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A SERMON
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DELIVERED BY C. H. SPURGEON,
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*“What is the thing that the Lord has said unto you?”
1 Samuel 3:17.*

THE Lord would not speak directly to Eli, although he was the High Priest. In ordinary circumstances it would have been so, but Eli had grieved the Lord, and thus had lost his honorable standing. God had not cast him off, but He viewed him with such displeasure that He would only speak to him through another person; even as great kings, if they are offended with their courtiers, send them messages by other hands. The Lord sent, first, a man of God to warn Eli of what would be the sure result of his lack of firmness with his sons, and when He gave him a second warning, it was sent through one who was a little underling in his family.

O you saints, who live upon familiar terms with the Lord, take heed of sin, lest you lose your close communion, your favored fellowship, and stand in a second place! God will speak to you, but it will be in warning and in a roundabout way, and not face to face, with His lips to your ear, as He has been known to do while you have pleased Him. God will not cast you off, but He may set you aside for a time. You may still hear His message through others, but He will be silent to you personally. You may have to live in the frigid zone of doubt and anxiety, instead of sunning yourselves in the full blaze of divine love. It was so with Eli; he had forbore to rebuke sin in his own house, and had brought the anger of God upon himself, and therefore he had no comfortable communion and no honor with Jehovah, but must be schooled by a child.

Further, when God had sent a man of God to Eli and the message did not awaken him to a sense of his sin in over-indulgence of his sons, and toleration of evil in those under him, the Lord sends him a word of threatening by a child, for God has many messengers. The sending of the child Samuel, to bear the terrible tidings to the aged priest, was a sweet but stern rebuke of Eli. The child is awake, while the old man is locked in the slumber which comes of a seared conscience. Experience must now be admonished by childhood and wisdom by simplicity. Grey hairs, in this case, yield not a crown of glory to the erring ruler, but he must bow his head in sorrow at a rebuke brought to him by a lowly boy. The child is evidently more trusted of God than the venerable priest. It was the beginning of the divine chastisement that his honor should pass away, and an aged priest should stand reproved by a youthful prophet. There was much mercy in it, yet we clearly see the Lord stripping His servant of his decorations, and setting him in a lower place—making the Urim and the Thummim which he wore upon his breast to be of secondary power for showing the future, while the Spirit rested more fully on a holy boy. He, whose talk was still that of childhood, becomes a mouth for God, while the venerable ruler of his people has nothing to say but to submit to his inevitable punishment. Eli was a man of God, and, notwithstanding his great chastisement and his mournful death, I doubt not that he died in the Lord, but he brought dishonor on his own name, and he was condemned to know that his holy office would not be continued in his line, and that none of his descendants should live to old age. He had not duly honored the Lord, and therefore he heard the sentence pronounced on him and on his race. “They that honor Me I will honor, and they that despise Me shall be lightly esteemed.” He had spared the rod of rebuke, and therefore the axe of judgment fell on his house, “because his sons made themselves vile, and he restrained them not.” O brethren, let us beware of sin, of allowing sin in those under our charge, lest the Lord lay us low, and send an affliction upon us, which shall cleave to our race forever.

We will now use his question, by which he extracted from Samuel the message of God, and we will view it in three lights; first, as put *to Samuel*; secondly, as coming *from Eli*; and, thirdly, as capable of being turned *upon ourselves*. We will ask it of ourselves, as another might ask it, and we will answer it to our own hearts, so that we may by a rehearsal become ready to give an answer to Him that shall ask us in days to come. Come, my heart, answer to yourself, “What is the thing that the Lord has said to you?” May the Holy Spirit help you, by bringing all things to your remembrance, whatsoever He has said to you!

I. First, let us view this question as addressed TO SAMUEL.

The first remark which we shall make upon it is that God does speak to men. Otherwise this would be a senseless question, “What is the thing that the Lord has said unto you?” God does communicate with mortals. He is not shut up all alone by Himself in sublime solitude. He has not placed His creatures at an immeasurable distance, with an impassable abyss between their littleness and His own grandeur. It is not true that He cannot hear their cries, nor respond to them in tones of love. In ways suitable to their feeble nature the Lord has spoken to men.

He has done so *in the inspired volume of His sacred Word*. Every line in this priceless volume was dictated by the Spirit, and is a message from God to men. This Book is to be read as the record of Jehovah’s voice. It is the phonograph of our Father’s speech in days gone by. What He has spoken aforetime by His voice, He continues to speak to us by His written Word. He spoke through prophets and seers, evangelists and apostles, and here we have it—even all that is of abiding significance to us upon whom the ends of the world are come.

