

AN ALL-IMPORTANT QUESTION

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A SERMON

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“Dost thou believe on the Son of God?”

John 9:35

THE man, to whom our Savior addressed this question, had been born blind, but he had been the subject of one of the Master's mightiest miracles, and was rejoicing in the possession of his newly found sight. Our Lord is not accustomed to do things by halves, so, having given to this poor man natural sight, he intended also to give him spiritual sight. Having delivered him from the misery of living in this world in darkness, he would also deliver him from the dense darkness that brooded within his soul. Blessed be the name of the Lord, we are never straitened in him, but only in ourselves, and when we receive not, it is either because we ask not, or because we “ask amiss.” Our Lord had given to this man his left hand full of minor mercies, and now he finds him out with his right hand full of yet richer treasures, giving to him exceeding abundantly above what he had asked or even thought.

In order to effect this man's salvation, our Lord asked him a question upon a most vital point, “Dost thou believe on the Son of God?” That question I will try to press home upon all my hearers, asking you, dear friends, high and low, rich and poor, old and young, learned and ignorant, to listen to the question, to give it an honest and earnest consideration, and to endeavor, as in the sight of God, to answer it from your inmost heart.

I. In the first place, the question of the text, “Dost thou believe on the Son of God?” is A MOST NECESSARY QUESTION.

I believe it is *a question which ought to be asked from the pulpit far oftener than it is*. I have been frequently pained, in reading sermons, and on the rare occasions when I have had the opportunity of hearing sermons, to note that they have been addressed to the whole congregation just as though all were Christians. It is too much the custom for ministers to address the whole assembly as “brethren,” and to speak to a mixed multitude of men and women as if they all had a part and lot in spiritual things.

It seems that if anywhere, certainly in the pulpit, there should be a wise and constant use of discrimination. The preacher should make his hearers clearly understand that there are some who fear God, and some who fear Him not—some who are still dead in trespasses and sins, and others who are alive unto God through the quickening power of the Holy Spirit.

It would be a very wicked thing for me to delude you with the notion that you are all saved, for I cannot help fearing that some of you are not yet saved. The outward lives of some here are quite sufficient evidence that they have never been sanctified by the Holy Spirit. Indeed, I feel sure that I am addressing some who would not venture to claim that they are Christians. They are too honest to do that, for they know that they are strangers to the saving power of the grace of God, and how dare these lips of mine call those the children of God who are, at present, the children of wrath, even as others? How can my tongue pronounce that to be gold which I know is but dross? How can I speak to those of you who are living, and I fear will die, without a Savior, as though you had an equal interest in the precious blood of Jesus with those who believe in Him?

Further, *the Sunday school teacher must never take this matter for granted with his scholars*, any more than the preacher must take it for granted with his hearers. Even when the dear children appear to be favorable to the reception of the truth, to be impressed by the story of the cross, and to have a sort of

childish love to Jesus, I think it is still well for us to ask this question over and over again, with tearful earnestness, “Dear child, ‘dost thou believe on the Son of God?’ for if not, all that pretty talk of thine, and all those hopeful feelings of thine, will bring thee no solid, lasting good. Unless thou believest in Jesus, thou art, outside the bounds of the kingdom of grace.”

The people, who need to have this question most plainly put to them, are, probably, *those who have had godly parents, and who have been brought up under religious influences*. It is an untold blessing to have had godly parents, it is an unspeakable mercy to have been in the habit of attending a place of worship from our childhood, but there are dangers connected with even these blessings. It is not bigotry, it is not a want of Christian charity, it is not censoriousness when we say that there are tens of thousands of people, who have attended the services of the Church of England from their childhood, and who believe that, in their baptism, they were made members of Christ, the children of God, and inheritors of the kingdom of heaven, and that, since the bishop’s hands were laid upon them in their confirmation, there is no need to ask them whether they believe on the Son of God.

Do they not say, in their Creed, “I believe in God the Father...and in Jesus Christ, His Son?” To ask such people whether they believe in the Son of God must surely be a piece of impertinence! Yet I venture to say that there are no people in the whole world who need more to be asked that question than they do. And while it is especially so in the Church of England because the prayer-book helps Episcopalians to imagine that they are Christians when they are not, it is very much the same among Dissenters.

