

TURNING BACK IN THE DAY OF BATTLE

NO. 696

A SERMON
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 AT THE METROPOLITAN TABERNACLE, NEWINGTON

*“The children of Ephraim, being armed,
 and carrying bows, turned back in the day of battle.”
 Psalm 78:9*

I DO not think that it has ever been clearly ascertained to what particular historical event Asaph here refers, but I do not find that any of the commentators mention a very obscure passage in the First Book of Chronicles, which I venture to suggest may give us the explanation.

In the First Book of Chronicles, the seventh chapter and the twentieth verse, you read—“And the sons of Ephraim, Shuthelah, and Bered his son, and Tahath his son, and Eladah, and Tahath his son, and Zabad his son, and Shuthelah his son, and Ezer, and Elead, whom the men of Gath that were born in that land slew, because they came down to take away their cattle. And Ephraim their father mourned many days, and his brethren came to comfort him.”

This event appears to have occurred while the children of Israel were still in Egypt. It has been supposed by some that these sons of Ephraim made a raid upon the promised land, and attacked the men of Gath. Believing the land to be theirs by promise they went to take it before they had divine authority so to do. They made God’s decrees the rule of their life instead of God’s revealed will, and so they soon fell into trouble—as those people always do who make that mistake—and their father Ephraim mourned over them many days.

But it appears to have been rather an attack made upon them by some men of Gath. The people seem some of them to have been of Egyptian origin, and they probably made an attack upon the cattle of the men of Ephraim. These young men defended their cattle for a time, but at last—if this is the event which this psalm refers to—it would appear they turned their backs and so fell slain. That may or may not be. Still there are other passages in history which might serve to illustrate the text.

You are aware that Joshua was of the tribe of Ephraim, and probably on account of this the ark of God was first placed at Shiloh. On the occasion when Hophni and Phineas were slain, the children of Israel, we are told, fled. It appears to have been the peculiar duty of the men of Ephraim, in whose tribe Shiloh was, to guard the ark. It may be possible that they were set around the ark as a bodyguard to it, but fled at the approach of the Philistines, or fell slain together with Hophni and Phineas on that terrible and disastrous day.

If this is the event alluded to, you will find the history of it in the fourth chapter of the First Book of Samuel. Perhaps, however, reference is made to the whole history of the tribe of Ephraim, that though they were well armed and were dexterous men in the use of the bow, yet on many occasions they turned their backs in the day of battle. Whether any of these explanations interpret the historical reference or not, the subject in itself will furnish us with a theme for meditation.

I. We will first consider for a little while WHAT THESE MEN DID.

They turned their backs. When the time for fighting came they ought to have shown their fronts. Like bold men they should have kept their face to the foe and their breast against the adversary, but they dishonorably turned their backs and fled.

This, I am sorry to say, is not an unusual thing among professing Christians. They turn back, they turn back in the day of battle. Some do this *at the first appearance of difficulty*. “There is a lion in the way,” saith the slothful man, “I shall be slain in the streets.” They hear that there is some trouble involved in Christian service, or that some persecution may be met with in the pursuit of the truth, and

straightway they look before they leap, as the world has it, and turn back to the way which they suppose to be that of safety. Timorous and Mistrust come running down the hill crying, “The lions! The lions!” and thus may a pilgrim turn back towards the City of Destruction.

Others are somewhat braver. They bear the first brunt. When the skirmishers begin these are as bold as any. They can return blow for blow, and you hear them boast, as they buckle on their armor, at such a rate that you would suppose, if you did not know that boasters are seldom good at fighting, that they must certainly be victorious. During the first thrust they stand like martyrs and behave like heroes, but very soon, when the armor gets a little battered, and the fine plume on their helmet a little stained, they turn back in the day of battle.

Some professors bear the fight a little longer. They are not to be laughed out of their religion. They can stand the jeers and jests of their old companions. When they find that they have got the cut direct in the society which once loved them so much they can put up with that, and they are very much complimented by themselves on having done it. “Cowards,” say they, “are those who flee, but we shall never do that.”