God, in a renewed manner, speaks to us *by His Word when His Spirit applies it to us individually*. We never truly hear the voice of God in Scripture until the truth is spoken home to each heart and conscience by the Holy Spirit. Revelation must be revealed to each one; otherwise it soon comes to be a veiling of the truth, rather than a discovering of the Lord’s mind. The revelation is clear enough in itself, but we have not the opened eyes till grace bestows it. If we have not the Spirit of God, the letter may actually become a veil to hide the spirit of truth; this, indeed, it should not be, neither is it according to its natural intent and tendency, but our depravity makes it so, turning even light itself into a thing which blinds. Do you know what it is to have a text leap out of the Scriptures upon you, and carry you away? This special energy and flash of truth is always memorable. How often have the waves of this sea of truth been phosphorescent before my eyes—a sea of glass mingled with fire, of which the spray has dashed over me and set my soul on fire! As surely as the Lord spoke these words to Moses, or to David, or to Isaiah, or to John, or to Paul, so surely does He speak them to our souls by His Spirit. Do you understand what I say?

Moreover, our God has ways of communicating His mind to His children *by those of His servants who speak in His name*. He directs the thoughts of His ministers, and suggests their words, so that they speak to the cases of those who are led to hear the Word of God.

By our own thoughts, also, the Lord communes with us. If we will be still before Him, He will prepare our hearts, and in silence we shall hear His voice. It would be a strange thing if God could not, and did not, communicate with His own children, and it is still more strange and sad that, though He does speak, His people are slow of heart and dull of hearing.

Our God speaks to us also *in providence*. In choice favors we hear His soft and tender tones; in chastisement and rebukes we hear the sterner notes, but every sound is full of love. The Lord has ways of taking His children apart and speaking to them upon their beds. In the wilderness He speaks to the heart. He can talk with us *in nature*; have you not heard Him in the thunder? In the roaring of the sea? Yes, we hear Him, not only in the dash of Niagara, but in the ripple of the brook, and the smiling of a primrose on its bank; the Lord is never voiceless except to the earless soul. He speaks; let us hear.

Here we make a further remark; God regards not age in His speaking, but He condescends to speak with young children. Samuel was the Lord’s in his long clothes, and served the Lord while a boy and the Lord did not disdain to come to his little cot at night and call him by his name. We often talk as if it could not be possible that the Lord should speak with boys and girls, and yet, my brethren, there is not much more of a stoop in God’s talking with a child than in His speaking to a man. Indeed, the man has more of sin, and thus he is often farther off from God than the child. If the children here present are, by

God's grace, made willing to hear God's voice—if they are obedient to the Lord, and have open hearts and attentive minds towards His Word—the great God will not pass them by. The Lord stoops to the lowliness of a child, and smiles at its simplicity. If young people are prayerful, thoughtful, reverent, believing, and obedient, the fact that, like Samuel, they are small in stature and young in years shall be no detriment to them. The Lord will speak and call them by their names. My observation leads me to believe, that many children have heard more of God than persons who are grown up. They may not find willing ears to hear what the Lord has said to them, but if they did, they could tell us marvelous things. Some of us remember how in our own childhood the Lord dealt wonderfully with us, and there were “prophecies which went before” concerning us, whose meaning we can now read, though at the time we did not understand them. I think that young Samuel was one of the fittest persons in the world for the Lord to choose as His messenger, and so far from its being unusual for young ears to hear the voice from heaven, I think they are the best prepared to do so. Four times the Lord said, “Samuel, Samuel,” and the child responded and said at last, when he knew who it was that called him, “Speak, Lord, for Your servant hears.” Anyone here who can say from his heart, “Speak, Lord, for Your servant hears,” will not be long without a word from the Invisible. Oh, that our ears may be opened to heavenly tidings—may be wakened, morning by morning, by the voice of the Lord! May we often hear it as the morning song and the evening hymn! May the Lord also hear our voices in prayer and praise and meditation, till our lives shall be a holy dialog between our souls and our God, never dying down into silence, but lasting on until we behold Him face to face!

