

# Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit.

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CONVERSIONS DESIRED.

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## A Sermon

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“And the hand of the Lord was with them: and a great number believed, and turned unto the Lord.”—Acts xi. 21.

THE brethren who had dwelt together in church fellowship at Jerusalem were scattered abroad by persecution which arose about Stephen. Their Master had told them that when they were persecuted in one city they were to flee to another. They obeyed his command, and in the course of escape from persecution they took very long journeys—very long journeys indeed for that age of the world, when locomotion was exceedingly difficult: but wherever they found themselves they began at once to preach Jesus Christ, so that the scattering of the disciples was also a scattering of good seed in broader fields. The malice of Satan was made the instrument of the mercy of God. Learn from this, dear brethren, every one of you, that wherever you are called to go you should persevere in making known the name and gospel of Jesus. Look upon this as your calling and occupation. You will not be scattered now by persecution, but should the demands of business carry you into different climes, employ your distant travel for missionary purposes. Providence every now and then bids you remove your tent, take care that wherever it is pitched you carry with you a testimony for Jesus. At times the necessities of health require relaxation and change of air, and this may take you to different places of public resort: seize the opportunity to encourage the churches in such localities by your presence and countenance, and also endeavour to spread the knowledge of Jesus among those to whom you may be directed. The position which you occupy in society is not an accidental one; it has not been decreed to you by a blind, purposeless fate; there is predestination in it, but that predestination is wise, and looks towards a merciful end: you are placed where you are that you may be a preserving salt to those around, a sweet savour of Christ to all who know you. The methods of divine grace have ordained a happy connection between you and the people with whom you associate; you are a messenger of mercy to them, a herald of good tidings, an epistle of

Christ. The surrounding darkness needs you, and therefore it is written, "Among whom ye shine as lights in the world." You are intended to warn and rebuke some, to entreat and encourage others. To you the mourner looks for comfort and the ignorant for instruction; let them never look in vain. Be the true friend of men, observe their condition before God, and endeavour to reclaim them from their wanderings. If Joseph was sent to Egypt that he might save his father's house alive, you also are sent where you are for the sake of some hidden ones of the Lord's chosen family. If Esther was placed in the court of a heathen king for the deliverance of her nation, so are you, my sister, called to occupy your present position for the good of the church of Christ. Look ye to it, brethren, lest ye miss your life's object, and live in vain. It would be a sad thing indeed if you who profess to belong to Christ should be "creation's blot, creation's blank," by having failed to work while it is called today.

These good people of the early church, however, with all their zeal, were somewhat narrow-minded and hampered by their national prejudices, for they preached at first to the Jews only, and it was very hard to make them see that the gospel was meant for the whole race of man, Gentiles as well as Jews. Their Master had said "Go ye into all the world, and preach the gospel to every creature," and yet they began with preaching to the Jews only. Words could not have been plainer, and yet they missed their meaning. It is not to be wondered at that some in our day are still unable to preach to men as men when we see how slow the early saints were to learn the lesson. Brethren, if there be any narrowness about our spirit, let us pray the Lord to take it away. We shall not, of course, be shackled as these Jews were by boasting our nationality, but perhaps there may be classes of society of whom we despair, and therefore for whom we make no effort. We say, "It would be useless to attempt the conversion of such characters. I feel myself quite able to talk to other persons; but although I am placed in the midst of these people I cannot bring my mind to speak with them about spiritual things, for I feel hopeless of success." Beloved, may you be delivered from this snare, and learn to sow beside all waters. The Gentiles, though they were for awhile passed over by the brethren, turned out to be the most hopeful of all classes; from the Gentile fields they reaped harvests such as were never gathered in Judea. Antioch with its Grecians became famous among Christian churches;—there the church of Christ first took its name amid a revival of religion, when great multitudes believed and turned unto the Lord. God had from of old intended that the great majority of the election of grace should be gathered out of those very Gentiles whom even the apostles themselves scarcely ventured to address. Now then, my brother, in the light of this incident begin to work where as yet you have done nothing: begin to hope where hitherto you have despaired, throw out your best energies in that very direction in which you have felt most hampered, for there awaits you, to your own

