***Prayer from the Great Fish***

**The Reluctant Prophet, Pt. 3: Jonah 2:1-10 September 24, 2023**

***“Salvation comes from the Lord.”*Jonah 2:9**

**Questions from Jonah’s prayer**

From inside the fish Jonah prayed to the Lord his God. 2 He said:

“In my distress I called to the Lord,

and he answered me.

From the depths of the grave I called for help,

and you listened to my cry.

3 You hurled me into the deep, into the very heart of the seas,

and the currents swirled about me;

all your waves and breakers swept over me.

4 I said, ‘I have been banished from your sight;

yet I will look again toward your holy temple.’

5 The engulfing waters threatened me,

the deep surrounded me;

seaweed was wrapped around my head.

6 To the roots of the mountains I sank down;

the earth beneath barred me in forever.

But you brought my life up from the pit, O Lord my God.

7 “When my life was ebbing away,

I remembered you, Lord,

and my prayer rose to you,

to your holy temple.

8 “Those who cling to worthless idols

forfeit the grace that could be theirs.

9 But I, with a song of thanksgiving, will sacrifice to you.

What I have vowed I will make good.

Salvation comes from the Lord.”

10 And the Lord commanded the fish, and it vomited Jonah onto dry land.

Jonah 2

1. Jonah continues to move from the third to second person – he makes is personal!

2. Jonah knows God is present (the reason for his appeal to the temple though he’s from

the Northern Kingdom

3. Jonah recognizes that God is still the primary mover

A black and white image of a poster

Description automatically generated with medium confidence

**Jonah’s incredible prayer**

1. Jonah’s descent: he God provides the “pig pen”

*“In my distress I called to the Lord, and he answered me.*

*From the depths of the grave I called for help, and you listened to my cry.*

*3 You hurled me into the deep, into the very heart of the seas,*

*and the currents swirled about me; all your waves and breakers swept over me.*

Jonah 2

2. Jonah’s deliverance: God has been present all the time

*6 To the roots of the mountains I sank down; the earth beneath barred me in forever.*

*But you brought my life up from the pit, O Lord my God.*

*7 “When my life was ebbing away, I remembered you, Lord,*

*and my prayer rose to you, to your holy temple.*

Jonah 2

3. Jonah’s praise and promise:

*8 “Those who cling to worthless idols forfeit the grace that could be theirs.*

*9 But I, with a song of thanksgiving, will sacrifice to you.*

*What I have vowed I will make good.*

*Salvation comes from the Lord.”*

Jonah 2

**Reading Jonah as a pastor**

1. God provides hope for the backslidden (that’s Spurgeon’s description of Jonah in his thought   
 provoking sermon “The Fainting Soul Revived”)

*7 “When my life was ebbing away, I remembered you, Lord,*

Jonah 2

All the while the ship sailed smoothly over the sea, Jonah forgot his God. You could not have distinguished him from the veriest heathen on board. He was just as bad as they were. Yet was there a spark of fire among the embers, which God in due time fanned into a flame. Happy for you if this better part of his experience should tally with your own.

Spurgeon’s “The Fainting Soul Revived”   
at [*https://www.biblebb.com/files/spurgeon/3510.txt*](https://www.biblebb.com/files/spurgeon/3510.txt)

2. Pastors are most aware of the cost of running away from God’s *hesed* love

8 *“Those who cling to worthless idols*

*forfeit the grace that could be theirs.*

Jonah 2 (go back to our recent texts Galatians 5:16; 1 Thessalonians 4:1-8)

3. The more distractions and wickedness in a culture, the more important it is to point people to   
 the “one greater than Jonah” (who also calls us to repentance)

*39 [Jesus] answered, “A wicked and adulterous generation asks for a miraculous sign! But none will be given it except the sign of the prophet Jonah. 40 For as Jonah was three days and three nights in the belly of a huge fish, so the Son of Man will be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth . . . and now one greater than Jonah is here.*

Matthew 12 (but read on for the rest of the “sign”)

**Resources for further study**

The Bible Project team does a great job of introducing Jonah at [*https://bibleproject.com/guides/book-of-jonah/*](https://bibleproject.com/guides/book-of-jonah/)

Spurgeon has five sermons on Jonah at this Monergism site: [*https://www.biblebb.com/brefindex/jon.htm*](https://www.biblebb.com/brefindex/jon.htm)

For Jonah 2, I recommend these two Spurgeon sermons:  
“The Fainting Soul Revived” at <https://www.biblebb.com/files/spurgeon/3510.txt>  
“Salvation of the Lord” at [*https://www.biblebb.com/files/spurgeon/0131.htm*](https://www.biblebb.com/files/spurgeon/0131.htm)

Doug’s Logos library includes a helpful Bible study by Paul Mackrell (Day One Publishing, 2007)

Erik Manning has an interesting discussion of the scientific questions around the Jonah sign/miracle at [*https://crossexamined.org/the-mind-blowing-meaning-behind-the-sign-of-jonah/*](https://crossexamined.org/the-mind-blowing-meaning-behind-the-sign-of-jonah/)

Doug likes the ESV Study Bible’s introduction to Jonah included below.

**ESV Study Bible introduction:**

*Theme*

The Lord is a God of boundless compassion not just for “us” (Jonah and the Israelites) but also for “them” (the pagan sailors and Ninevites).

*Purpose, Occasion, and Background*

The primary purpose of the book of Jonah is to engage readers in theological reflection on the compassionate character of God, and in self-reflection on the degree to which their own character reflects this compassion, to the end that they become vehicles of this compassion in the world that God has made and so deeply cares about.

Jonah prophesied during the reign of Jeroboam II (2 Kings 14:23–28), who ruled in Israel (the northern kingdom) from 782 to 753 b.c. Jeroboam was the grandson of Jehoahaz, who ruled in Israel from 814 to 798 b.c. Because of the sins of Jehoahaz, Israel was oppressed by the Arameans (2 Kings 13:3). But because of the Lord’s great compassion (2 Kings 13:4, 23), Israel was spared destruction and delivered from this oppression (2 Kings 13:5). This deliverance came through a “savior” (2 Kings 13:5), who may have been Adad-nirari III (810–783 b.c.), king of Assyria.

Jeroboam’s father, Jehoash (798–782 b.c.), capitalized on this freedom from Aramean oppression and began to expand Israel’s boundaries, recapturing towns taken during the reign of Jehoahaz (2 Kings 13:25). Though Jeroboam “did what was evil in the sight of the Lord” (2 Kings 14:24), he nevertheless expanded Israel even farther than his father did, matching the boundaries in the days of David and Solomon (2 Kings 14:25); this was “according to the word of the Lord, the God of Israel, which he spoke by his servant Jonah the son of Amittai, the prophet, who was from Gath-hepher” (2 Kings 14:25). Thus Jonah witnessed firsthand the restorative compassion of God extended to his wayward people.

In God’s providence, the expansion by Jeroboam was made easier because of Assyrian weakness. The Assyrians were engaged in conflicts with the Arameans and the Urartians. There was also widespread famine, and numerous revolts within the Assyrian Empire (where regional governors ruled with a fair degree of autonomy). Then there was an auspicious eclipse of the sun during the reign of Ashur-dan III (771–754 b.c.). This convergence of events supports the plausibility of the Ninevites being so responsive to Jonah’s call to repent.

It was not until some years later that Tiglath-pileser (745–727 b.c.) would gain control and reestablish Assyrian dominance in the area, and his son Shalmaneser V (727–722) was the king responsible for the conquest of Israel and the destruction of Samaria in 722. Thus Jonah prophesied in an era when Assyria was not an immediate threat to Israel and when Israel enjoyed peace and prosperity because of the compassion of God.

*Genre*

The genre of Jonah is debated. The book has been read as an *allegory*, using fictional figures to symbolize some other reality. According to this interpretation, Jonah is a symbol of Israel in its refusal to carry out God’s mission to the nations. The primary argument against this view is that Jonah is clearly presented as a historical and not a fictional figure (see the specific historical and geographical details in 1:1–3; 3:2–10; 4:11; cf. also 2 Kings 14:25). Another proposal is that the book is a *parable* to teach believers not to be like Jonah. Like allegories, parables are also based on fictional and not historical characters. Parables, however, are typically simple tales that make a single point, whereas the book of Jonah is quite complex and teaches a multiplicity of themes.

