

CONSIDER BEFORE YOU FIGHT

NO. 632

A SERMON
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AT THE METROPOLITAN TABERNACLE, NEWINGTON

“What king, going to make war against another king, sitteth not down first, and consulteth whether he be able with ten thousand to meet him that cometh against him with twenty thousand? Or else, while the other is yet a great way off, he sendeth an ambassage, and desireth conditions of peace.”
Luke 14:31-32

EVERY sensible man endeavors to adapt his purposes to his strength. He does not begin to build a house which he will not be able to finish, nor commence a war which he cannot hope to fight through. The religion of Christ is the most reasonable one in the world, and Jesus Christ never desires to have any disciples who shall blindly follow Him without counting the cost.

We always esteem it to be a happy thing when we can get men to sit down and consider. The most of you are so full of other thoughts, so occupied with the world, ever running hither and thither about your ordinary business, that we cannot get you to think, or calmly sit down, and soberly look at things as in the light of eternity, and weigh them deliberately as you ought.

And yet it is only reasonable that the Master should ask you to do for Him, with regard to your spiritual matters, what you will admit that every sensible man does in his business continually. You are poor traders if you never have any stock-takings. You are likely to be ere long in the bankruptcy court if there is no periodical examination of accounts.

And so Christ would have you sit down sometimes, and take stock as to where you are, and what you are, and then figure up by some sort of arithmetic by which you may come to a truthful calculation, what you are able to do, and what not to do, and what therefore it is reasonable for you to undertake, and what unreasonable, and where your position ought, and where it ought not to be.

I especially invite this evening, those who are unconverted in this assembly, to some few thoughts upon the war in which they are engaged with God, hoping that perhaps if they consider a little upon it, they will send an ambassage and desire peace.

When I have spoken upon that, there will be some, perhaps, who will be running away with the idea that they will at once be at peace with God, and make war with Satan. But I shall want to pin them down a moment, and make them estimate their chances of victory in such a war as that, and see whether they are able to meet the black prince of darkness in their own strength.

We will try if we cannot to make it tonight the subject of a little homely talk about our souls, and a little earnest personal consideration about our future.

I. First, then, THERE ARE SOME HERE WHO ARE NOT THE FRIENDS OF GOD, and in this case he that is not with Him is against Him.

If you cannot look up to God and say, “My Father,” and feel that your heart beats true to Him, then remember it is a fact that you are His enemy. If you could have what you wish, there would be no God. If it were in your power you would never trouble yourself again with thoughts of Him. You would like to live, you say, as you list, and I know how you would list to live. It would be anyhow, rather than as God commands.

Now, as you are engaged in antagonism with Him, just think awhile—can you expect to succeed? Are you likely to win the day? You have entered into a conflict with His law, you do not intend to keep it. With His day, you do not regard it. You are thus at war with God. Now, is it likely that you will be successful? Is there a chance for you? If there be, why then, perhaps, it may be as well to go on.

If you can conquer Him, if the battlements of glory may yet see the flag of sin waved triumphant there, why, man, then try it. There will be at least an ambition worthy of Satan who desired sooner to reign in hell than to be ruled by heaven. But is there any hope for you? Let me put a few things before you which may, perhaps, make you think the conflict too unequal and thus lead you to abandon the thought at once.

Think of God's *stupendous power*! What is there which He cannot do? We see but little of God's power comparatively in our land. Now and then there comes a crash of thunder in a storm, and we look up with amazement when He sets the heavens on blaze with His lightning.

But go, and do business on the deep waters. Let your vessel fly before the howling hurricane. Mark how every staunch timber seems to crack as though it were but match-board, and the steady mast goes by the board, and snaps, and is broken to shivers. Mark what God does when He stirs up the great deep, and seems to bring heaven down, and lift the earth up till the elements mingle in a common mass of tempest.