But by and by the skirmishers have done their work, and it comes to a hand-to-hand fight. The struggle begins to be somewhat more arduous, and now we shall see what metal they are made of. The enemy gets hold of them, and—

*“That desperate tug their soul might feel
Through bars of brass and triple steel.”*

Then they find that they are being hugged in the wrong place. They are touched in a tender part, and so they also turn back in the day of battle!

And alas! sad as it is to say it—firmly as we believe that every child of God is safe, yet is it true that many who profess to be so, after having fought so long that you would suppose the next thing would be for them to rest upon their laurels and receive their crown, just at the very last they fall and turn back!

We have seen grey-headed apostates as well as juvenile ones. There have been those who seemed to wear well for a time, but at last one crushing blow came which they could not bear, and they gave way before it!

Oh, brethren, it is only those who persevere to the end who will be saved, and only those who have a true faith in Jesus Christ have a sure evidence of their election of God. These be they who shall be clothed with white raiment, and shall sit down upon His throne forever. But how many who say they will to do this, after all turn back!

I may be describing—I hope I am not—some actual case here. Some of you may say as you turn the thought over in your minds—

*“My feet had almost gone;
My steps had well nigh slipped.”*

That young man over yonder was so much jeered at the other day by those with whom he works, that he felt it was very unkind, and he did think something about renouncing his religion altogether. And my other brother yonder, who has had so many losses, has lately had such a time as he never had before, and he thinks nobody else ever had and he cries, “God has forsaken me.” He cannot just now say, “Though he slay me yet will I trust in him,” But he thinks, “Surely I had better turn to the world. I had better leave my religion and give it up, for I am encompassed about with such a terrible conflict that I shall never win the victory!”

Ah! brethren, these are often the trials that God sends, and it is by these that He separates the chaff from the wheat, and lets us see who are true soldiers, and who are only the lackeys who wear regimentals, but have not the soldier’s heart pulsing beneath the scarlet. God grant us grace to be found at last men that turned *not* back in the day of battle.

If I take the history of the children of Ephraim, I should say that they turned their backs and *failed to defend the ark*. There are some who, when they are defending the truth, shun controversy. They are of such a timid disposition—a loving disposition they call it—that as soon as ever the war-trumpet sounds they find it to be their duty to attend to the baggage in the rear.

They are very brave men indeed in that particular quarter of the conflict where it does not happen to rage. But there in the van, where the corpses are piled on heaps, and where the battle-axes drip with gore, they will never be found because they have not the courage to fight and to conquer for Jesus. As far as they are concerned the ark of God may be taken by the Philistines because they turn their backs.

These Ephraimites ought, too, as Joshua had set them the example, *to have conquered Canaan and to have driven out the Canaanites still left*. Ah! my brethren, there are some of you whose sins still live, because you have turned your backs upon them, but not in the right sense, for you have turned your backs against contending with sin. There is that bad temper of yours—you have given up trying to curb it now. You say, “Well, you know many of God’s children have bad tempers,” whereas you know that this is very wicked talking.

You ought to slay that Agag. You have no business to tolerate a bad temper. You must never have any peace with that spiteful temper, or that hasty temper of yours. You must down with it, or else it will down with you, and if you do not overcome it, it will overcome you. Rest assured that you are guilty, and that you turn your back if you do not fight with it. So too with that worldliness of yours, and that want of a prayerful spirit. If you say, “Well, I will be content to be as I am. I will not try after a high state of piety,” you turn your backs, my brethren.

You ought to slay all these Canaanites, and you must in Christ’s name do it, and not spare so much as one of them, but say, “they compass me about, like bees, yea, they compass me about, but in the name of the LORD will I destroy them.”