intense surprise, a success which will amply reward you. You need not restrict yourselves to lands familiar with the plough, invade the primeval forest, fell the ancient trees, and clear the broad acres: that virgin soil will yield you harvests a hundredfold such as you will never find in fields where others have laboured before you. If your spiritual mining is becoming a failure, open fresh lodes of the precious metal, for veins of treasure lie concealed in the unbroken ground. Launch out into the deep, and let down your nets for a draught, and multitudes of fish shall crowd the net. It seems to me to be the obvious teaching of the text that wherever we are cast we should try to do good, and that we may hope for the largest success among the most neglected portions of society.

Coming closely to the text, I desire to press upon you this morning, with great earnestness, the need of the conversion of men, and the desirableness that we should have many converted here, and I shall want to suggest what we can do to produce that result. In all these I beg to be assisted by the Holy Spirit, without whose aid I shall only exhibit my own weakness, and deaden those energies which I long to arouse. These will be our heads: first, *the end we aim at*, that many may believe and turn unto the Lord; secondly, *the power by which this can be attained*, “The hand of the Lord was with them”; thirdly, *the desirableness of our object*; and, fourthly, *how we may promote its attainment*.

I. Let us speak upon THE END WHICH WE DESIRE. It may seem very commonplace, but it is in fact one of the grandest designs under heaven: he who contemplates it has a higher aim than philosopher, reformer, or patriot. He aims at that for which the Son of God both lived and died. We desire that men may believe, that is to say, first, *that they may believe the testimony of Jesus Christ to be true*, for there are some who have not reached as far as that: they reject altogether the inspired Word, and to them the incarnation, the redemption, the resurrection, the glory, the second advent, are so many old wives’ fables. You to whom these truths are the light of your lives can scarcely realise the power of unbelief of this kind, and yet some men live and die in its gloom. We pray that they may be taught better, and that the evidence of these great facts may be forced home upon them. Alas, there are many who profess to believe these things, but their only reason for so doing is that they have been taught so from their childhood, and it is the current religion of the nation. They regard the inspiration of Scripture, and so on, as matters about which it is not expedient to trouble themselves,—they do not care one way or the other, but find it the easier and more respectable plan to admit the truth of the gospel, and think no more about it. Such a vain complimentary belief is rather an insult to our holy faith than a thing to be rejoiced in. But, dear friends, we want more than this faith of indifference, which is little more than dishonest unbelief; we want men to believe for themselves, because they are personally convinced and have felt in themselves the saving power of

Christ Jesus. We pray that nominal believers may treat the doctrines of revelation, not as dogmas, but as facts; not as opinions, but as verities; as surely facts as the events of history, as much verities as the actual incidents of every day life; for, alas, the grand doctrines of eternal truth are frequently treated as venerable nonentities, and have no effect whatever upon the conduct of those who profess to receive them, because they do not realise them as matters of fact, or see their solemn bearings. It is shocking to reflect that a change in the weather has more effect on some men's lives than the dread alternative of heaven or hell. A woman's glance affects them more than the eye of God. We, therefore, desire to see men really and truly believing the facts of the gospel, in an honest, practical manner.

We cannot, however, be content with this; we labour *that those around us may savingly believe by putting their trust in the Lord Jesus Christ*. This is the grand saving act: the man brings his soul and commits it to Christ for safe keeping, and that entrusting of the soul to Jesus saves him. He makes the Saviour trustee of his spiritual estates, and leaves himself and all his eternal interests in those dear hands which once were nailed to the cross. Oh, how we long to see the Holy Spirit bringing men to this, that they may believe in Jesus Christ by resting in him and trusting upon him. For this we live, for this we would be content to die, that many might believe.

