RETREAT IMPOSSIBLE

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A SERMON
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"I have opened my mouth unto the LORD, and I cannot go back."
Judges 11:35

IN Jephthah's case there were good reasons for going back. He had made a rash vow, and such things are much better broken than kept. If a man makes a vow to commit a crime, his vow to do so is in itself a sin, and the carrying out of his vow will be doubly sinful.

If a man's vowing to do a thing made it necessary and right for him to do it, then the whole moral law might be suspended by the mere act of vowing, for a man might vow to steal, to commit adultery, or to murder, and then say, "I was right in all those acts, because I vowed to do them." This is self-evidently absurd and to admit such a principle would be to destroy all morality.

You have, first of all, no right to promise to do what is wrong. And then, secondly, your promise, which is in itself wrong, cannot make a criminal act to be right. If you have come under a rash vow, you must not dare to keep it. You ought to go before God, and repent that you have made a vow which involves sin. But as to keeping the sinful vow, that were to add sin to sin.

"But," says one, "would it not be sin to break my vow?" I reply, there was great sin in making it, and there will probably be some measure of sin connected with your breaking it, for few human actions are perfect, but to keep your evil vow would certainly be sin, and you must not commit the greater sin to avoid the less sin which perhaps may be involved in the breach of your foolish promise.

I think it would have been well if Jephthah, though he had opened his mouth before God, had gone back when it involved, as I think it did, so dreadful a necessity as that of sacrificing his own innocent, only child. His having sworn to do it did not make it right—it was just as wrong. If he really did slay her, it was a horrible action, dramatize or disguise it as you may. He had no right to make the dangerous promise. He had still less right to carry it out after he had made it, if it led to such terrible consequences.

But now I am going to speak about other openings of the mouth to God, in which there is no ill—openings of the mouth which need never be regretted, which certainly never can be recalled, and of which we may rightly say, before the living God, in the strength which He gives us, "I have opened my mouth unto the LORD, and I cannot go back."

My sermon will not have much to do with some of you. You have not given your word to God, or made any sort of promise, but you remain as you were, far off from Him, and negligent of His claims. I do not envy you. Your being under no obligation from any resolution of your own does not prevent your being under just as much natural obligation to God on account of your being His creatures, and therefore subjects under His law.

I sometimes hear of people who say, "You know I do not profess anything," and after that assertion, they appear to feel at liberty to say and do whatever they like. Now, if we heard of certain persons entrusted with our business that they had not acted honestly, what should we think of it if one man among them should rise up and say, "Don't blame me. You know I never professed to be honest"?

What would that mean? It would mean that he is a confessed and acknowledged thief. Suppose a man were to say, "Well, I never profess to be truthful." What is he? He is an acknowledged liar. And he who says, "Ah, I never made any vows or promises, neither do I pretend to serve the Lord," acknowledges himself to be a godless man.

He is living in the daily robbery of God, defrauding Him of His rights. He is living in direct and avowed rebellion against the King of kings. He is living without a hope for the hereafter—without grace in his soul for the present—and without glory in prospect for the future.

Ah, friend, although the things I may have to say at this time may not directly bear upon *you*, yet the very fact that they do not bear upon you should make you think, and weigh, and consider, and ponder your ways as to the place which you now occupy. You are, by your non-profession and non-avowal of Christ, making a confession of being on the opposite side. For he that is not with Him is against Him, and he that gathers not with Him scatters abroad.

But now I speak to my own brethren and sisters in Christ Jesus. Dear friends, there are three things which I would bring to your practical remembrance. First, *what we have done*—we have opened our mouth unto the Lord. Secondly, *what we cannot do*—"I cannot go back." And thirdly, *what we must do*—there are some things that we must seek after if we are to be able to hold on and to act faithfully to our profession.

I. First, then, WHAT WE HAVE DONE. "I have opened my mouth unto the LORD."

We have opened our mouths before the Lord, first, *by confessing our faith in Jesus Christ*. I have said, and most of you upon whom I am looking have also solemnly said, before others, "I believe in the Lord Jesus Christ with all my heart. Let others believe what they will and trust in what they please.

'My hope is fixed on nothing less
Than Jesus' blood and righteousness.'"

We are troubled by no question of our Lord's power to save, or of our interest in His salvation, but we have testified outright, as a matter-of-fact which we feel in our own souls, that we believe that Jesus died for us, and that He is all our salvation and all our desire. We have opened our mouth to that in the most decided manner, and we are continually doing so in various ways.