And then, when these people turned their backs, *Canaan was not won*. So it is with you. The Lord’s kingdom is not yet fully extended, and just when you ought to be pushing far and wide the conquests of the cross, and be letting this great city of ours know that the King reigneth mighty to save, you turn back in the day of battle.

There are some Christians here who are doing nothing. I would not say this, perhaps, if I were preaching on Sunday, for I thank God that I could not in my own heart say it of my own members. The most of them are doing, I believe, as much as lies in them, or if not, I hope they very soon will be. But I am persuaded that there are many other Christians who are not doing what they should do, but are shrinking from practical service. They come in here, perhaps, on a Thursday night, and get a little bit, and they go elsewhere on other evenings of the week and pick up sweet morsels and crumbs. They like feeding very well, but they do not like work so much.

There is a certain little company who come here on weekday evenings, into whose ears I would like to whisper, and ask them what they are doing for Christ. They are spiritual vagrants who go from one place to another, but have no settled home where they work for the Master, and they are of very little credit to anybody.

We must all of us have a sphere of labor, and though I am glad to see all of you, as many as like to come, yet I pray you do have your own place for your own work, and are not like the children of Ephraim who “turned back in the day of battle.”

II. Having thus observed what these men of Ephraim did, we come to look at the inopportune time WHEN THEY DID IT.

They turned back, and their doing so would not have mattered much had they done it in a day of feasting. They could always be spared then, but that was not when they did it. They always had their faces to the front when there was any feasting to be done. They turned back, when? On holidays, when the banners waved high and the silver trumpets sounded? No, they were in the front then! Exeter Hall! May meetings! How many people are in the front there and then? When there is something sweet to feed upon they do not think of turning back.

But these people turned back on a rather different occasion. They turned back *in the day of battle*. They turned back, it seems then, just when they were to be tried. Ah! how much there is we do that will not stand trial! How much there is of godliness which is useful for anything excepting that which it is meant for! It is all in vain for me to say, if I have bought a waterproof coat, that it is good for everything except keeping the water out. Why, then it is good for nothing, and so there are some Christians who have got a religion that is good for every day except the day when it has to be tested, and then it is good for nothing.

An anchor may be very pretty on shore, and it may be very showy as an ornament when it lies on the ship's deck or hangs from the side, but what is the good of it if it will not hold when the wind blows and the vessel needs to be held fast?

So, alas! there is much of religion and of godliness, so called, that is no good when it comes to the day of trial. The soldier is truly proved to be a soldier when the war trumpet sounds and the regiment must go up to the cannon's mouth. Then shall you know, when the bayonets begin to cross, who has the true soldier's blood in him, but ah! how many turn back when it really comes to the conflict, for then the day of trial is too much for them!

They turned back *at the only time when they were of any sort of use*. A man who has to fight is not of any particular use to his country, that I know of, except when there is fighting to be done. Like a man in any other trade, there is a season when he is wanted. Now, if the Christian soldier never fights, of what good is he at all? That is a very remarkable passage in one of the prophets, where the Lord compares His people to a vine, and then He says of them in words of which I will give the sense, "If the vine bears fruit it is very valuable, but if it bears no fruit, then it is good for nothing at all."

An oak without fruit is valuable for its timber, and even thorns are useful, for you may make a hedge of them. Smaller plants may be used for some medicinal purposes, but the vine, if it bears no fruit, is absolutely good for nothing. "Will a man even make a peg of it, to hang a vessel?" saith the prophet. No, it is of no service whatever.

So is it with the Christian. If he be not thorough and true he is no good at all. You can make nothing of him whatever. He is, to use Christ's expressive words, "Neither fit for the land nor even for the dunghill, and men cast him out." Who would enlist a soldier that knew he would turn back? and who amongst us would like to be in his regiment? Take off his colors, play "The Rogue's March," and turn him out of the barracks! And this is what will happen to some professors who turn back in the day of battle! Their regimentals will be torn off, and they will be excluded from the church of God because they turned back in the day of trial and at the time when they were needed.

