

A Prisoner and a King

Acts 26.

Seekers for Light.

Fourteen Addresses to Edinburgh Students.

by W. T. P. Wolston, M.D.

Chapter 13

A Prisoner and a King; or, Almost a Christian.

It is worthy of note that this is the third time that the Spirit of God is pleased to record the conversion of Saul, afterwards named Paul, when, as an aged man, with outstretched hand, and manacled wrists, he addressed the king. Whether or no the king was converted by the prisoner's address, is a question; but that Agrippa got the opportunity of receiving Christ as his Saviour, on that occasion, is undoubted. That you will have the opportunity, friend, of receiving Christ as your Saviour tonight, I believe, is as certain; and I would like at the outset to urge you not to do as Agrippa did. He did not absolutely decide for the Saviour, of whom he had heard.

Now, I say, this is the third time that Paul's conversion is given us (*see Acts 9: 1-30, Acts 22: 1-16*). Could God write about your conversion yet? Sometimes people say to me, You should not speak about yours. Well, friends, I cannot help it. If I live till the 16th inst., it will be my birthday: I shall be thirty. seven years old. Perhaps you think I am a little grey for a man of thirty-seven years. It is seven-and-thirty years since I began to live truly, and I always keep my birthday. I do not ask my friends to do it But I do it, and when the 16th of December comes round, I remember, This is the day that Christ met me in 1860. I am not tonight going to tell you of my conversion, however, I am going to tell you of Paul's, and I hope, friend, that if you have never been able to say you were converted, that you will be able to turn back to this night and say, God converted me then by the revelation of light from heaven, in the Oddfellows' Hall.

Did I hear you say, I, do not believe in conversion? It is a real thing, nevertheless. I admit it is not a very fashionable topic, and perhaps you do not often hear about it. You do not like it. Well, I would just like you to understand this; you must either be converted, or damned; you must either be converted to God, and brought to face His grace, and to know His voice, or you will have to taste the judgment of God, in respect of your sin. If I did not believe that, I should not stand upon this platform to address you, I assure you. You may tell me you do not believe it I know it, and that is the reason why God sends the gospel to you. It was when we did not know His grace, and did not believe His gospel, and when the love of God was nothing to our hearts,

and the tale of Jesus but an empty sound in our ears, that God's Spirit, in holy love to us, convicted us of our sins, and broke us down before God. The gospel did that for me, and, thank God! it has reached many a heart in this hall tonight besides mine. I hope it may reach you tonight; for, mark, your heart is no harder than Paul's was.

You are no further away from the arm of the Saviour than Saul of Tarsus was; because, he tells us elsewhere that he was "the chief of sinners." He says, "This is a faithful saying, and worthy of all acceptance, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners; of whom I am chief" (1 Tim. 1: 15). Now he did not pen that in mock modesty. I quite admit that his life outwardly would bear comparison with anybody's here tonight. There is not a man in this hall this evening whose outward life could compare at all with Paul's (or Saul's, as he was then called). But yet, when he comes to see it in the light of the Saviour's estimate of what he was when the grace of Christ met him, he says distinctly — and the Holy Ghost has penned it, and the Holy Ghost never writes what is not true, — "Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners; *of whom I am chief.*" Wherein lay the sin of this moral, religious man, who was yet the "chief of sinners"? It was this; he was persecuting Christ. He was no drunkard; outwardly he was a perfectly moral man. He was no loose liver; he was a most careful man. He was no profligate, no debauchee. You may be that, but Christ can save you notwithstanding; because the chief of sinners has been saved.

Wherein, then, was it that Paul was the chief of sinners? I repeat, it was in this: He had bitterly and deeply hated the Son of God, Jesus of Nazareth, and had done his best to blot that name out of the earth. As he tells us himself here, his malignity against the followers of Jesus had reached such a level, that he was engaged upon a missionary enterprise of extermination. He wanted to blot the name of Jesus from the face of the earth, and also every man or woman who believed in Jesus; and, therefore, as we now read from this scripture, his missionary zeal became so violent that he secured credentials from the chief priests and travelled over the burning deserts to Damascus, that he might lead the Christians to Jerusalem, there to blaspheme the name of Christ; or, if they did not do that, to taste certain and violent death. What a lovely business that was for an intelligent man! It was while on such an enterprise and mission that this man was met; light shone upon him from heaven, and he was converted. Oh! the grace of Christ! Think of the grace of the Saviour; for we have all been opposed to Him, more or less. There is no man, no hearer, in this hall tonight who has not, more or less, been opposed to the Saviour; unless, indeed, he has been brought to Christ in early and tender years.