We have also avowed and declared before the living God that we are Christ's disciples and followers. If anyone should ask us, "Are you one of them? Do you consort with Jesus of Nazareth?" We would gladly answer, "Yes." However short we come of perfect obedience to His commands, yet His will is our rule.

We call Him "Master" and "Lord," and when we read about the disciples of Christ, we think of ourselves as belonging to them. Blessed Master, how glad we are to own that we are indeed Your disciples. We are not ashamed to acknowledge that we have opened our mouth unto You, to believe all Your teachings, and to obey all Your commands.

We have opened our month to the Lord, next, because as we believe in Jesus Christ, and take Him to be our Master, so *we have admitted the Redeemer's claims to our persons and services, and have resolved to live for Him alone all our days*. We have made a dedication of ourselves to His service, declaring that we are not our own, but bought with a price.

Some of us did this years ago and—

"High heaven that heard the solemn vow,
That vow, renewed, has often heard,"

and shall hear it again. We profess that nothing that we have is ours, but our goods, our hours, our talents, and ourselves are all marked with the broad arrow of the King. We are the perpetual heritage of the Lord, to be His forever, and never to serve self again, or the world, or the flesh, or any, save Jesus.

We have also cast in our lot with His people. We belong to their fraternity, heart and soul. We are not ashamed of them either. It is some years ago with some of us since we came forward and asked to have our names enrolled with the despised people of God, and we opened our mouth to the Lord that we would take part and lot with His people—that if they were abused, we would take a share of the abuse—

that if they had sorrows, we would help to bear their burdens, and if they had joys, we only hoped that we might be worthy to enjoy the crumbs of their table.

We craved to be numbered with the citizens of that noble city, the New Jerusalem, and we requested to share the portion of Zion's blessed but tried inhabitants, whether they held a fast or a festival, suffered siege or enjoyed triumph. We asked to have it said of us that we were born there, and when we were asked if we would forego the world and all its allurements to become heirs of the better country, we stood up before the Lord and declared that it was even so.

In all these things we have, as Christian people, opened our mouths unto the Lord, have we not? Now, if you ask me when you did so, I shall have to mention several occasions.

Some of us opened our mouths in this respect to the Lord in a very solemn way *in private*. We made our dedication to God a solemn deed performed in a distinct and formal manner. We took time about it, thought it over, and then did it deliberately and definitely.

Some have even written out an act of solemn dedication, and signed it. Others, perhaps, more wisely, have refrained from writing it, lest it should become a bondage to their spirits, but they have, nevertheless, made a formal act of transfer of themselves and all that they had, to the Lord.

At any rate, whether we did it formally or not, we can say—

"'Tis done! The great transaction's done,
I am my Lord's, and He is mine."

There was a time when once for all we gave up the keys of the city of Mansoul, and surrendered to the Lord absolutely, that He might be ours, and that we might be His forever and ever.

Then many of you, beloved friends, opened your mouth to the Lord *in baptism*. Searching His Word, you saw there clearly that as many as believed were baptized. You read of the eunuch to whom the question was put, "Dost thou believe in the Lord Jesus Christ? for if thou believest with all thy heart thou mayest"—and then on confession of his faith he was baptized.

I have opened my mouth unto the Lord in that manner. I remember the solemn occasion when I went into the river, with multitudes of people as witnesses on either bank, to mark my burial with the Lord in the water. And though I have not the remotest confidence in outward form or ceremony, yet often has my soul recalled that day when I did, before men and angels and devils, declare myself to be the servant of the living God, and was therefore buried in water in token of my death to all the world, and then raised from it as the emblem of my newness of life.

Oh, to be always faithful to what we did, when, coming forward of our own accord, we declared that we were dead with Christ, that we might also live with Him.

We have opened our mouth unto the Lord since then, full often when we have come to *the communion table*. The solemn sitting down at the table of communion, when others have to go away, or can only look on—the separation which is made in that act—is a declaration on your part, beloved, that you belong to the Lord Jesus Christ, that He is become your meat and your drink, that you feed at His table, and are His servants.

There is something very solemn about the communion service—it ought never to be lightly entered upon—and when you have been attending to that ordinance in remembrance of Him, you should feel, "I have opened my mouth unto the Lord in a very special manner by sitting at the table with His people."