Then go to the Alps and listen to the thunder of the avalanche. Stand amazed, as you look down some grim precipice, or peer with awe-struck wonder into the blue mysteries of a crevasse. See the leaping cataracts, and mark those frozen seas, the glaciers, as they come sweeping down the mountainside. Stay awhile till a storm shall gather there, and Alp shall talk to Alp, and those white prophetic heads shall seem to bow while the wings of tempest cover them! There you may learn something of the power of God amidst the crash of nature.

If you could have stood by the side of Dr. Woolfe, when rising early one morning, he went out of Aleppo, and upon turning his head, saw that Aleppo was no more, it having been in a single moment swallowed up by an earthquake, then again you might see what God can do. But why need I feebly recapitulate what you all know so well? Think of what that Book records of His deeds of prowess, when He unloosed the depths, and bade the fountains of the great deep be broken up, that the whole world that then was, might be covered with water.

Think of what He did at the Red Sea, when the depths stood upright as an heap for a time, while His people went through, and when afterwards with eager joy the floods clasped their hands and buried the foemen in the deep, never to rise again! Let such names as Og, king of Bashan, Sihon, king of the Amorites, and Sennacherib, the mighty, rise before your recollection, and mark what God has done! Who has ever dashed upon the bosses of His buckler without being wounded? What iron has He not broken? What spear has He not shivered?

Millions came against Him, but by the blast of the breath of His nostrils they fell, or they flew, like the chaff before the wind. Let the sea roar, and the fulness thereof, but the rocks stand still, and hurl off the waves in flakes of foam, and so does God when His foes are most enraged and passionate. He that sits in the heavens does laugh. The Lord does have them in derision, and He breaks them in pieces without a stroke of His hand or even the glance of His eye.

Think, sinner, think of Him with whom you contend. Have you an arm like God's? Can you thunder with a voice like His? Can you stamp with your foot and shake the mountains? Can you touch the hills and make them smoke? Can you say to the sea, "Be stirred to your depths," or can you call to the winds, and bid the steeds of tempest be unloosed?

If you cannot, then think of the battle! Attempt to do no more, but hie you back to your bed, and there commune with your heart, and make your peace with Him, against whom you cannot hope successfully to contend.

Think, again, O rebellious man, you have to deal not only with almighty, but with an ever *encompassing power*. Please to think how much you are in God's power tonight as it regards your temporal position. You are prospering in business, but the tide of prosperity may be turned in a way unknown to you. God has a thousand ways of stripping those whom He aforetime seemed to clothe most lavishly.

You dote upon that wife of yours. She may be smitten before your eyes, and waste with consumption or decline, or more rapidly still, she may be taken from you at a stroke, and then where is your joy? Those children, those happy prattlers who make glad your hearth—could you hold them for a moment if God should call back their spirits? If He said, “Return you children of men,” your prayers, the physician, your love—what could all these avail you? You have but to buy the coffin, and the shroud, and the grave, and bury your dead out of your sight.

God can sweep away all, if He will, and leave you penniless, childless, a widower, without comfort in the world. I would not contend with Him who has so many ways to wound me. I am vulnerable at so many points and He knows how to pierce me to the quick in them all. I will, therefore, make Him my friend rather than my foe. I had better not strive with Him who has the key of the postern, and of the front gate, and of the iron gate, and who can storm every position along my bastion whenever He shall please.

Think, again, how much you are personally in His hand! You are strong, you say. You will do a day’s work with any man. There are few can lift a load more readily than you can perhaps, and yet one second would be enough to paralyze every limb. Your faculties are clear. You can write with perspicuity, no one can see through an intricate account more rapidly than you can, or find out a secret more speedily. And yet one tick of that clock is time enough to reduce either you or me to a driveling idiot or to a raving madman.

A mysterious hand falls on that brain and cools it, so that there is no longer the light of intellect within it, or else an awful breath fans its flame, till it burns like Nebuchadnezzar’s furnace, and the soul walks within it a martyr, doomed to live in the midst of fire.