The grace of Christ met Saul of Tarsus, and the same grace waits on you. Oh, that you might taste it now!

When this scene before us occurred, Paul was a prisoner. He had been converted for over a quarter of a century. The historical account is given in the ninth chapter of the Acts, and his own account he has given in the twenty-second of Acts, when the Jews caught him with the intent of killing him. After that he had appealed to Caesar, so to Rome he must go. Festus could not send a prisoner to Rome without giving some substantial indication of the crime that was laid to his charge. King Agrippa having come to Caesarea with a great deal of pomp and ceremony, Festus takes the opportunity of bringing Paul out of Herod's judgment-hall, that he might examine him,

and have something certain to write regarding the prisoner whom the Jews demanded should be put to death, because he was preaching Jesus.

In this way God brings this simple, fervent evangelist-apostle into the presence of royalty. Look at him, as he stands there with the chains upon him. That he was bound there can be no doubt, for he himself says, he wishes them all to be such as he was, "except these bonds" (ver. 29). He did not want them to be manacled as he was for the truth's sake. He was "the prisoner of Jesus Christ, for you Gentiles," as he puts it in the third of Ephesians; and here a prisoner in bonds.

He was in the presence of royalty, and was given permission to speak. And we hear him tell how he was converted, "I think myself happy, King Agrippa, because I shall answer for myself this day before thee, touching all the things whereof I am accused of the Jews: especially because I know thee to be expert in all customs and questions which are among the Jews: wherefore I beseech thee to hear me patiently" (vers. 2, 3).

I have to ask of you the same favour tonight — hear me patiently! I have a difficult subject in hand, but hear me patiently; and I think if you believe what God may let fall from my lips tonight, you will do as this man did — praise the Saviour from this night forth. "My manner of life, from my youth, which was at the first among mine own nation at Jerusalem, know all the Jews; which knew me from the beginning, if they would testify, that after the most straitest sect of our religion I lived a Pharisee" (vers. 4, 5). That is, outwardly he was a most religious man. As he elsewhere says, "Touching the righteousness which is in the law, blameless" (Phil. 3: 6). He was, legally, a spotless man: he was a man who had done everything that could be expected to give him a place before God, yet he had to give all up. You may have never so much righteousness in yourself, my friend; but it will not do for God. A man came to me during last week in soul exercise. He had heard me preach last Sunday night, and the difficulty in his soul was this, he was trying to get a little bit of righteousness, something to cover himself with; but the Word of God showed him that, "all our righteousnesses are as filthy rags" (Isa. 64: 6).

None of you would care to appear in this company tonight clothed in filthy rags? How then could you appear in the presence of God so apparelled — in "filthy rags"? It is not your bad deeds that are thus spoken of — it is your very best deeds, even these are unfit for God. Paul did not know that; he had to learn it, and we shall tonight see how he learnt it. He says to Agrippa, "Why should it be thought a thing incredible with you, that God should raise the dead?" Paul had learned that Jesus died, and rose again; he had learned that the Lord had risen from the dead. He had seen Him in glory, and the result was that he preached His name. "Why should it be thought a thing incredible with you, that God should raise the dead?" Whom did he refer to? Christ. He had died. And why did Christ die? He died for sinners. That is the wonderful news which the gospel brings to us, that "when we were yet without strength, in due time Christ died for the ungodly" (Rom. 5: 6). Paul had got hold of she blessed news that the Son of God had become incarnate; had become a man in this world; that He passed through it a blessed, holy, sinless man; and that at length, in grace, He died on the cross for man.

It is quite true, man put Him there, but when there He died to make atonement for sin. But God raised Him from the dead. Wickedness nailed Him to the tree. Hatred slew Him; love took

Him down from the cross, and buried Him; and fear sealed Him in the tomb. Do not forget that! They rolled a great stone to the mouth of the tomb, and set a watch over it. Was not that a strange thing? They put a guard around a dead man. And why? Because, they were afraid He would rise; and thank God, that was what happened. He has been raised. If hatred slew Him, love buried Him, and fear sealed Him in the tomb, what raised Him? Righteousness. It was His due, and He got it. The glory of the Father raised Him, as we read, "Christ was raised up from the dead by the glory of the Father" (Rom. 6: 4). God took that sinless man out of death, and put Him into glory. Paul had seen Him there, and been commissioned to proclaim the news. He had been preaching it to the Gentiles, and for that dire offence he is accused of the Jews, and cast into prison. Strange that man should refuse the most blessed tidings that ever fell on mortal ears!

