

Preaching! Man's Privilege and God's Power

by C.H. Spurgeon

C.H. Spurgeon passionately teaches that preaching is both a divine privilege and a powerful instrument through which God awakens, convicts, and saves sinners.

Scripture: Mark 6:20, Ezekiel 37, Luke 5:17-26, John 6:9-13, Matthew 4:16, Matthew 28:20, Luke 18:35-43, Luke 16:19-31
Topics: "Preaching", "Salvation", "The Word of God"

Description

In this powerful sermon, C.H. Spurgeon explores the divine privilege and immense power of preaching the Word of God. Using the example of John the Baptist and vivid biblical illustrations, Spurgeon emphasizes the blessedness of hearing the gospel and the responsibilities it entails. He passionately calls believers to honor preaching as God's ordained instrument for salvation and revival, urging all to respond faithfully to the message of Christ.

Transcript

"For Herod feared John, knowing that he was a just man and an holy, and observed him; and when he heard him, he did many things, and heard him gladly."—Mark 6:20.

HE PREACHING OF THE WORD hath exceeding power. John commenced his ministry as an obscure individual, a man who led an almost hermit life. He begins to preach in the wilderness of Judea, but his cry is so powerful, that ere he has spoken many days, multitudes wait upon his words. He continues, clothed in that shaggy garment, and living on the simplest of food, still to utter the same cry of preparation for the kingdom of heaven—Repent! repent! repent! And now, not only the multitude, but the teachers, the respectable part of the community, come to listen to him. The Scribes and Pharisees sit down by Jordan's banks to listen to the Baptist's word. So powerful is his preaching that many of all ranks—publicans, sinners, and soldiers,—come unto him and are baptized by him in Jordan confessing their sins. Nay, the Scribes and Pharisees themselves seek baptism at his hands. Boldly, however, he repulses them; tells them to bring forth fruits meet for repentance, and warns them that their descent from Abraham does not entitle them to the blessings of the coming kingdom of the great Messiah. His word rings from one end of Judea to the other. All men wonder what this can mean, and already there begins to be a feeling in the hearts of men that Messiah is at hand. Herod himself hears of John, and now you behold the spectacle of a cruel and unrighteous king sitting humbly to listen to this stern reformer. The Baptist changes not his preaching. The same boldness which had made him rebuke the common people and their teachers, now leads him to defy the wrath of Herod himself. He touches him in his most tender place, strikes his favourite

sin, dashes down his idle lust to the ground, counts it his business not to speak of truth in generals but in particulars. Yea, he tells him to his very face, "It is not lawful for thee to take to thyself thy brother's wife."

Oh, what a power there is in the Word of God! I do not find that the Pharynx with all their learning had moved Herod. I discover not that the most mighty of the Grecian philosophers, or of the Gnostics who were then in existence, had any power to reach the heart of Herod. But the simple, plain preaching of John, his declaration of the Word with all honesty and simplicity, had power to pin Herod by the ear, to vibrate in his heart and to awaken his conscience, for sure we are it was awakened; if the awakening did not end in his conversion, at any rate it made him troubled in his sins so that he could not go on peaceably in iniquity. Ah, my dear friends, we want nothing in these times for revival in the world but the simple preaching of the gospel. This is the great battering ram that shall dash down the bulwarks of iniquity. This is the great light that shall scatter the darkness. We need not that men should be adopting new schemes and new plans. We are glad of the agencies and assistances which are continually arising; but after all, the true Jerusalem blade, the sword that can cut to the piercing asunder of the joints and marrow, is preaching the Word of God. We must never neglect it, never despise it. The age in which the pulpit it despised, will be an age in which gospel truth will cease to be honored. Once put away God's ministers, and you have to a great extent taken the candle out of the candlestick; quenched the lamps that God hath appointed in the sanctuary. Our missionary societies need continually to be reminded of this; they get so busy with translations, so diligently employed with the different operations of civilization, with the founding of stores, with the encouragement of commerce among a people, that they seem to neglect—at least in some degree—that which is the great and master weapon of the minister, the foolishness of preaching by which it pleases God to save them that believe. Preaching the gospel will effectually civilize, while introducing the arts of civilization will sometimes fail. Preaching the gospel will lift up the barbarian, while attempts to do it by philosophy will be found ineffectual. We must go among them, and tell them of Christ; we must point them to heaven; we must lead them to the cross; shall they be elevated in their character, and raised in their condition. But by no other means. God forbid that we should begin to depreciate preaching. Let us still honor it; let us look to it as God's ordained instrumentality, and we shall yet see in the world a repetition of great wonders wrought by the preaching in the name of Jesus Christ.

