

Why Some Seekers Are Not Saved

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*“Behold the Lord’s hand is not shortened, that it cannot save;
neither his ear heavy, that it cannot hear: but your iniquities have
separated between you and your God, and your sins have hid his
face from you, that he will not hear.”-Isaiah. 59:1, 2.*

THERE are some people who are not saved, though we should have expected that they would have been converted long ago. Our text explains the reason, so, without any preface, let us come to it at once.

I. First, let us consider, THE FACT CONFESSED!

The people of whom I am specially thinking just now have been hears of the gospel, and diligent hearers, too. Their seat is seldom vacant, and they are not among those who go to sleep during the sermon. They do not enjoy the Sunday after the fashion of the countryman, who said that he liked that day best because he could go to church, put up his feet, fall asleep, and think of nothing at all. The people to whom I am referring really listen to what the preacher has to say; they are attentive, and they seek to retain in their memories the truths he preaches. They even talk when they are at home of the striking passages, if such there be, in what they have heard. You would suppose that such persons would get a blessing from the gospel; yet they do not. They have now been for years listening to an earnest minister, they would not like to hear one who was not earnest. They have grown to be somewhat discriminating in their taste; they know what is the gospel, and. they would not care to be present at a service in which the gospel was not clearly set forth; yet, for all this, they are not saved. They stand out in the shower, yet they are not wet. They are like Gideon’s fleece, perfectly dry when all the ground was saturated with the dew. This is a strange circumstance; but, alas! by no means an uncommon one. We should not have thought that there could be such people, but we are compelled to believe that there are, for we frequently stumble across them, people who are often sitting under the sound of the gospel, yet who never hear it with the ears of their heart. The light shines upon their eyeballs, yet they do not see it, for thick scales seem to be there to hide from them the beams of the sun.

You will be perhaps still more surprised when I add that there are some people who go beyond hearing, and yet are not saved. They have become men of prayer after a fashion; are they not described in the chapter I read to you? "Yet they seek me daily, and delight to know my ways, as a nation that did righteousness, and forsook not the ordinances of their God: they ask of me the ordinances of justice, they take delight in approaching to God." These people are in such a state of mind that, if they went to their business without the repetition of a form of prayer, they would be uneasy through the whole day. What is more, it is not merely a form of prayer; in some cases, there is a measure of life, and desire, and earnestness in their devotions. Only this morning, one of them sighed when the sermon was over, and he said, "Oh, that I could be a friend of God!" And a few Sunday nights ago, the one of whom I am speaking, when he reached his home, fell on his knees in his own private room, and asked God to bless the word to his soul. This same thing happened to him ten or even twenty years ago, he has often been stirred up, and driven to his knees in prayer; yet he has gone no further, but still remains to his own consciousness an undecided, hesitating person, on the borders of the kingdom, yet not in the kingdom, almost persuaded, yet not fully persuaded to be a Christian. You know, dear hearers, and I hardly need tell you that a man who is almost honest is a rogue, and the man who is almost a Christian is an unchristian person. There was a man who was almost saved in a fire, but he was burnt; there was another who was almost healed of a disease, but he died; there was one who was almost reprieved, but he was hanged; and there are many in hell who were almost saved.

I am not talking now at a venture; I know that, with some of my most hopeful hearers, it is just as I have been describing it; they do hear the gospel, and they do pray to God, yet they have not gone beyond those outward exercises, they have not believed in the Lord Jesus Christ, and they have not received him into their hearts as their own personal Savior. I know also that these people are greatly disappointed with themselves; not altogether so, for they know to a great extent where the blame lies, but yet they had hoped better things of themselves. If anyone had told them, ten, twelve, or twenty years ago, that they would be where they now are, each one of them would have said, "I hope that will not be the case with me; I trust that, long before the time you mention, I shall have cast in my lot with the people of God, and shall have been saved in the Lord with an everlasting salvation." They are still hoping, but their hope is curdling into doubt, and their doubt is souring into despair; and I am very fearful lest that despair should lead them into still greater sin.