The book of Jonah has all the marks of a *prophetic narrative*, like those about Elijah and Elisha found in 1 Kings, which set out to report actual historical events. The phrase that opens the book (“the word of the Lord came to”) is also at the beginning of the first two stories told about Elijah (1 Kings 17:2, 8) and is used in other prophetic narratives as well (e.g., 1 Sam. 15:10; 2 Sam. 7:4). Just as the Elijah and Elisha narratives contain extraordinary events, like ravens providing bread and meat for the prophet (1 Kings 17:6), so does the book of Jonah, as when the fish “provides transportation” for the prophet. In fact, the story of Jonah is so much like the stories about Elijah and Elisha that one would hardly think it odd if the story of Jonah were embedded in 2 Kings right after Jonah’s prophetic words about the expansion of the kingdom. The story of Jonah is thus presented as historical, like the other prophetic narratives.

There are additional arguments for the historical nature of the book of Jonah. It is difficult to say that the story teaches God’s sovereignty over the creation if God did not in fact “appoint” the fish (1:17), the plant (4:6), the worm (4:7), and the east wind (4:8) to do his will. Jesus, moreover, treated the story as historical when he used elements of the story as analogies for other historical events (see Matt. 12:40–41). This is especially clear when Jesus declared that “the men of Nineveh will rise up at the judgment with this generation and condemn it, for they repented at the preaching of Jonah” (Matt. 12:41).

The story of Jonah is not, however, history for history’s sake. The book is clearly *didactic* (as the allegorical and parabolic interpretations rightly affirm); that is, the story is told *to teach the reader key lessons*. The didactic character of the book shines through in the repeated use of questions, 11 out of 14 being addressed to Jonah, and the question that closes the narrative leaves readers asking themselves how they will respond to the story.

*Key Themes*

The primary theme in Jonah is that God’s compassion is boundless, not limited just to “us” but also available for “them.” This is clear from the flow of the story and its conclusion: (1) Jonah is the object of God’s compassion throughout the book, and the pagan sailors and pagan Ninevites are also the benefactors of this compassion. (2) The story ends with the question, “Should I not pity Nineveh …?” (4:11). Tied to this theological teaching is the anthropological question, Do readers of the story have hearts that are like the heart of God? While Jonah was concerned about a plant that “perished” (4:10), he showed no such concern for the Ninevites. Conversely, the pagan sailors (1:14), their captain (1:6), and the king of Nineveh (3:9) all showed concern that human beings, including Jonah, not “perish.”

Several other major themes in the book include:

1. God’s sovereign control over events on the earth

2. God’s determination to get his message to the nations

3. The need for repentance from sin in general

4. The need for repentance from self-centeredness and hypocrisy in particular

5. The full assurance that God will relent when people repent

*History of Salvation Summary*

Jonah’s rescue from death provides an analogy for the resurrection of Christ (Matt. 12:39–40). The repentance of the Ninevites anticipates the wide-scale repentance of Gentiles in the messianic era (Matt. 28:18–20; Luke 24:47). (For an explanation of the “History of Salvation,” see the Overview of the Bible. See also History of Salvation in the Old Testament: Preparing the Way for Christ.)

*Literary Features*

The book of Jonah is a literary masterpiece. While the story line is so simple that children follow it readily, the story is marked by as high a degree of literary sophistication as any book in the Hebrew Bible. The author employs structure, humor, hyperbole, irony, double entendre, and literary figures like merism to communicate his message with great rhetorical power. The first example of this sophistication is seen in the outline of the book (see below).

The main category for the book is satire—the exposure of human vice or folly. The four elements of satire take the following form in the book of Jonah: (1) the *object of attack* is Jonah and what he represents—a bigotry and ethnocentrism that regarded God as the exclusive property of the believing community (in the OT, the nation of Israel); (2) the *satiric vehicle* is narrative or story; (3) the *satiric norm* or standard by which Jonah’s bad attitudes are judged is the character of God, who is portrayed as a God of universal mercy, whose mercy is not limited by national boundaries; (4) the *satiric tone* is laughing, with Jonah emerging as a laughable figure—someone who runs away from God and is caught by a fish, and as a childish and pouting prophet who prefers death over life without his shade tree.

Three stylistic techniques are especially important. (1) The *giantesque motif*—the motif of the unexpectedly large (e.g., the magnitude of the task assigned to Jonah, of the fish that swallows him, and of the repentance that Jonah’s eight-word sermon accomplishes). (2) A *pervasive irony* (e.g., the ironic discrepancy between Jonah’s prophetic vocation and his ignominious behavior, and the ironic impossibility of fleeing from the presence of God). (3) *Humor*, as Jonah’s behavior is not only ignominious but also ridiculous.

**The Setting of Jonah**

*c. 760 b.c.*

Jonah prophesied during the politically prosperous time of Jeroboam II of Israel (2 Kings 14:23–28). During this time the Assyrians were occupied with matters elsewhere in the empire, allowing Jeroboam II to capture much of Syria for Israel. The Lord called Jonah to go to the great Assyrian city of Nineveh to pronounce judgment upon it. Jonah attempted to escape the Lord’s calling by sailing from the seaport of Joppa to Tarshish, which was probably in the western Mediterranean. Eventually he obeyed the Lord and traveled overland to Nineveh at the heart of the Assyrian Empire.[[1]](#footnote-1)

***Salvation of the Lord***

May 10, 1857, by C. H. SPURGEON (1834-1892)  
at [*https://www.biblebb.com/files/spurgeon/0131.htm*](https://www.biblebb.com/files/spurgeon/0131.htm)

"Salvation is of the Lord."—Jonah 2:9.

Jonah learned this sentence of good theology in a strange college. He learned it in the whale's belly, at the bottom of the mountains, with the weeds wrapped about his head, when he supposed that the earth with her bars was about him for ever. Most of the grand truths of God have to be learned by trouble; they must be burned into us with the hot iron of affliction, otherwise we shall not truly receive them. No man is competent to judge in matters of the kingdom, until first he has been tried; since there are many things to be learned in the depths which we can never know in the heights. We discover many secrets in the caverns of the ocean, which, though we had soared to heaven, we never could have known. He shall best meet the wants of God's people as a preacher who has had those wants himself; he shall best comfort God's Israel who has needed comfort; and he shall best preach salvation who has felt his own need of it. Jonah, when he was delivered from his great danger, when, by the command of God the fish had obediently left its great deeps and delivered its cargo upon dry land, was then capable of judging; and this was the result of his experience under his trouble—"Salvation is of the Lord."  
  
By salvation here we do not merely understand the special salvation which Jonah received from death; for according to Dr. Gill, there is something so special in the original, in the word salvation having one more letter than it usually has, when it only refers to some temporary deliverance, that we can only understand it here as relating to the great work of the salvation of the soul which endureth for ever. That "salvation is of the Lord," I shall this morning try to show as best I can. First, I shall endeavor to *explain the doctrine;* then I shall try to show you *how God has guarded us from making any mistakes, and has hedged us up to make us believe the gospel;* then I shall dwell upon *the influence of this truth upon men;* and shall close up by showing you *the counterpart of the doctrine*. Seeing every truth hath its obverse, so hath this.  
  
I. First, then, to begin by explanation, let us EXPOUND THIS DOCTRINE—the doctrine that salvation is of the Lord, or of Jehovah. We are to understand by this, that the whole of the work whereby men are saved from their natural estate of sin and ruin, and are translated into the kingdom of God and made heirs of eternal happiness, is of God, and of him only. "Salvation is of the Lord."  
  
