





# SERMON

IN WHICH IS ATTEMPTED

A FULL AND EXPLICIT ANSWER

TO THE

COMMON AND HIGHLY IMPORTANT QUESTION,

**"What wilt Thou have me to do?"**

DELIVERED IN THE ORDINARY COURSE,

*On one of the Sabbaths in August, 1814,*

TO THE

CONGREGATION IN PARK STREET,

BOSTON.

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*Pastor of said Congregation.*

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SECOND EDITION.

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BOSTON:

PRINTED BY EZRA LINCOLN.

1824.



## SERMON.

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ACTS IX. 6.

*And he, trembling and astonished, said, Lord, what wilt Thou have me to do?*

THIS was the exclamation of the trembling Paul, when he was arrested on his way to Damascus. And this will be the anxious inquiry of every sinner when God opens Himself to his view. There must be a moment in the life of every man who is saved, when he is brought to feel that he cannot put off religion any longer, that he must enter upon it immediately and in earnest, and from this self-same moment must make it his great object till he has made sure of eternal life. Unless a man is brought to this stand, he will continue to postpone and postpone till he dies. I am willing to hope that there are some of my hearers who are convinced that they cannot find happiness in the world; that it is high time to seek a better happiness in God, that they have lived too long in sin, that they are hastening to the judgment seat of Christ, to a never ending eternity, and ought no longer to sleep over the concerns of their souls; and who are ready to ask the question in the text with great sincerity, and with a determination to obey the answer whatever it may be. If there are any such in the house, this Sermon is intended for them. It is a pity that people who are brought to this state of inquiry, should be left one moment in doubt respecting the course they are to pursue. Unable to come at them all in a personal interview, I have determined to meet them in a mass, and hold this public conversation with them together. If they will

lend me their whole attention, I will endeavour to tell them, with all the plainness and simplicity in my power, what God would have them to do.

I. You must enter at once on the most earnest attention to *the means of grace*. You must frequently and solemnly read the Scriptures, with a fervent desire to feel their illuminating and sanctifying influence. You must often repair to your closets, and cast yourselves down before God, and pour out your souls in prayer; not in that cold, wandering manner that you have too often done, but with the most agonizing wrestlings, feeling that you cannot let Him go, that you can never again rise from your face till you have obtained His pardoning love. You must keep your minds on these things through the day, and be often lifting up your hearts in ejaculatory prayer in the intervals of business. Nothing but the most pressing necessity must be suffered to keep you from the house of God; and when there, you must banish every sluggish, sleepy feeling, call in every wandering thought, and attend as for your lives to every part of the service. You must seek those other meetings which are held in the week, and suffer nothing to keep you from them that would not keep you from the bed of a dying child. You should go to some judicious, pious friend, and unbosom your heart to him, and tell him all your difficulties and temptations, and take the benefit of his instruction and advice. Though an obtrusive loquacity is to be avoided, you ought early to let your case be known to some prudent friend who is able to give you instruction. Your natural adviser on such subjects is your minister, and he will be happy to receive you at all times, and afford you every aid in his power. You should get some capable person to select for you a few books, which are adapted to your present case; such as Doddridge's *Rise and Progress*, Edwards' *Sermons*, Backus on *Regeneration*, and the like; and should make a point of reading some in them every day. You must strictly avoid, especially in the present crisis of your fate, all company that is calculated to dissipate your thoughts. You must guard, as though the Judgment were to-morrow, against every sinful thought, word, or

action, against every transgression or neglect that would tend to grieve the divine Spirit from you. You must employ yourselves much in deep, fixed meditations on God, His character, and government, on your obligations and guilt, on your ruin and helplessness, on heaven and hell, on Christ and His Gospel. To this duty you must bring all the powers of your nature, and make a great effort *to see*. You must turn the eye of your mind full upon these subjects, and pry with the most eager intenseness, and come to the task again and again. Sit down often to consider the end of your creation, why you were sent into this world, and what you have done since you have been here. Spread out your past life before your eyes, and your future prospects. Place yourselves frequently before the judgment seat of Christ, and go over the whole of that tremendous process. Dart forward an eye to those ages which will succeed, till you are lost in the ocean of years. Meditate upon the grandeur, the holiness, the goodness of God, what obligations a creature is under to serve Him, how great an evil it must be to sin against Him, how just your condemnation, how reasonable to repent, and forsake sin, and cast yourselves upon a Saviour. And then fall down and plead with Him again to open your eyes and bless you with His sanctifying and pardoning grace.

