

“SITTING BY”
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A SERMON DELIVERED ON LORD’S-DAY MORNING, NOVEMBER 13, 1887,
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AT THE METROPOLITAN TABERNACLE, NEWINGTON.

*“And it came to pass on a certain day, as He was teaching,
that there were Pharisees and doctors of the Law sitting by.”*
Luke 5:17.

A CONGREGATION is a strange aggregate—it is like the gatherings of a net, or the collections of a dredge. If it is a very large one, it is especially remarkable. What strange varieties of creatures meet in the Noah’s ark of a crowded House of Prayer! If anybody could write the histories of all gathered here, the result would be a library of singular stories.

You, my dear Friends, who usually worship here, have probably no idea of the strange medley of nations, ranks, professions, conditions and religions which are represented in one of the great congregations of this Tabernacle. I am often myself greatly startled when I come across the tracks of people quite unknown to me, except by the newspapers, who have mingled in these vast assemblies. I could not have imagined that they would ever have entered a place where the Gospel is preached! It is noteworthy that God always selects our congregations for us—and His arrangements are always wise. I have frequently said to myself, “I shall have a picked congregation tonight,” and in some instances this has been very singularly the case. Persons have come here who had, themselves, no thought of coming, till some special matter drew them—and then the Word of God spoken has been so manifestly suited to their case that it made them marvel! If they had sent notice of their coming and the preacher had known all about them, he might not have ventured to be quite so personal, for he has unwittingly entered into minute details and secret items which, knowingly, he would never have revealed! The Lord who knows what is done in the closet, knows how to direct His ministering servant so that he shall speak to the point and speak to the heart.

In the present congregation we have a large company of people who have long known the Lord and have, for years, rejoiced in His name. We have another company of persons who do not know the Lord *savingly*, but yet are well acquainted with the Gospel and are not far from the Kingdom of God. They are almost persuaded. They tarry in the border land. Oh, that they would cross the frontier and become dwellers in Immanuel’s Land! We have also among us some who are far removed from Divine life—a people about whom we have little or no hope. Yet it is from among these that we reap the richest spoils for Christ, for He has compassion on the ignorant and on those that are out-of-the-way. I am fond of that word, “out-of-the-way.” The Lord save all of you who are out-of-the-way ones!

In every congregation we have a fourth class who would decline to be classed at all—they may be said to be here and not here! They are spectators rather than hearers. Like the gentlemen mentioned in our text, they are “*sitting by*.” They are too respectable to be numbered with the vulgar crowd. No, no—they are only callers, sitting by. They would not like to have it supposed that they are regular hearers, much less converts—they are “*sitting by*.” They are not repenting. They are not believing. They are not entering into the Truth of God at all. But, they are, “*sitting by*.” They have come to look on, take notes and make remarks. They are on the outskirts of the battle, but they are not combatants at all—they are “*sitting by*”—where they hope they are out the range of gunshot!

It is about these who are “*sitting by*” that I shall now speak, for I am afraid they are becoming by far too easy in the seats which they have chosen. They are sitting as God’s people sit and yet they are not truly among them, but only, “*sitting by*.” They are a very irritating and disappointing part of our assemblies, but, at the same time, there they are and we would not turn them out if we could! We are *glad* to have these persons to quarry from, for who knows but that out of

them, God, in infinite mercy, may select individuals who will never again “sit by,” but who will be heart and soul with Christ and His people—and even become leaders of the host of God?

Let me freely speak to you concerning certain of those who sat by. They were by no means to be despised, for some of them were eminent persons. They were Pharisees, members of the separate sect, who kept themselves to themselves, and were punctilious about the externals of religion. Very superior, indeed, were these Pharisees—and you could see by their faces that they felt themselves to be persons of importance. With these were doctors of the Law of God, the learned men who had studied the Scriptures very carefully, counted the words of each Holy Book and found out the middle letter of it. These doctors of the Law had come to hear the unlettered peasant from Nazareth, concerning whom they had a very strong, but by no means favorable opinion. They had heard about Him and they condescended to give Him a hearing, half blushing at their own modesty in doing so. Not, of course, that *He* could teach *them* anything—they were merely, “sitting by,” and nothing more. We do not see many of these great folk among our crowds and, perhaps, there are none such here on this occasion, but we cannot be sure. I do not much care to know whether the learned and profound are here, but they do come among us at times, though it is only to sit by. I will say no more about these remarkable people just now, for many others come into congregations merely to sit by. They have not come with any wish to learn, or understand, or feel, or be saved—they are only “sitting by.”