To begin, then, at the beginning, *the plan of salvation is entirely of God.* No human intellect and no created intelligence assisted God in the planning of salvation; he contrived the way, even as he himself carried it out. The plan of salvation was devised before the existence of angels. Before the day-star flung its ray across the darkness, when as yet the unnavigated ether had not been fanned by the wing of seraph, and when the solemnity of silence had never been disturbed by the song of angel, God had devised a way whereby he might save man, whom he foresaw would fall. He did not create angels to consult with them; no, of himself he did it. We might truly ask the question, "With whom took he counsel? Who instructed him, when be planned the great architecture of the temple of mercy? With whom took he counsel when he digged the deeps of love, that out of them there might well up springs of salvation? Who aided him?" None. He himself, alone, did it. In fact, if angels had then been in existence, they could not have assisted God; for I can well suppose that if a solemn conclave of those spirits had been held, if God had put to them this question, "Man will rebel; I declare I will punish; my justice, inflexible and severe, demands that I should do so; but yet I intend to have mercy;" if he had put the question to the celestial squadrons of mighty ones, "How can those things be? How can justice have its demands fulfilled, and how can mercy reign?" the angels would have sat in silence until now; they could not have dictated the plan; it would have surpassed angelic intellect to have conceived the way whereby righteousness and peace should meet together, and judgment and mercy should kiss each other. God devised it, because without God it could not have been devised. It is a plan too splendid to have been the product of any mind except of that mind which afterward carried it out. "Salvation" is older than creation; it is "of the Lord."  
  
And as it was of the Lord in planning so *it was of the Lord in execution.* No one has helped to provide salvation; God has done it all himself. The banquet of mercy is served up by one host; that host is he to whom the cattle on a thousand hills belong. But none have contributed any dainties to that royal banquet; he bath done it all himself The royal bath of mercy, wherein black souls are washed, was filled from the veins of Jesus; not a drop was contributed by any other being. He died upon the cross, and as an expiator he died alone. No blood of martyrs mingled with that stream; no blood of noble confessors and of heroes of the cross entered into the river of atonement; that is filled from the veins of Christ, and from nowhere else beside. He bath done it wholly Atonement is the unaided work of Jesus. On yonder cross I see the man who "trod the winepress alone;" in yonder garden I see the solitary conqueror, who came to the fight single-handed, whose own arm brought salvation, and whose omnipotence sustained him. "Salvation is of the Lord," as to its provisions; Jehovah—Father, Son, and Spirit—hath provided everything.  
  
So far we are all agreed: but now we shall have to separate a bit. "Salvation is of the Lord" *in the application of it*. "No," says the Arminian, "it is not; salvation is of the Lord, inasmuch as he does all for man that he can do; but there is something that man must do, which if he does not do, he must perish." That is the Arminian way of salvation. Now last week I thought of this very theory of salvation, when I stood by the side of that window of Carisbrooke castle, out of which King Charles of unhappy and unrighteous memory, attempted to escape. I read in the guide book that every thing was provided for his escape; his followers had means at the bottom of the wall to enable him to fly across the country, and on the coast they had their boats lying ready to take him to another land; in fact every thing was ready for his escape. But here was the important circumstance: his friends had done all they could; he was to do the rest; but that doing the rest was just the point and brunt of the battle. It was to get out of the window, out of which he was not able to escape by any means, so that all his friends did for him went for nothing, so far as he was concerned. So with the sinner. If God had provided every means of escape, and only required him to get out of his dungeon, he would have remained there to all eternity. Why, is not the sinner by nature dead in sin? And if God requires him to make himself alive, and then afterward he will do the rest for him, then verily, my friends, we are not so much obliged to God as we had thought for; for if he require so much as that of us, and we can do it, we can do the rest without his assistance. The Romanists have an extraordinary miracle of their own about St. Dennis, of whom they tell the lying legend that after his head was off be took it up in his hands and walked with it two thousand miles; whereupon, said a wit, "So far as the two thousand miles go, it is nothing at all; it is only the first step in which there is any difficulty." So I believe, if that is taken, all the rest can be easily accomplished. And if God does require of the sinner—dead in sin—that he should take the first step, then he requireth just that which renders salvation as impossible under the gospel as ever it was under the law, seeing man is as unable to believe as he is to obey, and is just as much without power to come to Christ as he is without power to go to heaven without Christ. The power must be given to him of the Spirit. He lieth dead in sin; the Spirit must quicken him. He is bound hand and foot and fettered by transgression; the Spirit must cut his bonds, and then he will leap to liberty. God must come and dash the iron bars out of their sockets, and then he can escape from the window, and make good his escape afterward; but unless the first thing be done for him, he must perish as surely under the gospel as he would have done under the law. I would cease to preach, if I believed that God, in the matter of salvation, required any thing whatever of man which be himself had not also engaged to furnish. For how many have I frequently hanging upon my lips of the worst of characters—men whose lives have become so horribly bad, that the lip of morality would refuse to give a description of their character? When I enter my pulpit am I to believe that these men are to do something before God's Spirit will operate upon them? If so, I should go there with a faint heart, feeling that I never could induce them to do the first part. But now I come to my pulpit with a sure confidence—God the Holy Spirit will meet with these men this morning. They are as bad as they can be; he will put a new thought into their hearts; he will give them new wishes; he will give them new wills, and those who hated Christ will desire to love him; those who once loved sin will, by God's divine Spirit, be made to hate it; and here is my confidence, that what they can not do, in that they are weak through the flesh, God sending his Spirit into their hearts will do for them, and in them, and so they shall be saved.  
  
Well then, says one, that will make people sit still and fold their arms. Sir, it shill not. But if men did so I could not help it; my business, as I have often said in this place before, is not to prove to you the reasonableness of any truth, nor to defend any truth from its consequences; all I do here, and I mean to keep to it, is just to assert the truth, because it is in the Bible; then, if you do not like it, you must settle the quarrel with my Master, and if you think it unreasonable, you must quarrel with the Bible. Let others defend Scripture and prove it to be true; they can do their work better than I could; mine is just the mere work of proclaiming. I am the messenger; I tell the Master's message; if you do not like the message, quarrel with the Bible, not with me; so long as I have Scripture on my side I will dare and defy you to do any thing against me. "Salvation is of the Lord." The Lord has to apply it, to make the unwilling willing, to make the ungodly godly, and bring the vile rebel to the feet of Jesus, or else salvation will never be accomplished. Leave that one thing undone, and you have broken the link of the chain, the very link which was just necessary to its integrity. Take away the fact that God begins the good work, and that he sends us what the old divines call preventing grace—take that away, and you have spoilt the whole of salvation; you have just taken the key-stone out of the arch, and down it tumbles. There is nothing left then.  
  
And now on the next point we shall a little disagree again, "Salvation is of the Lord," *as to the sustaining of the work in any man's heart*. When a man is made a child of God he does not have a stock of grace given to him with which to go on for ever, but be has grace for that day; and he must have grace for the next day, and grace for the next, and grace for the next, until days shall end, or else the beginning shall be of no avail. As a man does not make himself spiritually alive, so neither can he keep himself so. He can feed on spiritual food, and so preserve his spiritual strength; he can walk in the commandments of the Lord, and so enjoy rest and peace, but still the inner life is dependent upon the Spirit as much for its after existence as for its first begetting. I do verily believe that if it should ever be my lot to put my foot upon the golden threshold of Paradise, and put this thumb upon the pearly latch, I should never cross the threshold unless I had grace given me to take that last step whereby I might enter heaven. No man of himself, even when converted, hath any power, except as that power is daily, constantly, and perpetually infused into him by the Spirit. But Christians often set up for independent gentlemen; they get a little stock of grace in hand, and they say, "My mountain standeth firm, I shall never be moved." But ah! it is not long before the manna begins to be putrid. It was only meant to be the manna for the day, and we have kept it for the morrow, and therefore it fails us. We must have fresh grace.

"For day by day the manna fell;  
O to learn that lesson well."

