

Lingerers Hastened

by C.H. Spurgeon

C.H. Spurgeon passionately urges believers to urgently and lovingly compel sinners to flee from sin and embrace salvation, exemplifying the merciful urgency of the angels who hastened Lot out of Sodom.

Scripture: Genesis 19:16, Luke 19:10, Matthew 10:16, Mark 5:19, John 3:16, Luke 16:24, Hebrews 12:1, 1 Corinthians 15:58

Topics: "Salvation", "Evangelism", "Divine Mercy"

Description

In 'Lingerers Hastened,' C.H. Spurgeon passionately exhorts believers to emulate the angels' merciful urgency in leading sinners away from destruction. He challenges God's messengers to boldly proclaim the Gospel, confront sin with truth, and persist in loving entreaties until souls are saved. Spurgeon balances the doctrines of divine election with the believer's responsibility to actively and compassionately persuade others to embrace salvation. This sermon is a stirring call to evangelistic zeal and perseverance.

Transcript

"And while he lingered, the men laid hold upon his hand, and upon the hand of his wife, and upon the hand of his two daughters the Lord being merciful unto him: and they brought him forth, and set him outside the city." Genesis 19:16.

EVEN as Lot lingered in Sodom, awakened sinners are apt to tarry long in their sin and unbelief. Some few are suddenly brought to Christ, and, like Saul of Tarsus, within a few hours enjoy complete Gospel liberty. But many others are unwise children and tarry long in the place of danger, loitering where they ought to hasten and wasting time which they should diligently redeem. It is angelic work to quicken those who linger. The angels who descended to earth in the disguise of wayfarers did not disdain to be employed in such a gracious office, and, if you and I would be like angels, we must do as they did—take procrastinating sinners by the hand and endeavor to compel them to escape—constraining them to flee from the wrath to come.

It is a sign of God's great mercy to any soul when it has an anxious friend to quicken its pace heavenward and Christ-ward. So the text tells us, "The Lord being merciful unto him." Let no unconverted person think it an annoyance to be rebuked for his sin or to be frequently exhorted to lay hold on eternal life. It is a great loving-kindness from the Father of mercies to be beset by the persevering earnestness of believing friends. Look upon it in that light, O young man, over whom a mother yearns anxiously, for, if God's longsuffering in bearing with you should lead you to repentance, much more should this kindness in

sending you a compassionate friend constrain you to yield your heart to Him. Bless God every day for kind-hearted relatives who labor to guide you to the Lord Jesus! You cannot have a greater blessing.

I thought, this morning, that perhaps the Lord might make me to some of you the angel of mercy by enabling me to lead you out of the Sodom of your sins and to conduct you into a state of present salvation. Oh, how I long for this with eagerness of desire! Happy shall I be if I may win your souls, and, while you will rejoice in the mercy given, I shall rejoice exceedingly in being the instrument of it by the power of the Spirit. First, I shall address a few words, this morning, to God's messengers, and then, secondly, to those who linger.

I. First, I have to speak TO GOD'S MESSENGERS. I hope they are very numerous in this Church. Every Believer should be an ambassador from Heaven. "As my Father has sent Me," said the Well-Beloved, "even so send I you." You are sent, my Brethren, to gather together the lost sheep of the house of Israel, and, like your Master, to seek and to save that which is lost. I speak solemnly to you who have wept over Jerusalem and who are prying your true love to souls by your exertions for them. And I remind you, in the first place, that it is a glorious work to seek to save men and that for its sake you should be witting to put up with the greatest possible inconveniences.

The angels never hesitated when they were bid to go to Sodom. They descended without demur and went about their work without delay. Although the report of Sodom's detestable iniquity had gone up to Heaven and the Lord would bear no longer with that filthy city, yet, from the purity of Heaven, the angels did not hesitate to descend to behold the infamy of Sodom. Where God sent them they failed not to go. Note how the chapter before us begins. I have thought it might be applied to the holy laborers in the dark lanes, and courts, and houses of infamy in this city. "There came two angels to Sodom at even." What? Angels? Did angels come to Sodom? To Sodom, and yet angels? Yes, and none the less angelic because they came to Sodom, but all the more so, because in unquestioning obedience to their Master's high behests they sought out the elect one and his family, to deliver him and his from impending destruction.