Besides that, how often have we opened our mouth before God in *hymn-singing*. I am afraid that we do not always think enough about what we say when we sing. But what solemn things you have sung. Did you not sing the other day—

"And if I might make some reserve,
And duty did not call,
I love my God with zeal so great
That I would give Him all"?

And did you not sing—

"Had I ten thousand hearts, dear Lord,
I'd give them all to Thee:
Had I ten thousand tongues, they all
Should join the harmony."

Ah, you have opened your mouth very widely unto the Lord in song.

And so, too, *in prayer*—both in the closet and in public. We say great things to God in supplication—do we always come up to what we say? Are we always of the mind of Jephthah, who said, "I have opened my mouth unto the LORD, and I cannot go back"? Do we remember those vows which our soul in anguish made when we drew near to God in the bitterness of our spirit, and poured out our complaint before Him?

But ah, beloved, very specially I may speak of some here present who are my partners in the work and ministry of the church for her Lord. We who bear *public testimony*, "We have opened our mouths unto the LORD, and cannot go back." You who teach classes in the school, you who try to tell the Gospel to other men in the workshop, you who talk of Jesus Christ even to your children—remember that you have committed yourselves.

While you are trying to speak to others you make avowals for yourselves which bind you to present truth and future fidelity. As for me, whither could I flee from my Master's presence? Where could I go from His service? Should I desert His ministry, unto what part of the earth could I go to hide myself? Somebody would remember this face which has been seen by so many thousands—the very tones of my voice would betray me—and men would point me out as an apostate from my Lord.

Jonah might flee to Tarshish, but if I went to Tarshish someone or other would know me, and pronounce my name as soon as I set foot upon the soil. I must fight this battle to the finish now, retreat is out of the question. "I have opened my mouth unto the LORD" so often, and before so many, that I am bound by a myriad ties, nor would I wish to be bound with one the less, but daily with more and more.

But beloved friends, do remember that in proportion as your religion gains publicity, and in proportion as, by teaching others, you tacitly or avowedly, declare your faith in the Gospel, in that proportion you have opened your mouth unto the Lord, and it is not possible that you should go back without deep disgrace and dire destruction.

Now, it is worth our remembering *after what fashion we have done this*. I have shown you that we have opened our mouth unto the Lord, and I have shown you the occasions when we have done so, but in the very manner of the deed there has been practical force.

We have done this *voluntarily*. We have opened our mouth to the Lord without any compulsion. The little child, you know, who according to the Prayer Book is made a member of Christ, and a child of God, and so on, has nothing to do with the business, and is in no way responsible for what others choose to promise without its leave.

But you and I did willingly what we did. We came forward and said, "Let me be baptized, for I am a believer in Jesus. Let me be united with the church, for I am one of the Lord's redeemed." We said to the Lord Jesus Christ, "I am cheerfully and willingly Your servant." We took upon ourselves the bonds of a Christian profession, because we loved to do so. Well, then, if we have done this voluntarily, there is the strongest reason why we should not go back from our own chosen position as the Lord's own disciples.

And we did this very *solemnly*. Oh, to some of you, it was indeed a devout action when you avowed yourselves on the Lord's side. Many were the prayers and praises which preceded and followed it. Shall such solemnity be made into a falsehood? Shall the weeping and the supplication be proven to have been base hypocrisy?

I hope also that we did it very *deliberately*, counting the cost, looking round about, and seeing what it meant, and understanding what we were doing. We did not reckon upon a smooth path. We did not consider that we should gain crowns without crosses, or win victories without fightings—and we have found it much as we expected.

We passed through the wicket-gate, and entered on the road to the celestial city, knowing that there were dragons to encounter, giants to fight, hills to climb, rivers to swim, and swamps to ford. We set out with considerable knowledge of what we were doing and what it involved, and we were not thereby prevented from decidedly and deliberately declaring ourselves to be on the Lord's side.

Are we now going to confess ourselves to have been fools and dupes? Will we now tell our Lord that His service is hard and worthless?

Most of us made our profession *publicly*. We had many onlookers. We cannot forget that when we began the race, a cloud of witnesses surrounded us, and have ever since kept us in full survey. If there is a little speck in our character, they are sure to point it out. Never cat watched a mouse as the lynx-eyed world watches the Christian. How it magnifies and multiplies the faults of believers, and cries, "Aha! aha! So would we have it," the moment it finds the slightest trip or mistake.