Think of this—not many yards from here there stands in Bedlam an awful proof of what the Providence of God can do in one moment with those who seemed the most sane, the most witty, and the most able of men. And you have not to go far in either direction, before at the gate of some hospital, you will find how soon the body may become very, very low, even to the dust, if God but will it.

I would not, O sinner, I would not have God other than my friend, while I am thus helplessly in His control. If the moth is in my hand, and I can crush it at my will and pleasure, surely if that moth had wit and sense, it would not provoke me to anger nor seek to bring down my plagues upon it. But if it could, it would seek to nestle near my heart, that I, so able to crush it, might use my power for its protection, and might make what wit I have to be its wisdom for its shelter and defense.

It is well also to remember the *mighty army* of the Lord of Hosts, and that you live amidst the creatures of God who all are ready to do His bidding. As the children of Israel journeyed in the wilderness, they were preserved by God from many foes and innumerable dangers which lurked around waiting to destroy them. Once God gave the fiery serpents permission to assault the host, and what death and terror immediately filled the camp! They must have seen then, that it was no small thing to be at variance with God, when He had so many allies waiting to do His bidding.

How clearly this was shown in the plagues of Egypt, when frogs, locusts, and lice, hail and fire, plague and death flooded the ill-fated land, when beckoned on by the uplifted finger of God. He can still call to His help the forces of creation. The stars in their courses fought against Sisera, and God can still make all things work for evil as well as good, if He be pleased to command them.

When Herod strove with God, he was smitten of worms and died, and God has still a countless army of servants who do His commandments, hearkening to the voice of His word. You had better wait awhile and think how you can meet them. Are your friends as numerous? Can you muster an army like God’s? Is the muster-roll of your hosts like His? Consider the heavens, for He marshals yon starry multitude and calls them all by names, because He is great in strength, not one fails. Be wise and enter into covenant with Him through blood, and rush not on to certain defeat by seeking to out rival God.

Remember moreover what is the extent of *God’s wisdom*, and that His foolishness is greater than your highest knowledge. A good general is worth more than a regiment of men. When Stonewall

Jackson was killed, his enemies and friends alike felt that his death was more than the loss of ten thousand men. Our Iron Duke, when alive, was a strength to our army beyond all calculation.

Now mark the skill and infinite wisdom of the God who leads the army of the skies. All light and knowledge are His. He is the Ancient of days and His experience runs back to all eternity. You are but of yesterday and know nothing. His plans are beyond your conception, but He knows the way you take. He is far above your thoughts and ever out of your sight, but He can see you through and through, and knows you better than you know yourself.

Do not show your folly by weighing your wisdom against His in the scales or by expecting to outshine Him so as to triumph over Him. Poor moth rushing into the flame, you will be consumed amidst the pity of good men and the derision of evil ones.

Yet there is another matter I want you to recollect, you that are the enemies of God—that you have a *conscience*. You have not got rid of it yet. You have a thief in that candle of the Lord, it is true, but still it is alight. It is not put out. And God has ways of making it to become a terrible plague to you, if you do not accept it as a friend. Conscience is meant to be man's armor-bearer, beneath whose shield he may fight the battles of the right. But if you make it your enemy, then conscience often places a sword in such a way as to cut and wound you severely.

You have a conscience and that is a very awkward thing for a man to have who is an enemy of God. If I were God's enemy, I should prefer having no monitor to call my attention to the holy character and righteous law of the Most High. I should be glad to get rid of every particle of moral sense. But you have consciences, and most of you are not yet dead to all feeling of guilt and shame. You cannot, therefore, sin so cheaply as others.

And if you do for the present manage to put Mr. Conscience down, yet since he is still in you, the time will come when you will find his voice grow louder, and there will be a terror in that voice which will make it a terror for you to sleep, and hard for you to go about your daily business with your accustomed regularity.