The end we aim at is that men may so believe in Jesus that they may be altogether changed in their relation towards God, for "many believed *and turned unto the Lord*." What does that mean? It means that these heathen gave up their idols and began to worship the only living and true God. We desire, dear hearers, that faith in the Lord Jesus may lead you to give up the objects of your idolatrous love, yourselves, your money, your pleasures, the world, the flesh, the devil; for there be some whose God is their belly, and who glory in their shame. When a man believes in Jesus Christ he puts away his false gods, and worships the great Father of spirits; he makes no inferior object the aim of his being, but henceforth lives for the glory of God. This is a glorious turning, a complete conversion of the man's heart and soul.

To turn to God means not merely to forsake the false god for the true, but to turn from the love of sin. Sin lies that way, but God's glory lies in the opposite quarter. He who looks sinward has his back to God—he who looks Godward has his back to sin. It is blessed conversion when men turn from the folly of sin to the glory of God. With weeping and supplication do men so turn, confessing their wrongdoing, lamenting their transgressions, abhorring their evil lustings, desiring pardon, and hoping for renewal of their nature. Precious in the sight of the Lord are the tears of penitence and the sighs of contrite hearts. We can never be satisfied with the results of our ministry unless faith leads man to hearty repentance towards God, an intense loathing of their sins, and an actual forsaking of them.

To turn to God means that henceforth God shall be sought in prayer. "Behold he prayeth" is one of the indications of a true convert. The man who lives without prayer lives without God, but the man who has turned to God is familiar with the mercy-seat. What a turning it is when the eye is turned upward to seek the Lord with the solemn glancing of the eye, when none but God is near. To turn to God means to yield yourself obediently to his sway, to be willing to do what he bids, to think what he teaches, and to be what he commands. Faith is nothing unless it brings with it a willing and obedient mind. Wilful rebellion is the child of unbelief, sincere obedience is the offspring of humble believing. "They believed, and turned unto the Lord." We want men, indeed, so to turn that their whole life shall be a going towards God, a growing more like him, a closer communing with him, leading on to the soul's becoming perfectly like him, and dwelling for ever where he is.

Now, dear friends, when I speak thus of believing and turning unto God some will say, "Well, but that must be a very easy matter, only to believe and turn." Yes, my brethren, it appears simple, but it is none the less vitally essential. "He that believeth on the Lord Jesus hath everlasting life; but he that believeth not is condemned already, because he hath not believed." You say, "Why make all this stir about it?" Just because upon this apparently little matter depends the present and eternal condition of the sinner. To believe and to turn to God is to be delivered from the present dominion of sin, and from the future punishment of it: to be without faith and without God is to be without joy here and without hope hereafter. Brothers and sisters in Christ, this is what you and I must aim at in all our attempts to influence our fellow men. It may be useful to reform them; but it is far better that grace should regenerate them. God speed every effort to promote sobriety, chastity, thrift, honesty, and morality; but you and I are sent for something more than this, our work goes deeper and is more difficult; it is not ours to wash the blackamoor, but to seek to change his skin; we do not so much pray that the lion may be tamed as that he may be turned into a lamb. It may be well to lop the branches of the tree of sin, but our business is to lay the axe at the root of the trees by leading men to turn to God. This is a change, not of the outward conduct merely, but of the heart; and if we do not see this result, if men do not believe and turn to God, we have laboured in vain, and spent our strength for naught and in vain. If there are no believings and turnings to the Lord, we may get us to our secret chambers and bewail ourselves before God because none have believed our report, and the arm of the Lord has not been revealed. There is the object—aim at it, saying, "This one thing I do." Praying in the Holy Ghost, and depending upon his power, push on with this one sole object. Drive at it, you teachers in the Sabbath-school; do not be satisfied with instructing the children, labour to have them converted. Drive at it, you preachers; do not believe that you have done your work when you have taught the people, you must never rest till they believe in Jesus Christ. Pursue

this end in every sermon or Sabbath-school address; throw your whole soul into this one object. Yours must not be a cold inculcation of an external morality, but a warm enthusiasm for an inward regeneration. You are not to bring men to believe in themselves and so become self-made men, but to lead them to believe in Jesus, and to become new creatures in him. There is our end and aim, are we all alive to it?