So look day by day for fresh grace. Frequently too the Christian wants to have grace enough for a month vouchsafed to him in one moment. "O!" he says, "what a host of troubles I have coming—how shall I meet them all? O! that I had grace enough to bear me through them all! "My dear friends, you will have grace enough for your troubles, as they come one by one. "As thy days, so shall thy strength be;" but thy strength shall never be as thy months, or as thy weeks. Thou shalt have thy strength as thou hast thy bread. "Give us this day our daily bread." Give us this day our daily grace. But why is it you will be troubling yourself about the things of to-morrow? The common people say, "Cross a bridge when you come to it." That is good advice. Do the same. When a trouble comes, attack it, and down with it, and master it ; but do not begin now to forestall your woes. "Ah! but I have so many," says one. Therefore I say, do not look further before thee than thou needest. "Sufficient unto the day is the evil thereof." Do as the brave Grecian did, who, when he defended his country from Persia, did not go into the plains to fight, but stood in the narrow pass of Thermopylae; there, when the myriads came to him, they had to come one by one, and he felled them to the earth. Had he ventured into the plain he would have been soon devoured, and his handfull would have been melted like a drop of dew in the sea. Stand in the narrow pass of to-day, and fight thy troubles one by one; but do not rush into the plains of tomorrow, for there thou wilt be routed and killed. As the evil is sufficient so will the grace be. "Salvation is of the Lord."  
  
But, lastly, upon this point. *The ultimate perfection of salvation is of the Lord*. Soon, soon, the saints of earth shall be saints in light; their hairs of snowy age shall be crowned with perpetual joy and everlasting youth; their eyes suffused with tears shall be made bright as stars, never to be clouded again by sorrow; their hearts that tremble now are to be made joyous and fast, and set for ever like pillars in the temple of God. Their follies, their burdens, their griefs, their woes, are soon to be over; sin is to be slain, corruption is to be removed, and a heaven of spotless purity and of unmingled peace is to be theirs for ever. But it must still be by grace. As was the foundation such must the top-stone be; that which laid on earth the first beginning must lay in heaven the top-most stone. As they were redeemed from their filthy conversation by grace, so they must be redeemed from death and the grave by grace too, and they must enter heaven singing

"Salvation of the Lord alone;  
Grace is a shoreless sea."

There may be Arminians here, but they will not be Arminians there; they may here say, "It is of the will of the flesh," but in heaven they shall not think so. Here they may ascribe some little to the creature; but there they shall cast their crowns at the Redeemer's feet, and acknowledge that he did it all. Here they may sometimes look a little at themselves, and boast somewhat of their own strength; but there, "Not unto us, not unto us," shall be sung with deeper sincerity and with more profound emphasis than they have even sung it here below. In heaven, when grace shall have done its work, this truth shall stand out in blazing letters of gold, "Salvation is of the Lord."  
  
II. Thus I have tried to expound the gospel. Now shall I show you How GOD HAS HEDGED THIS GOSPEL ABOUT.  
  
Some have said salvation in some cases is the result of *natural temperament.* Well, Sir, well; God has effectually answered your argument. You say that some people are saved because they are naturally religious and inclined to be good; unfortunately I have never met with any of that class of persons yet; but I will suppose for a moment that there are such people. God has unanswerably met your objection; for, strange to say, the great number of these who are saved are just the most unlikely people in the world to have been saved, while a great number of those who perish were once just the very people whom, if natural disposition had any thing to do with it, we should have expected to see in heaven. Why, there is one here who in his youth was a child of many follies. Often did his mother weep over him, and cry and groan over her son's wanderings; for what with a fierce high spirit that could brook neither bit nor bridle, what with perpetual rebellions and ebullitions of hot anger, she said, "My son, my son, what wilt thou be in thy riper years? Surely thou wilt dash in pieces law and order, and be a disgrace to thy father's name." He grew up; in youth he was wild and wanton, but, wonder of wonders, on a sudden he became a new man, changed, altogether changed; no more like what he was before than angels are like lost spirits. He sat at her feet, he cheered her heart, and the lost, fiery one became gentle, mild, humble as a little child, and obedient to God's commandments. You say, wonder of wonders! But there is another here. He was a fair youth: when but a child be talked of Jesus; often when his mother had him on her knee he asked her questions about heaven; be was a prodigy, a wonder of piety in his youth. As he grew up, the tear rolled down his cheek under any sermon; he could scarcely bear to hear of death without a sigh; sometimes his mother caught him, as she thought, in prayer alone. And what is he now? He has just this very morning come from sin; he has become the debauched desperate villain, has gone far into all manner of wicked ness and lust, and sin, and has become more damnably corrupt than other men could have made him only his own evil spirit, once confined, has now developed itself; he has learned to play the lion in his manhood, as once he played the fox in his youth. I do not know whether you have ever met with such a case; but it very frequently is so. I know I can say that in my congregation some abandoned wicked fellow has had his heart broken, and been led to weep, and has cried to God for mercy, and renounced his vile sin; whilst some fair maiden by his side hath heard the same sermon, and if there was a tear she brushed it away; she still continues just what she was, "without God and without hope in the world." God has taken the base things of the world, and has just picked his people out of the very roughest of men, in order that he may prove that it is not natural disposition, but that "salvation is of the Lord" alone.  
  
Well, but some say, it is *the minister* they hear who converts men. Ah! that is a grand idea, full sure. No man but a fool would entertain it. I met with a man some time ago who assured me that he knew a minister who bad a very large amount of converting power in him. Speaking of a great evangelist in America, he said, "That man, sir, has got the greatest quantity of converting power I ever knew a man to have; and Mr.. So-and-so in a neighboring town I think is second to him." At that time this converting power was being exhibited; two hundred persons were converted by the converting power of this second best, and joined to the church in a few months. I went to the place some time afterwards—it was in England—and I said, "How do your converts get on?" "Well," said he, "I can not say much about them." "How many out of those two hundred whom you received in a year ago stand fast?" "Well," he said, "I am afraid not many of them; we have turned seventy of them out for drunkenness already." "Yes," I said, "I thought so: that is the end of the grand experiment of converting power." If I could convert you all, any one else might unconvert you; what any man can do another man can undo; it is only what God does that is abiding.  
  
No, my brethren; God has taken good care it shall never be said conversion is of man, for usually he blesses those who seem to be the most unlikely to be useful. I do not expect to see so many conversions in this place as I had a year ago, when I had far fewer hearers. Do you ask why? Why, a year ago I was abused by every body; to mention my name was to mention the name of the most abominable buffoon that lived. The mere utterance of it brought forth oaths and cursing; with many men it was a name of contempt, kicked about the street as a football; but then God gave me souls by hundreds, who were added to my church, and in one year it was my happiness to see not less than a thousand personally who had then been converted. I do not expect that now. My name is somewhat esteemed now, and the great ones of the earth think it no dishonor to sit at my feet; but this makes me fear lest my God should forsake me now that the world esteems me. I would rather be despised and slandered than aught else. This assembly that you think so grand and fine, I would readily part with, if by such a loss I could gain a greater blessing. "God has chosen the base things of the world;" and, therefore, I reckon that the more esteemed I may be, the worse is my position, so much the less expectation shall I have that God will bless me. He hath but his treasure in earthen vessels, that the excellency of the power may be of God, and not of man." A poor minister began to preach once, and all the world spoke ill of him; but God blessed him. By-and-bye they turned round and petted him. He was the man—a wonder! God left him! It has often been the same. It is for us to recollect, in all times of popularity, that "Crucify him; crucify him" follows fast upon the heels of "Hosanna," and that the crowd to-day, if dealt faithfully with, may turn into the handful of to-morrow; for men love not plain speaking. We should learn to be despised, learn to be contemned, learn to be slandered, and then we shall learn to be made useful by God. Down on my knees I have often fallen, with the hot sweat rising from my brow, under some fresh slander poured upon me; in an agony of grief my heart has been well-nigh broken; till at last I learned the art of bearing all and caring for none. And how my grief runneth in another line. It is just the opposite. I fear lest God should forsake me, to prove that he is the author of salvation, that it is not in the preacher, that it is not in the crowd, that it is not in the attention I can attract, but in God, and in God alone. And this thing I hope I can say from my heart: if to be made as the mire of the streets again, if to be the laughingstock of fools and the song of the drunkard once more will make me more serviceable to my Master, and more useful to his cause, I will prefer it to all this multitude, or to all the applause that man could give. Pray for me, dear friends, pray for me, that God would still make me the means of the salvation of souls; for I fear he may say, "I will not help that man, lest the world should say he has done it," for "salvation is of the Lord," and so it must be, even to the world's end.  
  