I want to speak specially to these friends; I shall do it with much kindness of heart towards them, but I wish to do it also with equal faithfulness, praying all the while that what I say may help them to escape from their present unsatisfactory and unsafe position.

II. So, in the second place, I call their attention to THE IMPUTATION IMPLIED AND MET.

It is suggested to some that, inasmuch as they are not saved though they have put themselves in the way of saving ordinances, and though they have sought salvation, perhaps salvation is not so easily to be had as it used to be, perhaps Christ cannot save them as he has saved others.

Notice the first word of our text: "Behold." This is like our nota bene; mark well, turn your eye this way, "Behold, the Lord's hand is not shortened, that it cannot save; neither his ear heavy, that it cannot hear." You are called upon to mark this, distinctly to see it, and to entertain no doubt about it. If you are not saved, it is not because God is unable to save you, nor is it because he is unwilling to hear your prayers. Do listen to this word, for it is God himself who speaks it. He knows whether his hand is palsied, or whether his ear is deaf; and he himself declares that his hand is not shortened that it cannot save, and that his ear is not heavy that it cannot hear. If you have any doubt about this fact, I recommend you to prove it for yourselves; come by faith to Jesus, and see whether he will save you. We sang just now,—"Venture on him, venture wholly," and if you? think that it is a venture, if you fancy that, peradventure, the blood of Christ cannot cleanse you, or the Spirit of God cannot renew you, come and put the matter to the test. Dare now to cast yourself at Jesus feet, and say, "I believe that thou canst save me, and I trust thee to be my Savior." If he does not save thee, if he cannot do so, thou hast at least made the trial; but I do beseech thee to listen to this text, do not close thine ear or thy heart to its message, "Behold, behold, behold, the Lord's hand is not shortened, that it cannot save; neither his ear heavy, that it cannot hear." This passage proves that the power to wave remains with God unimpaired. Just as of old he forgave great sinners through the atoning sacrifice of his well-beloved Son, so is he able to forgive great sinners now. He forgave the dying thief, and he can forgive you. All manner of sin and of blasphemy have been forgiven unto men, and all manner of sin and of blasphemy can be forgiven unto you. Though you had spent a lifetime in drunkenness, or unchastity, or dishonesty, or any other form of evil, though you should have grown grey in the service of sin and Satan,-"

There is a fountain flll'd with blood,
Drawn from Immanuel's veins
And sinners, plunged beneath that flood,
still, still, Lose all their guilty stains."

There is the same power with God to forgive sin as there used to be, for the blood of Jesus is as powerful to cleanse as ever it was.

Note also that there is the same power of the Holy Spirit to change your nature as ever there was. He who turned Saul of Tarsus from an enemy into an apostle can do just the same with you. Of old, conversion was

likened to the raising of the dead; and he who has quickened many a dead soul can quicken your dead soul, and raise you from the dead. It was also called a new creation, and he who made all things new in other men can make all things new in you.

Look ye, sirs, if you think that God cannot forgive sin nowadays as he did in the olden times, I stand here as a living witness to the contrary, for I know that he has pardoned me. It always has surprised me, but I do not think that ever in my life I so much wondered at being a child of God as I wonder now. Thirty- seven years ago, I was baptized into the sacred name, and I adored the grace of God then; but not as much as I do now. What I owe to that grace, it is not possible for me to express. Every time I preach to you, I feel unworthy of my sacred office, and I would fain run from it if I dared; but woe is unto me if I preach not the gospel. Yet I bear witness to this fact, that the grace of God, which was able to save me, is able to save you. Here, give me your hand, you trembler, give me your hand! I wish that I could go round the galleries, and down below there in the area, and get a hold of your hands; and say to each one of you, “My brother, my sister, the Lord can save you, he can save you; I am a witness that he can save you because he has saved me. His hand is not shortened, that it cannot save.”