I pray you to carefully note his question, "Why should it be thought a thing incredible with you, that God should raise the dead?" Resurrection is the very backbone of the gospel: it is the evidence that the work of redemption is accomplished; that the power of the enemy has been broken; that death has been annulled; that sins are wiped away; that God's claims in righteousness are met. The fruit of the cross is that the door of heaven is opened, so to speak, to allow of the outflowing of the rich grace of God, to a guilty world. Satan could not stand that: therefore he used these Jews to silence, if possible, the witness, and crush the "chosen vessel" of this heavenly testimony. "Why should it be thought a thing incredible with you, that God should raise the dead?" I hear some one saying, "Of course God can raise the dead." Let me ask you, my friend, How do you expect to be raised? Do you expect to be raised up to be judged? I pity you if you are expecting that. Are you going to be raised from the dead, and then have the question of your sins and your standing before God settled? There is no salvation, in that case, for you. Thank God! I know this; that the Man who knew no sin, and who did no sin, and on whom death had no claim, because He had never sinned, died for sinners, and God has raised that Man from the dead. What, then, is the outcome of that for the heart that trusts in Him? Absolute association with Himself He has paid the penalty that I should have paid. The debt that I should have met, He has liquidated. I often hear people talking about dying, and "paying nature's debt" I shall never do that, I am glad to say. What then, you say, will you not die? I do not say that, my friend. All I say is, *I need not*; because Another has died for me. Blessed be His name, Another, upon whom death had no claim, has gone down to death for the man on whom it had a claim; and God has taken that Man out of the grave, and has put Him into glory after He bore the sins of the man for whom He died. That is the point, do you not see? God has put Jesus into glory, after He bore my sins on the cross. "The wages of sin is death:" that He bore for me, passed into the grave, and God has taken Him out of it, and put Him in glory. That is how I know I am saved.

I was dealing with an anxious man last Monday night. He had much difficulty about the gospel. "If anybody is going to be kept out of heaven for my sins," said I, "do you know who it is?" He thought for a minute, and said, "You?" "No," I replied. We had just been talking about Christ being once offered "to bear the sins of many." He saw the truth, and said, "If anybody be kept out, it will be Jesus." I said, "Exactly so." "But," he replied, "you cannot keep Him out." "No," I said, "He has gone in for me, and that is why I know I am going in. You cannot keep Him out; He is gone in, but before He went in He had taken up the question of sin. He bore the judgment of God for sin, and He settled for ever the question of sin upon the cross for all who trust in Him. He has made Himself responsible for my liabilities; and, thank God, I am clear in the clearance of Christ. I hang on Him, and fall or rise with Him. I am clear in this fact, that what

He has done, has infinitely glorified God, and the whole question of sin has been settled on the cross. Christ 'was delivered for our offences and was raised again for our justification' (Rom. 4: 25). And what is the result? 'Therefore, being justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ'" (Rom. 5: 1).

Christ's work was complete in what He did for sinners, and in respect of sin; and when He goes into the grave in the fulfilment of Scripture, God comes in righteousness, and takes Him out of the grave, and puts Him into glory. He is now the life and righteousness of every one who believes in Him. Be clear as to that, Christ is our righteousness before God. If I do not get Christ for my righteousness, then I cannot be in God's presence. There is only One Man who perfectly suits God, and that spotless Man adorns the throne of God this night, crowned with glory. That Man is my Saviour. Oh! that you could say the same. The resurrection of Jesus, I repeat, is the backbone of the gospel; and that is just what Satan could not stand, when the apostles preached it; and therefore there was a stir got up among the Jews. The apostles taught not merely the resurrection of the dead, but the resurrection *from among* the dead. God's resurrection of Jesus was a witness to the value of the work that He did, not for Himself, but for others, — for you and for me. There must be resurrection. But is it going to be a resurrection unto judgment? That is the question. I have in the work that Christ has accomplished, and through His resurrection, a right to appear before God, and that means peace, pardon, and deliverance to my soul, and to everyone that gets hold of Christ.