However near to Christ you may be, however much your character may be like that of your Lord, you who are called to such service, must never say, "I cannot talk to these people—they are so depraved and debased. I cannot enter that haunt of sin to tell of Jesus. I sicken at the thought! Its associations are altogether too revolting to my feelings." But, because you are there wanted, men of God, you must there be found! To whom should the physician go but to the sick, and where can the distributor of the alms of mercy find such a fitting sphere as among those whose spiritual destitution is extreme? Be you angels of mercy each one of you and God speed you in your soul-saving work.

As you have received Christ Jesus into your hearts, so imitate Him in your lives. Let the woman that is a sinner receive your kindness, for Jesus looked on her with mercy. Let the man who has been most mad with wickedness be sought after, for Jesus healed demoniacs. Let no type of sin, however terrible, be thought by you to be beneath your pity, or beyond your labor. Seek out those who have wandered farthest and snatch from the flame the firebrands which are already smoking in it!

Note again—I still speak to those who are messengers of God to men's souls—when you go to lost souls, you must, as these angels did, let them plainly see their condition and their danger. "Up," they said, "for God will destroy this place." If you really long to save men's souls, you must tell them a great deal of disagreeable Truths of God. The preaching of the wrath of God has come to be sneered at nowadays, and even good people are half ashamed of it. A mushy sentimentality about love and goodness has hushed, in

a great measure, plain Gospel expostulations and warnings. But, my Brothers, if we expect souls to be saved we must declare unflinchingly, with all affectionate fidelity, the terrors of the Lord.

"Well," said the Scotch lad when he listened to the minister who told his congregation that there was no Hell, or at any rate only a temporary punishment. "Well," said he, "I need not come and hear this man any longer, for if it is as he says, it is all right, and religion is of no consequence. And if it is not as he says, then I must not hear him again, because he will deceive me." "Therefore," says the Apostle, "Knowing the terrors of the Lord we persuade men." Let not modern squeamishness prevent plain speaking concerning everlasting torment. Are we to be more gentle than the Apostles? Shall we be wiser than the inspired preachers of the Word of God? Until we feel our minds overshadowed with the dread thought of the sinner's doom we are not in a fit frame for preaching to the unconverted. We shall never persuade men if we are afraid to speak of the judgment and the condemnation of the unrighteous.

There was none so infinitely gracious as our Lord Jesus Christ, yet no preacher ever uttered more faithful words of thunder than He did. It was He who spoke of the place "where their worm dies not and their fire is not quenched." It was He who said, "These shall go away into everlasting punishment." It was He who spoke the parable concerning that man in Hell who longed for a drop of water to cool his tongue. We must be as plain as Christ was—as downright in honesty to the souls of men—or we may be called to account for our treachery at the last. If we flatter our fellows into fond dreams as to the littleness of future punishment, they will eternally detest us for so deluding them—and in the world of woe they will invoke perpetual curses upon us for having prophesied smooth things, and having withheld from them the Truth of God.

When we have affectionately and plainly told the sinner that the wages of his sin will be death and that woe will come upon him because of his unbelief, we must go farther, and must, in the name of our Lord Jesus, exhort the guilty one to escape from the deserved destruction. Observe that these angels, though they understood that God had elected Lot to be saved, did not omit a single exhortation or leave the work to itself, as though it were to be done by predestination apart from instrumentality. They said, "Arise, take your wife and your two daughters which are here, lest you be consumed."