But I need not speak of myself only; if it were proper, I could ask hundreds, ay, thousands, of persons who are present this evening at this service, to stand up, and bear witness that the Lord saved them, and that they firmly believe, after what has been wrought in them, that no case is beyond the reach of almighty grace. Come along with you, then; do not east blame upon God, as though your not being saved was the result of want of power on the part of God the Father, God the Son, or God the Holy Ghost, for it is not so.

You say that it must be the want of will, then; but it is not, for the Lord’s willingness to hear remains the same as ever. You are called upon in the text to behold that his ear is not heavy, that it cannot hear. You know that there are none so deaf as those that will not hear; and if God resolved not to hear your prayers, then he would be indeed the possessor of a heavy ear. But he has not resolved to refuse your prayer; you may be unwilling to pray, but God is not unwilling to hear. “If thou seek him, he will be found of thee.” “Seek ye the Lord while he may be found, call ye upon him while he is near;” “for every one that asketh receiveth; and he that seeketh findeth; and to him that knocketh it shall be opened.” If thou wilt come in God’s way, and cast thyself at Christ’s feet, and cry for mercy for his sake, thou shalt have it as surely as there is a God in heaven. Ho knoweth that I lie not when I offer to be bondsman for my Master that he will keep his promise, “Whosoever shall call upon the name of the Lord shall be saved;” and that “whosoever” must include you. Call upon his name, and prove for yourself the truth of the promise.

Perhaps someone asks the question, "If what you tell me is true, why is it that I who am really hearing, and, seeking, and praying am not saved?" Now I want to try and find that out.?

III. Therefore, my third division will be, THE ACCUSATION PRESSED AND EXPLAINED.

If you will permit me, I will call upon you as a physician might. There is something the matter with you, and you want to know what it is. I shall probably have to probe a little, and perhaps have to go pretty deep, and if you really desire to receive a blessing, if there is anything, which I say that fits your case, will you kindly take it home? Even if it should seem very personal, and should make you feel cross, I cannot help that. You know that good blisters are not pleasant things, yet they may be very necessary. I want, if I can, to find out why it is that you have not obtained peace with God. The clue which guides me in my search is in the second verse of my text, "Your iniquities have separated between you and your God, and your sins have hid his face from you, that he will not hear."

Now hearken. Your accusation against God may be turned against you. You thought that God's hand was shortened, that it could not save; but it is your hand that is shortened, for you have not laid hold upon Christ. You have not taken your sins to him to be put away, you have not turned to God with full purpose of heart, you are shorthanded, but the Lord is not. You said that God's ear was heavy. Nay, nay, nay, it is your ear that is heavy; you have not heard what God the Lord has been saying to you, you have not been obedient to the heavenly message. All the mischief lies with yourself, not with God; and at the last, if you are not saved, the blame will not rest upon the Savior, but upon yourself. This is the doctrine that we preach; if a man be saved, all the honor is to be given to Christ; but if a man be lost, all the blame is to be laid upon himself. You will find all true theology summed up in these two short sentences, salvation is all of the grace of God, damnation is all of the will of man.

The real reason why you have not found peace, you who have sought it, is sin; not your sins in the abstract, for, "though your sins be as scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they be red like crimson, they shall be as wool." No sin, whatever it is, shall ruin any man if he shall come to Christ for mercy. Though you are black as hell's midnight through iniquity, yet if you will come to Christ, he is ready to cleanse you. It is sin, after all, that lieth at the door, and blocks your way to the Savior.