Many of you were taken to a place of worship in your mother’s arms, and therefore, unless you have been privileged to sit under a very honest and faithful ministry, you may be led to conceive that you are the children of God through your godly ancestry, and to imagine that the grace of God runs in your blood, and that you are a Christian because your father was a Christian, and that you ought to join a Christian church because your ancestors, for many generations, have belonged to that church.

Beware of a mere ancestral religion, which may be of no more value than the ancestral religion of the Chinese. Do not suppose that you are personally right in the sight of God because you have had a godly mother and father, or godly grandparents. Christ’s message to all who have not been regenerated by the Holy Spirit is, “Ye must be born again.”

True religion is personal, it is a thing which concerns each man himself. In the Prayer-book there is same nonsense about a sponsor promising, in a child’s name, that he shall “renounce the devil and all his works, the vain pomp and glory of the world, with all covetous desires of the same, and the carnal desires of the flesh.” Why, the sponsor cannot promise to do all that for himself, much less can he promise it for the child! No, you must yourselves come to God through Christ, personally make confession to Him of your own sins, seek pardon for your own selves, look with your own eyes to Christ upon the cross, and find salvation in Him for yourselves. All teaching that is contrary to this is nothing but deception, the invention of priestcraft or of the devil, and may God graciously enable you to escape from its snares!

It also strikes me that *this question ought to be frequently asked of all religious professors, and especially of all ministers of the Gospel*. It is a terribly easy matter to be a minister of the Gospel and a vile hypocrite at the same time. My brethren in the ministry, I feel this to be only too true, and I often regret that I am not able to sit in one of those pews yonder, to listen to some faithful brother-minister, who would help me to see myself as I really am in the sight of God, and cause me to tremble before Him, lest I should be either self-deceived or a deceiver of others. It is our misfortune that, if we begin to preach without being truly converted, there is little likelihood that we shall ever be converted.

This thought makes the pulpit to become a place where our shoes may well be, metaphorically, put off our feet—a place of trembling, and alarm, and anxiety, for who is to preach to the preacher if he is himself unregenerate? Who shall press upon him the question, “Dost *thou* believe on the Son of God?” Oh, then what solemn heart-searchings, what strict self-examinations the preacher should have! How he should lay bare his breast before the all-searching eye of God, implore the inspection of the Infallible,

ask to be weighed in the balances of the sanctuary, which cannot err, and seek to be judged by almighty wisdom lest, as Paul said, after having preached to others, he himself should be a castaway!

And it is very much the same, I am persuaded, with *the deacons and elders of the church*. Ah, my brethren, it is a high privilege to be officers of a Christian church, and for many of you I have long thanked God every time I have bowed my knees before Him. Yet I must remind you that even you may be deceived, for some like you have been deceived. As I look back, with trembling, over the years of my pastorate in London, I cannot help recalling some who did run well, yet something or someone hindered them, so that they obeyed not the truth. As they turned back, may not any one of you, my brethren, do the same? May not I also go and do likewise? Nothing but the grace of God will prevent such a calamity.

I do not know how to talk with you as I want to do concerning this sad condition of soul. My heart would, if it could, get rid of my tongue, and then it would speak to you something like this—Did not some of you, at one time, the moment you awoke in the morning, begin communing with God? Were there not red-letter days, when, from morning light to evening shade, you were in fellowship with the Most High? You had your burdens, but you always carried them to Jesus, and you had your joys, but you always shared them with Him. You lived for Him, your heart was warm towards Him, you walked with Him in constant communion, but now, can you really live without even thinking of Him? Can you be happy without thinking of your God?

Have you a better house than you used to have, and more money, more friends, more of this world's good things, and do you now forget your God, and go the whole livelong day without any communication between your soul and Him? Ah, then, you have indeed gone down in the world, not up, you are getting poorer and poorer, God help you! If you had come to me, and told me that you had lost everything, but that you loved Jesus better, I should have sympathized with you because of your trouble, but I should have congratulated you upon your grace. But now that you have got on so well in the world that you do not love your Lord as you once did, I can only pity you because of your dreadful prosperity, and mourn over the fearful loss which you have experienced.

