

The Metropolitan Tabernacle

A DOUBLE CHALLENGE

A Sermon

Delivered by

C. H. SPURGEON

At the Metropolitan Tabernacle,
One Lord's Day Evening, prior to 1884

Biographical Introduction

The circulation of Spurgeon's sermons was called one of the 'miracles' of the nineteenth century. Each Thursday from the 11th January 1855 until 26th April 1917, a weekly sermon was published and sold for one penny. During this period, these timely messages were circulated throughout the world, and were the means of great spiritual blessing. Although the preacher himself was called to his eternal rest in 1892, the weekly sermons continued without interruption, long after his death, until they reached the grand total of 3,561.

These extraordinary printed messages are to be found in sixty-three volumes entitled: *The New Park Street Pulpit* and *The Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit*. Through these 'literary pulpits', The Prince of Preachers has reached out to far larger numbers than his voice could ever have addressed.

For one man to have preached 3,561 sermons in one pastorate was quite unusual. However, during his time in London Mr Spurgeon preached many more sermons than these. In 1883 Passmore & Alabaster published a little book

entitled '*The Present Truth.*' This contained messages preached at the Metropolitan Tabernacle, on Sunday evenings and Thursday evenings, but not included in the aforementioned *Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit* volumes.

In order to give our readers the opportunity of enjoying a selection of these lesser-known sermons, we intend to publish one every now and then. It is our pleasure now to reproduce ***A Double Challenge.*** This is a hard-hitting message, which was designed to touch the hearts of both believers and unbelievers. We are not sure when this particular timely message was delivered, but we are sure that it will challenge all who read it in a spirit of meekness.

“I will say to the north, GIVE UP; and to the south, KEEP NOT BACK”

— *Isaiah 43:6.*

THESE words, no doubt, primarily refer to the gathering together of the Jews in the latter days. Whether they have wandered to the north, or whether they have pitched their habitation in the south, it matters little. By the wonderful power of God they shall be both converted to Christ and gathered into their own land. God will have but to speak the word, and that miracle of miracles will be wrought. The unbelief of Judah and of Israel shall be taken away. They shall look on Him whom they have pierced, and they shall mourn because of Him.

The words may also be applied to those glorious gatherings of the latter times when the Church shall make up her full number; when the elect, though they may be scattered hither and thither, shall hear the call of effectual grace, and return unto the Lord who has bought them with His precious blood. May the Lord hasten those happy times, when His word shall run, and have free course, and be glorified!

But my intention is rather to utilise than to expound the text. To you, dear friends, specially to you who are not saved, I have thought that the address to the north and that to the south might prove, either or both of them, messages from God. "I will say to the north, Give up; and to the south, Keep not back" These are two appeals from heaven to which ye do well that

ye take heed. May the Eternal Spirit make them powerful; so that you may be obedient to their high behests. Here are two short, terse addresses; two simple items of serious advice. Oh that you might hearken and follow them to your soul's eternal benefit!

I. The first counsel is — **“GIVE UP”**. Give up what? Why, with some of you it is imperative that you *give up your prejudices*. So have you mis-estimated true religion, that you have been accustomed to denounce it as cant, and to declaim the professors of it as hypocrites. Now, give up this blind bias, and give the gospel a fair hearing. Should it turn out to be an imposture, you will at least be the better able to expose its fictions, after having studied its facts; but should it happen to be genuine and true, how ill will it be for you if you continue to despise it! The doctrine of Christ claims to be divine. It asserts itself to be the only true faith, and it argues all other systems to be false. It tells that "God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life." This is a startling announcement. History or poetry has no parallel for such a wonder that the Holy God was willing to die for sinful man, that He who was offended should Himself take the guilt of those who offended Him upon Himself, and suffer for their transgressions. Strange miracle of grace, that the Lord of life and glory should become a substitute for His enemies. Do not mock at the mention of such mercy. There must be something in it. Tens of thousands live happily upon the tidings. Millions have died exultingly on the credit of its authenticity. The trust reposed in it has been tried and tested in the prison, on the rack, and at the stake, and believers in it have triumphed over every form of infernal torture. They have held their confidence steadfast to the end, and finished their course bravely and gloriously, grasping the standard of the cross of Christ. Seal not your ears, shut not your hearts against the testimony; let it have a fair hearing. Give up your prejudices. Hear, and your souls shall live.