Those men who serve God most faithfully, yet find that their conscience, when it can accuse them of anything wrong, though it is their best friend, is no very pleasant companion. It is said that David's heart smote him. I would sooner have anybody smite me than my own heart, for it strikes with so hard a blow, and hits the place where one may most tenderly feel it.

And it will be so with you unless you get your "conscience seared with a hot iron." I am afraid there will come a time when you will not rest in your beds, nor be able anywhere to find peace or satisfaction. I think therefore, if I had a friend of God inside my heart, I would not like to fight with God, so long as he continued within me. Oh, that you would be at peace with Him, "and thereby good shall come unto you."

One other reflection, for I must not keep you thinking on this point long, it is this. Remember *you must die* and therefore it is a pity to be at enmity with God. You may put it off, and say, "I shall not die yet," but you do not know. How can you tell? It is possible that you may die tomorrow. But suppose that you live for the next twenty or thirty years? Why what is that?

I am only thirty years of age, and yet I confess that I never thought time so short as I feel it to be now. When we were children, we thought twelve months was a great length of time. When we were twenty, a year seemed to be a very respectable period. But now it flies, and some of my friends here, whose hair is turning grey, will tell you that whether it is fifty, sixty, or seventy years, it all seems but a mere dream, a snap of the finger, it is gone so soon. Well, just push through a little interval of time, then you must die.

My dear friend, will it not be a very dreadful thing to die when you are at war with God? If you could fight this out for ever under such circumstances as those in which you now are, I could not then commend the struggle, but since it must come to such an awful pause, since there must be that death-rattle in your throat, since there must be that clammy sweat upon your brow, O you will want some better business than to be carrying arms against the God of heaven in your dying moments.

They that have God for their friend, yet find death no very pleasant task, but what will *you* find it, who will have to strike yourselves in every blow that you are aiming against the Most High, whom you have made and continue to make your enemy.

Here is this, too, to think of, there is a *future state*, so that when you die, you have to live again. We know very little about that next state, and I do not intend to say much about it tonight. You are launched without your body, an unclothed spirit, into a world which you have never seen. Will you find companions there or will you be alone? Where will it be? What sort of place will it be like?

I should not choose to enter upon the realm of spirits without having God to be my friend. It would be a dreadful thing to get into that mysterious unknown country, having nothing to take with me across its boundary except this—an inveterate enmity to the King that reigns supreme in it. If I must cross the border, and go into a land I have never trodden, I would like, at least, to carry a passport with me, or to be able to say, “I am a friend of the King that reigns here.” But to go there as God’s enemy—why how terrible it must be!

Besides, let me say, you cannot hope to succeed, *all experience is against you*. There never was one yet that either in this state or the next has fought with God and conquered, and you will not be the first. For they who contend with God all come to this one conclusion, “He comes forth in his strength, and his enemies are given like stubble to the fire, and like wax to the flame: He lifteth up his voice, and they melt away: He looks at them, and that one flash of fire withers them forever, and out of the bottomless pit of despair they weep and wail the piteous but useless regret, that their harvest is past, and their summer is ended, and that they are not saved. For they have spent their strength against their God, and so have brought themselves where ruin is eternal, and hope can never come.” Oh that you would send an ambassage,, and be at peace!

Methinks I hear some say, “Well, we wish to give up the contest. But what is to be done so as to be at peace with God?” I ask, Have you got an ambassador to go to God for you? That is the first thing. He cannot look at *you*. Jesus Christ is the Ambassador between God and man, can you commit your case into His hand? Will you do so?

If so, your case will go well. God cannot deny Him any request. He has a right to all He ever asks the Father to give, and the Father is always well-pleased in Him, and delights to grant Him whatever He desires. That Savior is willing to plead your cause. He waits to be gracious. I am sent to tell you the good news of His love and mercy, to warn you of the certain doom which awaits all who turn from Christ. And to bid you and every sin-sick rebel to come at once, just as you are, to the footstool of mercy.