And as for *you who have been members of this church year after year*, you who have been baptized into the name of the ever-blessed Trinity, you who have often gathered around your Master's communion table, permit me to shake you out of the slumbers of your fancied security. If you have taken it for granted that all must be well with you because you are a member of a Christian church, I do beseech you to make diligent search, lest you should be mistaken.

I am no advocate of doubts and fears, as you all well know, on the contrary, I delight to extol the blessings of a full assurance of faith, yet at the same time, I am well aware that it is hardly possible to have too much holy anxiety and sacred suspicion lest we should not be right with God. I do solemnly conjure you, by the living God—every one of you old professors, you venerable fathers in our Israel, again to put this question of questions to your own heart and conscience, “Dost *thou* believe on the Son of God?” Have you a real, vital faith in the Lord Jesus Christ, or is it only a mere notion or name, a mere sham to which you are trusting? God grant that we may all answer the question, and answer it honestly, as in His sight, for it is a most necessary question for every one of us to answer.

II. Secondly, and but briefly, I want to remind you that the question of the text is A REMARKABLY PLAIN QUESTION, “Dost thou believe on the Son of God?”

Some people delight to see difficulties even where there are none, they revel in reading the Bible through spectacles of various colors. When you and I read our Bibles, there are certain passages which seem perfectly plain to us, we can understand them without any difficulty. But where these sectaries read the Bible, they find out such novelties, such astounding marvels, such wonderful things that are to happen in the future, that I can only say that, if their interpretation of the Bible be the correct one, it is a strange sort of Bible for God to have given to ordinary Christians like ourselves, for we might have read the Bible through fifty times yet never have found out such mysterious doctrines and practices as these people profess to have discovered there. May God graciously preserve all of you from falling into the

snare that are set by these inventors of novelties and absurdities! They are always hunting after some new thing, like the Athenians of old, and they lead away many from the simple truths of the Gospel.

But the question in our text is not a difficult or obscure one, it is, as our proverb says, “As plain as a pike-staff,”—“Dost thou believe on the Son of God?” Perhaps you would like me to explain to you the doctrine of election, well, I may do that another day. Possibly you would like to hear about the Second Advent, and that also I may tell you, as far as I can, in due time, but just now the question is concerning your soul’s most vital interests. How do you stand in relation to God, and especially in relation to Jesus Christ whom He hath sent to be the propitiation for the sins of all who believe in Him? This question is short, simple, plain, pointed, “Dost thou believe on the Son of God?” That is to say, is Jesus Christ, who was born of the Virgin Mary, acknowledged by thee to be the Son of God? You know that He died in the room, and place, and stead of sinners, and that His sacrifice atoned for the sins of all who trust in Him, so that God can be just, and yet the Justifier of all who believe in His Son, so again I ask, “Dost thou believe on the Son of God?” When we were singing, a little while ago—

“Jesus our Lord is crucified,”—

didst thou feel that the crucified Christ was thy Lord and Savior? Didst thou rest thy soul, for time and eternity, upon that blessed Substitute for sinners, Jesus Christ the Son of God, expiring upon the accursed tree? If so, it is well with thy soul, but if not—if your answer to the question of the text is in the negative, it amounts to this—“I will not accept the propitiation which God has so forth, the only Savior, whom God has provided, shall not save me, I will not come unto Him that I may have life, I will force my way to heaven by my own works or merits, or else I will go down to hell neglecting His great salvation.”

That is the real meaning of thy negative answer, and I ask thee, as an honest man, to do one thing, if that be thine answer, say it to thyself in so many words, or better still, write it down, and sign it with thy name. If thou meanest to serve Baal, say so. If thou meanest not to have Christ as thy Savior, say so. Sit down, and write out the reasons why thou rejectest Christ, put them into black and white, that thou mayest see them, and weigh them, as every rightminded man should do when he takes such an extraordinary course.

If you think that Christ is not worth having for a Savior, say, in your own handwriting, I will not have Him, I will not trust Him, I will not be saved by Him.” If you do that, there will be something done, sad as it will be. But at any rate, do answer the question of the text, for it is so plain and simple that it deserves a perfectly plain and straightforward answer.

III. Now, in the third place, and again with great brevity, I want to show you that THIS IS A VERY PERSONAL QUESTION, “Dost *thou* believe in the Son of God?”