They turned their backs, too, like fools, *in the day when victory was to be won*. The soldier wants to distinguish himself. He wants to rise out of the ranks. He wants to be promoted. He hardly expects an opportunity of doing this in time of peace, but the officer rises when in time of war he leads a successful charge.

And so it is with the Christian soldier. I make no advance while I am not fighting. I cannot win if I am not warring. My only opportunity for conquering is when I am fighting. If I run away when there is a chance of winning the crown, then I am like the ship that does not come out of harbor when there is a fair wind, or like the man who does not avail himself of the high tide to get his vessel over the bar at the harbor's mouth.

I cannot win without fighting, and therefore I thank God when the trial comes, and count it a joy when I fall into manifold temptations, because now I may add to my faith one virtue after another, till my Christian character is all complete. To throw away the time of conflict is to throw away the crown.

Oh simple heart! Oh silly heart! to be afraid of suffering for Jesus! You are, in fact, afraid of reigning with Him, for you must do the one if you would do the other. You, young woman, who are so alarmed at a little laughing, recollect you cannot go to heaven without being laughed at sometimes in the circle in which you move, or the family in which you live. He who will live a godly life in Christ Jesus

must suffer persecution. Since, then, this is the way to heaven, why do you turn from it? Be not like these children of Ephraim who turned back when there was a crown to be won.

They turned back, once more, *when turning back involved the most disastrous defeat*. The ark of God was taken. "Ichabod," the enemy cried, for the glory was departed from Israel, because the children of Ephraim turned back in the day of battle.

And so, dear friends, unless God gives you preserving grace to stand fast to the end, do you not see that you are turning back—to what? *To perdition*. You do not turn back merely to the world. That is what it looks like perhaps, to you, but you really turn back to hell. If, after having once put your hand to the plough, you look back, you are unworthy of the kingdom. But what are you worthy of? Why, those "reserved seats" in hell!

Did you ever think of that? There are such, and let me quote a passage which proves it. We are told in one place of darkness "reserved" for some who were "wandering stars, for whom is *reserved* the blackness of darkness for ever!" When *you* turn back you turn back to those reserved places where the darkness is more black, and the pain more terrible. Oh! may God save you from ever turning back in the day of battle! This, then, is when they did it—they turned back in the day of battle.

III. But now let us notice WHO THEY WERE WHO TURNED BACK.

They were "children of Ephraim," and they are described as "being armed and carrying bows," or bows throwing forth sharp arrows. *They were men of a noble parentage*. They were the *children of Ephraim*. Joshua was of that line, and he was the greatest of conquerors who led the people into the promised land.

And you professors, you profess to be descended from our Joshua—Jesus the Conqueror, and will you turn back? Are you followers of the Savior who gave His back to the smiters, and His cheeks to them who plucked off the hair, and are you afraid or ashamed of anything? He gave His face to be spat upon, and will you hide your faces at the mention of His name because fools choose to laugh at you? Followers of Joshua, and yet afraid? Followers of Jesus, and yet blush? God grant that we may never blush, except when we think that we ever blushed at the thought of His Son!

Oh! Thou dear, despised, and persecuted One, I see You on Your way amidst the scoffers. One plucks Your beard, another pulls Your hair, a third casts his accursed spittle into Your face, another beats You, another cries, "Let him be crucified." They mock You with all forms of mockery. Taunt and jeer they heap upon You. They fill Your mouth with vinegar, and give You gall to drink. They pierce Your hands and Your feet, and yet You go on along Your way of kindness and of mercy!

And I—what have I ever suffered compared with You? And these, Your people—what have any of these endured, or what can they endure, compared with all Your griefs? Your martyrs follow You. Up from their fiery stakes they mount to their thrones. Confessors follow You, from dungeons and from racks their testimony sounds.

And shall we, upon whom the ends of the earth are come, in these softer and gentler times, shall we turn back, and say we know not the Man? O God, forbid! But do You keep us faithful unto You, that we, the sons of Ephraim, may not turn back in the day of battle.