I. Let our first head answer the enquiry—WHAT WERE THESE PEOPLE DOING? They were “sitting by.” There is a good deal in this. First, *they were indulging their curiosity*. They had come out of every town of Galilee, Judea and Jerusalem to know what this stir was all about. They had heard the great fame of Christ for working miracles and this drew them into the throng which continually surrounded Him. Besides, the crowd, itself, drew them. Why was there such a large company? What could it be all about? They would like to know for the sake of curiosity. They would, for once, hear the Man, that they might be able to say that they had heard Him—but they were not going to be influenced by what they heard—they would hear Him as outsiders, “sitting by.” They were curious, but not anxious.

As a rule, very little comes of this kind of attendance at places of worship. And yet, I had sooner people come from this motive than not at all! Curiosity may be the stepping-stone to something better, but, in itself, what good is there in it? Persons on the Sunday go to St. Paul’s, to Westminster Abbey, to the Tabernacle, to this place and to that—and they suppose that they are worshipping God—whereas they might just as well have gone to see a show! In fact, it is going to a show and nothing more as far as their motive is concerned! Do not flatter yourselves—if you go to places of worship merely to look about you or to hear music, you are not worshipping God! If you come to this great house to gratify your own fancy, you are no more worshipping God than you would be if you walked in the fields! You are only, in a very poor and groveling sense, “sitting by.”

Many come into our assemblies and sit by in *this* respect—that *they are altogether indifferent*. I do not suppose that these scribes and Pharisees were quite good enough to be altogether indifferent—they leaned the wrong way and were bitterly opposed. Too many act as if they said, “I come to hear a noted preacher, but what his doctrine may be I neither know nor care.” They do not enquire, “What is this doctrine of the Fall? What is this depravity of heart? What is this work of the Spirit? What is this vicarious Sacrifice?” They do not *care* to know whether they are concerned in anything that is spoken of. Nor do they ask, “What is this new birth, this translation from darkness to Light, this sanctification of nature?” They hear a theological term and dismiss it as no concern of theirs. They do not want to know too much. This atoning Sacrifice—they hear so much about it. This shedding of the precious blood of Jesus. This putting away of sin by the Sacrifice of Jesus—they will not lend an ear to this saving mystery—but treat it as a matter of little or no consequence. It is nothing to them that Jesus should die!

O dear Sirs, it ought to be something to you! If there is anything worth enquiring into, it is your own state before God, your position as to eternal things, your condition at this moment in reference to sin—whether it stains you scarlet, or whether you have been washed from it in the fountain which Christ has opened! If there is *anything* worthy of a man’s enquiry, it is the matter which concerns his own soul for eternity! Would God you would no longer be found, “sitting by,” but would in earnest feel, “There is something here for me. Perhaps for me there is a peace which I have never known, a joy which I have never imagined. I will see for myself. Perhaps for me there is a Heaven of which I have, up to now, despised. I will make a searching enquiry and see whether it is so or not.” May *that* be your resolve and may you no longer be among those who sit by in stolid indifference!

The scribes and Pharisees were sitting by in another and a worse, sense, for *they were there to criticize in an unfriendly spirit*, and either find faults, or invent them. I see them take out their notebooks to jot down a Word the Savior said which they thought could be twisted. How they nudged one another as He said something which sounded unusual and bold! Oh, could they but catch Him! When, at last, He said to the sick man, “Your sins are forgiven you,” I think I see their eyes flash with malignant fire! “*Now we have got Him! Now we have got Him! This Man blasphemeth!*” They hoped He had now said more than He could stand to and they asked in triumph, “Who can forgive sins but God only?” They were, “sitting by,” watching the Savior as a cat watches a mouse! How eagerly they spring upon Him!