First, it may be sin unconfessed. Permit me to ask whether you have made before God a full and complete confession of your sin. I do not insist that you should go into the details of every sin; that would be impossible, but there must be no cloaking or attempting to hide any sin from God. There must be no wish to excuse yourself, or to make out that what might be sin

in others was less sinful in you. The Romanist tries to get help in confession by going to his priest, and the priest puts many questions to him to help his memory. We observe no such practice as that, for we believe it to be ruinous to the priest and mischievous to the man; but we do ask you to make confession to God, for remember that it is written, "If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins." Recollect how the prodigal said, "Father, I have sinned against heaven, and in thy sight." Have you said that? That is the beginning of the saved life, the acknowledgment of your former evil ways, the humble and truthful confession that you deserve the wrath of God on account of your sin, the putting of yourself into the dock, as one who pleads guilty, and who could not speak against God even if he took you at your word, and condemned you there and then. You must take that position; you must not expect pardon till you plead guilty. Only acknowledge thy transgression, and then mayest thou lay hold on Christ as thy Savior, and believe in him for perfect pardon. It may be that you have never had peace with God because you have not made a confession of your sin in plain, distinct terms. It is no good to mince matters with God; he knows all about you. Your secret sins-the sins your wife does not know, and that no one knows but yourself,-they are all known to him. Go and whisper them into the great Father's ear, with many a tear of deep regret that you should have offended so grievously against him. If you do not so, unconfessed sin will be a barrier between your soul and God.

But, next, sin is a very great hindrance to grace when it is sin unforsaken. Some men know they are doing wrong, yet they will not quit it. They confess sin, yet still go on with it. They are half resolved to part with it, but they never really do so. They know that it is the right eye that offends, but they dare not pluck it out; and that it is the right hand that offends, but they will not cut it off. They are dilatory about this work, and they still go on in sin. I appeal to your own conscience, can you expect God to pardon your sin while you continue in it? Can you think of the blessed Son of God coming to the world to be a minister of sin? That heart must be wicked to an awful extreme which will dare to say, "God is merciful, therefore I will continue in sin. We are saved by faith alone, therefore I will believe in Christ, and go on in my sin." Why, man, you are perverting the gospel of Christ to your own destruction! You are making for yourself a deathbed? which will be very terrible, since you are finding a way to hell hard by that wicket gate which lets men into the road to heaven. I pray you, do not desecrate the very cross of Christ by hanging yourself upon it! There are some who do even that. You must forsake your sins if you would be saved. Christ has come to save his people from their sins, not in their sins. Drunkard, you cannot keep your cup and yet go to heaven. I speak plainly. You who are accustomed to lie cannot have a lying tongue and a saved soul. If any of you cheat in business, do not talk to me about your faith in Christ. If you can lie, and cheat, and act unfairly, you are of your father, the devil, and he will have you as surely as you live unless you repent, and

turn from your evil ways. There is no real salvation except salvation from sinning, so your sin must be quitted. I put this question to any man here who is a hearer, and a seeker, and yet who does not find peace,-Is there not some sin that you have yet to abandon? If there be, God help you, by his mighty grace, to get rid of it at once!

There may be also some sin that has been forsaken, but it is still loved. Sin hankered after is a great barrier to grace. When the cow's calf is taken away, how she bellows after it! And there is many a man who has had his sin taken away from him, yet he still longs after it. He does not sin with his hand or his foot, but he sins with his heart, his soul goes a-lusting after his iniquities. Now, while it is so, while sin still lies in the heart, can you expect to have peace with God? No, you must have the evil out, not from the house only, but from the heart. You must have done with it, not with the hand only, but with the very desire of your spirit. "Oh!" say you, "that is hard work." It is harder work than you can accomplish; and in order to do it you must be born again. This truth should drive you to Christ that he may give you this new life by his Holy Spirit. But, mark you, if it is not your desire to give up the love of sin, you will never find salvation while you are thus hankering after evil.