Well, we have opened our mouth to the Lord before multitudes, and shall we recant and deny the faith? Men and angels and devils know that we belong to the Lord Jesus Christ. We have declared it before all with whom we have come into contact, not always in so many words, but I hope in our actions, by the decided stand that we have taken up for God, and for Christ, and for truth, and for holiness, and for the fear of God in the land.

But the weight of it all lies in this, "We have opened our mouth *unto the LORD*." It is not what we promised the church, though in becoming members of it we have promised to fulfill the mutual duties of Christians. It was not what we promised to the minister, though, in the very fact of becoming members of a church of which he is the pastor, we have a Christian duty towards him.

It was not what we promised one another, though we all owe something to each other. But we have opened our mouth *to the Lord*. If a man must trifle, let him trifle with men, but not with God. If promises to men may be lightly broken—and they should not be—yet let us not trifle with promises made to God. And if solemn declarations ever can be forgotten—which they should not be—yet not solemn declarations made to God.

Beware, oh! beware of anything like levity in entering into covenant with the Most High. If a man should measure his footsteps and weigh his words when he appears before an earthly monarch, how much more when he stands before the King of kings, who is also Judge of quick and dead. There let your words be few and guarded, but when you have once spoken them, and lifted your hand to heaven, let your promise stand, and do you keep it faithfully, saying, "I have opened my mouth unto the LORD, and I cannot go back."

II. But enough upon what we have done, for we want our full strength of thought to dwell upon WHAT WE CANNOT DO. "I have opened my mouth unto the LORD, and *I cannot go back*."

That is to say, having once become Christians, *we cannot apostatize from the faith*. We feel that we cannot, and God's servants in all ages have proved that they cannot. Men have threatened them, "You shall go to prison if you do not go back," but they have said, "We cannot." And they have gone to prison, and they have said, like John Bunyan, "I will lie there till the moss grows on my eyelids, but I cannot—I cannot do other than God bids me."

The enemy has said, "If you do not leave Christ you shall be stretched on the rack," and that means the pulling of every bone from its fellow, but in defiance of torture they have replied, "We cannot go back—we can rather bear the rack." Poor women, like Anne Askew, have been racked most cruelly, but they could not go back.

Then the enemies of the Lord have sworn, "We will burn you quick to the death." The saints have accepted that challenge also, and they have burned, and triumphed in the burning, clapping their blazing hands—for they could not go back.

The young people in the old city of London, over the water there, went down to Smithfield in the early morning to see their pastor burned. And when they came home and their mother said, "What went you for?" the boys replied, "We went to learn the way." They wanted to know how to burn when their turn should come!

Brave sons of brave sires! God's servants always have known how to burn, but they have not known how to turn. They have lifted their hand to the Lord, and if it involved losses, and crosses, and torment, and death, they could not go back. No, sir, if you can go back, you never knew Christ! If you can go back, He never marked the cross mark on your heart, He never baptized you into His death.

For, if He had done so, a sacred impulse would be upon you, and you would go forward. As though you were a thunderbolt launched from the omnipotent hand, you must go on, and burst through every opposition till you reach the end towards which God's eternal might is speeding you. You cannot go back.

Moreover, if we are right at heart, we feel that we have lifted our hand to the Lord, and *we cannot go back, even by temporary turnings aside*. I do not mean that we do not do so, sadly too often—the Lord have mercy upon us for it. But it ought to be our solemn declaration that we cannot go back.

Somebody says to you when you enter the workshop, "Ah, you are one of those fools of Christians." The devil tempts you to say that you are not, or at any rate, to be very quiet about it. Do not fall into cowardly silence, but say at once, "I have opened my mouth unto the LORD, and I cannot go back. I am in for it now. Whatever it means, I am enlisted and will never desert."

Sometimes the temptation is, "Come with me, young man, come with me, young woman—to such and such a questionable place of amusement." "Shall I go? Perhaps I shall not get much hurt." Stand still and say, "No, I have opened my mouth unto the Lord, and I cannot go back, even if I had the desire to do so. I have committed myself to the pursuit of holiness, and I cannot go back to the foolish pleasures of sin."

I like you young people to make a very straightforward profession of your faith, because it may be the means of keeping you in the hour of temptation. You will say to yourself, "The vows of the Lord are upon me. How can I do this great wickedness and sin against God?"