My Hearers, this was a wretched business, was it not? It is a very poor business to go to the House of God to criticize a fellow mortal who is sincerely trying to do us good. It will not, in the present case, affect the preacher much, for his skin is hardened and he feels not the tiny strokes of ordinary censure. In no case can ungenerous criticisms do any good. But the pity of it is that when we earnestly desire to show you the way of salvation, some of you should hinder us by petty observations upon a faulty mannerism, a slight blunder, a mispronunciation of a word, or an inaccurate accent! Alas, what small things put the eternal Truth of God on one side! I do not know and I would not like to say if I did know, what petty trifles people will carry away and talk of, after we have been solemnly pleading with them about Heaven, Hell, the Judgement Day and the wrath to come—and the way to escape from it! Was it Carlyle who spoke of the cricket as chirping amid the crack of doom?

I am apt to think that many people are like that cricket—they go on with their idle chitchat when Christ, Himself, is set before them on the Cross. Assuredly this is poor work! I am hungry. I come to a banquet, but, instead of feasting upon the food, I begin to criticize the dress of the waiters, abuse the arrangements of the banqueting hall and vilify the provisions! I shall go home as hungry as I came and who will be blamed for it? The best criticism that you can possibly give of your friend’s entertainment is to be hearty in partaking of it! The greatest honor that we can do to Christ Jesus is to feed upon Him, to receive Him, to trust Him, to live upon Him! Merely to complain and to question will bring no good to the most clever of you. How can it? It is a pitiful waste of time for yourself and a trial of temper to others. Yet there are many who, like the scribes and Pharisees, are in this manner, “sitting by.”

Now, I do not care to go farther into these different forms of “sitting by,” but no doubt *some kindly admire, but do not profit*. Hundreds of people are “sitting by” who are attentive hearers and warm friends—and yet have no part nor lot in the matter. They have been more or less regular attendants at this House of Prayer for, say 12, 14, 15, 20 years—and yet they are not one whit the better! Some go from public worship to the public house—and yet they would not neglect church or chapel on any account! Many are no better at home for all they have heard—their wives are sorrowful witnesses to that fact. Why, some of you have been prayed for time out of mind and you have been preached at as well, but still, you are, “sitting by.” I cannot make out why you come so constantly and yet profit so little! It would seem to all who knew you a very odd thing if you were seen loafing about a certain shop for an hour and a half one day in the week for 20 years and yet you never bought a pennyworth of goods! Why do you hang about the Gospel shop and yet purchase nothing? On your own showing you are a fool! I do not like using a hard word, still, it is used in Scripture for such as you are. He who believes a thing to be so important that he spends one day in the week in hearing about it, and yet does not think it important enough to accept it as a gift, stultifies himself by his own actions! How will you answer for it at the Last Great Day when the Judge shall say, “You believed enough to go and hear about salvation. Why did you not believe enough to accept it? You believed enough to quarrel for it. You would stand up for the doctrine of the Gospel—and yet you, yourself, perished in your sin.” What answer will you give, you that are “sitting by”? You will have to give some answer, what will it be? Oh, that you would use a little commonsense about your souls and would quit the seat of the foolish for the stool of the penitent—and no more be of those who are “sitting by!”

II. Secondly, let us enquire WHAT WAS HAPPENING WHILE THESE PERSONS WERE “SITTING BY”? They had entered the room where Jesus was preaching, where crowds were listening, where miracles of mercy were being worked. They were criticizing, carping and quibbling—but what was happening to them all the while?