There are some who are hindered from finding peace, I do not doubt, through sin of which they are not aware. "Oh!" say you, "that is rather a puzzling statement." Well, there is many a man who is living in sin without being aware that it is sin, and that may keep him back from finding peace with God. I have to add this also, that many men do not want to find out too much. There are great numbers of people who do not want to learn too much about their sin. You know that light breaks in upon us by degrees; if we sin in the dark, that sin is not so grossly guilty and serious as sin in the light. But if we are in that darkness willfully, and we do not wish to have it? removed, then we shall be guilty indeed. If I commit a crime, and then say, "I did not know that I was breaking the law," the judge says, "I cannot help your ignorance; you broke the law, and you must bear the penalty." But supposing I have a book at home that tells me all about the requirements of the law, and I still say to the judge, "I did not know what the law forbade," then he would answer, "But you ought to have known. You have committed a double offense, as you have not studied the law. It was put into your house with a command that you should study it, and you are therefore doubly guilty, for you have refused to pay sufficient respect to the law to learn what it says." I fear that some of you people are not conscious of your sin because you do not want to know it. Where ignorance is bliss, you think it folly to be wise; but it would not be folly to be wise unto salvation. Some of you are losing comfort, losing years of usefulness, losing all certainty about heaven, because you will not search the Scriptures, and you do not desire to know what evil thing it is in you which separates between you and your God. O men and women, do not lie under such a charge as this! Say, "I will know the worst of my case. If I

have to probe as with a lancet, I will find out what the mischief is. My prayer shall be, 'Lord, let me know the very worst of my case, that I may afterwards find that sure salvation which will stand the test even of the day of judgment itself!'"

I would further suggest that there may be some who are really seeking to believe, but they do not find peace because of some sin of omission. Does that open a window anywhere for any one of you? It is not so much that you are doing wrong as that you are not doing right. You are forgetting some positive duty, and it is that which separates between you and your God. I have had some very curious experiences which I may never tell so that the persons about whom I relate them will ever be known. There was one which happened so long ago that I may tell it without fear. A man, through reading my sermons, was convinced of sin. He sought the Savior, but he found no peace. He was a long time in darkness, and at last it was suggested to him that perhaps he found no peace with God because of some wrongdoing that remained unforgiven. It appeared that, some years before, he had robbed a person who was not aware of the theft; he had taken a large sum of money, and he could never rest till that amount had been returned. I never saw the man who had been robbed, and I had to rack my brain to find a way by which I could return that large sum to him without giving him any clue as to who it was that took it. I managed the business, and I have the receipt for the money, and I have never heard another word about it; but he who was in heaviness of heart is now a joyful Christian man, as I firmly believe, though I have never seen him. The money he had taken from the other man lay upon his conscience, and when the stolen sum had been restored to its rightful owner, God granted peace to the one who had made restitution. It may be that there is someone else who has something that does not belong to him; if so, let him also make restitution. If any of you have been fraudulent bankrupts, try to make up that twenty shillings in the pound, which you ought to have paid. Christ did not come into the world to let you live as a rogue, and then sneak into heaven at last. No, he would make you an honest man at once; and when he has done so, there will be another obstacle to your finding joy and peace removed out of the way.

Now let us aim once more at the target; I am trying to find out why it is that some seeking sinners cannot find peace. Do you not think that some fail to find peace because they have an ugly temper? Some people are born with nasty tempers; they are a poor inheritance for anybody. I heard one say that he was sorry that he had lost his temper. I was uncommonly glad to hear that he had lost it, but I regretted that he found it again so soon. There are persons who are at variance with their mother or their father; and it is very sad when husbands and wives are at strife with one another; perhaps some such are listening to me now. You are praying, you say, and you wonder that God does not have mercy on you; and yet there is strife in the household! Or it may be that your poor girl ran away from home, and if