III. And now WHAT IS, WHAT SHOULD BE, THE INFLUENCE OF THIS DOCTRINE UPON MEN?  
  
Why, first, with sinners, this doctrine is *a great battering ram against their pride.* I will give you a figure The sinner in his natural estate reminds me of a man who has a strong and well-nigh impenetrable castle into which he has fled. There is the outer moat; there is a second moat; there are the high walls; and then afterward there is the dungeon and keep, into which the sinner will retire. Now, the first moat that goes round the sinner's trusting place is his good works. "Ah!" he says, "I am as good as my neighbor; twenty shillings in the pound down, ready money, I have always paid; I am no sinner; 'I tithe mint and cummin;' a good respectable gentleman I am indeed." Well, when God comes to work with him, to save him, he sends his army across the first moat; and as they go through it, they cry, "Salvation is of the Lord;" and the moat is dried up, for if it be of the Lord, how can it be of good works? But when that is done, he has a second intrenchment—ceremonies. "Well," he says, "I will not trust in my good works, but I have been baptized, I have been confirmed; do not I take the sacrament? That shall be my trust." "Over the moat! Over the moat!" And the soldiers go over again, shouting, "Salvation is of the Lord." The second moat is dried up; it is all over with that. Now they come to the next strong wall; the sinner, looking over it, says, "I can repent, I can believe, whenever I like; I will save myself by repenting and believing." Up come the soldiers of God, his great army of conviction, and they batter this wall to the ground, crying, "'Salvation is of the Lord.' Your faith and your repentance must all be given you, or else you will neither believe nor repent of sin." And now the castle is taken; the man's hopes are all cut off; he feels that it is not of self; the castle of self is overcome, and the great banner upon which is written "Salvation is of the Lord" is displayed upon the battlements. But is the battle over? O no; the sinner has retired to the keep, in the center of the castle; and now he changes his tactics. "I can not save myself," says he, "therefore I will despair; there is no salvation for me." Now this second castle is as hard to take as the first, for the sinner sits down and says, "I can't be saved, I must perish." But God commands the soldiers to take this castle too, shouting, "Salvation *is* of the Lord;" though it is not of man*, it is of God;* "he is able to save, even to the uttermost," though you can not save yourself. This sword, you see, cuts two ways; it cut pride down, and then it cleaves the skull of despair. If any man say he can save himself, it halveth his pride at once; and if another man say he can not be saved, it dasheth his despair to the earth; for it affirms that he can be saved, seeing, "Salvation is of the Lord." That is the effect this doctrine has upon the sinner, may it have that effect on you!  
  
But what influence has it upon the saint? Why, it is the keystone of all divinity*. I will defy you to be heterodox* if you believe this truth. You must be sound in the faith if you have learned to spell this sentence— "Salvation is of the Lord;" and if you feel it in your soul *you will not be proud;* you can not be; you will cast every thing at his feet, confessing that you have done nothing, save what he has helped you to do and therefore the glory must be where the salvation is. If you believe this *you will not be distrustful*. You will say, "My salvation does not depend on my faith, but on the Lord; my keeping does not depend on myself, but on God who keepeth me; my being brought to heaven rests not now in my own hands, but in the hands of God;" you will, when doubts and fears prevail, fold your arms, look upward and say,

"And now my eye of faith is dim,  
I trust in Jesus, sink or swim."

If you can keep this in your mind *you may always be joyful*. He can have no cause for trouble who knows and feels that his salvation is of God. Come on, legions of bell; come on demons of the pit!

"He that has helped me bears me through,  
And makes me more than conqueror too."

Salvation resteth not on this poor arm, else should I despair, but on the arm of yon Omnipotent—that arm on which the pillars of the heavens do lean. "Whom should I fear ? The Lord is my strength and my life; of whom shall I be afraid?"  
  
And this, may by grace, *nerve you to work for God*. If you had to save your neighbors you might sit down and do nothing; but since "salvation is of the Lord," go on and prosper. Go and preach the gospel; go and tell the gospel everywhere. Tell it in your house, tell it in the street, tell it in every land and every nation; for it is not of yourself, it is "of the Lord." Why do not our friends go to Ireland to preach the gospel? Ireland is a disgrace to the Protestant church. Why do not they go and preach there? A year or so ago a number of our brave ministers went over there to preach; they did right bravely; they went there, and they came back again, and that is about the sum total of the glorious expedition against Popery. But why come back again? Because they were stoned, good easy men! Do they not think that the gospel ever will spread without a few stones? But they would have been killed! Brave martyrs they! Let them be enrolled in the red chronicle. Did the martyrs of old, did the apostles shrink from going to any country because they would have been killed? No, they were ready to die: and if half a dozen ministers had been killed in Ireland, it would have been the finest thing in the world for liberty in future; for after that the people dare not have touched us; the strong arm of the law would have put them down; we might have gone through every village of Ireland afterwards, and been at peace; the constabulary. would soon have put an end to such infamous murder; it would have awakened the Protestantism of England to claim the liberty which is our right there as we give it elsewhere. We shall never see any great change till we have some men in our ranks who are willing to be martyrs. That deep ditch can never be crossed till the bodies of a few of us shall fill it up; and after that it will be easy work to preach the gospel there. Our brethren should go there once more. They can leave their white cravats at home, and the white feather too, and go forth with a brave heart and a bold spirit; and if the people mock and scoff, let them mock and scoff on. George Whitefield said, when he preached on Kennington Common, where they threw dead cats and rotten eggs at him, "This is only the manure of Methodism, the best thing in the world to make it grow; throw away as fast as you please." And when a stone cut him on the forehead, he seemed to preach the better for a little blood-letting. O! for such a man to dare the mob, and then the mob would not need to be dared. Let us go there, recollecting that "salvation is of the Lord," and let us in every place and at every time preach God's Word, believing that God's Word is more than a match for man's sin, and God will yet be master over all the earth.  
  
My voice fails me again, and my thoughts too, I was weary this morning, when I came into this pulpit, and I am weary now. Sometimes I am joyous and glad, and feel in the pulpit as if I could preach for ever; at other times I feel glad to close; but yet with such a text I would that I could have finished up with all the might that mortal lip could summon. O! to let men know this, that their salvation is of God! Swearer, swear not against him in whose hand thy breath is! Despiser, despise not him who can save you or destroy you. And thou hypocrite, seek not to deceive him from whom salvation comes, and who therefore knows right well whether thy salvation come from him.  
  
IV. And now in concluding, let me just tell you WHAT IS THE OBSERVE OF THIS TRUTH. Salvation is of God: then *damnation is of man*. If any of you are damned, you will have no one to blame but yourselves; if any of you perish, the blame will not lie at God's door; if you are lost and cast away, you will have to bear all the blame and all the tortures of conscience yourself; you will lie for ever in perdition, and reflect, "I have destroyed myself; I have made a suicide of my soul; I have been my own destroyer; I can lay no blame to God." Remember, if saved, you must be saved by God alone, though if lost you have lost yourselves. "Turn ye, turn ye, why will ye die, O house of Israel." With my last faltering sentence I bid you stop and think. Ah! my hearers, my hearers! it is an awful thing to preach to such a mass as this. But the other Sunday, as I came down stairs, I was struck with a memorable sentence, uttered by one who stood there. He said, "There are 9000 people this morning without excuse in the day of judgment." I should like to preach so that this always might be said; and if I can not, O may God have mercy on me, for his name's sake! But now remember! Ye have souls; those souls will be damned, or saved. Which will it be ? Damned they must be for ever, unless God shall save you; unless Christ shall have mercy upon you, there is no hope for you. Down on your knees I Cry to God for mercy. Now lift up your heart in prayer to God. May now be the very time when you shall be saved. Or ever the next drop of blood shall run through your veins, may you find peace! Remember, that peace is to be had now. If you feel now your need of it, it is to be had now. And how? For the mere asking for it. ' Ask, and it shall be given you; seek, and ye shall find."