Give up in like manner *your self-righteousness*. In vain my entreaties, for unless God shall say it, no man will do it. The worst of men flatter themselves with some conceit of their own righteousness. Their companions back them up, and praise them as good fellows. However abandoned and dissolute their lives, they credit themselves with some virtues that make a fair show before men of their own type, which they fondly hope will pass current with God at the last. But I beseech you hearken to a brother's voice, while I assure you that excuses for sin are unavailing and apologies impertinent. The best labours of the human hand, and the best dispositions

of the human heart, are so defiled through our natural depravity, that they cannot be accepted by the Most High. Paul, the great apostle, who during the early part of his life had been one of the most excellent and exemplary of men, observing the most authentic religion with the most austere consistency, and supplementing it with the most furious zeal, discovered the hollowness of his piety, and the hideousness of his character, when he came to see things in the right light; so that he counted his own righteousness to be but dross and dung, that he might win Christ, and be found in Him. Surely Paul knew as well as you know, and much better too, what creature righteousness may attain. I would feelingly admire, rather than foolishly disparage, all that is honest and upright; admirable and benevolent; sober and sensible. This is all admirable in its way, but do not trust to such trifling charms.

A bridge that may carry you well enough, over the straits of this life, among your fellow-men, will fail to bear the weight of your soul when you reach the torrent of death, and are about to pass into eternity. Then every timber will creak and snap, and down you will go, if grace prevent not, into the gulf that is bottomless. I do beseech you to give up all dependence on your own merit; give it up. No man can be saved by Christ while he has any degree of reliance upon himself. One of the first requisites of genuine faith in Christ is to have a total despair of all salvation by your own efforts. How long we are haggling with God before we submit unreservedly to this self-renunciation. If we cannot be saved entirely by our own merits, we say — "Well, may we not at least do a little?" Let this snare be broken, and we soon entangle ourselves again, saying, "Surely something must be required from us?" To bring a man to the full assurance of understanding that, *'it is finished*, that love's redeeming work is done, that the blood which cleanses from all sin has been shed, that the righteousness which justifies a man before God is already wrought out and completed, Oh, this simple statement — Give up, is the hardest lesson a sinner has to learn. Little heed ye take when *I* cry, Give up your self-righteousness. Only God can so teach you that you shall be willing to cast it away as not only profitless, but utterly polluted. The confidence you feel in the rectitude of your judgment, in the resolutions of your conscience, and the reasonableness of your hope is a rotten foundation. Give it up.

Give up; again I say — *give up your sins*. You cannot be saved from their consequence if you cling to their company. Christ is willing to forgive you all your past sins, if you are willing to part with them now; but when you

make a league with your lusts you are plotting against your own life. Drunkard, though you have all but killed yourself with strong drink, there is pardon for you now; but you must renounce that intoxicating cup. So long, sir, as you keep to it you are drinking down the venom of a deadly poison. What! Will you ask Christ to deliver you, while you are destroying yourself? And you too, ye libertines, you who have violated the laws of chastity, foul as your offences are, there is forgiveness for them; the precious blood can make you white, but you must forsake your impurities. The Saviour of sinners will make no compromise with sin, nor will He have anything to do with you, unless you clear yourself of these abominations. Is there one here who has been dishonest? Still there is pardon for the penitent. Your transgression shall be covered if you come to Christ; but you must cease from fraud and falsehood of every kind. There must be no more trickery in trading; no short weights, no spurious articles, no cheating or shuffling henceforward. All imposture must be renounced. You must shake such villainy off your hand as Paul shook off the viper into the fire. Give up, and have done with it.