You, young man, have been giving away tracts this afternoon, that is a very proper occupation, but “dost thou believe on the Son of God?” You, young woman, have been teaching a class in the Sabbath school, that is well done on your part, I hope, but “dost thou believe on the Son of God?” You, my brother, have been preaching the Gospel this morning, according to your ability, so far, so good, but “dost thou believe on the Son of God?”

Some of us sat this morning, at the close of the public service, around our Master’s communion table, where we broke bread in His name, as is our wont on the first day of the week, but my fellow-communicant, “dost thou believe in the Son of God?” Wife, thou hast nothing to do with thy husband in this matter, and husband, thou and thy wife must be set apart in this instance. For the moment, forget that dear child of thine, hold him on thy knee if thou wilt, but apply not the question to him just now, but answer for thyself, “Dost *thou* believe on the Son of God?” That is to say, has thy heart really felt the weight of thine own sin, and hast thou come to Jesus Christ, and given that life-look at the crucified One which brings instantaneous pardon to all who believingly look? “Dost thou believe on the Son of God?”

Even our own prayers may come to be idols and hindrances to us. We may think that the way of salvation is to pray, which it certainly is not, for the way of salvation is to believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and to believe on Him at once. Unbelieving prayers will leave us as they find us, they cannot yield us any comfort. As it is with the prayers of others, so is it with our own, unless faith in Jesus Christ be mingled with them, they can never be a sweet savor unto God, and they can never bring a blessing to our own souls.

What you have to do, dear friend, broken-hearted and cast, down, is to look away from yourself, and all your fellow-men, to Him whom God hath set forth to be a propitiation for sin. Looking to Him brings life to the soul, and the testimony concerning all the saints is this, “They looked unto him, and were lightened: and their faces were not ashamed.” However feeble may be your eyesight, and however dark may be your surroundings—

“There is life for a look at the Crucified One;”—

and whosoever looketh unto him shall live. Those who were bitten by the serpents in the wilderness were in various stages of poisoning. Some of them, no doubt, had their eyes well-nigh stopped up by the swellings that arose through the bites of the serpents, but however feeble was the look they gave—if it was only through the corner of the eye—if they did but catch a glimpse of the serpent of brass that Moses set upon the pole, as God commanded him, they lived at once.

And if, in your case, sin seems to prevent the full exercise of faith, and your consciousness of guilt hinders your belief in Jesus Christ, yet say to Him, “Lord, I believe; help thou mine unbelief.” Touch at least the hem of His garment, and you shall find that it is not the measure of your faith, but the measurelessness of His grace, that will bring you the blessing you need. Though your faith is weak, His grace is strong. Though you can scarcely believe in Him, all things are possible unto Him, and He can cause even your weak faith to be the means of bringing salvation unto you.

Ah, my dear hearers, plainly as I am speaking to you—and the gaudiness of oratory would be out of place here—how hard it is to get you to do what I urge you to do! I would fain go down these stairs, and talk to you one by one, but I might fail even with such an expedient as that, and there are far too many of you for me to come round to each one, yet I remember how holy Richard Baxter pleaded with his people, “I would fain come, and kneel down before you, one by one, and say to you, ‘Why will you reject the Savior? Why will you die? Why will you cast away your souls?’” If I cannot do that literally, my spirit shall do it.

My hearer, I ask thee, each one, “Dost *thou* believe on the Son of God?” This is the question which must be put personally to thee, for thou must die alone, and thou must rise in thine own body, and thou must be judged alone, and if thou will not believe on the Son of God, thou must be condemned alone, thou must personally be cast into hell. There can be no sponsor for thee in the flames of hell, no substitute there to bear thine everlasting woe in thy stead. Thou thyself wilt be cast into hell, if thou remainest an unbeliever, and therefore, again I ask thee, “Dost *thou* believe on the Son of God?”

Thus I have shown you that the question of the text is a necessary, plain, personal question.

IV. Now, fourthly, I have to tell you that THIS QUESTION IS FUNDAMENTAL, “Dost thou believe on the Son of God?”

This question goes right down to the very foundations of our faith—the fundamentals, as we most properly call them. I do not think that we are right in asking for answers to very abstruse questions from young people. An aged Christian may be asked many questions concerning his experience, the depth of his sense of inward sin, the height of his enjoyment of fellowship with Christ. These are proper points to be brought before those “who are of full age, even those who by reason of use have their senses exercised to discern both good and evil.” It would be very improper to put questions upon these points to a babe in grace, but it would not be improper to put to a babe in grace the question now before us. I

venture to come to any man, who professes to be a Christian, and whether he is illiterate or not, to put to him this question, “Dost thou believe on the Son of God?”