Now, Paul had been busy working out his own righteousness, and he learns that he has to give it all up. "I verily thought with myself, that I ought to do many things contrary to the name of Jesus of Nazareth. Which thing I also did in Jerusalem: and many of the saints did I shut up in prison, having received authority from the chief priests: and when they were put to death, I gave my voice against them" (vers. 9, 10). In all this, he was the chief of legalists, as well as the chief of sinners. His persecution of the Church was the full measure of his sin. So, he says to the legalists, you will have to give all up, and let Jesus save you; and he says to the poor despairing sinner, You may be sinner number two, friend; but you cannot be number one. I was sinner number one, and Jesus saved me. Do you see? You and I may be numbers two and three, but we cannot be chief: there are not two chiefs, — and Paul says, "Sinners, of whom I am *chief*." You and I may have second and third place, but we cannot be number one. If number one has been saved, then there is hope for you.

He here unfolds what made him chief of sinners, and how the Lord arrested him. "And I punished them oft in every synagogue, and compelled them to blaspheme; and being exceedingly mad against them, I persecuted them even unto strange cities. Whereupon as I went to Damascus with authority and commission from the chief priests at midday, O king, I saw in the way a light from heaven, above the brightness of the sun, shining round about me and them which journeyed with me" (vers. 11-13). In one moment, as he is breathing out threatenings and slaughter, and going to hale those simple, faithful Christians to Jerusalem, really for their murder, in a moment a light, brighter than the sun at noonday, shines about him and those with him. Now, mark that! The noonday sun with us is often not very bright We have often a murky sky; but, picture to yourself the wonderful brilliancy of the Eastern noonday sun, when in undimmed splendour, it casts its rays over all the land. And yet that light was dimmed by a brighter light; and what was the mightier light? Have you ever thought what that light was? I will tell you! "For God, who

commanded the light to shine out of darkness, hath shined in our hearts, to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ" (2 Cor. 4: 6).

Where did that light come from? It came from the face of the Man in glory; and the effulgence of the glory from that Man's face eclipsed the light of the sun at noonday. Its effect was all-powerful towards Paul. "And when we were all fallen to the earth, I heard a voice speaking unto me." It smote him to the ground. It brought this self-confident, self-righteous man to the conclusion of the history of his self-will. It was light from heaven that did it: it was not an earthquake; it was not a lightning flash; it was not a hand that struck him; it was light that struck him down. Has light ever struck you? I shall never forget when light struck me, and illuminated me! I shall never forget when light from heaven showed me what I was, where I was, and where I was going. And, my friend, when you have been struck by the light, you will speak similarly.

We read that the whole party were struck to the earth, but only Saul heard the Lord's voice. "*I heard a voice speaking unto me, and saying in the Hebrew tongue, Saul, Saul, why persecutest thou me? It is hard for thee to kick against the pricks*" (ver. 14). Fancy hearing your mother tongue from glory. That is what Saul heard that day. It would not do you much good, if I were talking to you in Arabic: you would not understand a word of it. But you can understand plain English. Paul was in a similar position. He heard a voice speaking to him in his mother tongue; that is, in Hebrew. An unknown voice, in that language, speaks to the smitten man. And, friend, be sure of this, when God speaks to a sinner, He always makes him understand. I quite admit, there were along with Saul those who did not understand what was said, for elsewhere we read, "They that were with me saw indeed the light, and were afraid; but they heard not the voice of him that spake to me" (Acts 22: 9). When God speaks to a man, he is individualised: he is like a stricken deer. The deer-stalker goes out, and a herd may go by; but he only takes aim at one, and when the deer is wounded it will leave the herd to go alone to die. When a man is convicted of his sin by the Holy Ghost, he gets alone with God. Paul says, "I alone heard the voice." And what did it say? "Saul, Saul, why persecutest thou me?" What did that mean? It meant that Christ in glory, the head of the Church, owned His beloved people on earth as part of Himself — as forming His body; in plain language He says, Touch them, and you touch me. "Why persecutest thou me?"

"And I said, Who art thou, Lord?" He does not say, "Who art thou?" No, he asks, "Who art thou, Lord?" In a moment he has the sense, I am in the presence of One who knows all about me. I am in the presence of One who Himself is God. He knew very well who it was; though, perhaps, he dared not mention His name. He was in the presence of God, — in the presence of the exalted Son of Man. "Who art thou, Lord?" His will is broken, after he has come to recognise the Lord. Have you ever, dear friend, recognised such a Lord? "Who art thou, Lord?" What does that mean? I have come down; I am broken down; my will is broken. Yes, he was wonderfully broken down.