"But if your ears refuse  
The language of his grace,  
Your hearts grow hard, like stubborn Jews,  
That unbelieving race,

The Lord with vengeance drest,  
Shall lift his hand and swear,  
You that despised my promised rest  
Shall have no portion there."

O! that ye may not be despisers, lest ye "wonder and perish!" May ye now fly to Christ, and be accepted in the beloved. It is my last best prayer. May the Lord hear it. Amen.

The Fainting Soul Revived

By C. H. SPURGEON(1834-1892)at [*https://www.biblebb.com/files/spurgeon/3510.txt*](https://www.biblebb.com/files/spurgeon/3510.txt)

"When my soul fainted within me, I remembered the Lord."-Jonah 2:7.

When man was first made, there was no fear of his forgetting God for it was

his highest privilege and delight to have communion with his Maker. "The Lord

God walked in the garden in the cool of the day," and Adam was privileged to

hold fellowship with God, closer, perhaps, than even the angels had in

heaven. But the spell of that sacred harmony was rudely broken by man's

disobedience and his dreadful fall. Ever since our first parent tasted of the

forbidden fruit, which brought death into our world, and all its train of

woes, his mortal race has been naturally prone to forget God. The evil

propensities of flesh and blood have made it impossible to persuade man to

remember his Creator. The complaint of God against the Jews is true as an

indictment against the whole human family. "Hear, O heaven, and give ear. O

earth: I have nourished and brought up children, and they have rebelled

against me; the ox knoweth its owner, and the ass its master's crib, but

Israel doth not know, my people doth not consider." Man is foolish; he flies

from the highest good. Man is wicked; he turns his back upon supreme

holiness. Man is worldly: he forgets the kingdom of God and the world to

come. Man is wilful; he follows his own vain imaginations, and, with head-

strong rebellion, opposes himself to his God, that he may pursue his own

wayward course, and gratify his wanton passions.

To convince a man of his error, to arrest him in his evil pursuits, to

reclaim him to the paths of righteousness-this is seldom accomplished without

dire trouble and deep affliction. Some men, it is true, are brought to God by

gentle means; they are drawn by soft but mighty bonds; still, a much larger

class of persons remains, upon whom these silken cords would exert no

influence. They must not be handled softly, but must be dealt with heavily.

The picklock will never open their hearts; there must be the crowbar, and

even the battering ram, to give a furious cannonade. Some hearts can never be

captured for God and for truth except by storm. Sword in hand, God's law must

scale the ramparts. With thundering report, God's Word must dash down the

walls of their confidence, and make breach after breach in the bastions of

their pride, and even then they will fight it out, and never yield, until,

driven to an awful extremity, they see that they must either yield at once,

or else be lost for ever. It is with such persons that I now particularly

want to deal. There are those who have forgotten God after having once known

him, and they are not likely to be brought back without great trouble; and

there are others who never did know God, and they never will enquire after

him, unless they are driven to their wits' end by calamity, as when a great

famine in the land where he dwelt compelled the prodigal for very lack of

bread to seek his Father's house. So I have first to remonstrate:-

I. WITH THE BACKSLIDER.

Let me, however, before I go into the matter with you, describe a little more

minutely the individuals I wish to address. There is no need to call out your

names; it will suffice if we portray your character and describe your

conduct. There are some of you who used to be members of Christian churches

years ago, but you have gradually declined, and so reckless has your career

at length become, that it is a wonder that you have not utterly perished in

your sin. You seemed to run well on the outset, and for a time you held on in

the way; but where are you now? Well, you happen at this present to be in

God's house, and I do trust that God's own hour has come, when he will meet

you and bring you back. What we have to say of Jonah, I do entreat you to

apply to yourselves; if the cap seems to fit you, put it on and wear it, even

though it should be a fool's cap: wear it till you are ashamed of yourselves,

and are led to confess your folly before the God who is able to remove it,

and to make you wise unto salvation.

Observe, dear friends, that though Jonah remembered the Lord, it was not till

he got into the whale's belly, nor even then till his soul fainted within

him. He did not remember the Lord all the time he was going down to Joppa to

find a ship, nor yet when he got on board that ship. His Master had said to

him, Jonah, go to Nineveh," but Jonah was a strong-willed, head-strong

fellow. Though a true servant of God, and a prophet, yet he fled from the

presence of the Lord. To Nineveh, he resolved within himself, he would not

go. He could foresee no honour to himself out of the journey, no increase of

his own reputation, no deference that would come to him amongst those proud

Assyrians, so, in direct defiance of the divine command, he set off to Joppa,

to take a ship and to flee from God's presence. Into the ship he got, paid

the fare, and went sallying down the sea to go to Tarshish; but all this

while he never thought of God. Not unlikely in this assembly there may be a

woman who used to be a member of a Christian church, but she married an

ungodly man; after that there was no going to the house of God, much less

anything like keeping up her church membership. The shop was kept open on

Sunday, or there was a pleasure party to be entertained at home, or an

excursion taken into the country. All this seemed very pleasant. The

disquietude of conscience she might feel at first wore off as habit made it

familiar, until, year after year, this woman, who once seemed to be a true

servant of Christ, lives in carelessness and indifference, not to say

profanity, with hardly any thoughts of God. Perhaps she has not quite given

up prayer; she could not absolutely become an enemy of Christ, or entertain a

dislike to his people. Still, God was forgotten. So long as the business

prospered, the husband was in good health, and the world smiled, God was

never thought of. Can I be mistaken in supposing that there is a man here who

in his youth was a loud talker, a vehement professor of religion, and a

companion of those that fear the Lord? But after a time there seemed to be a

way of getting money rather faster than the ordinary methods of honest labour

or simple merchandise; so he entered into, a speculation, which soon ate out

the vitals of his piety. His new projects involved new companions; in their

fellowship he stifled his old convictions, and, as he would not play the

hypocrite, he ceased to make any profession at all. Perhaps months have

passed since he has been in a place of worship; even now he would rather be

unrecognised, for he has only come here because a friend from the country

asked his company to me the place and to hear the preacher. Ah! my dear sir,

it is strange indeed, if you be a child of God, that you could have walked so

contrary to God as you have. Yet so did Jonah. Do I, then, hold up his case

before your eyes to comfort you? Nay; but let me hope that you will apply the

bitter rebuke to your own soul, and be led to do as Jonah did. All the while

the ship sailed smoothly over the sea, Jonah forgot his God. You could not

have distinguished him from the veriest heathen on board. He was just as bad

as they were. Yet was there a spark of fire among the embers, which God in

due time fanned into a flame. Happy for you if this better part of his

experience should tally with your own.

Such, too, was Jonah's blank forgetfulness, that he does not appear to have

thought upon his God all the while the storm raged, the billows rolled, and

the ship was tossed with tempest. The poor heathen sailors were all on their

knees crying for mercy, but Jonah was asleep in the vessel, till the

superstitious captain himself was amazed at his apathy: "What meanest thou, O

sleeper; caress thou not that we all perish?" He went down and upbraided him,

and asked him how it was that he could sleep while the passengers and crew

were all crying. "Arise," said he, "and call upon thy God." He was stirred up

to his danger and his duty, even by a heathen! Now maybe there are some here

who have had a host of troubles. Is husband dead? Are you a lone woman with a

family to provide for? Or are you a widower, looking on your children with

pity, whom you once regarded with a homely pride? Possibly you may have

another form of trial. Your business has gone to the bad; you expected to

have realised large profits by it, but you encountered loss upon loss, till

your little capital has been scattered. Still, all this while you have not

thought about God. Mayhap that child after child has been taken from you, and

yet you have not remembered God. Is it really so, that the Lord loves you,

and, because he loves you, therefore chastens you? Mark my word, you will

continue to suffer loss upon loss, till you have lost all you have and all

you count dear, and you will be brought to death's door yourself, but he will

save you at last. If you ever were his, he never will let you sink into hell;

but, oh! it will be hard work for you to get to heaven. You will be saved,

but it will be so as by fire. You will be saved as by the skin of your teeth-

scarcely saved, and the way in which you are saved will be a most terrible

one to you. Oh! friend, I wish you would turn while God is smiting you

gently, for know of a certainty if rods will not do, he will come to

scourges, and if the scourge will not do, he will take the knife, and if the

knife will not do, he will take the sword, and you shall have to feel it,

for, as sure as God is God, he will never lose his child, and he will cut

that child, as it were, into pieces, but he will save his soul. He will

undermine your constitution by disease, and make you toss upon the bed of

anguish, but he will bring you back. Oh! that you had grace to come back by

gentler means before these terrible actions are tried!