And I can pledge the honor of God, (as being Christ’s ambassador for this purpose), that if you come, He will in no wise cast you out. And the terms of peace are very brief. They are these, *give up the traitors*. There can be no peace between you and God while you harbor sin. Give them up, and be willing to renounce every sin of every sort and kind, for one harbored traitor will prevent God concluding peace with you.

Sinner, what say you? Is it hard to give up your sin? Does that condition strike you as unreasonable? Out with the knife, man, and cut the throat of every iniquity. Why, there is no sin for which it is worth your while to be damned. A little rioting, and chambering, and wantonness—is that worth hell-fire forever?

What, to have your giddy amusements for an hour or two, is this a due recompense for an eternity of fire unmitigated by a drop of water? I pray you, be reasonable. Barter not away your soul for trifles. Pawn not eternity for the mere fictions of an instant. God give you grace, sinner, to not kick at that condition, but at once cast out your enemies and gods, and then *lay hold on Christ*, on Jesus Christ alone, and let Him stand as Ambassador for you. You cannot fight it out. Let peace be made. Oh may it be made tonight, through the blood of Jesus Christ, God’s dear Son.

Then next, *confess* that you deserve the King’s wrath. Bow that head, put the rope about your neck, as though you felt you deserved that the executioner should lead you forth. *Pray to God* for pardon, and

cry, “God be merciful to me, a sinner!” And then cling to the skirts of that appointed Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ, who on yonder bloody tree made expiation for the sins of God’s enemies, that they might thereby become God’s friends.

God demands of you a confession of your guilt. He will be honored by your humbling yourself before Him. Your sin has aimed at His glory and now He will glorify Himself by your repentance. It were only just on His part if He spurned you away, and cast you out into the pit which has no bottom, but He has said that whoso confesses his sin shall obtain forgiveness. Go, therefore, in the spirit of the publican, smite upon your breast, and say, “God be merciful to me a sinner.”

Confess that you deserve hell, but ask for heaven, and you shall not plead in vain. Only honor God’s justice and appeal to His mercy through the Lord Jesus Christ. This, surely, is not much for God to expect at your hands. If you will not submit, what can you say when God shall crush you? You refuse to bend the knee and to bow the head, what will you do when God shall trample on you in His fury and tread you in His hot displeasure?

You must, therefore, now in the accepted time, while it is still the day of mercy, seek His face, and with weeping and supplication, “Take with you words and turn unto the LORD, and he will have mercy upon you; and to our God, for he will abundantly pardon.”

II. And now we turn the subject, so as to look at THE SECOND CONTEST, IN WHICH I TRUST MANY ARE ANXIOUS TO BE ENGAGED.

Some young spirit that has been touched with a sense of his own condition, and somewhat aroused, may be saying, “I will be God’s enemy no longer. I will be His friend.” Bowing the knee, that heart cries, “Oh God, reconcile me unto Yourself by the death of Your dear Son. I throw down all my weapons. I confess my guilt. I plead for mercy. For Jesus’ sake vouchsafe it to me.” “But” says that soul, “if I am the friend of God, I must be the foe of Satan, and from this day I pledge myself to fight forever with Satan till I get the victory and am free from sin.”

My dear friend, I want you to stop. I do not wish you to make peace with the evil one, but I want you to consider what you are at. There are a few things I would whisper in your ear, and one is, that *sin is sweet*. The uppermost drops of sin’s cup glitter and sparkle. There is pleasure in sin of a certain sort and for a certain season. It is a poisoned sweet, it is but a temporary delusion, but still the world does promise fair. Its gingerbread is gilt, and though it wears nothing but tinsel, and a little gold-leaf now and then, yet it does look very much like gold.

Can you? Can you resist sin, when it seems so charming? The next time the cup is brought you—you know the flavor of it—oh, it is rich—can you turn away? Are you certain that you will be able to dash it from your lips? Ah, man, you will find it different when the trial-hour comes, to what it is now that you are sitting in the Tabernacle and resolving, away from the temptation, that you will do the right.