Then, again, *they were armed, and had proper weapons, weapons which they knew how to use, and good weapons for that period of warfare*. And as Christians, what weapons have we? Here is this "Sword of the Spirit, which is the Word of God." Here is a quiver, filled with innumerable arrows, and God has put into our hands the bow of prayer, by which we may shoot them, drawing that bow by the arm of faith against our innumerable foes. What weapons of holy warfare do you want better than those which this sacred armory supplies?

Read the last chapter of the epistle to the Ephesians, and see how the apostle, with a triumphant glorying, takes you through God's armory, and bids you look at the various pieces of armor, and the various weapons that are provided for you. If you lose the battle, it is not for want of being armed, and if you desert from the ranks, it is not for the want of bows.

But what is more. Another translation seems to show that these Ephraimites were *very skillful in the use of the bow*, and yet they turned back. Oh! may God grant that none of us who have preached to others, and preached to others with fluency and zeal may ever have our own weapons turned against us.

I may make a confession here now. I have read some of my own utterances and have trembled as I have read them, and afterwards I have wept over them, not wanting to alter them, not regretting them, but fearing and trembling lest I should have my own words used in judgment against me at the last great day, for there can be no more dreadful thing than for a man to have known and taught the Word to others, and then to hear the Master say—just listen to it— “Thou wicked servant! *Out of thine own mouth will I condemn thee!*”

O God! Condemn me out of anybody’s mouth rather than out of my own. It will be a dreadful thing to have known how to use the bow, and yet not to win the victory, to have been a sort of drill sergeant to God’s people, showing them how to use the weapons, and then not to have fought the battle one’s self! This will be a terrible thing!

Some of you know how to use this Bible. You are acquainted with it, you have studied its doctrines, you know the points of divinity and theology, you are well read in the teachings of God’s Word, you know how to use the bow. And some of you pray very sweetly at prayer meeting.

Ah! beloved, what I said about myself may well apply to you. Some of you are Sunday school teachers and others tract distributors, and you all know how to use the bow. I hope I can say to you who sit here that I have, like Saul, taught you to use the bow. We have sought to teach you young men to use God’s Word both in prayer and in other exercises of your holy faith, but beloved, if you turn back, the art which you have learned shall rise up in judgment against you to condemn you!

If as professors taught the use of God’s Word you are marched out to fight, but have not courage enough for the conflict, and turn your backs and slink into inglorious ease or into vain-glorious self-righteousness, or into false glorious pleasure, oh! how terrible must be your ruin at the last! May you not be like the children of Ephraim, who, though skilled in the use of the bow, yet turned back in the day of battle! This, then, is who they were.

IV. And ask ye now—WHY DID THEY DO IT?

Why did they, indeed? We might well have been at a loss to tell, for they were armed and carried bows. What then was the reason? The Word of God tells us and gives us three reasons. You will find them in the verses following the text. “They kept not the covenant of God and refused to walk in His law, and forgot his works, and his wonders that he had showed them.”

“*They kept not the covenant.*” Oh! that great covenant, “ordered in all things and sure,” when you can fall back upon that how it strengthens you! When you can read in it eternal thoughts of divine love to you, and can hear Jesus say, “I give unto my sheep eternal life, and they shall never perish, neither shall any pluck them out of my hand.” How it encourages you to go forward!

You cannot be killed, you are invulnerable, you have been dipped in the covenant stream that makes you invulnerable from head to foot. Why then should you fear to face the foe? If you forget that covenant you will soon turn back, and so prove that you are not in it. But the remembrance of it gives strength to God’s people to persevere since they feel that God’s purpose is that they shall persevere, and so win the victory.