To-day, I shall want your attention to a subject which concerns us all, but more especially those, who being hearers of the Word, are hearers only, and not doers of the same. I shall first attempt to show the blessedness of hearing the Word of God; secondly, the responsibilities of the hearer; and then, thirdly, those accompaniments which are necessary to go with the hearing of the Word of God, to make it effectual to save the soul.

I. First of all, my dear friends, let us speak a little about THE BLESSEDNESS OF HEARING THE WORD.

The prophet constantly asserts, "Blessed are the ears which hear the things that we hear; and blessed are the eyes which see the things which we see." Prophets and kings desired it long, but died without the sight. Often do the seers of old use language similar to this, "Blessed is the people that know the joyful sound, they shall walk, O Lord, in the light of thy countenance." Godly men accept it as an omen of happy times when their eyes should see their teachers. The angels sang the blessedness of it when they descended from on high, singing, "Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, good will toward men. Behold, we bring you good tidings of great joy, which shall be unto you and to all people." The angels' song is in harmony with the seers' testimony. Both conjoin to prove what I assert, that we are blessed in having the privilege of listening to God's Word.

Let us enlarge upon this point. If we reflect upon what the preaching of the Word is, we shall soon see that we are highly privileged in enjoying it. The preaching of the Word is the scattering of the seed. The hearers are the ground on which the good seed falls. Those who hear not the Word are as the arid desert, which has never seen a handful of the good corn; or as the unploughed waves of the sea which have never been gladdened with the prospect of a harvest. But when the sower goes forth to sow seed, he scatters it broadcast upon you that hear, and there is to you the hope that in you the good seed shall take root and bring forth fruit a hundred fold. True, some of you may be but wayside hearers, and evil birds may soon devour the seed. At least, it does fall upon you, nor is it the fault of the seed, but of the ground, if that seed does not grow. True, you may be as stony-ground hearers, who for awhile receive the Word and rejoice therein, but having no root in yourselves, the seed may wither away. That again, I say, does not diminish your privilege, though it increases your guilt, inasmuch as it is no fault of the seed nor of the sun, but the fault of the stony ground, if the fruit is not nourished unto perfection. And you, inasmuch as you are the field, the broad acres upon which the gospel husbandman scatters the precious grain, you enjoy the privilege which is denied to heathens and idolaters.

Again, the kingdom of heaven is likened unto a net which is cast into the sea, and which gathers of divers kinds. Now you represent the fish of the sea, and it is happy indeed for you that you are where the net is thrown, for there is at least the hope that you may be entangled in its meshes, and may be drawn out of the sea of sin, and gathered into the vessels of salvation. If you were far, far away, where the net is never cast, there would be no hope of your being caught therein. But here you are gathered round the fisherman's humble boat, and as he casts his net into the sea, he hopes that some of you may be caught therein,—and assuredly gracious is your privilege! But if you be not caught, it shall not be the fault of the net, but the fault of your own wilfulness, which shall make you fly from it, lest you be graciously taken therein.

Moreover, the preaching of the gospel is very much in this day like the mission of Christ upon earth. When Christ was on earth he went about walking through the midst of sick folk, and they laid them in their beds by the wayside, so that as Jesus passed by, they might touch the hem of his garment and be made whole. You, to-day, when you hear the Word, are like the sick in their beds where Jesus passes by. You are like blind Bartimaeus sitting by the wayside begging, in the very road along which the Son of David journeys. Lo, a multitude have come to listen to him. He is present wherever his truth is preached: "Lo, I am with you always, even to the ends of the world." You are not like sick men in their chambers, or sick men far away in Tyre and Sidon, but you are like the men who lay at Bethesda's pool under the five porches, waiting for the moving of the water. Angel of God, move the waters this day! or rather, O Jesus, give thou grace to the impotent man that he may now step in.