Remember, again, you may be *enticed by friends* who will be very pressing. You can give up sin just now, but you do not know who may be the tempter at some future time. If *she* should allure you, who has tempted so well before! If *he—he!* should speak! He! The very word has wakened up your recollection.

If he should speak as he alone can speak, and look as only he can look, can you then resist, and stand out? That witching voice, that fascinating eye! Oh how many souls have been damned for what men call love! Oh that they had but a little *true* love of themselves and others, and would not thus pander to the prince of hell.

But alas, alas, while the cup itself looks sweet, there is to be added to it the hand that holds it out. It is not easy to contend with Satan when he employs the service of someone whom you esteem highly, and love with all your heart. Remember the case of Solomon whose wisdom was marvelous, but who was enticed by his wives, and fell a prey into the hands of the evil one.

It needs a spirit like the Master’s to be able to say, “Get thee behind me, Satan,” to the tempter, when he has the appearance of one of your best loved friends. The devil is a crafty being, and if he cannot force the door, he will try and get the key which fits the wards of the lock, and by the means of our

tenderest love and affections, will make a way for himself into our hearts. You will find it no easy task therefore to contend with him.

Then again, remember, man, there is *habit*. You say you will all of a sudden give up your sins and fight Satan? Do not tell me that. Can the Ethiopian change his skin or the leopard his spots? If so, then he that is accustomed to do evil may learn to do well. If you had never sinned as you have sinned, there were not this difficulty with you. But he that has gone day after day, and year after year, into sin, is not so easily turned from it. As well hope to make Niagara leap up instead of down, as make human nature flow back to virtue instead of going downward to sin.

You do not know yourself. Habit is an iron bond, and he that is once enveloped in it may pull and strain, but he will tear away his flesh sooner than break the links of that dread chain. We have seen men who, convinced of the error of their ways, have sought to turn from them without asking the help of God. For a time they have made some little progress in appearance, but it has only been like the retreating of the waves at the rising of the tide. Their evil habits have returned upon them with a rush and have covered them deeper than before.

Read the parable of our Lord concerning the unclean spirit which went out of the man, and roamed through dry places, seeking rest but finding none, and it said, "I will return to the place from whence I went out." It came back, and found it swept and garnished, and then took to it seven other evil spirits, more wicked than itself. So the last end of that man was worse than the first. Thus it is with those who enter upon the work of saving themselves, without looking up by faith to God for His needed help.

Satan will triumph over you. You are like the fly in the toils of the spider's web, the more it struggles, the more it will be encompassed. You must cry for help as you are quite unable of yourself to escape from the snares of the wicked one. He has you bound fast, hand and foot, and you will never break his cords, nor be able to cast his bands from you. You have not seven locks of strength like Samson, but you will certainly be overcome.

Again, you think you will give up sin, but *ridicule* is very unpleasant, and when the finger comes to be pointed at you, and they say, "Ah, so you have set up for a saint, I see." When they put it as only they can put it, in such a sharp, cutting, grating manner. When it is wrapped up so wittily in an epigram that is told all round the shop against you, and when, moreover, there is some weakness of yours, some giddy weakness, and they know how to hook your attempt at saintship to your weakness, and they bandy that all round, and there are fifty laughing faces at you, can you stand that?

Yes, it is a very pretty thing for you to come here on Sundays and say what you will do, but it is different to do it on Mondays. To be laughed at is not really to a sensible man anything very wonderful, for methinks you have only to get used to it, and then you will just as much expect to hear people laugh at you as to hear birds singing when you walk out of a morning. But at first that is a very sharp trial, that trial of "cruel mockings," and many who have been going to fight Satan have drawn back, for they found they could not stand it.