The covenant, however, not only secures safety, but it also provides all sorts of blessings. If a Christian always had his eyes on the covenant storehouse he could never desert his God for the world. Will a man leave a treasury that is full of gold to go to a beggar’s cottage for money? Will a man turn from the flowing stream that comes cool and fresh from Lebanon’s melting snow to go and drink of some filthy stagnant pool? No, not he, and when a man knows the treasures of grace that are in Christ Jesus, and remembers that it pleased the Father that in Him should all fullness dwell, and that He has made Him a covenant for the people, will such a man turn back? Assuredly not, but every promise of the covenant will enable him to face his foes and prevent his turning back in the day of battle.

Perhaps, however, the covenant which we forget is the covenant we feel we made with Christ in the day when we said, "My beloved is mine, and I am his," when we gave ourselves up in a full surrender, body, soul, and spirit, to God. Oh! let us never forget that covenant!

Supposing we should lose our character for Christ's sake? Did we not give Christ our character to begin with? You are of no use in the ministry, my dear brother, if you are not quite willing to be called a fool, to be called a thief, or even to be called a devil! You will never be successful if you are afraid of being pelted.

The true minister often finds his pulpit to be a place but little preferable to a pillory, and he is content to stand there, feeling that all the abuse and blasphemy which may come upon him are only the means by which the world recognizes and proves its recognition of a God-sent man. Oh! to rest upon the covenant which is made in grace, and to hold fast the covenant which Christ has compelled us to make with Him, resolved that even should He take all away, our joy, our comfort, and our ease, we will still stand to it, and still keep the covenant.

Another reason why they turned back was that "*they refused to walk in His law.*" When we get a proud heart we very soon get beaten, for with the face of a lion but the heart of a deer, such a one is afraid of the world. If I am willing to do what God tells me as He tells me, when He tells me, and because He tells me, I shall not turn back in the day of battle.

They also seem to have turned back *because they had bad memories.* "They forgot his works, and the wonders that he had showed them." My dear friends, we the members of this church have seen many of God's wonders, and have rejoiced in them, and if we were to forget these we should lack one means of comfort in our own darkness.

Some of you have had very wonderful manifestations of the Lord's kindness, and if you forget all these I should not wonder if you should prove to be a mere professor and turn your back, for God's true people are like that Mary, whom all generations call "blessed," they treasure these things in their hearts. We ought to stir up our remembrances of God's lovingkindness, for if we do not it will soon be a powerful reason for our turning back in the day of battle.

Oh! have we not fought in days gone by, and shall we now be afraid? Have we not slain old Giant Grim? Did we not fight with dragons and with lions? Have we not gone through the valley of the shadow of death? Have we not had a conflict with Apollyon himself foot to foot, and shall Giant Despair or his wife Mrs. Diffidence make us afraid?

No, in the name of God we will use the good old sword, the true Jerusalem blade that we wielded aforetime, and we shall yet again be more than conquerors through Him that loved us. Let us, then, not forget God's works in the days of yore, lest we fail to trust Him in the days that are to come. This was why they turned back.

V. And now the last inquiry is—WHAT WAS THE RESULT OF THEIR TURNING BACK?

One result of their turning back was, *that their father mourned over them.* We are told, in the passage I quoted first, that "Ephraim their father mourned for them many days." What a lamentation it brings into the Christian church when a professor falls! There is one heart which feels it with peculiar poignancy—the heart of him who thought he was the spiritual father of the person so falling.

There are no griefs connected with our work like the grief of mourning over fallen professors, especially if these happen to be ministers, men who are armed and carry bows, for when they turn back, well accoutred and well skilled in war, it is heart breaking work indeed!

I do not exaggerate, but I know I only speak the sober truth when I say that if I could submit to any form of corporeal torture that I have ever heard of, I would be willing to bear it sooner than submit to the torture I have sometimes felt over members of this church, or what is worse, over young men educated in our college, or what is worse still, over ministers who have been for some time settled over their flocks.