How impressive is each admonition! What force and eagerness of love gleams in each entreaty! "Escape for your life! Look not behind you! Neither stay you in all the plain! Escape to the mountain lest you be consumed." Every word is quick and powerful, decisive and to the point. Souls need much earnest expostulation and affectionate exhortation to constrain them to escape from their own ruin. Were they wise, the bare information of their danger would be enough and the prospect of a happy escape would be sufficient. But they, as they are utterly unwise, as you and I know—for we were once such as they are—they must be urged, persuaded and entreated to look to the Crucified that they may be saved! We would never have come to Christ unless Divine constraint had been laid upon us, and neither will they.

That constraint usually comes by instrumentality—let us seek to be such instruments. If it had not been for earnest voices that spoke to us and earnest teachers that beckoned us to come to the Cross, we would never have come. Let us, therefore, repay the debt we owe to the Church of God and seek as much as lies in us to do unto others as God in His mercy has done unto us. I beseech you, my Brothers, be active to persuade men with all your powers of reasoning and argument, salting the whole with tears of affection. Do not let any doctrinal notions stand in the way of the freest persuading when you are dealing with the minds of men, for sound doctrine is perfectly reconcilable therewith.

I remember great complaint being made against a sermon of mine, "Compel Them to Come In," in which I spoke with much tenderness for souls. That sermon was said to be Arminian and unsound. Brethren, it is a small matter to be judged of men's judgment, for my Master set His seal on that message. I never preached a sermon by which so many souls were won to God, as our Church meetings can testify! And all over the world, where the sermon has been scattered, sinners have been saved through its instrumentality, and, therefore, if it is vile to exhort sinners, I purpose to be viler still!

I am as firm a Believer in the Doctrines of Grace as any man living, and a true Calvinist after the order of John Calvin himself—but if it is thought an evil thing to bid the sinner lay hold on eternal life—I will be yet more evil in this respect! And I will herein imitate my Lord and His Apostles, who, though they taught that salvation is of Divine Grace, and Grace alone, feared not to speak to men as rational beings and responsible agents, and bid them, "strive to enter in at the strait gate," and, "labor not for the meat which perishes, but for that meat which endures unto everlasting life." Beloved Friends, cling to the great Truth of electing love and Divine Sovereignty, but let not this bind you in fetters when, in the power of the Holy Spirit, you become fishers of men.

Learn, still further, from the case before us that where words suffice not, as they frequently will not, you must adopt other modes of pressure. The angel took them by the hand. I have much faith under God in close dealings with men. Personal entreaties, by the power of the Holy Spirit, do wonders! To grasp a man's hand while you speak with him may be wise and helpful, for sometimes if you can get one by the hand and show your anxiety by pleading with him, God will bless it. It is well to cast your words, as men drop pebbles into a well, right down into the depth of the soul, quietly, solemnly, when the man is alone. Often is such a means effectual where the preacher with his sermon has labored in vain.

If you cannot win men by words, you must say to yourself, "what can I do?" and go to the Lord with the same enquiry. By the pertinacity of your earnestness you must trouble them into thoughtfulness. As by continual coming the woman wearied the unjust judge, so you do by your continual anxiety and perseverance, weary them in their sins till they will happily give you a little heed in order, if possible, to be rid of you, if for nothing else! If you cannot reach them because they will not read the Bible, yet you can thrust a good book in their way which may say to them what you cannot say. You can write them a letter, short but earnest, and tell them how you feel. You can continue in prayer for them. You can stir up the arm of God and beseech the Most High to come to the rescue.

There have been cases in which, when everything else has failed, a tear, the tear of disappointed love, has done the work. I think it was Mr. Knill who, one day, when distributing tracts among the soldiers, was met by a man who cursed him and said to his fellow soldiers, "Make a ring round him, and I will stop his tract distributing once and for all," and then he uttered such fearful oaths and curses that Mr. Knill, who could not escape, burst into a flood of tears. Years afterwards, when he was preaching in the streets, a member of the British Grenadier Guards came up, and said, "Mr. Knill, do you know me?" "No, I do not," he said, "I don't know that I ever saw you."