A Good Physician is our great Master, and very willing is He to heal your diseases; but His treatment is not to be trifled with. You must not cling to habits that clash with health. Or should you feed the passions, and revel in the pleasures that sap your stamina and foster your sickness, then no remedy can restore you; your certain doom is death. Give up your sins. Are you loth to part with them? Oh, fools and slow of heart, to hanker after harm, and desire your own destruction! Why, your sins, perhaps, have already begun to entail sorrows upon you. Now that you feel their bitterness, is it not time to have done with them? I have heard of one who kept a tame leopard in his house. It had been nursed from the time it was a cub, and it gambolled about like a cat. But one day, while the master was asleep, it licked his hand. As it licked a place where the skin was thin and broken, the blood began to flow. Then all the wild instincts of the beast of the forest flashed from its furious eyes. The man suddenly woke, and saw the situation. His end was near—unless he should be quick and skilful enough to destroy the animal. Do you think he paused or hesitated? No; a loaded pistol was within his reach; so he stretched out his hand quietly, grasped it firmly, aimed it steadily, fired it instantly, and the creature lay dead at his feet. It had come to this; that he must either kill it, or it would kill him. It is so with you. Your sins begin to draw blood from you already. Those stings of conscience, that empty purse, those red eyes—all are beginning to tell what sin can do. Not yet do you know all its horror. Before the leopard springs upon you and

tears you in pieces, God help you to give it up! May God help you to give it up tonight, whatever it may be. Pluck it out, though it is like a right eye. Off with it, though it be like a right arm. It were better for you to enter into life having but one eye, or but one arm, than having both eyes and both arms to be cast into the fire of hell. Give up.

"Give up," says the text; and I use the expression thus — *give up delays*. Give up procrastination. Give up that constant—"Tomorrow, tomorrow, tomorrow!" Give up talking, like Felix, about "a more convenient season." Give all this up. Some here are sickly and drooping. Symptoms of consumption are beginning to betray themselves. What does this mean? Is the great Landlord giving His poor tenant a notice to quit? Prepare ye, then, for the removal. Last Sabbath, and during the early days of this week, there was present with us, and busy among us, a dear sister in Christ, whom we all regard with affection and esteem. She has been suddenly paralysed. When I looked at her just now, as she lay upon her bed, it was with much difficulty that she at last opened her eyes, recognised me, just smiled and then relapsed into unconsciousness. "Be ye also ready; for in such an hour as ye think not the Son of man cometh." She was at the beginning of the week, to all appearance, in as good health as you are. There she is now, suddenly smitten down, soon, perhaps, to be taken away. 'Tis a warning to us. Oh! take the warning to yourselves. How often do we hear of City men, who used to go up on the omnibus with us, or pass by our house regularly every morning. We miss them; and when we ask where they are, we are told that they are gone! Some who were so busy they could find no time to think of their latter end, have found out of a sudden that their time to live was spent, and their time to die had come. Scattered among this congregation are persons whose sable dress tells of recent bereavement. Ah! You have had the warning close at home. I pray you give up your supineness. May this be to you the appointed time, and this the hour of salvation, when eternal grace shall woo and win your hearts.

And I might well say to some here present, *give up quibbling*. You have never yet come to the point with your own conscience. You have always been so deft at finding out knots and raising questions. What is the good of it, man? If you are never saved till you get every problem solved, you will never be saved at all. A man is dying; there is a medicine that might restore him; he will not take it, because he does not understand the anatomy of his lungs and the various internal organs of his body. Stupid! Is it not enough that the physician understands the malady and the remedy? Take the medicine, man, and be content. Surely Christ understands every difficulty

that could perplex a sinner's brain, and He has prepared a potent salvation fully adequate to secure the sinner's welfare. Why should we stammer at the difficulties, instead of solving the dilemma by accepting the grace? If a vessel were breaking in pieces on yonder shore, and the rocket apparatus had fired a rope into the middle of the vessel, would you not think the crew to be insane if they said to one another — "We do not understand how it is that the rocket apparatus manages this!" Oh, but they just twist the rope round the mast, get a hold-fast, and begin to swing themselves ashore. So would every sane man do; and may the grace of God rid you of the insanity of your sin, and may the Eternal Spirit make you wise to flee to Jesus ere the night of death comes on.