And then from glory there came these touching words, "I am Jesus, whom thou persecutest" (ver. 15). Friend, He speaks to you tonight from glory. That blessed, loving Saviour, who was crucified on the tree, speaks now to each heart in this hall. "I am Jesus, whom thou persecutest." Perhaps you would not like to take that ground. Ah! you did not laugh at that young fellow, who said he was a Christian, did you? Oh! yes, you say, I poked a little fun at him. Why?

Because he was a Christian; that was why. "Saul, Saul, why persecutest thou me?" What ill has Jesus done you, my friend? What ill has the Lord done to you? If I could get the oldest heart, the hardest heart, or the coldest heart that hears me, to have the sense of the Saviour's love, how that would change it "I am Jesus, whom thou persecutest" Oh! hear His blessed voice this night. Saul heard it, and said, "Lord, what wilt thou have me to do?" (Acts 9: 6.) And what does the Lord tell him to do? "Rise, and stand upon thy feet: for I have appeared unto thee for this purpose, to make thee a minister and a witness both of these things which thou hast seen, and of those things in the which I will appear unto thee. Delivering thee from the people, and from the Gentiles, unto whom now I send thee" (vers. 16, 17).

Here this "chosen vessel" gets his commission and a wonderful commission it was. I quite admit he did not get peace at that moment. He had not yet the knowledge of forgiveness. We are told in another scripture, that he neither ate nor drank for three days (Acts 9: 9). And I suppose he did not sleep for three nights either. Then Ananias comes to him. You get these details in the ninth of Acts. He gets peace from the testimony of Ananias, who comes, in to him. And in this case also, you see how wonderful is the grace of Christ. Saul has a vision of Ananias coming to him, and Ananias gets word to go to him. There is on the one side the anxious man, and on the other the slow-moving servant; for Ananias, when commissioned, says, "Lord, I have heard by many of this man, how much evil he hath done to thy saints at Jerusalem." Never mind, says the Lord, "Go thy way: for he is a chosen vessel unto me, to bear my name before the Gentiles." I am going to make him a messenger, and a witness of My name amongst the Gentiles. In came Ananias then, and put his hands upon him, saying, "Brother Saul." What a thrill went through that man's soul as Ananias called him "Brother Saul." I can understand it well; for when some simple Somersetshire Christians, the week after I was converted, gave me the right hand of fellowship, and let me take my place with them at the Lord's Supper, there was a deep thrill of joy went through my soul that they should acknowledge that I was a child of God. Can we call you "Brother," my friend? I mean, honestly and truly, or are you ashamed of the name? The name Brother, simply brother, will do for me. A brother of what? Of that company of whom it is said, "He is not ashamed to call them brethren." I would be ashamed to call Him Brother. I would not even use the term "Elder Brother." He is our Lord, and our God. True, Christ calls us His brethren: "He is not ashamed to call them brethren;" but, beloved Christian friends, He is our Lord and Master, our Saviour and our God. Let us ever have the deepest reverence for Him, and give Him his right place and title.

Here then, comes in Ananias and says, "Brother Saul"; and the latter gets peace, as he was filled with the Holy Ghost, and the scales fell from his eyes. Thereon he began to carry out the commission which the Lord had given him. And what was it? "Delivering thee from the people, and from the Gentiles, unto whom now I send thee. To open their eyes, and to turn them from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan unto God, that they may receive forgiveness of sins, and inheritance among them which are sanctified, by faith that is in me" (Acts 26: 17, 18). What a wonderful commission! "To open their eyes." That is the first thing we need. I wonder if your eyes have ever been opened yet When a man's eyes are opened he is conscious that he has no light, and that he is in darkness. A man may have never so good eyes, but he cannot see with them in the darkness, and he gropes about. That is just how I felt the night I was converted. I felt like a man groping in a dark night; I wanted light, I wanted truth, I wanted Christ, and I wanted salvation. I did not know how or where I was to get Him.