I wish that some of you would put this fundamental question to yourselves, instead of trusting to the nonsense and absurdity in which you sometimes put your trust. Why, to this very day, there are some people who believe that they are Christians because, as they looked out of the window, they thought to themselves, “If the Lord is gracious to us, we hope the sun will shine upon us,” the sun did shine upon them, and therefore they think that God must be gracious to them! What fools they must be to talk like that!

Others have said that, as they were at their work, or in their bed, they thought they heard a voice! Suppose you did, what then? If all the voices in the world were heard by you, I would not give a penny for your religion if you do not believe on the Lord Jesus Christ. Another says, “I had such-and-such a text impressed upon my mind.” If it had been impressed upon your heart by the Holy Spirit, it would have been a different matter.

There is a superstitious way of misusing the Bible, of which even Mr. Wesley was guilty when he put a pin into the Scriptures to find out what he ought to do in a certain emergency, I believe that was as wicked as if he had shuffled a pack of cards for the same purpose. God does not guide us in any such way as that. Neither is there any importance to be attached to what you dreamt, or what you heard, or what you saw, the one fundamental question is, “Dost thou believe on the Son of God?” If you do, and yet you never dreamed a dream in all your life, thank God that you have slept so well, and that you have not been troubled with indigestion, which is a great cause of dreams and visions of the night.

If you have never heard mysterious voices, thank God that you have a well-regulated imagination and a well-balanced mind. If you have never had a text that seemed to speak to you like a mysterious incantation, thank God that, when you reverently read the Scripture, it speaks to you as the voice of God, and not as the voice of some witch of Endor, or as the voice of some old Delphic oracle speaking to a superstitious ear.

My brother, if thou believest on the Lord Jesus Christ, all is well with thee, so far as thy salvation is concerned. Thou mayest ask thyself, “Am, I growing in grace? Am I making such advances as I ought, in the divine life?” These questions are right and proper, and deserve to be duly pondered by thee, but if thou believest on the Son of God, thou hast the root of the matter in thee, thou hast the tree of life planted in thy soul, and thou shalt assuredly find a place in the paradise of God. So, ask no further question upon this point, for this is the fundamental question, “Dost thou believe on the Son of God?”

V. Now, just for a few moments, let me remind you of what you know so well, namely, that **THIS QUESTION IS ALL-IMPORTANT.**

“Have you made your will?” somebody asks, and that is a very important question to one who has anything to leave. I think that people ought to see to that matter, and there are fifty other questions that might be asked, all of which would have their relative importance, but this is the weightiest question of all, “Dost thou believe on the Son of God?” How can I put that question, with due solemnity, to each person in this congregation? Dost thou not know, man, that life and death, heaven and hell, and bliss or woe unutterable depend upon thine answer to that short, simple question? If thou believest on Jesus, there are robes of whiteness and tearless eyes for thee, but if thou believest not, there are for thee—

*“Flames that no abatement know
Though briny tears for ever flow.”*

If thou canst truly say, as thou lookest, by faith, to the precious blood of Jesus, “I am washed in that crimson flood, and I am clean every whit,”—if it be indeed so, then all things are thine, whether things present or things to come, life or death, time or eternity, all are thine, for thou art Christ’s, and Christ is God’s. All is well with thee now, and all shall be well with thee for ever and ever. But oh! if thou hast to shake thy head, and sorrowfully say, “No, I never was cleansed by Christ’s blood, I never accepted Him

as my Savior,” dost thou know what thy portion must be? Come, man, do not close thine eyes, like the silly ostrich, and then think to escape the hunter because thou dost not look upon him. Come man, come, look at the portion that awaits thee. Dost thou start at sight of it? Canst thou see thy dying bed, surrounded with gloom and darkness? Art thou afraid of that? That is a fair sight compared with what I have yet to show thee.