Our next observation is that when we do hear the voice of God we should be deeply impressed by it. Young Samuel gave evidence that he deeply felt the responsibility of having heard the voice of God. We read that “Samuel lay till morning”; he did not go to sleep, but he did not leave his bed. He laid still, and thought. After hearing that terrible word which made his heart heavy, and caused his ears to tingle, like a wise child, he lay still, and pondered it in his soul. He did not rush in upon Eli, for the news was hard to tell; neither did he seek out another confidant. He had been called to be the Lord's prophet, he was conscious of his commission, and he became sober beyond his years. “He lay till morning.” What thoughts passed through his mind on his bed! He had been a child when he went to rest last night, and now he had suddenly become a man, with a dread secret entrusted to him. A pressing anxiety was on him as to how he should speak to Eli, and a battle raged within his heart between a fear of grieving the good old man by the message, and the greater fear of grieving God by keeping any of it back. He remained still upon his bed, quietly meditating and turning over what he had heard, and thinking of what he should do. I would to God that, after every sermon, all my hearers, young and old, had a quarter of an hour alone! A night of wakeful thought over it would be better still. I am sure that what is wanted with our religious reading is time for private thought. We put into the mill more than it grinds. Some people imagine that, if they read so many chapters of the Bible every day, it will be much to their profit, but it is not so if the reading is a mere mechanical exercise. It will be far better to read a tenth as much, and weigh it, and let it take possession of brain and heart. A little food cooked is better for dinner than a great joint raw. A man who wants to see a country must not hurry through it by express train, but he must stop in the towns and villages, and see what is to be seen. He will know more about the land and its people if he walks the highways, climbs the mountains, stays in the homes, and visits the workshops, than if he does so many miles in the day, and hurries through picture galleries as if death were pursuing him. Don't hurry through Scripture, but pause for the Lord to speak to you. Oh, for more meditation! Samuel, “lay till morning.” Wise child that! With such work before him for his head and his heart, he did well to lie quiet, take a breath, and collect his strength.

Next, the heavenly voice made such an impression on his mind that he feared to tell it to Eli. The message was so dreadful to him that he dreaded to repeat it to him whom it most concerned. When you and I know God's word, and hear God's voice in it, it will often strike us with a solemn awe which will quite overpower us. Jacob, when he saw the ladder and the angels, did not say in the morning, “How delightful was the vision! How happy was my dream!” That would have been like the language of shallow, superficial minds. But he said, “How dreadful is this place! This is none other but the house of God, and this is the gate of heaven.” I know that God's revelation of Himself to us is calculated to fill us with intense joy, but it is even more likely to cast us down upon our faces, prostrate before His divine majesty,

in solemn awe of the Lord of hosts. Remember how John put it. “When I saw Him, I fell at His feet as dead.” He was the best beloved of the Lord, and yet, at the sight of our glorious Well-beloved, he had no life left in him, but he swooned at His feet. Marvel not that “the child Samuel feared,” and especially feared to tell Eli the vision. I say that, when you and I hear the voice of the Lord our God, it will create in us deep emotions of fear, of joy, and of holy reverence, and we shall know of a surety that it is no little thing to hear the word of the Most High. We shall tremble at His word, yet we shall rejoice to hear it.

I would say, next, that we should store up in our memories whatever God says to us. These are not things which we can safely allow to slip. What is written in this Book should be transferred to our memories. It is a good thing to learn passages of Scripture by heart, even as classical scholars treasure up the words of their favorite authors. It is a good thing to have texts of Scripture used from day to day to sweeten the breath, and then laid by in the heart to perfume the character. A mind well stored with Biblical lore will be a great cheer to us, should we live, like Eli, till our eyes are dim, and we cannot see to read. The Bible in the memory is better than the Bible in the bookcase. All that this child heard from the Lord he kept in his recollection, so that, when the time came, he could produce it “every whit,” and in later days could write it down in this his history. Oh, that you and I were able to produce “every whit” of what God has spoken to us! Alas, too often the Word has come, and it has gone, and it has left small trace behind. We have heard, and we have forgotten. God grant that, after this, whenever we hear what God the Lord shall speak, we may mark, learn, and inwardly digest the same! And then it will not depart from us, but will remain for our growth, strength, and building up.

One more remark. Looking at the text in its light toward Samuel, we learn that we should be able to tell what we hear from God. We find Eli saying to Samuel, “What is the thing that the Lord has said unto you?” If God has spoken to us, somebody or other will need to know, and will have a right to be informed. It may be that many whom we esteem will wish to know what God has spoken to us, and we must be prepared, even though it is with a measure of fear and trembling, to tell them the solemn tidings. What is whispered in our ear in the closet we may have to speak on the housetops.