Well, first, *they were incurring responsibility*. Sirs, you cannot hear the Gospel and refuse it, and yet remain as you were! You are either better or worse after hearing the Gospel. It is made to you either a savor of life unto life, or else of death unto death! Remember, it will be more tolerable for Sodom and Gomorrah in the Day of Judgement, than for Bethsaida and Chorazin, who had heard the Gospel. The refusal of the Gospel is a crowning crime—there is no sin like

it! Does not the Word of God say so? This is no gloomy talk of *mine*. The Lord Jesus taught that the men of Nineveh would condemn the men of Jerusalem because they heeded warning and Jerusalem did not. Oh, you that have heard the Gospel so long, and have been “sitting by” all the while, what a mountain of guilt rests upon you! How shall you escape? What must become of you after such base ingratitude?

Besides that, *they were gathering hardness of heart*. Every hour that you listen to the Gospel—and bar your heart against it—you are less and less likely to admit it. The bolt that is rusted is hard to move back from its place. The path that has long been trodden by daily traffic has become hard, as though it were paved with stone—hearts that have often been traversed by the Gospel become like iron beneath its tread. I fear your consciences have grown hardened by the traffic of the Gospel. I know that it is so with many. The Lord forgive them! If I could have a congregation that never heard the Gospel before, I should feel more hopeful than I do when I speak to you who have heard it for years. What is now likely to affect you? What fresh arguments can I bring? I can tell you some new story, perhaps, but what of that? You have had too many stories already! It is not so easy a matter to retain your attention, now, as it once was—the voice has grown familiar and the manner is stale to you. Can I hope that I shall now reach the hearts at which I have shot so many arrows which have all missed the mark? O God, have mercy upon those who have been “sitting by” so long!

Once again, let me remind you that those who were “sitting by” *were obstructing Christ all that they could*. There is a something—every preacher has felt it—there is a something in a congregation itself which affects the preacher, even as he affects the congregation. I soon feel when godly men are praying for me and crying, “O Lord, help him to preach!” I cannot tell you how it is, but so it is, that some congregations freeze me and others set me on fire. When the doctors of the Law and the Pharisees are, “sitting by,” they drag us down and we cannot do many mighty works. If my eye catches the glance of one of these ice men. If I perceive his wretched indifference and detect his half-concealed sneer, I am weakened by it. I fancy I hear such folks saying, “We care nothing for what you say. We do not belong to those whom you can influence. We are clad in mail against your weapons.” This chills one to the marrow.

Now, this is the tendency of your conduct if you are “sitting by”—you chill the preacher—and in chilling the preacher you do boundless mischief to the congregation. Don’t you know that it was said, even of Jesus, “He did not many mighty works there because of their unbelief”? Even He, as Man, was, in a measure, dependent upon those who surrounded Him! When He saw their faith, He healed the sick of the palsy! And at another time, when He saw their unbelief, He looked round with indignation! It is a terrible fact that certain of you may be so acting as to hinder the salvation of others by your indifference to the sacred message! I believe that this is eminently the case with you that are very good people in all but the one thing necessary—you do not fear God and your very goodness works for evil! The example of a rank and rotten profligate will not influence certain minds, for they are disgusted by its grossness and driven to seek something better. But when young men see an excellent person like you, so moral and amiable, without religion, they gather from your example that godliness is not absolutely necessary and take license to do without it! Thus, you who are “sitting by” may be a *curse* when you little suspect it—you may be encouraging others in the attempt to live without the Savior!

Yet let me not finish this head without repeating the remark that we are *glad to have these people*, “sitting by,” rather than not coming at all! Being in the way, the Lord may meet with them. If you go where shots are flying, you may be wounded one of these days. Better to come and hear the Gospel from a low motive than not to come at all! Remember Hugh Latimer’s quaint story when he urged all his hearers to go and hear the Gospel? He even praised that sleepless woman who had been taking sleeping medicine, but found that there was no drug strong enough to make her sleep till, at last, she said, “If you would take me to the parish church I know that I could go to sleep, for I have slept there every Sunday for many years.” She was taken to that place of rest and was soon at peace! “Well, well,” said Latimer, “she had better come for sleep than not come at all.” And so I say—even if you come here to sleep, the Lord may awake you to seek and find the Savior! Still it is a wretched business—this, “sitting by.”