"Give up," says the text — and I shall use it once more — give up, you troubled ones; *give up despondency*; give up the thought that there is no hope; give up the suspicion that Jesus cannot forgive. Know you not that our Lord Jesus Christ is very God, though man, of the substance of His mother? Made of a woman, made under the law, He was nevertheless co-equal and co-eternal with the Father. Now, if He, being God, took upon Himself the sin of his people, there must be a wonderful power in the sufferings He endured. There is, in fact, such power in the atonement of Christ that no sin was ever found too great for Christ to put away; no stain too deep for Him to wash out. However black you may have been, depend upon it your sins shall never baffle the power of the Almighty Saviour. Give up your doubts, then, and believe the message of my Lord and Master. "He that believeth on Him shall never perish, but have everlasting life." To despond and to despair, to doubt and to mistrust, were to insult the one Mediator and to bring swift destruction upon ourselves. Others have trusted, and none of them were rejected. They have depended upon the mercy of God in Christ; and many of them are safe in the city of the blessed, and thousands more are now happily on the road thither. Oh, troubled one! Why dost thou not try it? God is speaking to thee through my lips, and I trust His effectual grace is commanding thee to "give up," and constraining thee to "give up" thy dark suspicions and thy gloomy fears. Drop into the arms of Christ. Fall into the bosom of pardoning grace; "give up; give up; give up!" You are not asked to do aught; you are not asked to feel aught; you are not asked to prepare yourselves for mercy; you are not asked to perform penance, or to pass through purgatory. Give up! This is everything. Give up your every other trust. Give up your every other thought, and come just as you are to the sinners' Saviour, who has said — "Him that cometh to me I will in no wise cast out." May this prove to be the message of God to many

of you in these galleries and in that area. Give up! Give up!

II. We pass to the second address, which is this — **“KEEP NOT BACK”**.

Pray for me now, ye people of God, that during the next ten minutes I may be made God's mouth to some with this timely counsel, this solemn charge, "Keep not back."

Keep not back, my dear hearers — *from attending the means of grace*. It was with very great pleasure I heard that this afternoon at the special service for the young the Tabernacle was full. I do not doubt that if we had every Sunday three services we should have the house filled three times, for the people are, as a rule, willing to hear. Still, there are very many in London of all classes, relatively as many of the rich as of the poor, who keep back, and habitually neglect the house of God. Do you not see the penny Sunday paper handed in at many a working man's door on the Lord's Day morning? That is the sermon they are supplied with for the forenoon, I suppose. After dinner, they do their devotions to the god of this world with libations of ale and fumes of the pipe; their Sabbath being a day of inactivity, if not of intemperance. Ah! Did they but know the blessedness of gospel privileges, they would not forsake the assembling of themselves in the fellowship of the house of God, but they would gather with eager haste to hear of the things that make for their soul's peace. Not that WE have ourselves any cause for complaint. It is entirely for their own interest I counsel the careless not to keep back with reckless indifference. As you all know, the crowds that throng this capacious chapel baffle all our efforts to provide them with accommodation. Should I happen, however, to be addressing any who do not go regularly to a place of worship, I offer you, friends, a cordial greeting. I am glad to see you here. But I earnestly admonish you to make the house of prayer a settled home. Let this casual visit be followed up with a continual resort to the sanctuary. Keep not back. Going to church or chapel will not make you a saint any more than going to school would make you a scholar. Still, we are told of one that, "being in the way, the Lord met with him." If you are in the fields at time of wheat harvest you may glean some ears of corn, but if you lounge about that house at the roadside, you will get nothing worth carrying away. If you are where Christ is distributing His royal bounties, it may be you will receive a boon such as you could never purchase. But Oh! God forbid you should ever be content with "it may be!" Come with this firm resolve—that if true religion is taught anywhere you will know it; if pardon is to be had you will find it; if heaven is to be reached

you will, by the grace of God, secure a place among its holy inhabitants. Now if this purpose of heart be wrought in you by God the Holy Spirit, your desires will not be disappointed. I beseech you, therefore, keep not back.