she were to come back to-night, you would shut the door in her face, would you not? You are so good and respectable, that you could not harbour your own child! Yet you expect God to take pity upon you, do you? Or you parted from your husband in a pet, and you have never gone back to him, and you want to find peace with God. Peace with God? Get peace with man before you talk about finding peace with God. You brothers and sisters have had a quarrel, and have made up your minds that you will never forgive one another. O sirs, let me be very plain with you, if you cannot be at peace with your fellow men, you cannot hope to be at peace with God! The Lord bids you leave your offering at the altar, -he must not be insulted with it, -first be reconciled to thy brother, and then come and seek peace with thy God. Malice in the heart is altogether inconsistent with grace, and it must be cast out. I know two brothers who will not speak to one another; yet one of them professes to be a Christian, and the other says he wants to be one. What will God do with both of them? I cannot tell what to do with either of them, I am sure. A part of salvation is to save us from an evil hateful spirit, and to make us love God and love our fellowmen also. Perhaps that is the reason why some of you can find no peace, because you have been indulging an evil temper. And do you not think, once more, that there are some who find no peace because of an intellectual sin? There are sins of intellect quite as surely as there are sins of ignorance. Some men know a great deal too much to go to heaven; that is to say, they think that they know better than their Bibles, and better than their God! Their dear mother now in heaven, -oh, she was a poor, simple-minded creature! Their father, stern in his integrity, -oh, he is a bigot! The preacher who proclaims the gospel with all his heart and soul, and brings many to Christ, -he is a man behind his times; he has no "culture." Bah! what fools! I cannot use a milder word to describe some of you. I only wish that the compliment I have thus paid you were true in the best sense, for if you were fools, you would enter into heaven, but because you are so wise, you are more likely to miss the way. God has oftentimes chosen those who think nothing of themselves, and are poor and needy, while the great ones who are proudly wise, disdain the road that leads to Paradise. Oh, be not too great to enter heaven! Be converted, and become as little children, else ye shall in no wise enter therein.

I am going to close my discourse, yet I do not want to say the last thing that comes into my mind. I have been describing a great many reasons why some people do not find peace with God; but sometimes there are reasons that I have not mentioned. One of these is the commission of gross or secret sin. Oh, the things that a man who cares for the souls of his fellows has to see and mourn over in this world! It must be fifteen or sixteen years ago that I was called to visit a dying man. I had seen him before when he was ill and in distress of mind, and I had tried to bring him to the Savior, and to comfort him. He attended the Tabernacle constantly, and I could not make out why he did not find rest and peace. 'I often tried to remove various obstacles which I thought were in his way, but I never found out

why he had no peace till after he was dead. Then I understood it; I cannot tell you all that there was in it, it is sufficient to say that he was living in known sin of the saddest kind. Kind, generous, loving, all you could wish him to be; but, alas! there was another household and another family found afterwards; and I could understand that, while he lived so, there could be no peace between him and God. I hardly like to say it, but I may be? addressing somebody who is in a similar condition tonight. My dear souls, do not try to live in sin and yet to be Christians! Do not pretend to hope in God while you are indulging secret vice; it cannot be so. You must either give up your sins or give up all hope of heaven. Men and women, this is an evil age, full of impurity; and it behoves the minister of God, when he is dealing with men's souls, to speak very plainly, and I am forced to put the truth to you thus. Nobody knows of your sin; you have never been found out; yet it may be that you are living in the constant commission of some secret sin. By the love you bear to your own souls, and by your desire to find Christ, I beseech you to flee from the evil thing, escape for your life, flee from the wrath to come, and then lay hold on eternal life, for there is salvation in Christ, there is life for a look at him, but that life consists in great measure in being healed of sin; and you cannot continue a foul life and yet be washed in the Savior's blood. It is a contradiction in terms, and a contradiction in fact. As I shall meet you, my hearers, at the bar of God,-and as a dying man who may never speak to you again, I thought that I would put this truth in such a way that, if I went home to bed to die, I should not have the blood of any one of you resting upon my skirts,-I beseech you, by eternity, by heaven, by hell,-and there is a hell, let the smooth-tongued liars of this age say what they will,-by heaven, by hell, and by your own immortality, fly to Christ, give up your sin, and be saved by believing in Jesus even now!

God grant it! Amen and Amen.