When the Jews were rebuilding the walls of Jerusalem after their return from captivity, one of the most severe tests of their zeal and devotion was the laughter of their enemies who came and looked on, and said, "What do these feeble Jews? Even that which they build, if a fox go up, he shall even break down their stone wall."

The words of their foes were more cutting than swords, and keenly did they feel in their spirits the derision of the scoffers. It is as painful now for the sensitive spirit as it was of old, but you must not be daunted. Heaven is worth buying, even though it should cost a life heaped full of stinging words and malicious sayings from a deriding and taunting world.

Did not Christ Himself show us how to endure this trial? See His foes gathered around Him when He hung dying on the cross. They laugh at Him even there, "He saved others, himself he cannot save," said they as they wagged their heads, and mocked alike His dignity and His woe. "If thou be the Christ, come down from the cross, and we will believe on thee."

These sayings must have been more bitter to His spirit than the wormwood mingled with gall was to His lips. You must follow Christ here also if you would contend, as He did, with Satan. Then count the cost. Can you drink His cup and be baptized with His baptism?

And yet further, let me say to you, you who are for going to heaven so zealously—*gain*, gain is a very pretty thing, a very pleasant affair. Who does not like to make money? You know, if you can be religious, and grow rich at the same time, that will just suit some of you. Oh yes, the two going together, that will be admirable. You will kill two birds with one stone.

Mr. By-Ends said, “Now, if a man by being religious can get a good wife who has a considerable sum of money, and if by being religious he gets a good shop, and many customers, why,” says he, “then religion is a good thing. To get a good wife is a good thing, and to get customers, that is another good thing, and so,” he says, “the whole is a good thing put together.”

But he that knows Mr. By-Ends, knows that he is an old rogue, notwithstanding that he puts it prettily. I have known him. He is a member of this church, I am sorry to say. I never went into a church where he was not a member. I have tried to turn him out, and did once, but there was another one of the family left inside, and however many you may expel there are sure to be more of that breed remaining. But there sometimes comes a pinch with Mr. By-Ends. Now if you should find that shutting up your shop on Sundays should ruin your business, well, what then? Would you stand it?

Now there are some of you who try it every now and then when you get spasmodically godly, but it does not pay you, you find. And so you begin once more to open shop on the Lord’s day. Some of you Sunday traders discover that it gets a little hot and strong for you, when you come to the Tabernacle occasionally, and you shut up for a season, but soon you say, “Well, people must live.” Yes, and people must die, and people must be damned too, if they try to live by breaking God’s laws.

Remember that it will not pay to be religious, some people fancy. We have heard of a man saying, “I cannot afford to keep a conscience, it is too expensive an article for me.” Ah, but keep in mind the saying of the Lord, “What shall it profit a man if he gain the whole world, and lose his own soul? or what shall a man give in exchange for his soul?”

There is such a thing as being, “Penny wise, and pound foolish.” And there is such a thing also as being “worldly wise, and eternally foolish.” Think of this then, for the trial will come to you in the shape of yellow gold, and it will be hard to keep yourself from the glittering bait which the god of this world will lay before you.

I am putting these things to you so that you may calculate whether you can carry on the war against the devil with all these fearful odds against you. If I were a recruiting sergeant, I should not do this. He puts the shilling into the country lad’s hand, and the lad may say fifty things. “Oh never mind,” says the gallant soldier, “you know, it is all glory, nothing but glory. There, I will just tie these ribbons round your hat. There are some long strips of glory to begin with, and then all your days it will be just glory, glory forever. And you will die a general, and be buried at Westminster Abbey, and they will play the ‘Dead March in Saul,’ and all that kind of thing.”

Now I cannot thus deceive or try to cheat men to enlist under the banner of the cross. I do not desire to raise objections to it. All I want of you is to count the cost, lest you should be like unto him who began to build without being able to finish. That is the misery of so many. I advise you, if you are about to declare war with Satan, to see whether you are able to carry it out and win the victory.