I heard one say once, "I could not join the church because I should feel it such a tie." "Ay, but," I replied, "Brother, it is the sort of tie you need to feel." A profession of our faith in Jesus ought to be a very strong cord of love to hold us to that which is good. We ought to feel that the sacrifice is bound to the horns of the altar, but this bondage is true liberty to us, and pleasant to us, and it should be our desire to be bound faster and faster as long as we live. "I cannot go back" is an inability of the most desirable kind.

The enemies of your soul will attempt to persuade you to forsake the Lord. They will try ridicule and threats and bribes, but be you as a deaf man and hear them not. If you have really opened your mouth to God with all your heart, you cannot go back—the divine life within you will laugh to scorn all efforts of the foe. Baffled and discouraged, they will soon give up their wicked endeavors. They will see that it is of no use to tempt such a one as you are—your steadfastness and patient endurance will drive them from the field.

But there are some of you that make a profession, who attempt compromises, and go a little way with the world. If you go a furlong with the world you will soon go a mile. I will give you a sentence to recollect, "That man who is only half Christ's is altogether the devil's." Do remember that. He who is only half a Christian is altogether an unbeliever. As half clean is unclean, so half converted is unconverted, and half a saint is wholly a sinner.

You cannot say to the world, "Hitherto thou shalt go, but no further." It is greedy, and seeks to win the whole man. To its imperious demands give a stern denial, saying, "I have opened my mouth unto the LORD, and I cannot go back."

Now, what are our reasons why we cannot go back?

The first reason is that *if we did go back we should show that we have been altogether false.* You profess to be believers in Jesus Christ. You say that you have been born again, that you have received that inward principle which lives and abides forever. If you go back to the world and to sin, you say to all mankind, "I made a hypocritical profession. I was a mere formalist. The root of the matter was not in me."

You cannot say that, for you know you love the Lord. Even when you are in a doubting mood, you know you love Jesus. Though you question yourselves over and over again, you know that you love your Master. If you hear anybody finding fault with Him, are you not sorely grieved? Oh, yes, it brings the blood into your cheeks and you say, "I cannot bear to hear Him spoken against."

You thought that you did not love Him, but the enemy provokes you to feel that you do love Him. You do love Him. You cannot say that you do not. Can you? And yet if you went back it would be tantamount to a declaration that all your former life had been a falsehood.

You cannot go back, dear friend, because *that were to act most basely*. Have you been bought with the precious blood of Christ, and will you go away from Him? Did He die upon the cross for you, and will a little buffeting cause you to desert Him? What! Did He fetch you up out of the horrible pit and out of the miry clay by His own death, and will you forsake Him, and choose sinful ease and the praises of a wicked world?

Oh, it were baseness, abominable baseness, for a soul who once has tasted of His wondrous love, and seen Him in His glory and death throes to desert Christ. No, *no*, NO. We cannot be so base as this, God helping us.

To go back from that for which we have opened our mouth to the Lord were *to incur frightful penalties*, for there is no judgment so great as that which is pronounced upon the apostate. If they have tasted of the heavenly gift and the powers of the world to come, "If these shall fall away, it is impossible to renew them again unto repentance."

"Salt is good, but if the salt has lost its savor wherewith shall it be seasoned? It is henceforth good for nothing but to be trodden under foot of men," You know how many passages there are in which it is positively asserted that if a child of God did deliberately and totally apostatize, his restoration would be utterly impossible—not difficult—but *impossible*.

This is one of the greatest proofs of the doctrine of the final perseverance of the saints, since there is no man in a condition in which it is impossible to save him, and yet any man would be in such a state if he apostatized. Therefore, true believers shall not apostatize, but shall stand fast, and shall be kept even to the end.

Yet, could they totally apostatize, they could never be restored again. The greatest remedy having already failed, there would remain no other. On the supposition that the power of the Holy Spirit and the cleansing influence of the blood of Jesus could not preserve the man from falling back into his unregenerate state, what else could be done for such a one?

If regeneration fails—what then? If the incorruptible seed which lives and abides forever can die—what then? Oh, we cannot go back! To go back is death, shame, eternal ruin.

And to go back would be *so unreasonable*. Why should I leave my Lord? Why should I let my Savior go? In my heart of hearts, I cannot think of a reason why I should forsake my Master. Do I seek pleasure? What pleasure is equal to that which He can give me? Do I seek gain? What gain could there be if I lost Him? Do I seek ease? Ah, to leave Him were to forfeit eternal rest.