"Do you remember the soldier who said, 'Make a ring round him and stop his tract distributing,' and do you remember what you did?" "No, I do not." "Why, you broke into tears and when I got home those tears melted my heart, for I saw you were so in earnest that I felt ashamed of myself. And now I preach, myself, that same Jesus whom once I despised." Oh that you might have such a strong love for perishing sinners that you will put up with their rebuffs and rebukes, and say to them, "Strike me if you will, but hear me! Ridicule me, but still I will plead with you! Cast me under your feet as though I were the offscouring of all

things, but at any rate, I will not let you perish if it is in my power to warn you of your danger."

I thought, as I read my text, that it gave us a striking example of doing all we can. Lot and his wife, and the two daughters—well, that was four—the angels had only four hands, so they did all that they could. There was a hand for each. You notice the text expressly says they took hold of the hand of Lot, and the hand of his wife, and the hand of his two daughters. There were no more persons, and no more helping hands, so that there was just enough instrumentality, but there was not a hand to spare! I wish there were in this Church no idle hands, but that each Believer had both hands occupied in leading souls to Jesus Christ! I do not know what more I can do. I wish I knew. If there were any possibility of getting at some of you, to bring you to Christ, I would not leave a stone unturned!

But I am afraid all our members cannot truthfully say as much as that. Some few can, and I rejoice therein most heartily. I am afraid some of you, although saved yourselves, do but very little for my Lord and Master. And while this great city is perishing, and tens of thousands are going down into the place where our prayers cannot reach them, and where our tears can be of no help, you let them go as though it were of no consequence! You utter no lamentations and make no efforts on their behalf! Let the text rebuke you, my fellow laborers, and God give you Grace to be more earnest in the future.

Observe, also, that as those angels set us an example in using all their power, so they also encourage us to perseverance, for they ceased not to exhort till they had brought Lot out of danger. We must never pause in our efforts for any man till he is either saved or the funeral bell has tolled for him. Even if the last hour is come and the object of your solicitude is stretched upon the couch which is evidently meant to be his deathbed, still pursue his soul to the very brink of Hell. Up to the very gates of perdition hope should track the rebel. When once that iron gate is shut, it is all over with our efforts, but, meanwhile, until then we may entertain hope for any man! You and I have read nowhere concerning such-and-such a man that God will have no mercy on him! We have scanned the rolls of God's decree and cannot act upon what is not revealed!

We have rejoiced to learn that our own names are written in the Lamb's Book of Life, and yet we were by nature as vile as any. Then who shall say that any are too vile? The Lord may have made the worst of men the objects of His electing love. We know that some entered the vineyard at the 11th hour, and why not these? It is a pity that it should have come to the last hour, but still, until the sun goes down the Master of the vineyard calls laborers into His service. I pray you, Brothers and Sisters, faint not in your holy work!

Every now and then a lethargy creeps over the Christian Church and a degree of weariness steals over our own souls, but let us arise from such a state. We say, "O Lord, how long? How long?" We think we shall see but little good result of our labor, and we are ready to cast away our confidence and cease from perseverance. Up, Brethren, up! The devil wearies not! The powers of darkness rest not day nor night! The temptations of this city never know a pause! The dens of infamy and the halls of vice are always enclosing their prey! The lion is lurking everywhere—how, then, dare we be idle? Oh you that know the power of the inner life and have tasted that the Lord is gracious, stand fast in what you have received and press onward towards more exalted holiness. "Be you steadfast, unmovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, forasmuch as you know that your labor is not in vain in the Lord."

I will say no more to these messengers of God except this, that we ought to remember that we are the messengers of God's mercy to the sons of men. The text tells us, "The Lord being merciful unto him." The angels had not come to Lot of themselves—they were the embodiment and outward display of God's

mercy. Christians in the world should view themselves as manifestations of God's mercy to sinners, instruments of Divine Grace, servants of the Holy Spirit. Now mercy is a nimble attribute. Justice lingers, it is shod with lead, but the feet of mercy are winged. Mercy delights to perform its office. So should it be with us a delight to do good to men.