And when you do attend the house of the Lord, keep not back *from a simple obedience of the gospel*. How many times over have I told to this congregation the simple gospel whereby we are saved? How many times more, if God spare my life, shall I have to tell the same old, old story? It is summed up in a few syllables, God must punish sin. Sin is such a mischief that the most holy God, cannot put up with it. It must be punished. But Jesus Christ put His bare shoulders under the Divine lash. He took the penalty of sin upon Himself, and suffered for His people what they ought to have suffered. Who, do ye ask, are the people for whom Christ suffered? We answer — as many as trust Him. If you trust Him that is the evidence that He died for you. If you will depend upon Him, and upon Him alone, that is the mark that you were redeemed by the precious blood, of Christ, and a sure token that you shall never perish. God cannot punish you for your sins if they were laid on your Substitute. It would be unjust, for He has already punished Christ instead of you. If you believe in Jesus, God's justice cannot demand twice over payment of the same debt; first at your bleeding Surety's hands and then again at yours.

Now, sinner, Christ is lifted up in the gospel for you to know Him and to trust Him. Keep not back! Keep not back! The devil says that your sins are too great. He is a liar; keep not back. Your heart says you are not prepared. God is greater than your heart, and he knoweth all things — keep not back. You say you cannot pray, but a sigh is a prayer, a tear is a prayer — keep not back. You say you are afraid you are not elected. If your soul takes shelter in Christ you have conclusive evidence that your name is written in the Book of Life — keep not back. You are afraid you shall not hold on to the end. It is His covenant engagement to keep you from falling if you come and commit yourselves to His protection — keep not back. Christ Jesus, like the brazen serpent in the wilderness, is lifted high upon the pole that whosoever looks should be healed. Look! Sinner, look! 'Tis the whole gospel in a word — look! Look to Jesus. Away with your good deeds. Away with your fine prayers. Away with all your self-righteousnesses. None but Jesus can do helpless sinners good. Look then; look to Him, and keep not back.

And when you have looked to Christ, keep not back *from the mercy-seat*. You may ask of God, and He will give you your desires. Unworthy though

you be, God is a Father to you, and you may tell Him all your troubles, your sins, your doubts, and you may ask Him for whatever He has promised. According to your faith, so shall it be done unto you. Keep not back, poor soul. When you get home tonight and want to pray, you will think you must not, but I beseech you hear the word, "Keep not back." You will begin to pray, perhaps, and find yourself stammering and trembling, but keep not back. Your old sins will half choke you in the recollection of them, but keep not back. If anybody saw you trying to pray they would say, "What you, you old wretch, you trying to pray!" Oh! But keep not back. 'Tis mercy calls you; come and pray. The mercy-seat was built for sinners; it was sprinkled with blood for sinners; therefore keep not back."

When you have really trusted in Christ, and have learned to pray, then keep not back *from coming forward and making a profession of your faith in Jesus*. Your Master has told you to follow His example. The first thing He did in public life was to be baptized. He came to John, and asked him to baptize Him, and this was the reason He gave, "Suffer it to be so now, for thus it becometh us to fulfil all righteousness." You know your Lord was not sprinkled. He knew nothing of infant baptism. He was a man of ripe years when He came forward and was baptized. You know how the gospel puts it, "He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved." Do not put the cart before the horse. It is not written, 'He that is baptized and then believes', but "He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved." In the case of all the early converts, as soon as they believed, they were immediately baptized, and added to the church. If you have believed, then, keep not back; but in all your Lord's appointed ways pursue your journey to heaven.