If at any time you desire to be malicious towards the man whom you look upon as your spiritual father, if you would send an arrow through his very liver and smite him with a dagger in the core of his

heart, you have nothing to do but to turn back in the day of battle and you have done it. It were better that you had never been born than that you should go back to the world. It were better that you should be taken out of this house a corpse than that you should live to disgrace the profession which you have espoused, especially those of you who stand in a prominent place.

O God, keep us who witness before the multitude, keep us by Thine eternal power, keep us as the apple of Thine eye, hide us beneath the shadow of Thy wings, or else we who are chief and foremost, though armed and carrying bows, shall yet turn back in the day of battle.

Another result, which you perhaps will think more important by far, was that owing to their turning back *the enemy remained*. Owing to many Christians not doing what they ought to do in the day of battle, Romanism is still in this land, and infidelity is rife. If in the days of Elizabeth and Cranmer men had acted up to the light they then had, we should not be as we now are, a semi-Popish nation. Had Luther himself been faithful to some of the light to which he shut his eyes, he might have inaugurated a more perfect Reformation than that for which we are still devoutly grateful to God and for which we always cherish his memory.

There was a need of thoroughness even in that day. And at the present moment, if some of our brethren were but faithful to their own convictions, they would not be bolstering up an alliance of the State with a depraved Church. They would not dare to perform some ceremonies which are atrociously bad, and many of us, if we acted according to our inward monitor, would not do many things which we are now doing.

Oh! may God give us grace to smite the foe! What has sin to do in this world? Christ has bought the world with His blood, and oh! for grace to clear sin out of Christ's heritage! The earth is the Lord's, and the kingdoms thereof, the world and they who dwell therein, and if we were but faithful to God we should not turn back in the day of battle, and Rome and all our foes would be slain.

Then, again, if we did not turn our backs, *the country would be conquered for Christ*. I do not like the way in which some brethren say that if we were more faithful half of London would be saved. I say that I believe God's purpose is achieved, but still we are bound to speak of our sins according to their tendencies, and the tendency of our want of confidence in God, and our not boldly persevering, is to destroy souls. Paul talked once of destroying with meat him for whom Christ died, that being the tendency to destroy such souls if they could be destroyed.

So, humanly speaking, the darkness of the world at present is owing to the unfaithfulness of the church, and if the church had been as true to Christ as she was in the first century, long ere this there would not have been a village without the Gospel, nor a single empire in the world in which the truth had not been proclaimed. It is our turning back in the day of battle that leaves Canaan unconquered for our Lord.

But worse than this, *the ark itself was actually taken*. My dear friends, those of you who are armed and carry bows, men of learning, men who understand the Scriptures, I do pray you, do not turn back just now, for just now seems to be a time when the ark of God will be taken. It can never really be so, but still we must mind that it be not the tendency of our actions. We are in great danger from what some people will not believe, but what is most certainly a fact, and that is the marvelous increase of Popery in this land.

There are certain brethren who are always harping upon this one string, till we have grown sick of the theme, but without at all endorsing their alarm, I believe there is quite enough for the most quiet and confident spirit to be alarmed at. The thing has become monstrous, and there is need to awaken the anxious care and the earnest efforts of God's church.

You need not be long without good evidence of this. Every nerve is being strained by Rome to win England to itself, and on the other hand, while we have less neology, and less of all sorts of skepticism throughout the whole country, I am afraid that we have more of it than we used to have inside the church itself.

There are many doctrines that are now matters of question which I never heard questioned ten years ago. I am not altogether sorry for this, but rather glad, because there are some doctrines which are not preached now, but which will be preached more in the future in consequence of doubts being thrown upon them.

But it is a very ominous sign of the times that most of those truths which we have been accustomed to accept as being the received and orthodox faith of Christendom are now being questioned, and questioned too by men who are not to be despised, men who from their evident earnestness, from their deep knowledge, and from their close attention to the matter, deserve a hearing in the forum of common sense, even if they do not deserve it from spiritual men.