God can save men without instruments, but He very seldom does it. His usual rule is to work by means. Oh that the mercy of God would work mightily by us! Let us remember, as we mingle with society, that God has committed to us the ministry of reconciliation. If angels were sent upon this ministry, surely they would be incessantly active! They would fly with all their might from place to place to do the Lord's will! Shall we who are honored in this be less active than they? As much as lies in us, let us redeem the time because the days are evil. Let us be instant in season and out of season, let us sow beside all waters, and let it be our earnest endeavor to make full proof of our service, whatever that service may be, that at last it may be said, "Well done, you good and faithful servant: you have been faithful over a few things, I will make you ruler over many things."

I cannot speak with you as I would, but I feel in my own heart a most solemn earnestness to have all the members of this Church engaged in soul-saving work. Beloved, we shall never rebut the attacks of Popery, nor stop the advance of Puseyism, nor answer the quibbles of infidelity except by the personal holiness and individual consecration of our Church members. In the days immediately before the Reformation, and at the time of the Reformation, God's Gospel grew mightily and prevailed because the believers in the Gospel were noticed among their neighbors for the holiness of their lives—they were the most harmless, upright, and generous of men, so that when they were persecuted, their simple neighbors said to one another—"The priests let the lascivious and the debauched escape, but the good, and the honest, and the holy are taken to the stake, or cast into prison."

That was an argument against Popery, of which men's minds perceived the power! And, moreover, it was because every converted person sought to bring in others that the Gospel spread. It was thus in the first Apostolic fervor. Every man was a missionary, every woman was an evangelist, and so the kingdom in the power of the Holy Spirit could not but grow! I want you to conquer this city of London! I want you to subdue this United Kingdom! I labor in prayer to God that this Church may be the little handful of corn, the fruit of which shall shake like Lebanon! Not this Church alone, but all others, too—but as I have specially to deal with you, I want you to be distinguished for your zeal and perseverance in the cause of Christ.

It seems to me that if you were what you should be, there is no reason why this dead mass of London should not be made to heave with the power of vital godliness. Little knots of you might form Churches in the localities in which you are living. These would soon increase in membership and be new centers of usefulness. Some are called to emigrate. We have always considerable streams going from us—some into the country towns of England, some to Australia and New Zealand and others to the United States—if we were all full of holiness, how might we be like fire brands to set the world on a blaze with the sacred flame of love to Jesus our Lord!

I must now leave my Brethren to address myself to the lingering ones of whom there is a goodly number now present, lingering at the gates of Sodom, unsaved and in danger of destruction.

II. TO YOU, O LINGERERS, I NOW SPEAK, hoping to be the means, by God's Grace, of driving you out of this lingering. I shall begin—O you that are halting between two opinions—by asking you, Why do you linger? Lot, I think, loitered because he had much property in and around the city. Probably his flocks and

herds were all pastured in the well-watered plain of Sodom. Do you linger because you will lose your gains—because your trade, being an evil one, must be renounced—or because, by following the laws of Christ, you will become a loser in your transactions? My Friend, whatever you lose, lose not your soul! "Skin for skin, yes, all that a man has, will he give for his life," and the day will come when you will look upon your gold and silver and all your estate as worthless in comparison with your soul! Be not foolish, and let not fleeting gain, so soon to disappear, cause you to throw away eternal gain.

Perhaps Lot's wife lingered out of natural affection because she had daughters, and perhaps sons, who were determined not to leave the city. It seems to me very likely that Lot had other daughters beside the two who fled with him, for we are told in the early part of the chapter that those daughters who were with him in the house were not married, and yet this chapter speaks of sons-in-law. Though this is not certain, yet it is most probable that there were other daughters married to the sons-in-law who mocked. Certainly those mentioned who escaped were not married at the time. Did Lot's wife look back because of these daughters whom she could not bear to leave, or was she doting upon those jovial women who had often come gossiping to her house, and at whose house she had been entertained with vicious company?