III. Next, let us enquire WHAT WAS THE REASON THESE PEOPLE WERE “SITTING BY”? Why did they come to hear Jesus and yet did not become a part of the really attentive congregation, but were hovering round the skirts of it and, “sitting by”? I would not needlessly offend any of those who have come here at this time, but let me quietly say a few things which may be applicable to them.

In the first place, in the case of the scribes it was *self-conceit* which made them sit by. They were divided from the common throng by a sense of superiority. They said, “What have *we* to do with hearing Jesus of Nazareth and His message concerning the pardon of sin?” “Why,” they said, “we are highly educated people and do not need to listen to so plain a preacher. His salvation we do not need, for we are not lost.” Jesus, Himself, said, “They that are whole need not a physician; but they that are sick,” thus indicating that it was their good idea of themselves which kept them back from Him. That is the reason why so many sit by—in their own opinion they are quite as good as the best and are not in need of any great change. They are most respectable people and they believe that they are also upright and generous.

There went a man out of this place one evening who was spoken to by one of our friends who happened to know him in trade and had him in good repute. “What? Have you been to hear our minister tonight?” The good man answered, “Yes, I am sorry to say I have.” “But,” said our friend, “why are you sorry?” “Why,” he said, “he has turned me inside out and spoiled my idea of myself! When I went into the Tabernacle I thought I was the best man in Newington, but now I feel that my righteousness is worthless.” “Oh,” said the friend, “that is all right, you will come again, I am sure. The Word of God has come home to you and shown you the truth—you will get comfort soon.” That friend *did* come again and he is here tonight—he takes pleasure in that very Truth of God which turned him inside out! And he comes on purpose that the Word of the Lord may search him and try him—and be to him as a refiner’s fire! He that is most afraid to be turned inside out is the man who most needs to undergo that process!

Alas, many will not let the Word of God search them! They say within themselves, “That is good, very good. But it is not for me.” Such are those that sit by. They sit in a corner, out of the wind of the winnowing fan. Do you not see them draw themselves up and look very solemnly at other people, as if they would say to their neighbor, “There, you take that home! That doctrine is good for *you sinners*, but the preacher has no reference to *me*.”

These people were “sitting by” because there was, in them, *no sense of personal need*, no perception of their own nakedness which only Christ can cover, no sense of inward hunger which only Jesus can remove. They did not need a Savior for *themselves*, though quite willing to hear Him preached to others. They did not require mercy for *themselves*, though pleased that *sinners* should hear of it. They could see and, therefore, needed not that their eyes should be opened. They had all things and had no poverty to plead. So it always will be in the preaching of the Word—those will hear it with gladness who perceive that they need what it presents to them—but others will take no interest in it. Conscious need inclines the ear to hear—and until the *Spirit of God works this in us*, we shall be deaf as posts to the voice of love—and continue “sitting by.”

There was also about these people *a mass of prejudice*. Their conservative tendency kept them aloof. Carried a certain distance, this tendency is good, but it may turn a man into a pillar of salt and prevent his fleeing for his life. Having drunk the old wine, these immovable people do not desire new because they feel sure that the old is better. Yet if the old wine is sour or musty and the new wine is sweet and good, it is a pity to prefer the bad to the good! The old intoxicating wine of salvation by *human merit*, or by *ceremonies*, is, by many, preferred to our Lord’s own new wine of the Kingdom, namely Justification by His righteousness through *faith*. “Believe and live” is set aside for, “the man that does these things shall live by them.” They prefer Sinai to Calvary, their own filthy rags to the Lord’s perfect robe of righteousness! They stick to the Old Covenant, which is taken away, and cannot endure the Everlasting Covenant of Grace. The prejudice of proud human nature is hard to overcome—men are not willing to search the Scriptures and see whether they are right or not—they stick to their inherited falsehoods.

