "Believe in the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved," what shall I say? I cannot fashion an excuse for any of you, and if you, after having heard the gospel, be cast into

hell, I dare not think that its utmost pains will be too severe for so high an insult to such wondrous love. Ye will not be saved, sirs; ye put from you your own life; ye will not be saved when the way of salvation is plain, easy, simple, close to your hand.

"What chains of vengeance they deserve,
That slight the bonds of love."

I cannot—I could not—conceive a punishment too severe for men who, knowing that their rejection of Christ will bring upon them everlasting punishment, yet wilfully reject him. Ye choose your own delusion. If ye drank poison and did not know it, I could pity you; if you made all your veins to swell with agony, and caused your death—but when we stand up and say, "Sirs, it is poison; see others drop and die; touch it not!"—when we give you something a thousand times better, and bid you take that, but you will not take that, but *will* have the poison—then if you will, you must. If, then, you would destroy your soul, it must be so; but we would plead with you yet again, "See, see that ye refuse not him that speaketh." I wish I could raise him before you to-night—even the Christ of God, and bid him stand here, and you should see his hands and his feet, and you should ask, "What are these marks we see there?" He would reply, "These are the wounds that I received when I suffered for the sons of men," and he bares his side and says, "See here, here went the spear when I died that sinners might live." In glory now, yet once, saith he, this face was defiled with spittle, and this body mangled with Pilate's scourge and Herod's rod, and I, whom angels worshipped, was treated as a menial, ay, worse, God himself forsook me, Jehovah hid his face from me, that I, bearing the punishment of sin, might really bear it, not in fiction, but in fact, and might suffer the equivalent for all the miseries that souls redeemed by me ought to have suffered had they been cast into hell. Will ye look at his wounds, and yet refuse him? Will you hear the story of his love, and yet reject him? Must he go away and say in his heart, "They have refused me; they have refused me; I told them of salvation; I showed them how I bought salvation; they have refused me; I will go my way, and they shall never see my face again till that day when they shall say, 'Mountains fall upon us; hide us from the face of him that sitteth upon the throne' "? If you will not have him in mercy, you must have him in judgment, and if the silver sceptre of God will not touch you, the Christ of God, the man of Nazareth, will come a second time on the clouds of heaven, and woe unto you in that tremendous day. Then shall the nations of the earth weep and wail because of him. They would not have him as their Saviour; they must have him as their Judge, and out of his mouth shall the sentence come, "Depart! Depart!"

Now I have to close with the last reason that is given in the

text why we should see that we "refuse not him that speaketh." It is this: that if we do:—

IV. THERE IS A DOOM TO BE FEARED, for if they escaped not who refused him that spake on earth, much more shall not we escape if we turn away from him that speaketh from *heaven*. You hear the din that goes up from the Red Sea when the angry billows leap over Pharaoh and his horsemen. Why is the king asleep in the midst of the waters? Why are the chivalry of Egypt cut off? They rejected Moses when he said, "Thus saith the Lord, Let my people go." If Pharaoh escaped not when he refused him that spake on earth, oh! dreadful shall be that day when the Christ who this day speaks to you, and whom you reject, shall lift up the rods of his anger, and the lake of fire, more direful than the Red Sea, shall swallow up his adversaries. See you that next sight? A number of men are standing there holding censers of incense in their hands, and there stands Moses, the servant of God, and he says, "If these die the death of common men, God hath not spoken by me," for they have rebelled against Moses. Do you see the sight? Can you picture it? If they escaped not who refused him that spake on earth, how shall we escape if we refuse him that speaketh from heaven? Go through the peninsular of the Arabian desert. See how the tribes drop, one by one, and leave graves behind them as the track of their march. Of all that came out of Egypt, not one entered into Canaan. Who slew all these? They were all slain there because they resisted the Word of God by his servant Moses, and he swore in his wrath that they should not enter into his rest. If they escaped not who refused him that spake on earth, how shall we escape if we refuse him that speaketh to us from heaven?

I might multiply instances and give you proof of how God avenged the refusal to listen to his servant Moses, but how much more will he avenge it if we listen not to Jesus Christ the Lord! "Oh!" says one, "you preach the terrors of the Lord." The terrors of the Lord!—I scarce think of them; they are too dreadful for human language; but if I speak severely, even for a moment, it is in love. I dare not play with you, sinner; I dare not tell you sin is a trifle; I dare not tell you that the world to come is a matter of no great account; I dare not come and tell you that you need not be in earnest. I shall have to answer for it to my Master. I have these words ringing in my ears, "If the watchman warns them not, they shall perish, but their blood will I require at the watchman's hands." I cannot bear that I should have the blood of souls upon my skirts, and, therefore, do I again say to you—refuse what I say as much as you will; cast anything that is mine to the dogs; have nothing to do with it; but wherein I have spoken to you Christ's Word, and I have told you his gospel, "Believe and live," "He that believeth on him is not condemned," "He that believeth, and is baptized, shall be saved." Wherein it is Christ's gospel, it is Christ that speaks, and I again say to you,

for your soul's sake, "Refuse not him that speaks from heaven to you." May his Spirit sweetly incline you to listen to Christ's Word, and may you be saved to-night.

If you don't have Christ to-night, some of you never will have him. If you are not saved to-night, some of you never will be. 'Tis now or never with you. God's Spirit strives with you, conscience is a little awakened. Catch every breeze, catch every breeze; do not let this pass by. Oh! that to-night you might seek, and that to-night you might find the Saviour. Else remember if you refuse him that speaks from heaven, he lifts his hands and swears that you shall not enter into his rest. Then are you lost, lost, lost, beyond all recall! God bless every one of you, and may we meet in heaven.

I do not know, I sometimes am afraid that there are not so many conversions as there used to be. If I thought there were no more souls to be saved by me in this place, under God, I would break away from every comfort, and go and find out a place where I could find some that God would bless. Are they all saved that will be? You seatholders, have I fished in this pond till there is no more to come? Is it to be so, that in all the ground where wheat ever will grow, wheat has grown, and there can be no more? My brethren and sisters in Christ, pray God to send his Spirit that there may be more brought to Jesus. If not, it is hard, hard work to preach in vain. Perhaps I grow stale and dull to you; I would not if I could help it. If I could learn how to preach, I would go to school. If I could find the best way to reach you I am sure I would spare no pains. I do not know what more to say, but if Christ himself shall be refused, how shall I speak for him? If his dear wounds, if his precious blood, if his dying groans, if his love to the souls of men all go for nothing, then my words cannot be anything; they may well go to the wind. But do, do turn ye to him. Cast not away your souls. Come to him; he will receive you; he waiteth to be gracious. Whosoever is heavy laden, let him come to-night. One tear, one sigh, one cry—send it up to him; he will hear you. Come and trust him; he will save you. God bless you, for Christ's love's sake. Amen.

Exposition by C. W. Spurgeon.

HEBREWS XII.

Verses 1, 2. *Wherefore seeing we also are compassed about with so great a cloud of witnesses, let us lay aside every weight, and the sin which doth so easily beset us, and let us run with patience the race that is set before us. Looking unto Jesus*

The Apostle seems to say, since so many look on from heaven, and earth, and hell, and we are runners in the great life race, let us strip to it; let us throw aside everything that would make our running difficult; every weight, however golden; every garment, however richly embroidered, lest it should entangle us in our course. And then when we have set out, let us not conclude that we have won the victory, but "run with patience," on, on, on, till at last we reach the goal.