“Well,” says one, “it is hard to be saved.” Nobody ever thought it was not, I hope. What does Peter say? “If the righteous scarcely be saved, where shall the ungodly and the sinner appear?” “It is hard to be saved,” you say. Whoever said it was not? But it is not hard to be saved, if a man is willing to be received according to the plan which God has appointed. If Christ undertakes it, then it is done, and my counsel to those of you who are about making war with Satan, is to remember that it is too much for you, and therefore do not attempt it in your own strength. Beware of this.

I know Satan will tempt you first of all to believe that you need no Savior. Then if you are not convinced of this, but are disquieted because of sin, he suggests that you can save yourself. He speaks of

Abana and Pharpar rivers of Damascus which flow close by your own door. He says, “Wash in these home streams and be clean. Stay where you are and help yourself.” But if you listen to the words of the seducer of souls, you are lost and undone forever.

Can the man born blind see to operate upon his own scale-covered eyes so as to give himself sight? Can the crippled man run away from his lameness and outrun the feebleness of his feet? Can the dead man exert himself to make the life-tide flow once more in his veins, and flush his cheek anew with the glow of health? Can he call back his departed spirit from the shades of the unseen world, and make it reoccupy its decaying habitation, and bid the marks of the mighty consumer be gone, and leave no trace of Death’s conquest behind, to remind the returning inhabitant that the palace had been occupied by the ruthless spoiler?

We answer, no. A mighty finger must touch and open the eyes. An omnipotent arm must lift up the paralyzed and impotent man into strength and power. And most evidently, if life is to be secured, the voice of God alone can speak the word which shall make the dead to live.

On this point we wish to be clearly understood. You will never of yourself successfully resist sin so as to escape its thralldom, how much less can you remove its guilt. The cancer is in your blood and you can never get it out. The black deed is done, and it is written, “The soul that sinneth it shall die.” Oh, then at once ask help of Him who alone can save you from the wrath to come.

Remember, poor feeble one, nothing is too hard for God, and therefore ask Almighty strength to come unto your help. It is true you cannot contend with your besetting sins, your passions, your corruptions of whatever sort they may be, are much too strong for you. Old Adam is too mighty for you with your best intentions.

But there is a strong one, whose hand, once pierced, is always ready and at the service of every sinner who would have Satan cast out. There is one “mighty to save” who can come to the rescue, and do for you what you cannot do for yourself. Oh that you had Christ tonight, so that at once you might cry to Him, “Jesus, save me. I see the fight is too unequal for me, I cannot drive out my sins, I cannot fight my way to heaven. Come and help me, Lord Jesus. I put myself into Your hands. Wash me in Your blood. Fill me with Your Spirit. Save me with Your great salvation, and let me be with You where You are at the last.”

“No man can save himself,” says one. Yet the case is very like that of the master who sent his negro servant with a letter. The negro was, like some others, rather lazy, and came back with it. “Why did you not deliver it?” “I could not.” “Could not deliver it?” “No, master.” “Why not?” “A deep river, sir, very deep river, I could not get across.” “A deep river?” said he. “Yes.”

“Is not there a ferryman there?” “Do not know, sir. If there was, he was on the other side.” “Did you call across, ‘Boat, ahoy.’” “No, sir.” “Why then, you rascal,” said he, “what does it matter? It is no excuse. It is true, you could not get across the river, but then there was one there who could take you, and you never cried to him.”

And so it is in your case. You say, “I cannot save myself.” Quite true. But there is one who can, and you have never cried to Him, for, mark you, if you cry to Him, if your heart says, “Oh, Savior, come and save me,” and if your spirit rests in Him, deep as that river of your sin certainly is, He knows how to bear you safely through it, and land you on the other shore. May He do that with each of you. With God all things are possible, though with man it is impossible.

May the blessing of the Most High rest upon us this night, for Jesus’ sake. Amen.

PORTION OF SCRIPTURE READ BEFORE SERMON—LUKE 14

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.