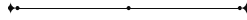


CHAPTER 1



INTRODUCTION

On December 11, 1859, Charles Haddon Spurgeon preached his last sermon at the Surrey Music Hall.¹ For the previous three years, beginning with the tragedy on October 19, 1856, in which seven lives perished, Spurgeon held services at that venue.² To commemorate his last address, Spurgeon chose his text from Acts 20:26–27. He took Paul’s words as his own. The apostle said, “Wherefore I take you to record this day, that I am pure from the blood

¹ Since Exeter Hall could not dedicate its building only to one congregation, circumstances forced New Park Street Church to seek other accommodations while they built a new facility. Spurgeon noted, “We did not go to the Music Hall because we thought that it was a good thing to worship in a building usually devoted to amusement, but because we had no other place to go to,” Charles Spurgeon, *C. H. Spurgeon’s Autobiography, Compiled from His Diary, Letters, and Records, by His Wife, and His Private Secretary*, 2:196–199. This controversy appeared in a previous journal article. Brandon Rhea, “Three Sabbath Controversies in the Life of C. H. Spurgeon,” 23–41.

² Spurgeon, *Autobiography*, 2:205. In the middle of the service, with an estimated 10,000–12,000 souls present, “all of a sudden there were cries simultaneously, doubtless preconcerted, from all parts of the building of ‘Fire!’ ‘The galleries are giving way!’ ‘The place is falling!’ the effect of which on the audience it is impossible to describe” (204). Due to the disaster, the church switched its services from Sunday evening to Sunday morning. W. Y. Fullerton, *C. H. Spurgeon: A Biography*, 98.

of all men. For I have not shunned to declare unto you all the counsel of God.” With the precious seconds of the hourglass passing, the Prince of Preachers disclosed his agonizing love for the assembly’s souls. “If you come not to Christ it is not for want of calling, or because I have not wept over your sins, and travailed in birth for the souls of men. The one thing I have to ask of you is this:—bear me witness, my hearers, bear me witness, that in this respect I am pure from the blood of all men, for I have preached all that I know of the whole counsel of God.”³ Nevertheless, Spurgeon’s affection for these hearers could not stop him from moving the services to another location the following Sunday. This circumstance compels us to ask the question: What caused Spurgeon to stop holding services at the Surrey Music Hall? The first of four options to answering this question looks to the church’s new construction project. Did the congregation leave Surrey Music Hall to move into their new Metropolitan Tabernacle building? No, they did not. In fact, the church went back to Exeter Hall on December 18, 1859, and continued holding meetings there until March 31, 1861.⁴ For approximately fourteen months, the congregation waited for the funds and masonry to be raised before they could hold their first service in their new building.

³ Charles Spurgeon, *NPSP*, 6:30.

⁴ Charles Spurgeon, *MTP*, 7:161.

If their new church building remained unfinished, then option two investigates the Surrey Music Hall. Did this temporary venue inhibit Spurgeon's gospel work? Did its architecture and layout make holding services there untenable long-term? No, even though the investors built the Music Hall for amusements, the building comfortably fit Spurgeon's congregation and allowed him to evangelize to an even greater multitude. On the contrary, changing locations to Exeter Hall created capacity issues for Spurgeon's flock. In a letter written by Spurgeon on December 26, 1859, and published on February 9, 1860, in "The Christian Watchman & Reflector," Spurgeon detailed the plight. "For not one-half of my people can get into Exeter Hall, if they were all able to go so far, and alas, not a third of them can make it convenient to walk that distance."⁵ Spurgeon's fears became reality, because on the first Sunday at Exeter Hall the facility only fit a quarter of the audience of the previous week's service.⁶ Thus, the congregation's leaving Surrey Music Hall made attending onerous and decreased the attendance. From a building perspective, Exeter Hall reduced the reach of Spurgeon's ministry.

The third possible option—small and declining attendance to the services at Surrey Music Hall—must be dismissed, too. Biographer E. W. Bacon noted, "For three years the Surrey Music Hall services continued with great success and

⁵ Charles Spurgeon, *Charles Spurgeon's Letters to the Christian Watchman and Reflector, 1859–1863*, 19.

⁶ G. Holden Pike, *The Life and Work of Charles Haddon Spurgeon*, 2:326.

manifest blessing.”⁷ On one occasion in 1857, the crowd filled the Hall up to standing room capacity within ten minutes of the doors opening.⁸ Fullerton supported Bacon’s statement. “There were, of course, ebbs and flows in the congregation, especially towards Christmas time, but the numbers at the end were as great as at the beginning.”⁹ Surrey Music Hall included in its sea of souls a diversity of classes and occupations. Bacon commented, “All classes of folk went to sit at his feet and hear the Word of God. Statesmen, soldiers, authors, artists, captains of industry, farmers, carters, clerks, factory workers, shopkeepers, thieves, prostitutes, ne’er-do-wells and drunks.”¹⁰ Charles Cavendish Fulke Greville, who served on the Privy Council and chronicled the British monarchy in his *Greville Memoirs*, recorded the details of his visit to hear Spurgeon. According to him, the pastor had “a very clear and powerful voice, which was heard through the whole hall” as he preached to 9000 individuals.¹¹ The preaching had “great effect,” as illustrated by Greville’s observation of “the handkerchiefs

⁷ Ernest W. Bacon, *Spurgeon: Heir of the Puritans*, 56.