Many are “sitting by” because of *resolute unbelief and determined self-confidence*. O Friends, it is born in us by nature to believe in ourselves! What is that but clear *idolatry*? It is not till we are *born again* that we come to believe in Jesus Christ and so to trust in the living God and receive a *living hope*! May the Lord deliver us from that old, good-for-nothing confidence in self, confidence in works, confidence in outward ceremonies, confidence in the flesh! Oh, that we might pour the old and musty wine on the ground—and taste of the new wine, crushed from the cluster by the dying Son of God—the new wine of salvation by Grace, through faith, unto the glory of God! Would God that those who are “sitting by” on account of their vainglorious prejudices, may be brought into the marriage feast of Grace and made willing to wear the wedding garment and honor Him who has prepared it! Prejudice is the ruin of thousands! They might be made to see if they did not think that they already saw! They might be happy in the Lord if their groundless conceit did not make them to be “sitting by.”

IV. WHAT SHALL WE SAY OF THESE SITTERS-BY? Just a word by way of forming an estimate of them and then I will have done with them. Oh, that the Lord, Himself, might deal with them by His Holy Spirit! These sitters-by, these people who do not go in for the Truth of God and faith of the Gospel, but hear it, play with it, talk about it and then have done with it—what shall I say of them?

Why, first, they seem to me to be *wonderfully out of place when you think of the Lord who was preaching*. How could they be indifferent in His Presence? He was at a white heat and they were blocks of ice. He was all energy and they were “sitting by.” He spending and being spent—and they “sitting by.” He engaged all night in prayer with His Divine Father and now, coming forth clothed with Divine Power to heal—and they, “sitting by.” Pretending to be doctors and teachers of the people and, therefore, under great responsibility, they were yet content to be, “sitting by,” when Jesus was pouring out His soul! O Sirs, none of us ought to be indifferent in the Presence of the Christ of God! He is clad with zeal as with a cloak—how can we be lukewarm? He laid down His life for the sheep—how can we live for self? He still lives for His people and holds not His peace, but by His incessant pleading He proves His everlasting interest in our cause—for us to be, “sitting by,” is horrible ingratitude! Men who have received great salvation, “sitting by,” while the Savior dies? Or even men who are in danger of sinking at once to Hell carelessly, “sitting by,” when the gate of mercy is set open before them by the pierced hand of Jesus? Oh, it is sadly strange! Lord, teach this foolish generation wisdom! Let them not still be, “sitting by”!

It was equally incongruous with the condition of the rest of the congregation. Look, there is such a crowd around the Lord Jesus that they are trying to bring in a man who is sick of the palsy, but they cannot get him near. Nobody will make way—they are all so eager to hear and to get a blessing! At last they take the palsied man to the roof—they actually break up the tiling! They lower the man down with ropes over the heads of the people! Yes, right in among the learned lawyers and the proud Pharisees! The pieces of the tiles are falling everywhere! The dust is on the doctors and divines! Look how eager, how earnest, how impetuous the people are! And yet these gentlemen Pharisees and lawyers are, “sitting by” with cold indifference!

Look at them taking out their notebooks to jot down an expression with which they may find fault! See how they coolly observe little points in what is done! They are not moved—not they! A man is about to be healed who has long been paralyzed—and they treat it as if it were an interesting case in the hospital—around which a company of medical students gather, as to a show. How can they act in this way? Are they made of stone or iron? One would think common humanity might affect them—but no, they will not enter into anything that Jesus says or does—they are merely, “sitting by.”

It will be an awful thing for some of you to be cast away forever—and then to remember that you sat next to people that were saved—sat next them at *the very time* when they heard unto eternal life! How will you bear to know that these people were saved by that powerful sermon which drove even *you* to your knees, but you shook off the impression, grew careless and again continued in your sin? This reflection will sting you as does a serpent when you are past hope and are driven forever from the Presence of God. This will be as the worm that never dies—when you say to yourself—“I was present when Jesus, by His Grace, renewed men’s hearts. I was present when my companion heard, believed and was saved, but I willfully refused to hear and turned away from the only Savior.” What shall I say to yonder husband who will have to remember that she who in this world lay in his bosom, wept for him, told him that she had found a Savior and begged him to think of his immortal soul and turn unto the Lord? You will remember how you steeled your heart against the blessed influence and refused the holy tears of one you loved so well!