We must all of us hold fast the truth now. If there is a man who has got a truth, let him draw his bow and shoot his arrows now, and not turn back in the day of battle. Now for your arrows! Now for your arrows! The more our foes shall conspire against Christ, the more do you make war against them. Give them double for their double. Reward them as they reward you.

Spare no arrows against Babylon. "Happy shall he be that taketh thy little ones and dashes them against the stones." Happy shall he be who slays the little errors, who kills the minor falsehoods, who does battle against Popery in every shape and form, and against infidelity in all its phases. If we do not come to the front now, the ark of God, as far as we are concerned, will be taken!

And then, worst of all, *we shall hear the Philistines shouting while God's church is weeping!* The Philistines are good hands at shouting. They shout rather loudly about nothing, but when they get a little they bark loudly enough then. If they see but one Christian turn back what rejoicing there is! They ring the bells and make great mirth over the fall of the very least among us, but if those of us who are armed and carry bows should turn back in the day of battle, oh "Tell it not in Gath, publish it not in the streets of Askelon, lest the daughters of Philistia rejoice, lest the sons of the uncircumcised triumph!"

God grant that we may never make mirth for hell. If Satan must have merriment may he find it anywhere rather than in us. Oh! may we stand at last, and having done all, may we still stand.

To conclude, brethren. If we do not stand fast, *you know what will come of it.* Supposing the churches of which we are members do not stand fast, what will come of you and what of me? What became of Shiloh? What became of Ephraim? Instead of the ark being any longer in the custody of Ephraim it was taken away from Shiloh, and God transferred the custody of it to Judah, and it rested upon Mount Zion under the government of King David.

So, mark you, whenever a church becomes unfaithful, and turns back in the day of battle, God takes away from it the keeping of His ark and entrusts it to others. "I have looked upon a neighbour of thine," saith He, "who is better than thou," and so He takes the sword and gives it to David, and thus perhaps may He do with us. There are many churches that were once flourishing but now are deserted altogether. So it may be with us individually, and with the churches at large unless we are faithful to God.

Now, I have said nothing to the unconverted. My drift seemed to be to speak to professing believers. Some of you say you never went to this war, and therefore you will not turn back. You never made a profession. Ah! dear friends, it will be a very poor excuse at the last great day to say, "I never made a profession."

Did you ever hear of a thief being brought up at the Mansion House before the Lord Mayor who said, when he was accused of being a thief, "Why, my Lord, I am not a very honest man. I never professed to be. I never professed that I would not pick people's pockets. I never professed that I would not steal a watch if I had the chance. I was regularly known as a thief. I never professed to be anything else, therefore you cannot blame me." If a man should make such a defense as that, I should think it very likely that the Lord Mayor would give him an extra six months, and I think it would serve him very well right.

You smile at this, but the very same argument may be applied to you. "Well," you say, "you know I do not make any profession of religion." That is to say, you do not make any pretense of serving and loving the God who made you, who gave you life, and has kept and preserved you in it. You do not

make any profession of being washed in the precious blood of Christ. You do not make a profession of being on the road to hell. Well, may God save you from that excuse, and may He give you grace to look it in the face and say, “Well, I do not dare even hope that I am saved. I know I am not.” Then, my brother, if you are not saved, you are lost.

I would like to stop while you turn that thought over, and when you have done so I would say, “The Son of Man is come to seek and to save that which was lost.”

May God’s eternal mercy seek and save you, and if it be His will, may He find you, and lead you to put your trust in Jesus Christ, and resting upon Him, and looking to His cross, you shall not, as the children of Ephraim did, “turn back in the day of battle.”

PORTION OF SCRIPTURE READ BEFORE SERMON—PSALM 78

Taken from The Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit C. H. Spurgeon Collection. Only necessary changes have been made, such as correcting spelling errors, some punctuation usage, capitalization of deity pronouns, and minimal updating of a few archaic words. The content is unabridged. Additional Bible-based resources are available at www.spurgeongems.org.