Samuel did this *very solemnly*, with a deep sense of its weight. Children are generally eager to tell a story, but they do not always consider what effect its repetition may produce. They are not able to keep a secret, but feel a pleasure in communicating what they know, but this child was now raised up by the Spirit of prophecy, and became tender and thoughtful, and as it would cause Eli great anguish, he was very slow to speak. He did not open his mouth on the matter till he was adjured by Eli, and then he did it as a sacred duty. Young Christians should speak much of their Lord and His gospel. God forbid that I should hinder them! But it will be well for them to speak, not because it is pleasant, but because they must. We must tell out the divine Word because there is a woe upon us if we withhold it. We must not be flippant, but solemnly under constraint. Much zeal is very natural, but very worthless, because its source is not divine. That zeal which is kindled and sustained by a heavenly power, which makes us feel that we *must* speak or the very stones would cry out against us—this zeal, I say, is of an effectual kind, and the more of it the better. If I only feel that I may, or may not, tell what I think I have heard from the Lord, the probability is that I had better be silent. The true prophetic word is as fire in the bones, and it must come out, and yet when it is spoken it is with lips which a live altar-coal has blistered.

Samuel did his work *very carefully and completely*. We read, “and Samuel told him every whit, and hid nothing from him.” He said nothing more and nothing less than God had spoken. You know how difficult it is to repeat a story correctly. You may try it at your own table, with all the good people around it. Whisper a story into the ear of the next person to you, and let it be repeated in the same fashion from one to another, and by the time it comes round the small circle it will be quite a fresh affair. Additions and subtractions are weeds which are hard to keep out of the garden of conversation. Alas! This holds good even of the Word of the Lord; how many add to it or take from it! But the child Samuel repeated his story correctly, because the fear of the Lord was upon him. When you do tell the gospel, tell it correctly, for it is wonderfully easy to make another gospel of it, and the tendency to do so is very powerful in these days. How many are proclaiming a mutilated gospel and are not telling “every whit!” Some part of revelation they think too high, or too dry, or too orthodox, or too something or other, and so their overweening conceit induces them to leave it out. Oh, do not so, I pray you! Samuel is to be commended that, when he had to tell Eli what God had spoken, he bated nothing. Tell out the gospel,

you ministers of Christ! Give Christ His due. Give fair proportion to each truth. Do not magnify one doctrine to the exclusion of another, but endeavor to paint the portrait of revelation with every feature in its place, and in due proportion to the rest. It is great wisdom to be able to repeat fully and faithfully what God has spoken to us. May the Holy Spirit aid us herein!

It was *a very painful duty*, which the holy child was called upon to perform. Samuel loved his foster father, and for him to mention the tremendous doom pronounced upon Eli's house must have caused him great grief of spirit. But he bravely repeated the dread words of the Most High. There are certain truths in God's word which we tremble to think upon. Do you dream that we have any pleasure in the doctrine of eternal punishment? We speak of the wrath to come, and the everlasting punishment which God apportions to the impenitent, with fear and trembling, but we speak of it because we cannot escape from the conviction that it is taught in the word of God. As Samuel was compelled to tell Eli of the unalterable curse that God had pronounced upon his household, so must God's faithful servants, in the discharge of their duty, speak of the doom of the wicked, and never flinch from warning them. O my hearers, "He that believes not shall be damned," is as true as that "He that believes and is baptized shall be saved." We must speak all the gospel, or else the blood of souls will stain our skirts at the last great day. However painful a duty it may be, it is none the less binding upon us.

But then, in Samuel's case, it was *an obvious duty*. It must have been clear to the young prophet that he must tell Eli what so much concerned him. This conclusion would be reached without much reasoning. If God had spoken to Samuel, it could only be that he might tell Eli. My hearer, if the Lord has told you anything about eternal things, He has revealed it that you may hand it on. The truth is no man's private property, to be kept under lock and key, as a secret hoard for personal enrichment. Whatever you know about Christ, tell it. Whatever you know about salvation and sovereign grace, tell it. It is revealed to you that you may bear it aloft like a flaming torch, for the enlightening of others. God will not speak again to the man who does not spread His truth. Samuel perceived his duty clearly.