II. Secondly, let us consider THE POWER BY WHICH THIS CAN BE ATTAINED,—“The hand of the Lord was with them.” None ever believe in Jesus except those in whom God’s arm has been revealed, for Jesus says, “No man can come to me except the Father which hath sent me draw him.” But, brethren, in answer to prayer that power has been revealed among his people, and is with them still. His arm is not shortened that he cannot save, neither has he withdrawn it from his church. Be encouraged while I suggest to you a few thoughts. The hand of God is upon many of our friends before we speak to them. It is most pleasant to me when I am seeing inquirers, to observe how God makes ready the hearts of my hearers. I am studying a certain subject, and praying to God for a blessing on it, and upstairs in a chamber, which I have never seen, one of my hearers is being made ready for my message; he is smitten with a sense of sin, or troubled with uneasy thoughts, or rendered hopeful of better things, and thus he is being made ready to accept the Christ whom I shall preach to him; yes, and ready to accept that particular form of the gospel message which the Spirit of God gave me when I preached. There on a sick bed will lie a woman painfully exercised with the sad memory of her sinful life, in order that when she comes up to the house of God every word may have power over her. Sickness and pain, shame and poverty, often produce a condition of mind most hopeful for the reception of the gospel. A man well-to-do in circumstances has been ruined in business, he despairs of happiness below, and therefore comes to hear the gospel, made willing to seek his happiness above. Another has lately felt failures of bodily strength, and so has been warned that life is frail, and thus he is prepared to listen to the admonitions which speak of eternity. Courage, minister of God: you are nothing, but the Almighty God is with you. When you lift your hand to build the house of the Lord, omnipotence works with you, and makes your labour a success. Every revolution of those awful wheels, so ponderous that even the prophet said, “O wheel!” is working to accomplish the object which is near your heart. The stars in their courses fight for you. The stones of the field are in league with you. Eternal wisdom plans for you, infinite power works with you, boundless patience perseveres with you, and almighty love will conquer by you. “The hand of the Lord was with them.” What more do we want? Sow, brother, for God has ploughed. Go up and build, for God has prepared the stones and made ready the foundation.

Moreover, the hand of the Lord is with his people in helping the teachers and preachers themselves. There are strange impulses which come over us at

times, which make us think and say what otherwise had never crossed our minds, and these work with power upon men's minds. If you will live to win souls it shall be given you in the selfsame hour what ye shall speak. You will often say to an inquirer what you would not have beforehand arranged to say, but God, who knows that inquirer's heart better than you do, has prevented you saying what you would have liked to have said, and has led you to say what you afterwards judged to be a mistake. My experience teaches me that we are often wise in our ignorance, and as often foolish in our wisdom. We have frequently done best when we felt that we did but badly. If we will but trust God and be whole-hearted in the winning of souls we shall have a power assisting us in our speech of which the greatest orator in the world is not aware. Speak in the House of Commons for a party, and you will have to look within for aid, but speak in the house of the Lord and you may look upward for spiritual aid. The poet invokes the fabled muses, but for you, O servant of the Lord, there is real help from a higher source. Think of this, ye workers, and be encouraged.

Besides providence and the gracious help by which good men speak, there is a distinct work of the Spirit of God upon the hearts of men where the gospel is preached. Not only is the Spirit in the Word, but over and above that, in his own elect God worketh most effectually, so the truth is rendered irresistible. Let us never forget where our great strength lieth, for in this matter we must rely alone upon the *Spirit* of God. How often has God wrought in the power of his grace by making men feel the majesty of the word. They come, perhaps, to hear the preacher out of the idlest curiosity, they look for something which shall amuse them; but the truth comes home to them and searches their heart. Simple as the language is, "as if an angel spake they hear the solemn sound"; it goes through them like a dart, and they cannot help feeling, "Surely God was there, and he spoke with me."