⁸ Bacon, *Spurgeon: Heir of the Puritans*, 56.

⁹ Fullerton, *C. H. Spurgeon: A Biography*, 110.

¹⁰ Bacon, *Spurgeon: Heir of the Puritans*, 56–57. Among the dignitaries who visited the Surrey Music Hall during these services, Bacon listed “the Lord Chief Justice Campbell, the Lord Mayor and Sheriffs of London, Earl Russell, Lord Alfred Paget, Lord Panmure, Earl Grey, the Earl of Shaftesbury, the Marquis of Westminster, Lord Carlisle, the Earl of Elgin, Baron Bramwell, Lady Rothschild and Miss Florence Nightingale” (56).

¹¹ Charles Cavendish Fulke Greville, *The Greville Memoirs: A Journal of the Reigns of King George IV, King William IV, and Queen Victoria*, 85.

and audible sobs.”¹² Hence, the Surrey Music Hall provided Spurgeon with new ministry opportunities to preach to a myriad of souls who under other circumstances could not have heard him. Given his success in filling the Surrey Music Hall, the need for a facility while they built the Metropolitan, and the smaller capacity and limiting location for congregants at Exeter Hall, why did Spurgeon choose to move his services?

The real justification for leaving the Surrey Music Hall lands on Spurgeon’s understanding of the Christian Sabbath. For him, the managers of the venue forced him to choose between biblical faithfulness or pragmatic considerations. At the beginning of the last service, he explained, “However sorrowful it may be to me to part with you, whose faces I have so long seen in the throng of my hearers, yet for Christ’s sake, for the sake of consistency and truth, we are compelled to withdraw from this place, and on the next Sabbath morning hope to worship God in Exeter Hall.”¹³ In his mind, to continue renting the facility would require him to be inconsistent and not to walk in the truth. He therefore took his theological stand despite the disadvantages of meeting at Exeter Hall.

For three years, Spurgeon’s congregation rented the Surrey Music Hall for the morning service, but they did not meet there in the evening. As a facility designed to make revenue, the owners wanted to provide shows on Sunday evenings to increase profits. Even though this plan would not interfere

¹² Greville, *Memoirs*, 85.

¹³ Spurgeon, *NPSP*, 6:32.

with Spurgeon's morning service, he objected. He clarified the events which led to the congregation's exodus in a letter to *The Christian Watchman and Reflector*:

The proprietors of the last named place had twice attempted to open it on Sunday evenings for music and amusements. I was, however, able to prevent this by threatening to cease my occupation, and as we paid a rent of more than £700 a year, (\$3500,) [sic] they were not willing to lose so large a sum, and therefore gave up their unhallowed design. Now, however, they have conceived the idea that my preaching injures them; for the people will not come to dance and drink on week days in a place where the Word is thundered out on Sunday mornings. This, I think, is very likely to be a near guess at the truth; for two companies have been broken up since I have preached there, and a blind man can see the end of the present one. I left the place on the very day upon which it was opened for Sunday desecration.¹⁴

While Spurgeon would not be breaking the Christian Sabbath himself, he still could not give money to a business that did. He would not have the church meet in a venue which encouraged and provided avenues to sin through Sabbath breaking. For him, this decision tested his character,

¹⁴ Spurgeon, *Charles Spurgeon's Letters to the Christian Watchman and Reflector, 1859–1863*, 19. See also Justin D. Fulton, *Charles H. Spurgeon, Our Ally*, 103–104. He included another quotation where Spurgeon gives the same justification for leaving.

adherence to his surname, and fidelity to the truth. “You can therefore perceive that I should be a craven to the truth, that I should be inconsistent with my own declarations, that, in fact, my name would cease to be a Spurgeon if I yielded. I neither can nor will give way in anything in which I know I am right; and in defence of God’s holy Sabbath the cry of this day is, ‘Arise, let us go hence!’”¹⁵ For this pastor, to ignore the actions of the Surrey Music Hall owners would be to renounce his family’s convictions regarding the Lord’s Day and to disobey God’s clear command. He therefore fought the Sabbath breakers by ending his lease with them.

As illustrated through this story, the Christian Sabbath mattered to Spurgeon. He fought to keep the day holy according to his understanding of Scripture. Due to his convictions, he moved his successful three-year ministry at the Surrey Music Hall to an inferior venue, which he knew would constrict his influence. Yet, Spurgeon’s theological views regarding the Christian Sabbath outweighed other expedient factors. To the chagrin of the Surrey Music Hall’s owners, he lived out his theology despite the cost. For Spurgeon, keeping the Christian Sabbath was essential for the Christian and the church.

WHY ANOTHER BOOK ON CHARLES SPURGEON?

Since Spurgeon’s death in 1892, individuals have written many articles and books on his life and theology. Between his homiletics, hermeneutics, evangelism, physical pain, depression, Puritan theology, social views, and

¹⁵ Spurgeon, *NPSP*, 6:32.