To whom should we go? That was a forcible question of the disciples when the Master inquired, "Will ye also go away?" They replied, "To whom can we go?" Ah, to whom can we go? If you give up the religion of Jesus Christ, what other religion would you have? If you were to give up the pleasures of godliness, what other pleasures would you have?

"Oh," says one, "we could go into the world." Could you? Could you? If you are a child of God you are spoiled for the world. Before you became a Christian you could have done very well in the world,

but now you know too much to be happy there. While the sow is a sow, the mud is good enough for her. Turn that sow into an angel—and if the angel has no place in heaven—where shall it go?

It cannot go back to the sty. What could it do there? The wash of the trough was good enough for the sow, but the angel has eaten heavenly food. It cannot roll in the mire, nor consort with swine, it must have heaven or nothing. If you can go back to the world you will go back to the world, but if you are a child of God you cannot go back, because grace has so changed your nature that you would not be in an element in which you could exist.

There is no reason for apostasy—all the reasons lie the other way. "I have opened my mouth unto the LORD, and I cannot go back" for this reason—that I have no inclination that way. Brethren, some of us have been Christians these five-and-twenty years, and we are glad of it.

You know that in the army they have short-time soldiers and long-time soldiers. When I enlisted in Christ's army, I did not go in to enlist for a quarter of a year, and then have a new ticket. But I enlisted for life. But suppose my Master were to say to me, "Now, you have had some five-and-twenty years of it, you may now go home and cease from being one of My soldiers."

"Ah, my Master, where should I go? Do not discharge me." If He were still to say, "You are out of your time, and may go home," I would tell Him that I would not leave Him in life or death. If I were put out at the front door, I would come in at the back. Ah, my Lord, what anguish has that question stirred, whether I would also go as others have done.

Go? You have fastened me to Your cross and driven in the nails. I cannot go. Go? I am dead and buried with You, and Your rich grace has made me part and parcel of Yourself by indissoluble union. "Who shall separate us from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus our Lord?" No, if I were discharged today, I would enlist again directly.

The man who is married to a good wife thinks to himself, "If I had to marry again tomorrow morning, she should be the bride, and happy would we be." And so, if we had our choice to make again, we would choose our dear Lord over again, only with much more eagerness and earnestness than we did at first.

Dear friends, we have opened our mouth to the Lord, and we cannot go back because *we are so happy as we now are*. A man does not turn his back upon that which has become his life and his joy. He is bound to it by the bliss which he derives from it.

Can the Swiss forget his country when he listens to the home music which he heard as a child amidst his native hills? Does not the home-sickness come over him so that he longs to be among the Alps, again?

Does not the Englishman, wherever he wanders, whether by land or sea, feel his heart instinctively turn to the white cliffs of Albion, and does he not say that with all her faults he loves his country still? Who would cease to be that which he loves to be?

And so now our joy in Christ is great, and we cannot wish to be divided from Him. Why should we? Shall the star desert the sphere in which it shines, or the fish the sea in which it lives? Shall the eagle abhor the craggy rock on which he builds his nest, or the angel shun the heaven in which he dwells? No, beloved, we cannot go back. Our joy holds us fast to our Lord.

And then, besides that, we cannot go back from what we have said, for *divine grace impels us onward*. There is a secret power more mighty than all other forces called the force of grace, and this has captured us.

When the temptation comes to go back to Egypt, and we recollect the garlic—that strong-smelling garlic, and the cucumbers—those spongy, watery cucumbers, and we recollect the onions—those pungent onions—the thought of going back to the fleshpots comes upon us like a man of war.

But mighty grace soon puts it down, drowns the desire in tears of repentance, and makes us loathe ourselves to think that we should be such fools as to think more of fleshpots than of manna, and more of cucumbers than of Canaan. Again, we resolutely press forward towards Canaan, blushing to think that we should have in heart turned back into Egypt. Grace will not let us return to our old bondage.

And there is another that holds us. It is He with the hands nailed to the tree. Whenever He is revealed in us we feel that we cannot go back. A sight of Him with His face to the world's opposition, His face to the devil, His face to death, His face to hell, His face towards the wrath of God—and going through it all with boundless courage—makes us feel that we must go forward too, even till we enter into His rest.

Brethren, all these arguments we are moved to testify each one for himself, "I have opened my mouth unto the LORD, and I cannot go back."