And, dear friends, to communicate the message of God was *a very weighty duty* to the child Samuel. Read what Eli said to him. "I pray you, hide it not from me: God do so to you, and more also, if you hide anything from me of all the things that He said unto you." My brother in the gospel, what if you and I should keep back some painful part of God's message, and God should do so to us and more also? I cannot bear to be lost, and yet I shall be lost if I decline to warn others of their danger, and of the doom of unbelief. I cannot bear to be cast away forever from the presence of God, yet this woe will be unto me if I preach not the gospel, and do not declare the whole counsel of God. The result of unbelief and sin in others will fall on us if we do not warn them. O sirs, if we are unfaithful, God will deal with us at the Day of Judgment, as He will deal with the wicked; this is an awful outlook for us. May we never dare to tone down the more severe parts of the story, and flatter men in their sins, for if we do this, God will mete out to us a portion with the condemned! If we have sown pillows for their armholes, and rocked their cradles by our smooth speech, their eternal ruin shall lie at our door. How shall we bear it when God shall "do so to us and more also," because we kept back His message from the sons of men who so much needed it? Let us resolve, that come what will, we will keep back nothing of the truth which the Lord has entrusted to us. A false witness for God, a liar to men's souls, what sentence can be greater than his deserts? Is it possible for us to be too earnest here?

I have said enough upon the text in its first light, and I pray for practical result from it. The Lord does speak to men, and it behooves them to hear with reverence, and make known His word with solemn fidelity and earnestness.

II. Let us now view the question as it comes FROM ELI.

I understand from Eli's question, first, that *we should willingly learn, even from a child*. "What! Shall I, a man of seventy or eighty, learn from a child?" says one. Yes, unless you are more foolish than Eli, you may do so. Eli, with all his faults, was willing to hear what God might speak, even if he heard it from the lips of the child Samuel. How unwise people are when they will not hear a man, but make up their mind that he knows nothing! Some would not hear the most precious truth from the lips of a man whom they despise. Certain of the friars in Luther's day confessed that much of what Luther said was very true, and a reformation was certainly very much needed, but then, they would not have it from such a fellow as Luther—a renegade monk, too, who spoke so rudely! Erasmus could be endured, but Luther

made such a noise about it. Teaching is often judged, not by its own value, but by the prejudices which people may happen to have concerning the source from which it comes. "I do not like him," says one. Well, what does it matter whether you like *him* or not? What does he say? If a thing is true, never mind who says it. Believe it. If a babe could be put into the pulpit, and it lisped out the precious gospel of Christ, its lisping would be more worth hearing than all the eloquence of men of years and name, whose objective might be to overthrow men's faith. Let the truth come from where it may, welcome it. If God has spoken, though it be but to a boy in knickerbockers, be ready to ask him, "What is the thing that the Lord has said to you?"

Next, learn from Eli that *we should be willing to know the very worst of our case*. Let me repeat that word; we should be willing to know the very worst of our case. I have used this expression in my own prayers many a time—"Lord, let me know the worst of my case." I suggest it as a very excellent petition. Surely, we do not wish to be left in a fool's paradise, pleased with the idea that we are rich and increased in goods, and have need of nothing, when all the while we are naked, and poor, and miserable. We desire to be informed as to our condition. We would know even the frightful truth, the humbling truth, what some would even call the degrading truth—if indeed it is truth. We wish to be degraded, if to know the truth would make us feel degraded. Better in the abyss of a truth than on the summit of a falsehood. We wish to be in our own sight what we are in the sight of God. We would not be shams, hypocrites, veneered pretenders, but we would be good men and true. Dear friend, for this reason do not be angry with the minister if, when you go to hear him on the Lord's day, his text is not a promise, or a sweet bit of doctrine, but a warning, and an exhortation, or even a condemnation. Bare your back to the whip, and take your share of the lashes. If the Lord's servant has nothing to give but what comes from the bitter box, do not make faces over it. If he is the Lord's steward, and deals out God's truth, quarrel not with him, lest you be found contending with your Maker. Take the portion, or I might say the potion; it may be the very thing you need. If God has sent you a bitter potion, it will be better for you than the sweetest dainties a smooth-tongued flatterer could prepare. Cry to God to search you, and to make you to know your true condition as before His face.