Let your eyes be opened, and you will soon find you are all wrong; that you are a sinner in your sins, and that you are on the wrong road. It is a wonderful thing when a man is turned "from darkness to light." It is a great change. I quite understand that some of you do not think so, and I will tell you why. You have never gone through the change. Now, my Christian friend, you, who were converted five years ago, what happened when you were converted? "I was in midnight darkness," you say, "when the glorious light of the gospel burst upon me. I saw that Jesus had loved me, and died for me; that He had forgiven me, and that through faith in His name, I got into peace and liberty." Exactly so; and do you tell me, my unsaved friend, that you do not believe that testimony? I will tell you why. You are in the darkness, and the very fact that you do not believe that you are, is the most powerful evidence that you are there. I will tell you why. I was once where you are; thirty-seven years ago, I was standing on the same ground as you are on this minute. I was a sinner in my sins. I do not mince matters. There are only two classes in this hall tonight — hell-bound sinners, or glory-bound saints. What makes the difference? One class is in sin, and unbelief; the other is in Christ, and all their sins are washed away in His precious blood. A great change took place in the moment of my conversion; it was as if I had slipped from darkness into light, and I have enjoyed the latter ever since.

This was a wonderful commission that Paul received, and I am quite clear upon this point, if the Lord had not known the necessity of it as regards the souls of men, He never would have given it. All need to be turned "from the power of Satan unto God." Every man is absolutely under the power of Satan, until he is under a sense of the grace of God. I hear some one say, I do not believe that. For many a long day, I did not believe it; but I believe it now, because I have learnt what the blessedness is of getting out of darkness into light, and of knowing the Saviour's delivering power.

What is the result when you are turned from Satan to God? Your heart at once gets into the enjoyment of peace, in the knowledge that you are forgiven. The moment you turn from Satan to God, what do you get? The due reward of your sins? judgment for your sins? No! You "receive forgiveness of sins." Think of that! What will you get, if you turn just now to the Saviour? You will get your sins forgiven. That is not to be lightly esteemed; but there is still more, for you receive "inheritance among them which are sanctified, by faith that is in me." That is, you get a portion and a place among God's people. You may think that too great and good a transition. Not so, and you cannot move too soon from the platform of the sinner on to the spot where the saint is, by grace. But you say, I thought the saints were all in heaven. A great many are; but I believe that there are a good many in this hall tonight. What! saints, you say; I did not think people were saints on earth. Then you are mistaken, my friend. Saint is the family name; that is the name by which God's children are called in Scripture. The word is used by Ananias when he does not want to go to Saul. He says, "Lord, I have heard by many of this man, how much evil he hath done to thy saints at Jerusalem" (Acts 9: 13). Let a man turn to the Lord, and he is then and there given, though he may not immediately take, his place among the saints.

Friend, are you to be henceforth classed among the sinners, or among the saints? You say, I would not like to take the name of saint. Why? Because if I were to take the place, and be known as a saint, people would look for a saintly walk on my part That is quite right; I do not object to that. If you accept Christ, there ought to be a walk and conversation becoming the gospel. Do not be afraid, young fellow-believer, you will find that if you follow the Lord He will help you. I do

not mean to say that the Christian does not sin, but he is told not to (1 John 2: 1). His sins are forgiven the moment he becomes a believer, and if he should sin he has to go and confess all to God, as his Father. The gospel meets you where you are, as a sinner, through the atoning work of the Saviour; and through the precious blood of Jesus all your sins are washed away and forgiven, for the heart that trusts in Him gets all the benefit of the work He has done. I want you to see this, for your help and comfort. Do not think that it is a mistake, if you are a Christian, to boldly confess that you are such. The seven-and-thirty years that have passed since I was converted, have been years of profound happiness, and joy. I will say more; the last year was the best, and I am expecting better still, as I get into my thirty-eighth year. Let me encourage you, my friend.

Paul then passes on to say, that he was not disobedient to the heavenly vision, but went out at once calling upon Jew and Gentile to repent, and turn to God. The Jews opposed him, but having "obtained help of God," he can add, "I continue unto this day, witnessing both to small and great, saying none other things than those which the prophets and Moses did say should come: that Christ should suffer, and that he should be the first that should rise from the dead, and should show light unto the people, and to the Gentiles" (vers. 22, 23). As he went on, Festus broke out. His conscience was a little bit touched; he felt that if he did not stop him, he would very likely be converted. I know some of you would like me to stop, and I will shortly, but what a mercy it would be if you were converted, and if you turned to the Lord. Listen to me. Come to Jesus; yield your heart to Him now. Do not be like the foolish king, and governor here. "And as he thus spake for himself, Festus said with a loud voice, Paul, thou art beside thyself; much learning doth make thee mad. But he said, I am not mad, most noble Festus; but speak forth the words of truth and soberness." What had he said? He had only told them of the Son of Man in glory. He knew his own sins were forgiven: he had been on the road to eternal judgment when he had been turned to God; and from that time forth he began to bring forth fruits meet for repentance, and warned others to follow in his steps.