III. Now, the last thing of all is that, if this is the case, there is something WHICH WE MUST DO. What we must do is this—if there is a present sacrifice demanded of us, we must make it directly, "I have opened my mouth unto the LORD: I cannot go back."

Now, if there is anything in your business, and you cannot be a Christian if you do it, abjure it at once and forever. Do not question about it, and do not ask a friend what you shall do, but follow conscience. If you know the thing is right, do it.

Do not ask your mother, or brother, or the wisest man that ever lived—consult not with flesh and blood—but follow Jesus at all hazards. Do not take time for second thoughts, but do it, and have done with it.

Oh, I have known Christians palter as to what they ought to do—their duty has been plain enough, but they have not liked it, and so they have wished for somebody to tell them that they might be Christians, and yet do wrong.

To get some sort of excuse from the judgment of others, they have gone fishing about to this and that minister, misrepresenting the circumstances to some extent, to gain the judgment they desired—till at last they have forged a sort of dispensation for sin from some good man's opinion, and then they have cheated their conscience by saying, "I feel much relieved. I can do it now, for I have consulted a gracious man, and he thinks I may." No consultation can be required where duty is plain.

"Oh, sir, but the sacrifice is great." If it were a thousand times greater, that does not enter into the question. Duty is imperative, and let it be done. If your doing right will make yourself and your children poor, so must it be. It were better that you were poor, and yet maintained your integrity, and continued in the service of God than that you should roll in riches by violating your conscience. Say, "I cannot go back." Make the sacrifice, and go on.

If you are to do this, however, you must ask for more grace, and dear brethren, wherever there is an ugly piece in the road, since you cannot go back, all you have to do is to ask the Lord to assist you over it, for you must go through it, and this can only be done by His strength. Recollect that your abiding faithful to the end does not depend upon yourself. You have to do it, but the Holy Spirit is to find you strength to do it.

The Negro said, "Massa, if the Lord say to Sambo, 'Jump through the brick wall,' I will jump. It is the Lord that will make me go through—but Sambo must jump." So it is with persevering in the face of difficulty and trouble.

If you are bidden to a hard duty, and it involves sacrifice and hardship, do not hesitate, but advance unflinchingly. It is the Lord who bids you do it, and if the Lord bids you go through the brick wall, He will make a hole in it for you, or make it soft for you, or in some way or other make you equal to the occasion. Yours it is to go through—do not stand back because of your own weakness, but let faith lay hold on the divine strength.

One other admonition to Christian people is this—burn the boats behind you. When the Roman commander meant victory, he landed his troops on the coast where he knew there were thousands of enemies, and he burned the boats, so as to cut off all chance of retreat.

"But how are we to get away if we are beaten?" "That is just it," he said, "we will not be beaten. We will not dream of such a thing." "Burn the boats"—that is what you Christian people must do. "Make no provision for the flesh." Let the separation between you and the world be final and irreversible. Say, "Here I go for Christ and His cross, for the truth of the Bible, for the laws of God, for holiness, for trust in Jesus, and never will I go back, come what may."

This is the right spirit. The Lord send it among us more and more! It is the spirit of martyrs. You want it, you converted working men—you want the spirit of martyrs. I know how your workmates jest, and jeer, and torment you. Well, do not think yourself hardly done by, but play the man, and bear it all, and say to yourself, "I did not quite reckon on this, but it does not matter. I have opened my mouth unto the Lord, and I cannot go back if it costs me everything."

I will not talk to you longer, for what, after all, brethren, can religion cost us compared with what our salvation cost our Lord? What is it to go forward if we compare it with the glory that is beyond? A pin's prick, that is all—and then you will be in heaven. Oh, to stand amongst the glorified! To hear the Master say, "Well done!" One might die a thousand deaths to get those two syllables, if there were nothing else, "Well done!"

To enjoy His smile, to share His crown, to stand amongst His palm-bearing hosts, and participate in His glory—this is worth all the difficulty and sacrifice involved in going forward—and ten thousand times more.

Therefore, accept this closing word. Forward, my brothers—forward! Whatever lies before you—the Red Sea or the rage of earth and hell combined—if God calls you, forward to it! He will bear you through to the glorious end.

The Lord be with you, for Christ's sake! Amen!

PORTION OF SCRIPTURE READ BEFORE SERMON—JUDGES 11:1-39

HYMNS FROM "OUR OWN HYMN BOOK"—661, 674, 668

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.