Next, *we should desire to hear the whole of God's word*. We should say to our minister, "I pray you hide it not from me. What is the thing that the Lord has said to you?" Oh, that our hearers would desire this at our hands! Ask us, yes, plead with us, to tell you all that we know of the truth, and when you have heard all that we know of the truth, search the Scriptures and find out somewhat more, that you may be well instructed in the things which make for your peace. Be like Eli, afraid to have anything kept from you, and anxious to have full information. Like Eli, we should demand faithfulness. We should say to the teacher, to the friend who is dealing with our soul, "I pray you hide it not from me; but be faithful to me." You do not go to a surgeon that he may falsely assure you that you have no wound, and I hope you do not come here that I may give you unsafe comfort, and make you feel content in sin. No, beloved, if you come aright, you say, "I go to hear the word as I go to a physician, that I may have my case truthfully described and honestly treated, by one who takes his Master's medicines out of his Master's treasures." Hear not that which makes you contented with self, but that which leads you to seek higher and better things. Let those who are foolish desire to be lulled into the deadly slumber of delusion, but for yourselves seek after the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth, and love that which humbles you, and draws you nearer to your Lord.

Dear hearers, pray for us who are preachers of the gospel, that we may be made faithful, and kept so. You know the prevailing currents of these times are toward flesh-pleasing teaching. Men aspire to be clever, and to that end, they must appear to be bold thinkers, highly cultured, and far removed from the old worn-out notions of orthodoxy. Many are the floral displays in sermons! Sheaves of corn are too plain and rustic. This is the age of bouquets and wreaths of rare flowers. Paul must give way to Browning, and David to Tennyson. Brethren, there are enough in the novelty business without us, and we have something better to do. We have to give an account unto our God of what we do and say, and if we have been murderers of souls, it will be no excuse that we flourished the dagger well, or that, when we gave them poison, we mixed the draught cleverly, and presented it with poetical phrases. Pray for us that we may be clear of the blood of all men. Keep us right by saying to us, "What is the thing the Lord has said to you? I pray you, hide it not from me!"

III. And now, we conclude by considering the question TO AND FROM OURSELVES. I want to put a series of questions very briefly, and with great solemnity.

Have we ever asked the Lord to speak to us? Yes, yes, my sister, I know you have, and you, my brother; you have done still more, for God has already spoken to you. But here, on Thursday evenings, are many unconverted people, and I am much rejoiced that you care to come on a week-night to such a place as this. I do not attribute your presence in every case to the highest motive, for you come to hear a preacher, of whom you have heard much talk, and at another time you will go to hear some noted orator in another place. Did you ever say to yourself, “I will hear what God the Lord will speak”? This would be a far better objective than listening to human rhetoric. Have you shut yourself up in your room, or have you gone into the woods, or climbed a hilltop, or sat down by the sea and said, “Speak to me, Lord! If there are voices out of the eternal and the unseen, here am I to hear them. In mercy speak to me”? My dear hearer, are you God’s creature, and have you never heard the voice of your Creator? Do you think yourself God’s child, and do you live by the month together and never hear your Father’s voice? This is pitiable—alas! It is blameworthy. I press the question home. Have you ever asked the Lord to speak to you?

Next, *have we all regarded what God has spoken?* When we were young, on a Sabbath day, we heard a word from the pulpit which seemed to go right through us, and there and then we wished that we could go home to our chamber to pray, and when we got home we shut our room door, and we cried out in our anxiety, because all was not right between God and our souls. But what came of it? The tears we shed, were they the tokens of coming conversion? Is it not sadly true that Monday found us at our old tricks? We had forgotten what manner of men we were. Was it not so? Is it so still with some of you? Has God spoken, and spoken, and spoken, and spoken again, and do you still act like the adder, that will not hear, though the charmer charms most wisely? Are you as the ass and as the mule which have no understanding, and need bit and bridle before you will obey your Master? The Lord have mercy upon you if it is so! If you have been brutish and obstinate, may grace subdue you.

A further question is this: *Have we shaped our lives by what God has said?* I know many people who read their Bibles and know what the Scripture means, but they never practice what God says to them. Among the rest they neglect that great gospel promise—“He that believes and is baptized shall be saved.” They have neither believed nor been baptized. They are bidden to do this and that as believers, and, avowing themselves to be believers, they yet refuse to their Lord the obedience which He claims. O my hearers, to know the word of God and not to put it into practice, is to make rods for your own backs, for he that knew his Master’s will and did it not, was beaten with many stripes. The more you know the more stripes will come upon you, if you have knowledge only, and not obedience. Does not this truthful word come home to some who are sitting here at this time? It ought to do so. God grant that it may lead the “hearers only” to become “doers of the word”!