The Spirit of God makes men recollect their sins: they try to forget them, but sometimes they cannot; sad memories steal over them, and wholesome regrets thrill their very souls. Men who have been giddy and careless, and forgetful, have on a sudden found themselves turning over the pages of their old diaries, and with thoughtfulness reviewing the past: all this leads to repentance and faith. That same Spirit makes men see the beauty of holiness; they cannot help admiring it, though they are far from it. They are charmed with the loveliness of the character of Jesus, and begin to feel that there is something about it which they would wish to imitate. When the preacher proclaims the way of salvation the same Spirit leads men to admire it, and to say within themselves, "There is something here which human wisdom could never have devised," and they begin to long for a share in it. A wish takes possession of their heart, as though some strange bird from an unknown land had flown into their souls, and had amazed them with a new song. They do not know where the desire came from, but they feel strangely bound to

entertain the stranger. Sometimes also the Spirit blows like a hurricane through men's hearts, and they have been borne along by its power without the will to resist. As when a tempest rushes across the sea, and drives the frail bark before it helplessly, so have I known the divine Spirit sweep away the peace and quiet of the soul's self-righteousness, stir up the deeps of inward trouble, make the soul reel to and fro and stagger like a drunken man, and impel the heart forward to the iron-bound coast of self-despair, where every false hope and vain-glorious trust has been wrecked for ever. Glory be to God when this is the case, for then the soul is driven to cling to Jesus.

Yes, brethren, it is not the preacher, and it is not altogether what the preacher says, but there is a power abroad, as potent as that by which the worlds were made. Unbelievers sometimes ask, "Where is your God?" O sirs, if you once felt the power of the great Spirit you would never ask that question. "Since the fathers fell asleep," say they, "all things continue as they were;" but this they willingly are ignorant of, that new creations are being wrought every day, that there are men and women alive in this world who are neither liars nor enthusiasts, who can declare that upon their spirit the eternal power and Godhead has operated and changed them, conquering them, and holding them henceforth as willing captives to its supreme majesty. Yes, brethren, there is a hand of the Lord, and that hand of the Lord is with his people still. If it be not, then we shall see no believing and no turning to God; but since it is still at work among us, let us work on, for as surely as we live we shall see great numbers converted to God, and God will be glorified.

III. Let us now dwell upon THE DESIRABLENESS OF CONVERSIONS. It is no new thing to you and to me to see many believing and turning to God. These two-and-twenty years God's hand has been stretched out still: we have had no spasm of revival, we have not alternated between furious spurts and sudden lulls, but month by month, I think I might say Sabbath by Sabbath, souls have been saved, and the church has grown exceedingly, and God has been glorified. What we have enjoyed we desire to retain—yea, we would have more. The Lord says to us what he said to the church at Philadelphia, "Hold fast what thou hast, that no man take thy crown," and our crown is the crown of soul winning, which we must hold fast, for we cannot endure to lose it. This must be our crown, that we have preached the gospel, both minister and church members, and have been all of us soul-winners. We desire this because, first of all, we desire to see truth, godliness, virtue, and holiness extended. Who among you does not? Does not every good man wish others to be good, every honest man wish others to be honest? Does not every man who loves his family desire that other families should be well-ordered? Oh, then, if there were no nobler reason, you may desire that men may be converted, since conversion is the root of everything that is pure, and lovely, and of good report.



You desire, too, that your fellow-creatures should be happy, but there is no such happiness as that which springs out of reconciliation to God. The peace which you yourselves enjoy through pardoned sin must surely make you desire that others may possess the same. If religion be indeed a source of perennial joy to yourself, you are inhuman if you do not wish others to drink of it. Brother, as you would make eyes sparkle, as you would make countenances radiant with delight, as I know you would spread gladness on all sides, desire above all things that your children, your relations, your neighbours, your friends, should be converted to God. Thus shall thorns and briars give place to myrtles and rose, and deserts shall be turned into gardens of the Lord.