Then there is the Lord's Supper. "If ye love me," said He, "keep my commandments." Can ye overlook His dying commandment? "This do in remembrance of me." Keep not back, then. When you have found Christ, come forward and avow it at once. Some who negligently wait for a year, inadvertently wait for two years. And as nothing seems urgent when it has been long deferred, years multiply and conviction chills; duty becomes doubtful, and a languid heart finds excuses for all the lingering, till they wait so long they never care to come at all. Be prompt, if you would be precise in serving the Lord. "I made haste," said David, "and delayed not to keep thy commandments." Christ deserves and demands the most scrupulous homage. He redeemed you openly; profess Him openly. Christ did not come into this world with a secret, covert love to you, but with a bold, outspoken love. He emptied out His very heart upon the cross for you; be not ashamed of Him.

Take your place in the pillory side, by side with His despised and persecuted people. Take up your cross daily and follow Him, for he that confesseth Him before men, him will He confess before His Father in heaven; but he that denieth Christ before men, Him will Christ deny before His Father and His holy angels. Keep not back, then, keep not back.

To those who are saved, and have avowed their conversion let me now say, Keep not back, my dear brethren and sisters, *from the Lord's service*. I entreat you young men not to keep back from preaching Christ. I hope when the weather permits, there will be plenty of street preaching all over this region. It delights me to hear occasionally that our preachers are numerous enough to become a nuisance to the neighbourhood. I hope you will increase the force tenfold. We must take the gospel to those who will not come and hear it. Occupy the street corners, police or no police. Preach the gospel wherever you have an opportunity. Throw it in the way of the wayfarer. Let the plan of salvation cross his path and greet his ears. I have known persons from Germany and France struck with nothing so much in London as with the open-air preaching. I have met too with cases, chiefly of foreigners, who had never heard our holy faith — such as Frenchmen, Germans, Poles, and Spaniards — who have mingled in the crowd, listened to what has been spoken, and learned for the first time a Saviour's love and felt the power of it in their hearts. Some of you young men may have great ability, but much bashfulness. Remember that souls are dying, and tremble at your own timidity while you contemplate this huge city perishing for lack of knowledge. How can you be cowardly and craven, and hide your light under a bushel? The Lord have mercy upon us if we have concealed the glad tidings in the past; but in the future let us publish the divine proclamation — "Keep not back!"

Those of you who could help in a Ragged School, need not make vain excuses, or cultivate your own ease on Sundays, as is your wont. Turn out and go in quest of young waifs from the streets. You who might be useful in the Sabbath school, but prefer to have your time to yourselves, make it a matter of conscience that ye volunteer on the Lord's side. Judge ye whether you are doing right while ye stand aloof. Are you at liberty to keep a single talent unemployed? You are six days at work in the world for your own wage, cannot you dedicate one day wholly to Christ? I may be speaking to some sentimental Christians, who never seriously think of serving the Lord. We look for ripe fruit from your rich experience. By the love of souls, I pray you, keep not back. Some of you are affluent in this world's currency; give

up your substance; keep not back. Aid others to do what you cannot accomplish by your own personal efforts. I am bold to beg for my Master. By the famishing millions; by the tens of thousands who know not their right hand from their left in the point of religion; by the activity of the priests of Rome; by the craftiness of the fiends of hell, who on every side are casting abroad their temptations; by the attractiveness of the gin-palace, the casino, the theatre, and the haunts of infamy, I pray you be vigilant, active, always on the alert. Give God no rest in your supplication for His favour. Cry aloud and spare not. Give sinners no rest in your deprecation of their behaviour. Constrain them to see what wages await their wickedness, and to hear what salvation is proclaimed to their souls.

Would God I could speak, with more fervour to you upon this point. Better is it that my text speak to you, "Keep not back" Let not anyone of you skulk or hold back. Every man to the front as far as possible. In the name of God, the Eternal, the Almighty; in the faith of the precious blood; in the power of the blessed Spirit, let each man advance to the conflict; let each sister take her part in the fray. God bless you according to your faith — bless you according to your zeal. Oh, that many may "Give up," and all of you "Keep not back" So shall He bless you very richly, for Jesus' sake, Amen.