My Hearers, is that your case? You would rather lose all earthly friends than lose the best of friends! You would rather be cast out of the circle of society than be cast out of the circle of the glorified spirits! You will find no woman, however enchanting, and no man upon earth, however admirable, to be at all worth the losing of your soul in order to the winning of their company and their esteem. Cut the bond if it binds you to ruin! Out with the knife and cut off that right arm, or pluck out that right eye sooner than perish in Hell fire!

As to Lot's daughters, I know not why they lingered, but, perhaps there were some very dear to them in the city. Some of you young people may have companions who are ungodly, and you are afraid to come away from them. Perhaps the dread of their laugh terrifies you. Oh, but it were better to be laughed at and go to Heaven than to be applauded and cast into the pit! You may be laughed into Hell, but you cannot be laughed out of it again. You may cast away your soul to escape ridicule, but by no possibility shall ridicule ever give you back the priceless treasure you have lost. I do beseech you, as men who would be wise, and as men who can judge, consider what there can be in this world that can recompense you for the loss of the Divine favor, and for being cast away forever and forever from all hope and joy!

Why do you linger? If it is for love of sinful company, you linger like madmen! Oh that your madness may be cured in time! Do you reply that you do not believe in the danger? Then I am, indeed, sorry for you, for the danger is none the less sure. When men die, they do not die like dogs—they live hereafter. There is a resurrection and a judgment. There is a day appointed in which God will judge the world by the Man, Christ Jesus, who will sit upon the Great White Throne to divide the nations, as the shepherd divided the sheep from the goats. Your doubting it will not make your doom less certain or less severe—believe it!

God has revealed it, your conscience justifies it! The most hardened unbelievers have, in the hour of death, as a general rule, given their assent to it, and so, I doubt not, will you! Tremble, you that forget God, for His own words are, "The wicked shall be cast into Hell, with all the nations that forget God." Do you linger because you doubt the way of escape? I hope it is not because you do not understand it! If you have attended this House of Prayer I am certain that you do understand it as far as the letter of it, if the Gospel can be understood, for I have put it into the most plain words a hundred times, that, "Whoever believes in the Lord Jesus Christ, shall be saved." That is, whoever trusts in what Christ is, and what Christ has done, shall not perish but have everlasting life! Do you mistrust this way of escape? Oh that you would have faith in it, for some of us have tried it! Thousands now on earth, and tens of thousands in the skies have rested

upon Christ alone for their salvation and they have rejoiced in life and in death in finding that there was no condemnation to them! Do not doubt it—it is your only hope!

Or perhaps you think that you do not need it. But it is a foolish thought. However excellent you may have been, you must be saved on the same footing as the very worst. This Book contains only one Gospel. It declares that there is only one door to Heaven. We are told over and over again, that, "no other foundation can man lay than that is laid." Soul, the Lord Jesus is your only hope! If you do not accept Him, there awaits you nothing but a fearful looking for of judgment and of fiery indignation! Reject Christ and you reject your soul's only hope! You cast yourself away! You willfully destroy yourself when you reject the Gospel of God's dear Son.

It is possible that the reason why you linger is that you indulge some favorite sin. I shall not attempt to guess at what it is. Perhaps it is a secret but shameful lust. You cannot indulge known sin and yet enter Heaven. Well Soul, God says to you this morning, "Will you have your sins and go to Hell, or will you give them up and trust in Christ and be saved?" That alternative is put before you. May you have Divine Grace to make the right choice. But your sin must be given up. I am not here to flatter you and tell you that you can cheat in business, or indulge in lasciviousness, or live in the neglect of the House of God, or be a drunkard and yet enter unto Heaven.