You also desire conversion, I am sure, because you feel the dreadful hazard of unconverted men. You have not yet subscribed to the modern doctrine that these men and women around you are only two-legged cats and dogs and horses, and will ultimately die out and cease to be. You believe in the God-given immortality of human souls, a heritage from which no man can escape, the noblest of all man's endowments; in itself the highest of all boons, though sin may pervert it into the direst of all necessities. You would have scant motives for desiring men's conversion if you did not believe that; there is another and everlasting state; but, believing that men live hereafter, and exist for ever, you must, I am sure, be eager that men may escape from the wrath to come. Knowing the terrors of the Lord, you would persuade men; judging that there is one of two things for them all, either "These shall go away into everlasting punishment"; or else, "The righteous into life eternal," you can never rest until you feel convinced that those about you are partakers of life eternal. Look at any unconverted person, and your sympathies should be aroused. If I saw tokens of fever, or marks of consumption in the face of any one I loved, I should be struck with alarm; what, then, must I feel when I see damnation—as I do see it—in the face of every unbeliever? How is it that we are not more distressed than we are when men are perishing in their sins? Why, my brethren, are we not more intent upon the conversion of men? Let these questions humble us and cause great searchings of heart. It is a shame to us that we have so little of the mind of Christ, so little compassion for men's souls.

Moreover, brethren, self-preservation is a law of nature, and the Church can never preserve herself except by increasing from the world by conversion. Where are the preachers for the next generation? Today they are amongst the ungodly, and we must labour to bring them to God. Where are the stones that are to make the next course in the walls of our Zion? They are unquarried yet, and we must, by God's grace, excavate them. We who now labour for the Lord will soon go our ways. Our thrones and crowns are waiting for us, and the angels are beckoning us away; who will fill our places? Who will bear the banner? Who will blow the trumpet? Who will wield the

sword? We must find new champions in the ranks of the foe; they must be born unto God, and we must pray that this may be accomplished by our instrumentality.

Seek conversions *for Christ's sake*. You know the agony and bloody sweat; shall these be spent in vain? You know the nailing to the cross and the shriek of "Why hast thou forsaken me?" shall these be unrewarded? You have thought over and trusted in the bitter pangs of your Redeemer's death; shall he not see of the travail of his soul? Shall he not be satisfied? These lost sheep are *his* sheep, for whom he shed his precious blood; these lost pieces of money are *his* money, and they bear his image and superscription; shall they not be found? These lost sons, away there spending their living in riotousness, are *his* brothers, children of *his* Father; do you not desire for Jesus' sake that they should be brought home?

Dear friends, what joy it will be to yourselves if men believe and turn to the Lord by your means. I put that motive last, and hope it will not be the strongest, but it may yet be one of the liveliest. What joy it will be to yourselves if you see many converted! Somebody has asked, "If the heathen are not evangelised, what will become of them?" I will put another question of a far more practical character. If you do not try to evangelise the heathen, *what wilt become of you?* Do not so much inquire about *their* destiny as your own, if you have no care for their salvation. He who never seeks the conversion of another is in imminent danger of being damned himself. I do not believe in any man's salvation who is wrapped up in self, assuredly he is not saved from selfishness. I cannot believe in any man's possessing the Spirit of God who is indifferent to the condition of others, for one of the first fruits of the Spirit is love. Even as flowers at their very first blooming shed their perfume, so do the saved ones in their earliest days of grace desire the good of their fellows. I know that one of my earliest impulses when I first looked to Christ and lost the burden of my sin was to tell everybody around me of the blessings I had received, for I longed to make others as happy as I was. I do fear me that you who never try to win souls lack an essential part of the Christian character. I leave the question with your own consciences.