Or is it so, that your darling child came home from the Sunday school weeping on account of sin and you, the mother who ought to have thanked God for blessing your offspring, ridiculed your child’s repentance? This is, “sitting by,” in a most horrible way—“sitting by” to scoff and oppose! While others are saved—you are “sitting by.” Why, if I were sick of the palsy, tonight. If I were lying here and I saw the Master healing you who were sick, I think I should at least cry out as best I could, “Jesus, Master, have mercy on me!” I exhort any of you who are unconverted to take these words out of my mouth and with your whole heart use them in prayer. Cry, “Lord have mercy upon me! Christ have mercy upon me!”

V. I had much more to add upon this point, but time admonishes me. Let me in a few sentences speak to some WHO SHOULD NOT BE AMONG THOSE WHO ARE “SITTING BY.” You that feel your *soul-sickness* will not be of that

number. You feel your guilt—you feel your need of Christ. You are broken down—then do not, for a moment, sit by! Rise, He calls you! Press through the crowd to Jesus! Believe in Him and live! May His Spirit lead you to do so at once!

Before I found the Savior, I visited nearly every place of worship in the town where I lived, but I did not find full salvation at any one of them. I believe that it was through my own ignorance. In the little Primitive Methodist chapel, when I heard Christ preached and was bid to look, alone, to Him, I found rest unto my soul! But the reason why I found Him was because His Grace had made me know that I needed Him. I do not suppose that the sermon which was made useful to me had anything in it more remarkable than other Gospel sermons. The special point was that the *Lord had prepared me to receive the Gospel message*. They say that the water of the Nile is very sweet. We have heard some of our countrymen assert that a very little of it was too much for them and that they never wished to drink of it again. There is no use in disputing about *tastes*, but surely, people might agree upon the quality of *water*! Yet some praise this Nile water to the skies and others call it muddy stuff. The reason why the water of the Nile is so sweet to Egyptians is that their climate is dry and the people are thirsty—and other water is scarce. Under a burning sun, a drink of water is very refreshing. To the soul that is thirsty after mercy and reconciliation and eternal life, every promise of the Lord is delightful! Nothing puts such a savor and flavor into the Gospel as that work of the Holy Spirit, by which we are made to feel our great need of it!

Oh, if you have not found Christ—you that are seeking Him—go to every place where Christ is preached till you find Him! If you do not get the heavenly blessing in one place, go to another! Do not stop where there is no blessing merely because it is your regular place of assembly. You need bread and if one baker has not got it, go to another! Seek after the Savior as men dig for gold or search for diamonds.

I have heard of a man who had long attended one of the Churches in Scotland, but as he did not get any good, he went off to listen to certain irregular preaching and there he found peace with God. The old minister warned him of his wickedness in being away from the Church and said, in Scotch, what I must put into English, “Donald, you should not have gone to hear that man! He is not of the old Church.” “Well,” said Donald, “but I needed a blessing and I felt I must go anywhere to get it.” “Well,” said the minister, “Donald, you should have waited at the pool, like the man in the Gospels, till the water was stirred.” “Well, Sir,” said the man, “but you see that man saw that the water was sometimes stirred and though he did not get in, himself, yet he knew that others stepped in and were healed. And that encouraged him to wait a little longer, in the hope that his turn might yet come. But I have lain at your pool these 40 years and I *never* saw the water stirred, neither did anybody get healed in it. And so I thought it was time for me to look somewhere else.”