Jesus, risen from the dead, had commissioned him as a light-bearer. Thus commissioned to carry a light from God unto the world, he had with deathless energy gone on in His blessed service. Happy man! Splendid servant! You are a madman, says Festus. "I am not mad, most noble Festus," he emphatically but very courteously retorts. "I am not mad, most noble Festus; but speak forth the words of truth and soberness." Sometimes people have said of me, I think that man is mad. I wish you had only half my malady, my dear friend; from the bottom of my heart I wish that Nay, I will go further — I would be deeply thankful if you had ten times as much fervour and earnestness for Christ as I, and God give it to you. If you had only half the peace and joy I have, you would be a downright happy man from this time forth, and I too speak the words of truth and soberness, when I thus affirm the blessedness of knowing and seeing Christ I think Paul was quite sane as he spoke to Festus. What he was before he was converted, he tells us himself: "And being exceedingly mad against them, I persecuted them even unto strange cities" (ver. 11). Then he was mad, if you like, but, as a witness for Jesus, he was in his right mind. Oh! my friend, you come to Jesus tonight, and thus bear witness for Him, and though your friends call you mad, never mind. You will be on the winning side of the field. The man who follows Christ is sure to win.

Hear him speak again: "I am not mad . . . but speak forth the words of truth and soberness. For the king knoweth of these things, before whom also I speak freely: for I am persuaded that

none of these things are hidden from him; for this thing was not done in a corner" (vers. 25, 26). Then he turns round on the king and asks: "King Agrippa, believest thou the prophets? I know that thou believest. Then Agrippa said unto Paul, Almost thou persuadest me to be a Christian." Almost! Ah! poor man, not altogether. Almost! Is that your position, my friend? I want to know, as I draw these meetings to a close. For several nights past I have been speaking to you; have you believed on Jesus? Has He saved you, pardoned you, forgiven you? Or are you a miserable, procrastinating sinner, who will yet work your way into hell, with a determination worthy of a better cause? Men abound who cannot be in earnest; who may be touched by the gospel sometimes, yea even impressed, but yet let the whole thing pass away again. What a lot of followers Agrippa has! "Almost thou persuadest me to be a Christian," said he to Paul, and so say all his followers to the soul-seekers, who would fain win them for Christ.

Well did Paul reply, "I would to God, that not only thou, but also all that hear me this day, were both *almost*, and *altogether* such as I am, except these bonds" (ver. 29). That was a grand rejoinder, and I would like to say a word on it. "Almost" and "altogether" in this conjunction are like a coin of the realm. You have the Queen's head on one side, and on the reverse, some other design. What is the obverse of "almost a Christian"? Do not forget, it is "altogether lost." The soul that is only almost decided, is *altogether* lost. Oh, let me urge you, with all the fervour and affection of my soul, from this hour, be decided. What is wanted is decision. What you want, what I want, is deep, downright, decision of heart for Christ. God give it to you. Oh! do not continue to be "almost a Christian" any longer. Be "altogether" persuaded. I glory in being a Christian: may you do so too.

May God enable you to begin your Christian course tonight: you cannot be too devoted to Christ, and it is better far, be your life long or short, to be able to look back upon that life as spent in the service of the Lord. Forgive me, if I speak of myself. But if I had not come to the Lord thirty-seven years ago, what should I have been doing all my life? I should simply have been serving the devil, sin, and the world, just pleasing myself, whereas now by grace, for these seven-and-thirty years I have been seeking to serve Jesus, my blessed Saviour. Oh! that He were your Saviour, and Lord, and Master, as well. In Him there is such greatness, such tenderness, such encouragement! I have a wonderful Master; and I commend Him to you. Oh! that He were yours.

Make up your mind tonight. On bended knee, before the Lord, offer yourself to Him, ere you leave this hall tonight. Turn, and say to Him, "Lord, I believe." "Almost thou persuadest me to be a Christian" will not suffice. Away with the word "almost" Let "altogether persuaded" be the language of your soul. Let there be a true ring in your voice as you say: "Lord, I believe; I am decided. Christ for me, from this night forth." God grant it, for His name's sake!