Yet further, we may illustrate the privilege of those who hear the Word by the fact that the Word of God is the bread of heaven. I can only compare this great number of people gathered here to-day to the sight which was seen upon the mountain in the days of Jesus. They were hungry, and the disciples would have sent them away. But Jesus bade them sit down in ranks upon the grass, as you are sitting down in rows here, and there were but a few barley loaves and five small fishes (fit type and representation of the minister's own poverty of words and thoughts!) But Jesus blessed the bread, and blessed the fishes, and brake them; and they were multiplied, and they did all eat and were filled. So you are as these men. God give you grace to eat. There is not given to you a stone instead of bread, nor a scorpion instead of an egg; but Christ Jesus shall be fully and freely preached to you. May you have appetites to long for the Word, faith to partake of the Word, and may it be to you the bread of life sent down from heaven.

Yet often in Scripture we find the Word of God compared to a light. "The people that sat in darkness saw a great light." "Unto them that dwell in darkness, and in the valley of the shadow of death, has a great light arisen." Those who hear not the Word are men that grope their way not only in a fog, but in a thick Egyptian darkness that may be felt. Before your eyes to-day is held up the flaming torch of God's Word, to shew you your path through the thick darkness. Nay, to-day there is not only a torch, but in the preaching of the Word the Sun of Righteousness himself arises with healing beneath his wings. You are not they that grope for the wall like blind men; you are not as they who are obliged to say, "We see not the path to heaven; we know not the way to God; we fear we shall never be reconciled to Christ." Behold, the light of heaven shineth upon your eyeballs, and, if ye perish, ye must perish wilfully; if ye sink into hell, it will be with the path to heaven shining before you, if damned, it will be not because you do not know the way of salvation, but because you wilfully and wickedly put it from you, and choose for yourselves the path of death. It must even be then a privilege to listen to the Word, if the Word be as a light, and as bread, and as healing, as a gospel net, and as divine seed.

Once more let me remind you, there is yet a greater privilege connected with the Word of God than this—for all this were nothing without the last. As I look upon a multitude of unconverted men and women, I am reminded of Ezekiel's vision. He saw lying in the valley of Hinnom multitudes of bones, the flesh of which had been consumed by fire, and the bones themselves were dried as in a furnace, scattered hither and thither. There with other bones in other charnel-houses, lying scattered at the mouths of other graves; but Ezekiel was not sent to them; to the valley of Hinnom was he sent, and there alone. And he stood by faith, and began to practice the foolishness of preaching, "Ye dry bones hear the word of the Lord; thus saith the Lord, ye dry bones live." And as he spoke there was a rustling, each bone sought its fellow; and as he spake again, these bones united and stood erect, as he continued his discourse the flesh clothed the skeleton; when he concluded by crying, "Come from the winds, and breathe upon these slain, that they may live," they stood upon their feet an exceeding great army. The preached Word is like Ezekiel's prophecy; life goes forth with the word of the faithful minister, when we say, "Repent!" We know that sinners cannot repent of themselves, but God's grace sweetly constrains them to repent. When we bid them believe, it is not because of any natural capacity for faith that lies within them, but because the command "Believe and live," when given by the faithful minister of God, hath in it a quickening power; as much as when Peter and John said to the man with the withered hand, "In the name of Jesus of Nazareth, stretch out thy hand," and it was done. So do we say to the dead in sin—"Sinner, live; repent and be converted; repent and be baptized every one of you in the name of the Lord Jesus." Owned of God the Spirit, it becomes a quickening cry, and you are made to live. Blessed are the dry bones that lay in a valley where Ezekiel prophesies; and blessed are ye that are found where Jesus Christ's name is preached, where his power is invoked by a heart which believes in its energy; where his truth is preached to you by one, who despite of many mistakes knows this one thing—that Christ is both the power of God and the wisdom of God unto every one that believeth. This consideration alone then—the peculiar power of the Word of God, might compel us to say, "That indeed there is a blessedness in hearing it."