Next, brethren, *have we told what we know?* That is a practical point. I speak to quite a number of Christian men and women who would have to confess, “No; I am like Samuel, so far that I fear to tell Eli the vision.” You were going to speak to the person, who sat in the pew with you the other Sunday, and you almost got a word out, but it died on your lips. For idle words you will have to give an account. You meant to pray with your child, mother, but you have not done it yet. What if she dies before you have done so? Good friend, you meant to speak to the man at the next bench in your workshop. Ah, you have meant to do it so many times! I had a friend, a dear friend, who is now I trust in heaven, and there was a man who used to take orders from him for goods, and bring them to him when finished. He was a good and punctual workman, but not a Christian. Well, my friend intended—ah! He intended for years—to have a quiet conversation with that workman about his soul. One day the goods came in, but a woman brought them. She said, “I am So-and-So’s wife. He finished these goods, but he is dead.” My friend said that the words were like a bullet to his heart, for he had so often thought of the man, and often said to himself, “I must and will speak to him the next time he calls,” but somehow, when he came into the shop, business was brisk, and he looked over the goods and paid for them as quickly as he could, and never began a conversation. Now the man was beyond the reach of warning or instruction. Do not let it be so with any person with whom you come in contact. Do as Samuel did; tell the whole of it if they ask you to tell them, or if they do not ask you to tell them. Those who do not ask you are prob-

ably those who have the most need of your efforts. There is an art in private conversation, I believe. Certain of our dear friends are always telling out the gospel on all sides, and they seem to do it with much ease. I speak of my Lord also to individuals, but I must confess that it does not come so easy to me to speak to an individual as to preach to thousands. We must school ourselves to it. That art of buttonholing, and coming into close contact with individuals, is one that we must cultivate, and we must not be satisfied until we become expert in it, for it is one of the chief ways in which men are saved.

Lastly, there is one question which I would like to ask, and I have done. *Do our children ever rebuke us?* Perhaps we have no children now; they are all grown up, but possibly we have grandchildren. This Samuel was to Eli like a grandchild. His sons were grown up, and had left him, but here was this little one brought into the temple to minister there, and the old man came to be rebuked by this little child. I have known some—perhaps they are even now present—who are godless fathers, drunken fathers, but their grandchildren are members of the church, and good, gracious, amiable, lovely, useful children, too. Grandfathers, are you going down to hell while your grandchildren are going to heaven? I charge you by the living God, before whose bar you must surely stand, look at your little ones, and hear their prayers, and hear their hymns, could you bear to be everlastingly separated from them? And, fathers, this should come home closely to you. You know that girl of yours; how you love her! And well you may. Your heart is bound up in your little daughter. She is everything a child can be to a father, but she often weeps because she tries to get you to hear the gospel, and you will not come. Sunday to you is not what it is to her, and that grieves her. You were making a rabbit hutch last Sunday, were you not? And your child said, “Father, do come to the house of God,” but you would not come, and you pained your child. Will you bear in mind a solemn truth? If your daughter goes to the right, and you go to the left, you are probably parting forever. It is not possible that the way of sin should end where the way of righteousness will end. Do not choose eternal separation from your dear ones who love the Lord. Do think these things over, because, on a Sabbath day, when we celebrate the Lord’s Supper, some of you have to go away, and leave a wife or a dear child behind to commune at the sacred feast. Many thoughts are stirred at that dividing time. I wish that such searching of heart might arise tonight in downright earnest. There will be weeping—there will be weeping, at the judgement seat of Christ, and if children now rebuke their Christless friends, what will be the thunder of that rebuke when they shall be caught up to the throne of the highest, and their ungodly relatives are cast out forever into the pit prepared for the wicked? God bless you all richly, for Jesus’ sake! Amen.

PORTION OF SCRIPTURE READ BEFORE SERMON—1 SAMUEL 2:27-36; 3.

HYMNS FROM “OUR OWN HYMN BOOK”—785, 393.

LETTER FROM MR. SPURGEON

DEAR FRIENDS—I hope soon to return to my pulpit in renewed strength. I have great joy in hearing from readers that the sermons which I have issued from my place of rest have been much appreciated by them. It will be a luxury to speak again in the name of the Lord in the great congregation; but prayer is earnestly asked that the Word may be with power. I beg a special petition on my behalf as the reader finishes this sermon.

Mentone, January 9, 1891,

Your needy fellow servant,

C. H. SPURGEON.

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