If any thing is to be done you must come up to the business with the most earnest exertions of soul. You must set upon it as the grand care. Until this great question is decided you must have no heart or mind for any thing else. You have long enough tried this half-way effort, now rise and take "the kingdom of heaven" by "*violence*," now "*agonize* to enter in at the strait gate." If God intends to work "in you—to will and to do," He will bring you thus to "work out your own salvation with fear and trembling;" and so you will "labour, striving according to His working which worketh in" you "*mightily*."\* If these earnest exertions are not excited, you never will be saved. But,

II. You must not go forth *in your own strength*. You must not feel that *by the power of these exertions* you

\* Phil. iii. 12, 13. Col. i. 29.

are going to obtain a conquest over yourselves. You must be sensible of your entire dependance on God for holiness. As your *obligation* is perfectly consistent with your *actual* dependance, so the *performance* of duty is perfectly consistent with your *sensible* dependance. While your agency is raised into the highest action, your hope for sanctification must rest on God alone,—your eye must be open to the great truth which is spread on every page of the Bible, that faith “is the gift of God,” that the renewal of the heart is achieved by power no less than that which caused the light at first “to shine out of darkness,”—than that which “raised” Christ “from the dead.”\* Nor,

III. Must you go forth *in your own righteousness*. You may start at this suggestion, and say, “I have long since given up all idea of a righteousness of my own.” *Perhaps not*. You know indeed that you are *sinners*, and notwithstanding the resistance which selfishness makes, your conscience acknowledges that you deserve *some evil*; but you may still hope to recommend yourselves to God, in some measure, by the earnestness and frequency of your prayers, the strictness of your walk, and the laboriousness of your duties. Some idea may lurk about your heart, that it would be hard in God to cast you off *after you have done so much*,—some hope, *not resting on Christ*, that God may respect you for your great seriousness and devotion. *This is self-righteousness*. All such ideas must be utterly abandoned, and every hope of acceptance must be founded on the grace of God through the merits of Jesus Christ. But it is necessary to come nearer to this subject. I observe therefore,

IV. That you must seek salvation *through Jesus Christ*, with a *cordial approbation* of the way of life through Him, and with *dependance* on Him alone. But this proposition includes several particulars which ought to be separately considered.

(1) You must feel your *need* of a Saviour. This sense cannot be obtained till your eyes are opened to see

\* 2 Cor. 17. 6. Eph. 1. 18-20, and ii. 8.



*what God is.* You must see the claims which God has upon His creatures, as a Being of infinite perfection, as their Creator, Preserver, and Redeemer. You must see the reasonableness and excellence of His holy law. You must see the amazing wickedness of rising up against such a God and such a government. You must see the justice of your condemnation to eternal death. You must justify God in all this severity,—must take all the shame and blame to yourselves, and clear your Maker. You must abhor yourselves and repent in dust and ashes. You must see that you never, by any thing which you can do, can render it *less just* that you should be forever punished, and therefore can never have a particle of *claim* on the justice of God for any thing but wrath; in other words, that you can never make the least *atonement* for your sins, or possess the least *righteousness* of your own,—of course that there is no way for you to be pardoned and accepted of a holy God but through the righteousness of another,—that you stand in perishing need of a Saviour who will consent to be the ground of your pardon, and whom God will accept as such. You must feel that you need a Saviour who has procured the mission of the Holy Spirit to enlighten the darkness and sanctify the hearts of sinners, that your benighted, stubborn nature will never yield to any other influence. Your proud heart must be humbled into a willingness to be conquered by the power and instructed by the wisdom of another,—to receive, as a beggar, a morsel of bread, as a criminal, pardon, of free grace, on account of the righteousness of another,—to part with all the glory of your salvation and yield it to another.

(2) You must see the Lord Jesus Christ to be the *very Saviour* you need, every way adapted to your necessities; allsufficient as an atoning and interceding Priest, on account of the infinite interest He has secured in the Father's heart by His holiness and obedience on earth; allsufficient as a conquering King, through the Spirit which was given Him without measure, and the universal power with which He was invested.

(3) You must see Christ to be *lovely* in all His offices, and must heartily approve the way of salvation by Him.