IV. Fourthly, let us enquire, WHAT WE CAN DO TO PROMOTE CONVERSIONS. Conversion is God's work: it cannot be wrought without his hand. Without him we can do nothing. Our hand is far too puny for such a work; the power of the first disciples and our own lies in the fact mentioned in the text,—“The hand of the Lord was with them.” Still, there are certain circumstances under which that hand will work, and there are hindrances which will restrain it. Let us think awhile. First, then, if sinners are to be converted *we must distinctly aim at it*. As a rule, a man does what he tries to do, and not that which is mere by-play. The conversion of sinners is not one of those things which a man is likely to accomplish without intending it. Sometimes in the sovereignty of God a preacher who does not aim at conversion may

nevertheless be made useful, for God works as he wills; but largely, and as a rule men do not win souls if they do not eagerly desire to do so. Fishing for men cannot be carried out by throwing in the net anyhow, without caring whether fish be caught or no. Few traders become rich by accident, they generally have to plod and work hard for money: and to be rich in treasures of saved souls you must aim at it and labour for it. I am struck with astonishment as I think how many sermons are preached, how many Sunday-school addresses are given, how many religious books are written of which you are quite sure that the intention was not immediate conversion. It is thought that in some unknown way these good things may accidentally contribute to men's salvation, but they are not aimed at as their present object. Ah, brother, if you want men to come to Christ you must preach Christ to them with all your heart, with this design, that immediately they may close in with Christ, and at once give their hearts to Jesus. Yes, and you are to pray that they may do so through the present effort which you are making for their good. There is the target, and if you continue to shoot into the air long enough an arrow may perhaps strike it; but, man alive, if you want to win the prize of archery you had better fix your eye upon the white and take your aim distinctly and with skill. If an individual would win souls he must bend his whole soul to it and make it the object of his whole energy.

Next to that we must take care if we would have souls won that we *press upon them the truths which God usually blesses*. Shall I read to you the verse before my text? Here it is: "They spake unto the Grecians, preaching the Lord Jesus, and the hand of the Lord was with them." Now, if we do not preach Jesus Christ we shall not see souls saved. There are certain forms of doctrines which condemn themselves by working out their own extinction. Did you ever hear of a minister whose preaching leaned towards Unitarianism but what the congregation sooner or later began to diminish? Though many such preachers have been men of great ability, they have not as a rule been able to keep the dead thing on its feet. You shall go into our small towns, and you may find an ancient chapel which was once an Independent, or a Presbyterian, or it may be a Baptist chapel; but if you see over the door "*Unitarian*" you have, as a rule, seen all that there is. There is neither church nor congregation worthy of the name; frequently the place is never opened at all, and the grass grows knee deep on the path to the door. Even when these little places are used, you will generally find that they contain half a dozen nobodies who think themselves everybody as to intellect and culture. It is a religion of the utmost value to spiders, for those insects are able to spin their webs in the meeting-houses without fear. Who ever heard, who ever will hear of a Unitarian Whitfield, or a Socinian Moody gathering twenty thousand people to listen to a Christless gospel? It is a phenomenon which never has been seen and never will be. Men's instincts lead them to turn away from a creed which contains so little which can solace the troubled soul.

If we want souls saved we must equally avoid the modern intellectual system in all its phases. “Oh,” cries somebody, “you should hear the great Mr. Bombast. It is—Oh, I cannot tell you what it is, but something very wonderful; it is an intellectual treat.” Just so; but how many conversions are wrought by this wonderful display of genius? How many hearts are broken by fine rhetoric? How many broken hearts are healed by philosophy? So far as I have observed, I find that God does not save souls by intellectual treats.