You cannot have eternal life and yet fondle these things in your bosom. You cannot be perfect, but you must be willing to be so, and anxious to be so. No sin nurtured in the heart can be compatible within salvation—you must wish to sweep them all away in the Holy Spirit's strength. You must do it, too, as God shall help you, or else if you cling to sin, you cling to destruction. Oh, but what sins can be so sweet as to be worth giving up the harps of angels, and worth the endurance of—

"The flames which no abatement know, Though briny tears forever flow"?

Perhaps, I have not touched the right reason for your lingering. You, perhaps, are subject to an idleness of spirit, a natural inaction and lethargy. I think in most cases this is the root of the matter. You are not bestirred about soul affairs—you are too idle to come to decision. But, Sirs, you must come to it or die! This stupefying and drugging your conscience, and these excuses and procrastination's will not do—you must come to a decision one way or the other, sooner or later—so why not now? Why, men, you are active enough in business! Are you not pushing your trade and moving Heaven and earth, and rightly enough, to pick up a living for yourselves and your families? And are your souls of such small account and esteem that you can afford to play over them and trifle?

Oh, Sirs, have you lost your wits? Has your reason gone out to grass that you think your immortal and eternal interests to be of so little value that you can sleep over the mouth of Hell? Shake yourselves, I pray you, lest you be shaken by the rough hand of death and lift up your eyes, as the Savior said the rich man did, "in Hell being in torment." Lift up those sluggard eyes now! If ever you were in earnest in your studies or about your business, be in earnest now, I beseech you, about your souls! Prove that you are not fools, but that you have some wits and reason left. I fear that in some cases—though I know not of many in this place—I fear that this whole matter is despised.

I often wonder over some of you. You acknowledge the Truth of the Bible. You acknowledge all that is revealed there, and yet you do not repent! I am astonished at you! I can understand the man who says, "I do not believe it." His remaining unconverted, though a dreadful thing, is a consistent thing. There is this to be said for him—he does not absolutely make himself out to be a fool. But you who say you believe in the

Bible and admit that there is a Hell? You who believe that there is salvation, and that this may be had by trusting in Christ and yet do not trust Him—what shall I say to you—what shall I say of you?

I will say this—I would sooner you give up all pretense than waver and halt, and parley with the Truth of God to the quenching of the Spirit and the hardening of your consciences! I am half inclined to say with stern Elijah, "If the Lord is God, follow Him: but if Baal, then follow him." If religion is a lie, do not pretend to believe it! Say so and be honest—and take the consequences. But, if it is true, act upon it. If there is a Hell, fly from it! If there is a Heaven, obtain it! If there is a City of Refuge, reach it! If there is a Christ, believe in Him! If He is an impostor, come not here, but reject Him utterly! But, if He is the Savior of sinners, bow down before Him now, I beseech you, lest this be the withering accusation at the last—that you were inconsistent even on your own admissions and that you went to Hell—not simply as sinners, but as fools going willingly to the gallows, knowing where they were going and yet walking on as bullocks to the slaughter! Well, I have put the question, Why do you linger?

Now I want to say two or three words to you, and they shall be to this effect—With what shall we hasten you? These few considerations, hurriedly offered, I hope will not be forgotten. Time is short. Young people do not believe this, but you who have reached 30 or 40 know it. You know how the weeks spin round, how the years fly like wheels that whiz in their hot haste. You know this and feel it, and yet you let these years run on and on. Why do you linger when time flies faster than a thunderbolt and lingers not?

Moreover, life is uncertain. Some of you know this by painful experience. You have recently lost friends. Sound and in strong health, they have been struck down. Others of you have been accustomed to attend the deathbed, or you often see the hearse go by the windows. Or you are sick and you carry death in your heart. Why do you linger? I feel as if I must stop awhile and weep over your insanity! O Friends, if you knew when you were to die, it would be but wise to lay hold on Christ now! But, since you do not know but what in this very house you may become corpses, will you run the risks of Hell and eternal wrath? I pray you do not do so for your own sake, for it is your business more than mine. For your own sakes be wise and linger no longer!