But, my dear friends, let us look at it in another light. Let us appeal to those who have heard the Word and have received good in their own souls by it. Men and brethren, I speak to hundreds of you, who know in your own soul what the Word of God is. Let me ask you—you who have been converted from a thousand crimes—you who have been picked from the dunghill and made to sit among the princely children of God—let me ask you what you think of the preaching of the Word. Why, there are hundreds of you men and women, who if this were the proper time and occasion, would rise from your seat and say, "I bless God that ever I listened to the preached Word. I was a stranger to all truth, but I was enticed to come and

listen, and God met with me." Some of you can look back to the first Sunday on which you ever entered a place of worship for twenty years, and that place was this very hall. Here you came an unaccustomed worshipper to tread God's hallowed floor. You stood and knew not what you were at. You wondered what the service of God's house could be. But you have reason to remember that Sabbath-day, and you will have reason to remember it to all eternity. Oh that day! it broke your bonds and set you free; that day aroused your conscience and made you feel your need of Christ. That day was a blessed turning point in your history, in which you were led to escape from hell, turn your back on sin, and fly for refuge to Christ Jesus. Since that day let me ask you, what has the Word of God been to you? Has it not been constantly a quickening word? You have grown dull and careless during the week; has not the Sabbath sermon stirred you up afresh? You have sometimes all but lost your hope, and has not the hearing of the Word revived you? Why I know that some of you have come up to the house of God as hungry men would come to a place where bread was distributed, you come to the house of God with a light and happy step, as thirsty men would come to a flowing well, and you rejoice when the day comes round: you only wish there were seven Sabbath days a week, that you might always be listening to God's Word. You can say with Dr. Watts,

"Father, my soul would still abide within thy temple, near thy side.

And if my feet must hence depart, still keep thy dwelling in my heart."

Personally I have to bless God for many good books. I thank God for Dr. Doddridge's Rise and Progress of Religion; I thank God for Baxter's Call to the Unconverted; for Alleyne's Alarm to Sinners; I bless God for James's Anxious Enquirer; but my gratitude most of all is due to God, not for books, but for the living Word—and that too addressed to me by a poor uneducated man, a man who had never received any training for the ministry, and probably will never be heard of in this life, a man engaged in business, no doubt of a menial kind during the week, but who had just enough of grace to say on the Sabbath, "Look unto me and be ye saved all ye ends of the earth. "The books were good, but the man was better. The revealed Word awakened me, it was the living Word saved me, and I must ever attach peculiar value to the hearing of the truth, for by it I received the joy and peace in which my soul delights.

But further, my dear hearers, the value of the Word preached and heard may be estimated by the opinions which the lost have of it now. Harken to one man, it is not a dream nor a picture of my imagination which I now present to you, it is one of Jesus Christ's own graphic descriptions. There lies a man in hell who has heard Moses and the prophets. His time is passed, he can hear them no more. But so great is the value he attaches to the preached Word, that he says, "Father Abraham, send Lazarus, for I have five brethren, let him testify unto them, lest they also come into this place of torment." He felt that if Lazarus could speak—speak personally his own personal testimony to the truth, that peradventure they might be saved. Oh! what would the damned in hell give for a sermon could they but listen once more to the church-going bell and go up to the sanctuary! Ah, my brethren, they would consent, if it were possible, to bear ten thousand years of hell's torments, if they might but once more have the Word preached to them! Ah! if I had a congregation such as that would be, of men who have tasted the wrath of God, of men who know what an awful thing it is to fall into the hands of an angry God, oh, how would they lean forward to catch every word, with what deep attention would they all regard the preacher, each one saying, "Is there a hope for me? May I not escape from the place of doom? Good God! may this fire not be quenched and I be plucked as a brand from the burning?" Value then, I pray you, the privilege while you have it now. We are always foolish, and we never value mercy till we lose it. But I do adjure you cast not aside this folly, value it while it is called to-day, value that which once lost will seem to us to be priceless beyond all

conception,—estimated then at its true worth, invaluable, and precious beyond a miser's dream.