So, then, Jonah did not think of God all this time. Now at length the vessel

begins to creak, and seems as if she must go to pieces. Then they cast lots,

and the lot fell upon Jonah. He is about to be thrown into the sea. At that

moment a pair of huge jaws open wide, shut again, and swallow him up. "Where

am I now?" says Jonah, as he is taken down deep by the motions of this

monstrous fish, till the weeds come into the fish and wrap about his head,

and his life is only preserved by a miracle. Then, oh! then Jonah thinks upon

his God. "When my soul fainted within me." Now why did his soul faint within

him? Was it not because he thought, "Now I am in a hopeless case; I shall

never come out of this; it is a wonder I am not drowned; it is a marvel I was

not snapped in pieces by those huge jaws; what a hopeless case I am in! I

will but linger a little while, then perish I must in this horrible prison of

a whale's belly." I dare say he thought that never was man in such a plight

before; never a person that was alive inside a fish; and how comfortless he

must have felt with nothing but the cold deep round him. Instead of garments,

weeds were wrapped about his head. How his heart throbbed, and his head

ached, with no cheer, no light, no friendly voice, no succour, no help;

faraway from dry land, out on the boundless deep, without a comrade to

sympathise with his strange plight.

Now when a child of God goes astray, it is not at all unusual for God to

bring him into just such a state as that, a condition in which he cannot help

himself; forlorn and friendless, with no one that can relieve or minister to

him. This dreary thought will meanwhile ever haunt his mind, "I brought it

all upon myself!" Hast thou not procured this unto thyself? Like a woman who

has left her husband's house, deserted her home, and betrayed her kind and

tender protector, what fruit can she expect to reap of her wickedness? When

she is ready to starve, when the wind blows through her tattered raiment,

when her face is swollen with weeping, and her soul is full of anguish, she

has only herself to upbraid, as she cries, "I have brought this upon myself;

would God I had never left my cheerful homestead, however humble the lodgings

might have been; would God I had never deserted the husband who loved me, and

spread his aegis over me, however roughly he sometimes spake! Oh! that I had

been more scrupulously obedient, and less prone to discontent!" The

afterthought of sin-I think they call it remorse. Thus it was that Jonah

thought upon his God, when the shame of his transgressions overwhelmed him.

Oh! how merciful our God is to allow us to think about him, and turn to him

when in so pitiable a plight! "Yes," said a tradesman once to a customer for

whose favours he felt little cause to be grateful, "you come to me, I know

why; you have been to every other shop in the town for the article you

require, and you could not obtain it; and now you come back to me whom you

had no good cause ever to leave, I shall not serve you." This is not how the

Lord speaks to us. He does not resent our ingratitude. "My child, my poor

child," says he, "though you have gone and spent your substance; though you

have been feeding swine: though you are all black, and foul and filthy, yet

you are my dear child still, and my heart yearns towards you." Without a word

of rebuke, or even a taunting look, so soon as ever a poor sinner comes back

to the Father's house, the Father's arms are round about his neck, and the

kiss of pardon is pressed on his cheek. "I remember thee well," says he; "I

have blotted out thy sins like a cloud, and like a thick cloud thine

iniquities." Now if there be a backslider here-and I know there are several-I

can only hope that God will bring you into Jonah's peril. You shall have no

pity from me if he does; I will rather be thankful to God that he has brought

you there, because I shall know then that he has some designs of love towards

you. But when you get into the regions of despair, do as Jonah did-think upon

your God. What, do any of you objects? Do you imagine that to think about God

would make you worse? Well, think that you were once his child, and think

again that he has found you out, and knows where you are. Jonah felt that God

knew where he was, because he had sent the fish. God knows your whereabouts,

my good woman; he knows what quarters you are now in, my fellow-sinner.

Remember, too, that you are yet alive! what a wonder it is that you are still

permitted to hear the voice which says, "Return, return; oh! backslider,

return." God is immutable; he cannot change; his covenant is steadfast; he

will not alter it. If he has loved you once, he loves you now. If I bought

you, I will have you. Come back to him, then; he is your husband still.

Return! return! he is your Father still-return! return! But, oh! my hearer,

perhaps you have no pretensions to be a child of his! Perhaps you may have

played the hypocrite and made a profession in your own strength. You turned

back from the company of those who fear the Lord, because you never were

truly converted. If it be so, let the mercy, which God shows to sinners,

embolden you to cry to him. And may he break you to pieces now with the

hammer of his Word. So may he save you, and so shall his praise be

exceedingly great in your salvation.

Though I have tried thus to reach the backslider, it is likely enough that I

have missed my mark, honest as my intention has been. Oh! it seems so

dreadful that any of you should perish in your sins, who know the way of

Rape! Some of you were candled on the knees of piety. There are those now in

heaven who look down upon you, and could they weep, you might feel their

tears dropping on your brow. You know very well that time was when the hope

of a better world yielded you some kind of comfort and joy. You do not think,

at any rate, that you were feigning piety then, but you did account yourself,

a sinner. By the compassion of the Most High, by the love of God, I pray you

stop! Do not drink the cup of devils after having drank the cup of the Lord,

and give not that soul to damnation which once seemed to bid fair for

salvation. Eternal life is too rich a prize to trifle with. May the Spirit of

God do what I cannot. May he send home these things to the persons for whom

they are intended.

And now we have, in the second place, to deal with the careless, the

thoughtless, the profligate-with:-

II. THOSE WHO NEVER WERE AWAKENED-mora1 or immoral in the world's reckoning.

Jonah did not remember God till his soul fainted within him; and the reckless

sinner, as a rule, never does remember God till under the stress of law, or

the distress of pain and penalty; his soul is ready to faint within him. Now

I hope some of you will be brought to feel this faintness.

What kind of faintness do persons who are under the saved discipline of the

Spirit of God generally feel?

There is faintness of horror at their present condition. I can imagine a

person lying down on the edge of a cliff and falling asleep. On suddenly

waking up, having moved during his sleep, he finds himself within an inch of

the precipice, and looks down and sees, far beneath him, the jagged rocks and

the boiling sea. How his nerves would quiver as he realized his position and

his jeopardy! Many a sinner has thus opened his eyes to discern his terrible

hazard. He has suddenly waked up to find that he is on the brink of eternal

wrath, standing where an angry God is waving a dreadful sword, and certain to

plunge it into his heart before long. Every unconverted person here is

poising over the mouth of hell upon a single plank, and that plank is rotten;

he is hanging over the jaws of perdition by one rope, and the strands of that

rope are snapping every moment. If a man does but apprehend this and feels

it, I do not wonder that he faints.

Faintness, moreover, arises from a dread of horrors yet to come. Who can

conceive the heart-sinking of those poor passengers on board that vessel

which so lately foundered in the open sea, at the prospect of being swallowed

up alive, and sinking they knew not whither! It would be no easy thing, one

would think, to keep from fainting at a time when such a doom was imminent.

So when God awakens the soul by the noise of the tempest, it looks out and

sees the ocean of divine wrath about to engulf it. The cries of lost spirits

appal it, and it says to itself, "I shall soon mingle with those shrieks; my

voice will aid the wailings of their dolorous company ore long; I shall be

driven from his presence with a fiery sword at my heels' before many hours

are over." Then the soul faints with alarm at the thought of judgment to

come.