If this will not quicken you, let me tell you that if you were now to believe in Christ you would be no loser. Present salvation would be present happiness. Trusting in Christ at this moment would give you—I speak from experience—a joy which nothing in the world can rival! Beside that, you are now, at this moment, in danger. Have you never read such texts as these, "He that believes not is condemned already, because he has not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God"? "There is no peace, says my God, to the wicked"? "God is angry with the wicked every day. If he turn not, He will whet His sword; He has bent His bow, and made it ready"?

Do not think I speak these terrible things because I like to speak them. No, but because I would have you saved! I cannot bear to think of your being lost, though you can! I cannot bear to think that I should have looked into the faces of some of you so many months, and even years, and yet should have to appear a swift witness against you in the day of judgment! Shall I not be compelled to say, "These people did know the Gospel, and did in a measure feel its power, but they said, 'Not now, not now. When I have a more convenient season, I will send for you.'" And it is so simple! It is but to believe and live, to trust and to be saved. O that now Christ would cast the weight of His love into the scale that you might once and for all give up yourself for Him!

There is one terrible reflection which I cannot help mentioning, namely, that with some of you it ought to be an alarming fact that the means of Grace are losing effect. You used to feel them much more than you do now. Why, when you first came to the Surrey Music Hall, or to the Tabernacle, if the preacher seemed at all in earnest, you wept! Sometimes you could not sleep at night because of the alarm that was caused you! But I may ring the alarm bell now, again and again before it will awaken you! To you my voice has lost its striking note. You are used to the sound of my entreaties. Oh that I could awaken you! May I sleep in the grave before I become a mere machine to lull you into slumber!

I do strive to get variety in my ministry because I know that without it I cannot get your attention and reach your hearts. Ah, thoughtless Hearer, you had better go somewhere else! There may be a chance of somebody else getting at your heart, but I am afraid I shall not. If you do not repent under my ministry, go somewhere else! Do not lose the chance that perhaps there may be somebody else who will be more plain and more earnest with you than I am—and do not let it be the sad case that you shall sit here till you shall nod yourselves unto destruction, slumbering under the sound of the Gospel and then sinking into perdition, hopelessly and without excuse.

This is the last reflection I shall offer you. Within a few short months, or say within a few short years at the very outside, you will know one of two things—you will know either the terrors of Hell or the glories of Heaven. Now, which shall it be? All this hinges upon your believing or not believing in the Lord Jesus. If you believe, your portion shall be with the white-robed throng whose life is bliss, whose existence is immortality! If you believe, all the splendors of Heaven shall be yours with Christ in whom you have trusted.

But if you believe not, as truly as God is God, and that this Book is true—and if you deny God and this Book, then I must deal with you another time—if these things are not a fable, then you, even you, a child of a godly mother—even you, a hearer at the Tabernacle—you must be bound up with bundles of sinners to be burned! You must hear the voice, "Depart, you cursed, into everlasting fire in Hell, prepared for the devil and his angels." And in that day, in that day, do me at least this one act of justice—acknowledge that I did warn you of it, that I did seek to stop you if I could—even to laying violent hands upon you, if possible, to turn you from your evil ways!

But oh, it must not be so! I cannot bear it! I cannot close without having said to you what God Himself has said, "Turn you, turn you; why will you die, O house of Israel." "Let the wicked forsake his ways and the unrighteous man his thoughts: and let him return unto the Lord, and He will have mercy upon him; and to our God, for He will abundantly pardon. For My thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways My ways, says the Lord. For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are My ways higher than your ways, and My thoughts than your thoughts." "Come now, and let us reason together, says the Lord: though your sins are as scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they are red like crimson, they shall be as wool."

Come unto Christ, all you that labor and are heavy laden, and He will give you rest. "The Spirit and the bride say, Come, and let him that hears say, Come. And let him that is thirsty come. And whoever will, let him take the water of life freely." God bless you for Jesus' sake. Amen.

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