Let me again ask you to value it in a brighter light—by the estimation of the saints before the throne. Ye glorified ones, what think ye of the preaching of the Word? Hark to them! Will they not sing it forth—"Faith came to us by hearing, and hearing by the Word of God. It was by it that we were led to confess our sins; by it we were led to wash our robes and make them white in the blood of the Lamb?" I am sure they before the throne think not lightly of God's ministers. They would not speak with cold language of the truth of the Gospel which is preached in your ears. No, in their eternal hallelujahs they bless the Lord who sent the Gospel to them, as they sing—"Unto him that loved us and washed us from our sins in his blood, unto him be glory for ever and ever." Value, then, the preaching of the Word, and count yourselves happy that you are allowed to listen to it.

II. My second head deals more closely with the text, and I hope it will likewise appeal more closely to our consciences—THE RESPONSIBILITIES OF THE HEARER OF THE WORD.

Herod, you will perceive, went as far as very many of us, perhaps farther than some, and yet was lost. Our responsibilities concerning the Word do not end with hearing it. Herod heard it, but hearing is not enough. Ye may sit for fifty years in the sanctuary of God hearing the gospel, and be rather the worse than the better for all you have heard, if it end in hearing. It is not the Word entering into one ear, and coming forth out of the other ear which converts the soul but it is the echoing of the Word down in the very heart, and the abiding of the truth in the conscience. I know there are very many who think they have fulfilled all their religion when they go to their church or chapel. Let us not deceive you in this thing. Your church-going, and your chapel-going, though they give you great privileges, yet involve the most solemn responsibilities. Instead of being in themselves saving, they may be damning to you unless you avail yourselves of the privileges presented to you by them. I doubt not that hell is crammed with church and chapel-goers, and that there are whole wards in that infernal prison house that are filled with men who heard the Word, but who stopped there, who sat in their pews, but never fled to Christ; who listened to the call, but did not obey it. "Yes," saith one, "but I do more than simply hear the Word, for I make choice of the most earnest preacher I can find." So did Herod, and yet he perished. He was not a hearer of a man with a soft tongue, for John did not speak as one clothed in fine raiment, John was not a reed shaken with the wind; he was a prophet, "Yea, I say unto you, and more than a prophet;" faithful in all his house, as a good servant of his God. There was never a more honest and faithful preacher than John. And you too, may with care have selected the most excellent minister, not for his eloquence, but for his earnestness; not for his talent, but for his power of faith, and you may listen to him, and that too with attention, and after all may be a cast-away. The responsibilities involved in listening to such a man may be so weighty, that like a millstone about your neck, they may help to sink you lower than the lowest hell. Take heed to yourselves, that you rest not in the outward Word, however fitly spoken, or however attentively heard; but reach forward to something deeper and better. "Yes," saith a third, "but I do not only hear the most earnest preacher, but I go out of my way to hear him. I have left my parish church, for instance, and I come walking five or six miles—I am willing to walk ten, or even twenty, if I can but hear a sermon—and I am not ashamed to mingle with the poor. I may have rank and position in life, but I am not ashamed to listen to the earnest preacher, though he should belong to the most despised of sects" Yea, and Herod did the like, Herod was a king, and yet listened to the peasant-prophet. Herod is clothed in purple, and yet listens to the Baptist in his shaggy garment. While Herod fared sumptuously every day, he who ate locusts and wild honey reproves him boldly to his face; and with all this, Herod was not saved. So, also, you may walk many a mile to listen to the truth, and that year after year, but unless ye go further than that, unless ye obey the