Faint, too, is the soul of the sinner through a sense of weakness. "I cannot

do anything to avert the catastrophe" seems to be the leading idea of a

person when he has fainted. Over the awakened sinner there comes this sense

of weakness. When a sinner does not know himself, he thinks that being saved

is the easiest thing in the world. He supposes that to come to Christ to get

peace is a matter that can be done just as readily as one snaps his fingers.

But when God begins to deal with him, he says. "I would believe, but I

cannot"; and he cries out, "Oh! God, I find that faith is as impossible to me

as keeping thy law, except thou help me!" Once he thought he could reform

himself, and become as holy as an angel; but now he can do nothing, and he,

cries out for very faintness, "Oh! God, what a poor, helpless, shiftless

creature I am!"

And then there will sometimes come over him faintness of such a kind as I

must call horrible. Well do I remember when I was in that state! I thought I

would give up prayer, because it seemed of no use to pray, and yet I could

not help praying; I must pray, and yet I felt that I did not pray. I thought

I would not go to hear the gospel any more; there was nothing in it for me,

and yet there was a fascination about the preaching of the gospel that made

me go and hear it. I heard that Christ was very gracious to sinners but I

could not believe that he would be gracious to me. Little did it matter

whether I heard a promise or a threatening. I liked the threatening best.

Threatenings appeared to me to be just what I deserved, and they provoked

some kind of emotion in my breast. But when I heard a promise I shuddered

with a gloomy feeling that it was of no use to me; I felt condemned already.

The pains of hell got hold upon me, so tortured was my soul with the

forebodings of an endless doom. I heard, the other day, of a young minister

becoming an infidel, and I prayed for him. What, think you, was the burden of

my petition? I prayed that God would make him feel the weight of his hand;

for I cannot imagine that a man who has once felt the weight of God's hand

can ever afterwards doubt his being, his sovereignty, or his power. Believe

me, brethren, there is such an unutterable anguish, as a man could not long

endure without becoming absolutely insane, which God makes some people feel

in order to crush their love of sin, to purge them of their self-

righteousness, and bring them to a sense of their dependence on himself. Some

men can never be brought in any other way. I may be addressing the patients I

am describing. I sincerely hope I am. You are feeling God's hand. The whole

weight of it rests upon you, and under it you are crushed, as a moth is

crushed beneath one's finger. Now I have a message from God for you. When

Jonah; was in your case he remembered his God. Tell me, what sayest thou,

poor heart-what sayest thou to remembering thy God?

The case I am going to describe is not exactly that of John Newton, but it is

from his experience that I gather my picture. There is a young man with a

very good father, a holy father. As the young man grows up he does not like

his trade: he cannot bear it, no he says to his father, "While I succumb to

your government I mean to have my own way; other people enjoy themselves, and

so will I; and as I cannot do it under your roof. I will follow my fancy

elsewhere." He goes to sea. When he is at sea he discovers that all is not

quite to his taste; the work he has to do is very different from what he had

been accustomed to; still, he doesn't flinch. At the first port he reaches he

gives loose to his passions. "Ah!" says he, "this is a jolly life! This is

far better than being at home with my father, and being kept tied to my

mother's apron-strings all my days. I say a merry life is the thing to suit

me, sir." He goes on board again, and wherever the vessel puts in, each port

becomes an outlet for his vices. He is a rare boy to swear and drink, and

when he comes back to England he has no words too bitter to utter against

religion in general, and against his father's scruples of conscience in

particular. It so happens that one day there comes on a dreadful storm. He

has to take a long spell at the pumps, and when that is over he must begin to

pump again, for the ship is ready to founder, and every man must keep hard at

it hour after hour. There is a driving wind and a heavy tempest. At 1ast they

are told that nothing can save them; there are breakers ahead, and the vessel

will be on shore! He lashes himself to the mast and floats about all night,

and the next day, and the next, with faint hope of life. He has some twitches

of conscience now; he cannot help thinking of his father and mother. However,

he is not going to be broken down by a trifle. He has a hard heart, and he

will not give way yet. He is crashed on shore, and finds himself among a

barbarous people. He is taken care of by the barbarians; they give him food;

albeit his meal is scant, and he is presently set to work as a slave. His

master proves harsh to him, and his master's wife especially cruel. He gets

but little to eat, and he is often beaten. Still, he bears up, and hopes for

better days. But, half-starved and hard worked, his bodily health and his

mental energy are reduced to a low degree. No marvel that fever overtakes

him. Who has he to nurse him? What friend to care for him? The people treat

him as a dog, and take no notice of him. He can neither stir nor move. In

vain he pines for a drop of water in the dead of the night; he feels that he

must die of thirst. He lifts his voice, but there is nobody to hear him. To

his piteous appeal there is no answer. Then it is he thinks, "Oh! God, if I

might but get back to my father!" Then it is, when he is at the last

extremity, that he thinks of home.

Now what did happen in the case of John Newton will happen, and has happened,

in the case of many a sinner. He never would come back to God, but at last he

felt that it was no use trying anywhere else. He was driven to utter

desperation. In this dilemma his heart said, "Oh! that I might find the

Lord." Hark, now: I will tell you a tale. A lot of sailors were going to sea.

When about to start, the owner said, "There! I have bought a lifeboat; put it

on board." They reply, "No, never! We don't believe in lifeboats; they are

new-fangled things. We do not understand them, and we shall never use one."

"Put it on board, and let it bide there," says the captain. "Well, captain,"

says the boatswain, "a tom fool of a boat-isn't it? I cannot think what the

owner meant by putting such a thing as this on board." Old tars, as they walk

along the deck say to themselves, "Ah! I never saw such a thing in all my

life as that! Think of old Ben Bolt taking a lifeboat with him! Don't believe

in such gimcracks!" Presently a stiff breeze springs up, it comes to a gale-a

hurricane-a perfect tornado! Now let down the lifeboat, captain. "No, no, no;

nonsense!" Let down the lifeboat! No; the other boats are got out, but they

are stove in, one after another, and capsized. They bring out another; she

cannot ride out the storm. There she goes, right up on the crest of the waves

and she has gone over, bottom uppermost. It is all over with them! "What

shall be do, captain?" "Try the lifeboat, boatswain." Just so; when every

spar is gone, when every other boat is washed overboard, and when the ship is

going down, they will take to the lifeboat. So be it. The Lord wash all your

boats overboard. May it please God to wreck your vessel; may he shiver every

timber, and make you take to the lifeboat. I fear me some of you will never

take counsel till you reach the crisis. May there come, then, such a storm

that you will be driven to take to Christ. That done there is no storm you

need ever fear. That done, let the loudest tempest roar, you are safe; you

have Christ in the vessel with you. Two or three more words, and I have done.

God has been pleased to give his dear Son, his only-begotten Son, to die a

most dreadful death, not for righteous ones, but for sinners. Jesus Christ

came into the world to seek and to save that which was lost. If you are a

sinned, you are the sort of person Christ came to save. If you are a lost

one, you are the sort of man that Jesus Christ came to seek. Let your present

sorrow comfort you, because it is an indication that you are the kind of

person that Christ will bless. Let your despair deliver you from despair, for

when you despair there is hope for you. When you can do nothing, God will do

everything. When you are empty of your own conceits, there is room for Christ

to enter your heart. When you are stripped, Christ's garments are provided

for you. When you are hungry, the bread that cometh down from heaven is

provided for you. When you are thirsty, the water of life is yours. Let this

broken-heartedness, this terror, this alarm, this faintness, this weakness of

yours, only lead you to say, "I am such as Christ invited to himself. I will

go to him, and if I perish, I will perish only there"; and if you trust

Jesus, you shall never perish, neither shall any pluck you out of his hand.

May you trust him here and now. Amen.

1. Crossway Bibles. (2008). [*The ESV Study Bible*](https://ref.ly/logosres/esvsb?ref=BibleESV.Jon&off=9711) (pp. 1683–1685). Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)