Certain views as to man’s future are equally to be kept clear of, if you would be the means of conversion. Diminish your ideas of the wrath of God and the terrors of hell, and in that proportion you will diminish the results of your work. I could not conceive a Bunyan or a Baxter, or any other great soul-winner, falling into these new notions, or if he did there would be an end to his success. Other crotchets and novelties of doctrine are also to be let alone, for they are not likely to promote your object, but will most probably divert men’s attention from the vital point. Dear brothers and sisters, if you want a harvest, look well to your seed. Time was when gardeners threw all the little potatoes on one side for seed, and then they had bad crops; but now I have seen them pick out the very best and put them by. “We must have good seed,” say they. If I had to sow my fields with wheat I would not take the tail corn. I should grudge no expense about seed, for it would be false economy to buy any but the very best. Go preach, teach, and instruct with the best doctrine, even that of God’s word; for depend upon it though the result is not in your hands, yet it very much depends upon what you teach. O, eternal and ever blessed Spirit, guide thy servants into all truth!

Next to this, if you want to win souls for Christ, *feel a solemn alarm about them*. You cannot make them feel if you do not feel yourself. Believe their danger, believe their helplessness, believe that only Christ can save them, and talk to them as if you meant it. The Holy Spirit will move them by first moving *you*. If you can rest without their being saved *they* will rest too; but if you are filled with an agony for them, if you cannot bear that they should be lost, you will soon find that they are uneasy too. I hope you will get into such a state that you will dream about your child, or about your hearer perishing for lack of Christ, and start up at once and begin to cry, “O God, give me converts or I die.” Then you will have converts; there is no fear about that. God does not send travail pangs to his servants without causing them to abound in spiritual children. There will be new births to God when you are agonising for them.

But, let me add, *there must be much prayer*. I delight to be at prayer-meetings where the brethren will not let the Lord go except he bless them, when a brother prays, choking as he speaks, tears rolling down his cheeks as he pleads with God have mercy on the sons of men. I am always certain that sinners are ordained to be blessed when I see saints thus compelled to plead with God for them. In your closets alone, at your family altars, and in your

gatherings for prayer be importunate, and the hand of the Lord must and will be with you. Cry aloud and spare not, plead as for your lives, and bring forth your strong arguments, for only by prevailing with God will you be enabled to prevail with men.

Then there must be added to prayer *direct personal effort on the part of all of you*. Great numbers may be saved by my preaching if the Holy Spirit blesses it, but I shall expect larger numbers if you all turn preachers, if every brother and sister here becomes a witness for Christ. Are you indolent? Are any of you beginning to sleep? I charge you, wake up. By the love you bear to Jesus, and by the love you bear to your fellow men, begin at once to seek the conversion of those who dwell around you. O my beloved, do not become lukewarm. My heart fails me at the very thought. If you are earnest, I live; if you grow slothful, my spirit dies within me.

Last of all, if you want to see many converts, *expect them*. “According to your faith so be it unto you.” Look out for them; believe that God will bless every sermon, and go a-hunting after the sermon to see where the converts are. As a company of sutlers and camp-followers generally follow every army, and after a battle go up to strip the slain, so if you cannot preach I would have you follow after the warriors to gather in the spoil. No one needed to urge the voracious spoilers to prowl over the field of Sedan or Gravelotte, but now it even seems needful to persuade you to collect a far nobler prey. Come ye up, come ye up, ye servants of the Lord, and divide the spoil with the strong. Christ has fought your battle, his arrows have been sharp in the hearts of the King’s enemies, the two-edged sword has smitten right and left; come ye up, ye sons of Jacob, to the prey, and gather in the converts as your spoil. Speak with the young converts, cheer the broken hearts, comfort the seekers, and bring into his palace trophies for your Lord. Verily, I say unto you, if ye look not for conversions neither shall ye obtain them, but then blame not the Lord; ye are not straitened in him, but in your own bowels. God bless you, beloved, and may we have a larger increase to this church during the next month than we have had for years past, that our God may have greater praise.

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PORTION OF SCRIPTURE READ BEFORE SERMON—ACTS xi.

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HYMNS FROM “OUR OWN HYMN BOOK”—387, 450, 331.