You must see that way to be glorious, and full of amazing exhibitions of God,—a way in which His purity, justice, and mercy shed their most resplendent lustre,—a way perfectly safe for man,—wonderfully adapted to promote the dignity, order, and prosperity of the universe, to bring out to view the mode of the divine existence, to form a connecting link between finite and infinite natures, to present a visible Shekinah to shed abroad the invisible glories of the Divinity, and be the medium of intercourse between God and His creatures, to preserve inviolate the principle of treating no transgressor with favour for his own sake, of letting no sin go unpunished, and to bring out to the view of creation, not only “the manifold wisdom,” but the astonishing love of God. Under such general views, more or less distinct, you must heartily approve of the way of salvation by Jesus Christ, not only as conducive to the happiness of man, but as subservient to the dignity and glory of the divine government. This approbation, it ought not to be concealed, implies a cordial reconciliation to the government and character of God. While you are in arms against the divine administration, you will never approve of a plan of redemption intended to vindicate that government against the charges of men, to discover and secure its everlasting stability, and to cause it to be forever respected. This approbation therefore implies an elevation above the dominion of selfishness, an expansion of heart from its native contractedness to God and His creation, a dilation of the wave of love from its little centre to the utmost shore.

(4) You must firmly believe in the *sincerity* of Him who *invites*, in the *truth* of Him who *promises*, in His *willingness* to receive all who “come unto Him,” in His perfect readiness to receive *you*, after all your rebellions and ingratitude. When the invitations of heaven follow you and find you pressed under your guilt, you must not say, “It is too good news to be true.” You must not measure God by your own contractedness, and say “He cannot pardon *so much*.” You must not say, “The invitation is for another. and does not mean *me*.” You must not say, “I am excluded by an eternal decree.” You

must believe, as firmly as you believe your own existence, that God is as willing to receive you as any child of Adam, if you will only return in the appointed way,—that Christ is willing, that the Holy Ghost is willing, that all heaven are willing, that all the unwillingness lies with yourselves.

(5) Under these views and feelings you must, by a deliberate act, make choice of the Lord Jesus Christ for your Saviour, and appropriate Him thus to yourselves, and actually venture your souls upon Him, resting all your hopes on Him, and committing to Him every part of your salvation. This done, you must cleave to Him, and rest on Him day by day for pardon, for sanctification and direction, for every needed blessing for time and eternity, confiding in Him as a faithful Shepherd and Leader, and drawing from Him, by faith and prayer, all your supplies of life and strength. This intercourse with Him must be kept up by a life of devotion, and a diligent attendance on all the means of His appointment : for without a constant resort to Him, and a continual derivation of life from Him, you will wither like a severed branch. The strength which you thus derive must be devoted to His service, in all holy obedience, in all piety towards God, in all benevolence and usefulness to men, in the exercise of all the Christian graces, in the practice of all the Christian virtues, in all gentleness, meekness, patience, in all humility and self-denial, in suppressing every unhallowed passion, in bringing the body into subjection, in conquering the world as Alexander never did, and in a constant struggle to rise above the last remains of selfishness, and expand into pure and everlasting love.

THIS is what the Lord Jesus Christ would have you to do. Short of this, whatever else you perform, you do nothing. There is no easier way to heaven marked out by the pencil of mercy itself. No easier way dare I attempt to sketch. If I should it would not be the way to heaven ; it might prove, both to you and me, the road to perdition. And indeed what easier way *ought* there to be ? Is not the road already pointed out plainly the *Gospel* path ? and is it not the path which it is most reason-

able for a rational being and a sinner to walk in? Ought not a creature of God who has revolted from Him, and been redeemed, to return to Him with such affections as these? If *such* affections may not be required of men, what may? what *can* be required of them but to feel as they *now do*, and as they *hereafter may*? If you ask more, the same objection may be raised as is raised against this demand, viz. "*How can a man create his own feelings?*" If this objection is admitted, there is an end to all moral government, to all distinction between right and wrong, and all punishment is oppression, and all our notions of blame are the mere prejudices of children. Start from this, and there is no stopping place short of that to which I have conducted you, viz. that men, however indisposed, are bound to feel, in all respects, just as they would feel if they had holy hearts, and just as God requires them to feel.