Word, unless it sinks deep into your inmost soul, ye shall perish still—perish under the sound of the Word—the very Word of God becoming a death-knell to your soul, dreadfully tolling you down to deep destruction. But I hear another object. "I, sir, not only take the trouble to hear, but I hear very gladly. I am delighted when I listen. I am not a captious, critical hearer, but I feel a pleasure in listening to God's Word. Is not that a blessed sign? Do you not think that I must be saved, if I rejoice to hear that good sound?" No, my friend, no; it is a hopeful sign, but it is a very uncertain one, for is it not written in our text, that Herod heard the Word gladly? The smile might be on his face, or the tear in his eye while the Baptist denounced sin; there was a something in his conscience which made him feel glad that there was one honest man alive; that in a time of enormous corruption, there was one fearless soul that dare with unblanched cheek, to correct sin in high places. He was like Henry the Eighth, who when Hugh Latimer presented him on New Year's day with a napkin, on which was embroidered the words, "Whoremongers and adulterers God will judge;" instead of casting the preacher into prison, he said, "He was glad there was one man who dared to tell him and he stands up for you and defends you, but he is as bad a man as there is living." Oh sirs! I am glad you listen to me; I do hope that the hammer may yet break your hearts but I do conjure you, give up your sins. Oh! for your own soul's sake, do not abide in your transgressions, for I warn you, if I have spoken faithfully to you, you cannot sin so cheaply as other men. I have never prosed away to you; I have never been too polite to warn you of perdition, I speak to you in rough and earnest terms—I may claim that credit without egotism. If you perish, sirs, it will little boot you that ye stood up in my defense; it will little serve you that ye tried to screen the minister from slander and from calumny. I would have you think of yourselves, even though ye thought less of me and my reputation. I would have you love yourselves, and so escape from hell, and fly to heaven while yet the gate of mercy stands on the jar, and the hour of mercy is not passed for ever. Think not, I say, that hearing the Word gladly is enough; you may do so and yet be lost.

But more than that. "Ah," says one, "you have just anticipated what I was about to say. I not only listen gladly, but I respect the preacher. I would not hear a man say a word against him." It was so with Herod. "He observed John," it is said, "and he accounted him a just man and a holy," and yet though he honored the preacher, he was lost himself. Ah! what multitudes go to our fashionable places of worship, and as they come out they say to one another, "What a noble sermon!" and then they go to their houses, and sit down and say, "What a fine turn he gave to that period! what a rich thought that was! what a sparkling metaphor!" And is it for this that we preach to you? Is your applause the breath of our nostrils? Do you think that God's ministers are sent into the world to tickle your ears and be unto you as one that plays a merry tune on a goodly instrument? God knows I would sooner break stones on the road than be a preacher for oratory's sake. I would never stand here to play the hypocrite. No, it is your hearts we want, not your admiration. It is your espousal to Christ, and not your love to us. Oh that we could break your hearts, and awake your consciences, we would not mind what other results should follow. We should feel that we were accepted of God, if we were but felt with power to be God's servants in the hearts and thoughts of men. No, think not that to honor the preacher is enough. Ye may perish praising the minister in your dying moments.

Yet further. Some one may say, "I feel I am a better man through hearing the minister, and is not that a good sign?" Yes, it is a good sign, but it is not a sure one for all that. For Herod they said did many things. Look at the text. It is expressly said there, "He observed him, and when he heard him, he did many things." I should not wonder after that, that Herod became somewhat more merciful in his government, somewhat less exacting, a little more outwardly moral, and though he continued in his lasciviousness, yet he tried to cover it up with respectable excuses. "He did many things." That was doing a very long way, but

Herod was Herod still. And you sirs, it may be, have been led to give up drunkenness, through the preaching of the Word: to shut up the shop that used to be opened on a Sunday. You cannot now swear; you would not now cheat. It is good, it is very good; but it is not enough. All this there may be, but yet the root of the matter may not be in you. To honor the Sabbath outwardly will not save you, unless you enter into the rest which remaineth for the people of God. Merely to close the shop is not enough. The heart itself must be shut up against the love of sin. To cease blasphemy is not sufficient, though it is good, for there may be blasphemy in the heart, when there is none upon the tongue. "Except ye be converted and become as little children ye shall in nowise enter the kingdom of heaven." For "Except a man be born again he cannot see the kingdom of God." The Lord grant that you may not rest with outward cleansing, with moral purification, but strike deeper into the root, and soul, and marrow of these blessings, the change of your heart, the bringing of your soul into union with Christ. One thing I must also remark about Herod, with the Greek text in view "He did many things," will allow me to infer that he felt many doubts. As a good old commentator says, "John smote him so hard, that he could not help feeling it. He gave him such home blows that he could not but be bruised every now and then, and yet though his conscience was smitten, his heart was never renewed." It is a pleasant sight to see men weep under the Word—to mark them tremble; but then we remember Felix. Felix trembled. But he said, "Go thy way for this time; when I have a more convenient season I will send for thee. Happy the minister who hears the people say, "Almost thou persuadest us to be Christians." But then, we remember Agrippa—we remember how he returns to his sins, and seeks not the Savior. We are glad if your consciences are awakened, we rejoice if you are made to doubt and question yourselves, but we mourn because your doubts are so transient, because your goodness is as the morning cloud, and as the early dew.