There, move away that bed, and let the next scene appear, dost thou see that? What! darest thou not look at it? It is thy naked spirit shivering before the face of God while He pronounces its doom! Doth that affright thee? I have to show thee a more terrible picture by far than that! It is the earth on ablaze, the mountains are reeling to and fro, like drunken men, the stars, like withered fig-leaves, are falling from the sky, the sun is becoming black as sackcloth of hair, and all the while thou art crying to the hills to cover thee, and to the rocks to give thee shelter, for the great day of God’s wrath has come, and thou art unable to endure it. Canst thou not gaze upon that picture? It is what thou wilt come to if thou remainest unsaved.

But if thou art afraid of the picture, why art thou not afraid of the dreadful reality, for I have not yet shown you the worst of your doom? I scarcely dare to lift the curtain which hides that dreadful prison of the lost, “where their worm dieth not, and the fire is not quenched,” where the wrath to come, like a mighty ocean, never ceasing in its fiery flow, beats over the guilty for ever and ever, where the fierce tornado of the wrath divine blows upon the lost for ever and ever, leaving them never a resting place, nor a moment’s cessation from their awful agony. My poor words, which may seem, to some, terrible in their intensity, are feeble compared with the weighty words of the Lord Jesus as recorded in the Gospels, and therefore, as a man who cares for you, and who fain would have you care for your own immortal souls, I do implore you, each one, to ask your own self this question, “Dost thou believe on the Son of God?”

If you must honestly answer, “No,” then I ask you, “Will you not believe in Jesus now? Oh, that the Holy Spirit would graciously enable you, this very hour, to trust wholly to that glorious finished work which, on the cross, my Master has concluded once for all, and the merit of which, even in heaven, He delights to bestow upon all the sons and daughters of men who will believe on Him.

VI. I feel persuaded, further, that, this is A QUESTION WHICH CAN BE ANSWERED, AND WHICH OUGHT TO BE ANSWERED, “Dost thou believe on the Son of God?”

I did not put into “Our Own Hymn Book” the hymn which begins—

*“Tis a point I long to know,
Oft it causes anxious thought,—
Do I love the Lord or no?
Am I His, or am I not?”*

I deliberated a good deal about it, and I left it out, not because I doubt whether a Christian may sing it, not because I have not sung it myself, but because I am not quite clear that I ought to ask any congregation to sing it, for I hope that most of those in any ordinary congregation will not be in such a state of mind as that. It is a suitable hymn for one to sing sometimes in private, when one cannot sing anything better, but it would scarcely suit a company of true believers in the Lord Jesus Christ.

A man may be, and I think sometimes will be in doubt as to whether he really believes in Jesus, but chronic doubt is a sin that is not to be tolerated. Constant questioning as to whether you are saved or not, is an unhealthy state for any of you to be in, you can tell, and you ought to tell, whether you believe in Christ, or whether you do not believe in Him.

Faith is, in one sense, the gift of God, but in another sense, it is a mental act for which we are responsible. God gives us faith, but He does not believe for us. He does not give us faith as we give our children bread, but He, by the gracious operation of His Holy Spirit, makes us willing in the day of His power, and then we will to believe in Jesus, and we do believe in Him. Well, then, this being the case, I

should think that you can, each one, tell whether you have ever believed in God's Son as readily as you can tell whether you have ever trembled at God's Word. One mental act must surely be as much under the cognizance of your inner consciousness as another mental act is.

Besides, you can judge whether you have faith by seeing whether you have its fruits. If you have believed on the Son of God, you have a care about spiritual things which you never had while you were an unbeliever, you are living in a world that is new to you—in the spiritual realm where God rules by His Spirit—and you are no longer confined to that which you can see with your eyes, and touch with your fingers. You see, and hear, and feel, and know now a thousand things of which you were formerly utterly unaware.

If you have truly trusted in the Lord Jesus Christ, you are “a new creature; old things are passed away; behold, all things are become new.” You love what once you hated, and you hate what once you loved. You have altogether new tastes, you would not now find pleasure where once you reveled in it, and the weariness which you formerly felt in the services of God's house is all gone now, and you find the Sabbath to be a delight, and the company of God's people to be a foretaste of heaven.