All excuse arising from indisposition being thus removed, I proceed to say, that the manner pointed out is the *proper way*, and the *only successful way* to seek salvation. Others do not seek, in any manner recognised in the Word of God. They have a general notion of reliance on Christ, as a friend to whom they can go more easily than to God. But they cannot apply to *Christ* in any other way than that which has been pointed out. Without faith and a broken heart they cannot go to Christ, they cannot speak to Christ, they cannot look to Christ. While they are enemies to the government of God which Christ came to support, what have they to do with Christ? While they are under the supreme dominion of selfishness, what union can they have with Christ? While they are "enmity against God," how can they have that faith in Christ which "worketh by love?" And without faith, how can they derive any spiritual benefit from Christ?

My dear hearers, the only way to seek salvation is now before you. If you now neglect to enter in, you must never say again, "*I would if I knew how, but I cannot learn what there is for me to do.*" The way is now as clearly set before you, I suppose, as it can be in lan-

guage. If you do not enter in, it must be owing to some other cause than a want of *knowledge*. What can that cause be? You have all the *natural faculties* which a Christian has: what can be wanting but a *good heart*? What can prevent but a *bad heart*? And how can a *bad heart* prevent you from *loving God*, but by *hating God*? How can a *bad heart* prevent you from *repenting*, but by its strong *attachment to sin*? How can a *bad heart* prevent you from *accepting the Saviour*, but by its opposition to that Saviour and His Gospel? Here then the true difficulty comes out. It consists in a *heart at enmity with God, in love with sin, and opposed to Christ*. And your heart is *you yourself*. The difficulty then is, plainly this: *you yourself are God's enemy, and Christ's enemy, and a willing slave to sin*. And this is your excuse! How will such an excuse appear at the Judgment of the Great Day? If this is not the *very guilt* for which the wicked will then be *punished*, what is that guilt? if the treason of being God's enemy, and Christ's enemy, and a willing slave to sin, escapes punishment in that Day, what I pray, will be punished? Take away these grounds of punishment, and what is there left? In short the difficulty which prevents you from cordially accepting the Gospel, and which you turn into an excuse, comprehends the *whole amount* of that wickedness which will call forth the tremendous sentence, "Depart, ye cursed, into everlasting fire, prepared for the devil and his angels."

But as deeply stained with guilt as this difficulty is, it is a difficulty which it will be very hard to remove. "The heart of the sons of men is" so "fully set in them to do evil," that neither reason, nor revelation, nor the convictions of the Spirit, nor all the motives which three worlds can furnish, can restrain its headlong "madness;" and on to destruction it will go, in spite of all the entreaties of ministers, the tears of parents, the loud expostulations of Calvary, the animated warnings of a God, unless Omnipotent Mercy conquers the rebel, and binds it in chains to His throne. This casts you at last into the hands of God, and leaves you there. Unless that God whom you have made your enemy by wicked works, has pity on you and subdues you, moved by nothing in

you, and only by what exists in Himself, you are forever undone. There you lie in the hands of God, and all creation cannot take you out. *Your own obstinacy*, has placed you there, and kept you there. *You die by your own hand*. Your inveterate enmity against God and His Son, has plunged you into ruin, and still holds you in ruin. And none but that God against whom you are so implacably set, can bring you relief. Whether He ever will, He has told no man. You richly *deserve* to die. You have no possible *claim* on Him. It would not be cruel or oppressive if He should cast you down to hell to day. It is a wonder of wonders that His patience has borne with you so long. He may turn His hand and let you fall this very hour. Nothing appears in heaven or earth but that He will. There, while you lie suspended between two eternities, on the naked hand of God, with none in heaven or earth to take you off, and none to tell how long before you will fall to rise no more, I am permitted to approach you, and utter one more word in your ear before your fate is decided. And what shall I say? That heart which has so often resisted, shall I address it again? It is an awful crisis,—I can but try. By all the solemnities of this universe around me, O stubborn heart, once more I conjure you, submit to God. As you hang over this world of dreadful secrets, fall down upon the palm which supports you, and yield your weapons at last. I remember the valley of vision and am encouraged to speak. O stubborn heart, hear thou the word of the Lord. *Earless, eyeless* as thou art, O obdurate soul, in the name of God I summon you to *see and hear*. Rock of adamant, my God commands you to dissolve.—“Let there be light,” said He, “and there was light!” Let that potent voice speak again! While the four angels hold the winds, and there is silence in heaven for half an hour, let that new-creating voice speak again! O may He “who commanded the light to shine out of darkness,” shine in your “hearts, to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ!” *Amen.*

9:7:49