I have tracked some of you to your houses. I have known of some who after a solemn sermon, when they got home could scarcely eat their meal. They sit down, leaning their head on their hand. The wife is glad to think that her husband is in a hopeful state. He rises from his seat; he goes up stairs; he walks about the house he says he is miserable. At last he comes down and sets his teeth together, and says "Well, if I am to be damned I shall be damned; if I am to be saved I shall be saved, and there's an end of it." Then he rouses himself, saying, "I cannot go to hear that man again: he is too hard with me. I must either give up my sins, or give up listening to the Word; the two things will not exist together." Happy, I say, are we to see that man troubled; but our unhappiness is so much the greater when we see him shaking it off—the dog returning to his vomit, and the sow that was washed to her wallowing in the mire. O God, save us from this, let us never be men who spring up fairly, but wither away suddenly and disappoint all hope. O God, let us not be as Balaam, who prayed that his last end might be with the righteous, but returned to defy Israel, to provoke the Lord God, and to perish in the midst of his iniquity.

And now I hear many of you say, "Well if all these things are not enough, what is it that is expected of the hearer of the Word?" Spirit of God! help us so to speak that the Word may come home to all! Believer in Christ, if you would hear the Word to profit, you must hear it obediently. You must hear it as James and John did, when the Master said "Follow me," and they left their nets and their boats and then followed him. You must do the Word as well as hear it, yielding up your hearts to its sway, being willing to walk in the road which it maps, to follow the path which it lays before you. Hearing it obediently, you must also hear it personally for yourselves, not for others, but for yourselves alone. You must be as Zacchaeus, who was in the sycamore tree, and the Master said, "Zacchaeus, make haste and come down, to-day I must abide in thy house." The Word will never bless you till it comes home directly to yourself. You must be as Mary, who when the Master spoke to her she did not know his voice, till he said unto her, "Mary!" and she said, "Rabboni." There must be an individual hearing of the truth, and a reception of it for yourself in your own

heart. Then, too, you must hear the truth penitently. You must be as that Mary, who when she listened to the Word, must needs go and wash the feet of Jesus with her tears, and wipe them with the hairs of her head. There must be tears for your many sins, a true confession of your guilt before God. But above all you must hear it believingly. The Word must not be unto you as mere sound, but as matter of fact. You must be as Lydia, whose heart the Lord opened; or as the trembling jailer, who believed on the Lord Jesus with all his house and was baptized forthwith. You must be as the thief, who could pray, "Lord, remember me," and who could believe the precious promise given, "To-day shalt thou be with me in Paradise." God give us grace so to listen, and then shall our responsibilities under the Word be cleared up receiving the power of the Word into our conscience, with demonstration of the Holy Spirit, and fruits agreeable to our profession.

III. Now to conclude. I want your serious attention to THE NEEDFUL ACCOMPANIMENTS OF HEARING THE WORD.

There are many men who get blessed by the Word through God's sovereign grace without any of the accompaniments of which I am now about to speak. We have, connected with us, as a Church, a brother in Christ, who came into this place of worship with his gin bottle in his pocket one night. A chance hit of mine—as some would have thought it, when I pointed to the man and told him of it, not knowing aught but that the feeling that I was moved thereunto—was the man's first awakening. That man came without any preparation, and God blessed the word. Numerous have been the instances, which those who have not proved them deem utterly incredible, in which persons have absolutely come to me after a sermon, and begged me not to tell anybody about them, being firmly persuaded from what I said that I knew their private history, whereas I knew no more about them than a stranger in the market. But the Word of God will find men out. Preach the gospel and it will always find the man out and tell him all his secrets, carrying the lamp of the Lord into the hidden recesses of the heart.