Are you, dear friend, at this moment desirous to be obedient to all the Lord's commandments? Obedience to God is a flower that never grew on nature's dunghill, it grows only where the Spirit of God has tilled the soil and planted the root from which it springs. Surely thou knowest whether thou believest in Christ or not. At any rate, go not to thy bed this night till thou knowest the truth about thy ease. Fall not asleep with even the possibility that thou mayest awake in hell. Rest not, man, till thou art for ever safe, sleep not till thou knowest that God is thy Friend, and that Christ is thy Savior, lest, in the watches of the night, the hair of the head should stand on end with horror as thou art awakened to find that thy last hour has come, and thou art not prepared to stand before thy Judge!

*“How will thy heart endure
The terrors of that day;
When earth and heaven, before His face,
Astonish'd shrink away?”*

VII. Now I must come to the conclusion of my discourse, and I do so by saying that THIS QUESTION DEMANDS AN IMMEDIATE REPLY, “Dost thou believe on the Son of God?”

Possibly, one of you says, “Well, sir, I will give you my answer when I have a more convenient season.” No, you will not, for you will probably forget all about it unless you give the answer now. Oh, what a lot of hammering and beating the iron of the human heart will stand! I am sure that if the iron that comes out of the bowels of the earth were half as difficult to soften, and to cast into molds as the nature of man is, the iron worker would give up his task as hopeless.

Oh, how many times I have tried to preach the Gospel to some of you—not without tears, and not without headaches and heartaches too—not without earnest pleadings in secret with God—not without thinking and planning how I could set the old truth in a new light, and by what means I might enlighten your understandings, or interest your imagination, and capture your heart. But alas! thus far, with some of you, the hunter has lost his prey, and the fisherman has waited in vain for his fish, and he is bitterly disappointed at his failure. When will the day come when we shall capture you for Christ? What weapon of truth will pierce you who are like leviathan in his pride? When shall we draw you ashore to life, and peace, and holiness, and happiness?

The great mischief with many of you is that you always talk about what you will do tomorrow! Yet there are newly-dug graves every day, and the grave diggers hide the bodies of your fellows beneath the sod of the cemetery. It is true that, thus far, you have been spared, but are you, therefore, foolish enough to dream that you are immortal? Do you think that there is no tree growing out of which your coffin is to be made? Ah, sirs, some of you will never see another year! This is not a matter of guess work with me, I know that it is the truth that a certain proportion out of every thousand persons now living must die this

year. Everybody knows that, and here we have some six or seven thousand persons gathered together. Well, then, there must be so many of us who must go to the grave within the next twelve months. You know that you are not immortal, you know that you must die sooner or later, and some of you know that, if you were to die now, you would die without hope, for you have not believed in Jesus, and you would be eternally lost.

I do beseech you, if you have any wits left, to use them now, and to be startled as I put to you that ancient question, “Why will ye die?”, Where is the sense of it? Where is the reason for being damned? Do anything that is reasonable, man, and who can blame you? If you have a good excuse for doing a certain thing, if it pays you well to do it, if it is the right thing to do for your country even though it does not pay you—go and do it.

Cassius did a noble deed when he rode into the chasm in the Forum, and so filled it up, for he did good to Rome, but what good will your damnation do to you or anybody else? What good will it do even to the lost in hell? Even they might wish to keep you out of that dread place of torment, as the rich man wished to warn his brethren, for they would get no good through your ruin. What possible good can ever come to you if you are lost? It will be all hurt, and no good—all loss, and no gain—all wretchedness, and no joy—all darkness, and no light—all hell, and no heaven, forever and ever.

In the name of the living God, I beseech you, in the name of Jesus of Nazareth, I implore you to trust Christ, and live. He, who stayed the storm on the Galilean lake, and saved the all-but-shipwrecked crew of the little ship, can stay the waters of wrath that threaten to beat upon your bark, and save you even now. He, who said to the dying thief, “Today shalt thou be with me in paradise,” can do as much for you. His precious blood still pleads for mercy, His almighty power is still engaged on mercy’s side. O my Master, enable these poor souls to trust in thee! Father, call the prodigal home! Welcome him now, give him the kiss of forgiveness now, clothe him with the best robe now! Spirit of the living God, descend and do what we cannot do, turn hearts of stone to flesh, and to Father, Son, and Holy Spirit shall be the praise for ever and ever. Amen.

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