Indeed it was! We cannot afford to be lost for the sake of churches or chapels. O my Hearer, seek the Lord with all your heart! And seek Him on and on till you find Him! Do not be a mere sitter-by any longer, but obey the call which bids you draw near. Be not content to sit in any pretended House of Prayer where prayer is not heard and souls are never saved. Do not let down your bucket into any more dry wells. Go where Jesus is! Traverse all the denominations and stay not till you can say, “I have found Jesus.” If He is not preached in one place, hasten to another. Keep your ears and your hearts open. “Seek you the Lord while He may be found; call upon Him while He is near.” Do not fall into the habit of going to a place because you always went there and always mean to go there. Why, some of you have almost grown to your seats and are as wooden as that which bears you up! O mere sitter-by, I implore you, do not remain in this wretched case! May your cry to the Lord be, at this moment—

“Give me Christ, or else I die!”

May God help you to make your hearing a reality, your sitting under the Gospel a true reception of it!

You that are in *great sorrow* I do not think it possible that you can be altogether sitters-by! You have been disappointed in love. You have met with a world of trouble, or else you have been the round of amusements and have seen no end of gaiety—but you are sick of it—and weary of the world and of yourself. You feel that you might as well try to fill your belly with wind as fill your soul with the world’s amusements—and you have come here jaded and nauseated. Your heart is laboring and heavy laden and you pine for rest. Come and try my Master! He invites you. He entreats you to come. He cries to you, “Come unto Me, all you that labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest.” He means what He says. You have labored enough for the world, and its wages are not worth having. Come now to Him whose gift is eternal life! May His Holy Spirit lead you to come at once and delay no longer! You are one of those that cannot afford to be, “sitting by,” for sin curses you, death threatens you and eternal wrath pursues you! I know how it will be with you

unless Grace prevents—you will go home and the sermon will be over—and the many of you will still be sitters-by, for you will shake off conviction and still be careless. Remember, I have warned you. Will you despise the warning?

A poor fallen woman is here at this time, worn out with her crimes. Does she desire to know the Savior? Let her confess her sin and forsake it—then she will not be “sitting by.” There is a broken-hearted youth here who begins to reap the wild oats he has sown. Will he sit by? Does he wish to know how his heart can be changed, his sin forgiven, his soul comforted? Let him arise and go to his Father—and no longer be “sitting by.”

And so I close with a full and free Gospel call! Come and welcome, you that gladly would come to Jesus. Come just now, with all your sins about you, and behold the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world! If you want to know what it is to come to Him, know that it is to *trust Him*. Go to your chamber, and look up and say, “Jesus, I cannot see You; but You are wherever there is a broken heart. Behold, I seek You; reveal Yourself to me. I trust You to forgive me and to renew me.”

Jesus will not refuse you, for He casts out none that come to Him. I said, “Go home,” but I will alter that. Keep your seats and seek Him where you are and as you are! Before you leave this place, commit yourselves into those dear hands which were pierced for the guilty and are always ready to grasp a sinner. As the pearl fisher is happy when he finds a handful of pearls, so is Jesus happy when He lays hold on poor sinners and takes them to be His own! Commit your souls to His keeping. Wholly trust Him! Trust him only! Trust him now! Today, escape for your lives and find refuge in the Rock of Ages! Jesus cries, “Look unto Me and be you saved, all the ends of the earth.” O Lord, lead all these sinners to look to Jesus by Your Holy Spirit for Your mercy’s sake! Amen.

PORTION OF SCRIPTURE READ BEFORE SERMON—Luke 5:12-26.

HYMNS FROM “OUR OWN HYMN BOOK”—430, 606, 992.

DEAR FRIENDS—Though for a while I shall be absent in body, yet shall I be present with you in spirit. Week by week I shall prepare the sermon with care and, I trust, it will be as profitable and as life-like as if I had just preached it. I beseech you to be more than ever importunate in prayer. A fierce battle is raging concerning the Gospel—“The God that answers by fire, let Him be God.” Let us plead for the fire of the Holy Spirit! If we have a special visitation from above, we shall see the defeat of this worst form of infidelity—the infidelity which wears the Christian name. My parting watchword is, “*Let us pray.*”

Yours, for Christ’s sake,

C. H. SPURGEON.

Adapted from *The C. H. Spurgeon Collection*, Ages Software, 1.800.297.4307