But to you as a mass I speak this. If you will be blessed under the Word, would that you would pray before you come here. You sometimes hear of preparation for the Lord's Supper—I am sure if the Word is to be blessed, there ought to be a preparation for hearing it. Do you, when you come up to this house, pray to God before you come, "Lord, give the minister words; help him to speak to me to-day; Lord, save me to-day; may the Word to-day be a quickening word to my poor soul?" Ah! my friends, ye would never go without the blessing, if ye come up prayerfully looking for it, having asked it of God. Then after prayer, if you would be blessed under the Word, there should be an expectation of being blessed. It is wonderful the differences between the same sermon preached in different places, and I do not doubt that the same words uttered by different men would have different effects. With some men the hearers expect they will say something worth hearing; they listen, and the man does say something worth hearing; another man might say just the same; nobody receives it as other than common-place. Now if you can come up to the house of God expecting that there will be something for you, you will have it. We always get what we angle for. If we come up to find fault, there always will be faults to find. If we come up to get good, good will be gotten. God will send no man empty away; he shall have what he came for. If he came merely for curiosity, he shall have his curiosity gratified; if he came for good, he shall not be disappointed. We may be disappointed at man's door; we never were at God's. Man may send us away empty, but God never will. Then while listening to the Word with expectation, it will naturally come to pass that you will listen with deep attention. A young boy who had been awakened to a sense of sin, was remarked to be exceedingly attentive to sermons, and when asked why it was, he said, "Because I do not know which part of the sermon may be blessed to me, but I know that whichever it is, the devil will do his utmost to take my

attention off then for fear I should be blessed;" so he would listen to the whole of it, lest by any means the Word of life should be let slip. So do you, and you will certainly be in the way of being blessed by the Word. Next to that, all through the sermon be appropriating it, saying to yourselves, "Does that belong to me?" If it be a promise, say, "Is that mine?" If it be a threatening, do not cover yourselves with the shield of hard-heartedness, but say, "If that threatening belongs to me, let it have its full force on me." Sit under the sermon with your breasts open to the Word; be ready to let the arrow come in.

Above all, this will be of no avail unless you hear with faith, Now faith cometh by hearing There must be faith mingled with the hearing. But you say, "What is faith? Is faith to believe that Christ died for me?" "No, it is not. The Arminian says that faith is to believe that Christ died for you. He teaches in the first place that Christ died for everybody, therefore, he says, he died for you; of course he died for everybody, and if he died for everybody he must have died for you. That is not faith at all. I hold, on the other hand, that Christ died for believers, that he died for no man that will be lost, that all he died for will be saved, that his intention cannot be frustrated in any man; that if he died to save any man, that man will be saved. Your question to-day is not whether Christ died for you or not, but it is this;—the Scripture says, "Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ and thou shalt be saved." And what is it to believe? To believe is to trust it is the same word, though believe is not so plain a word as trust. To trust Christ is to believe. I feel I cannot save myself, that all my doings and feelings cannot save me; I trust Christ to save me. That is faith; and the moment I trust Christ, I then know that Christ died for me, for they who trust him, he has surely died to save, so surely he died to save them that he will save them, so finished his work that he will never lose them, according to his own Word—"give unto my sheep eternal life, and they shall never perish, neither shall any pluck them out of my hand" "But may I trust it!" says one. May! You are commanded to do it. "But I dare not." What! dare not do what God bids you! Rather say—"I dare not live without Christ, I dare not disobey. God has said—"This is the commandment, that ye believe on the Lord Jesus Christ whom he hath sent." This is the great commandment which is sent to you. To-day trust Christ and you are saved; disobey that command, and do what you will you are damned.

Go home to your chamber, and say unto God, "I desire to believe what I have heard; I desire to trust my immortal soul in Jesus' hands. Give me genuine faith; give me a real trust. Save me now, and save me hereafter." I dare avow it—I never can believe that any man so hearing the Word can by any possibility perish. Hear it, receive it, pray over it, and trust Christ through it, and if you are lost, there can be none saved. If this foundation give way, another can never be laid. If you fall, we all fall together. If trusting in Christ you can perish, all God's prophets, and martyrs, and confessors, and ministers, perish too. You cannot. He will never fail you; trust him now.

Spirit of God! incline the hearts of men to trust Christ. Enable them now to overcome their pride and their timidity, and may they trust the Savior now, and they are saved for ever, through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

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