

DIVINE INTERPOSITIONS

NO. 1432

Suggested by the loss of the passenger ship, the "Princess Alice."

**DELIVERED ON LORD'S-DAY MORNING, SEPTEMBER 8, 1878,
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AT THE METROPOLITAN TABERNACLE, NEWINGTON.**

*"He sent from above, He took me, He drew me out of many waters."
Psalm 18:16.*

I DO not know how you feel, my Brothers and Sisters, at this time, but as for myself, a heavy cloud seems to hang over me all the day. The overwhelming calamity of last Tuesday, so crushing and so far reaching, of which we must have spoken to each other, I suppose, every hour during the past week, cannot be removed from the thoughts of our minds or from the affections of our hearts. The whole of London may well be likened to that ancient city of which we read—"The city Shushan was perplexed." Every man has been asking his fellow, "Have you lost a friend?" and no man wonders when the answer is, "Alas, I have been sorely bereaved." In our own immediate circle we have borne a special share of the grief, for five, at least, of those who are in Church membership with us have been removed from our midst and we can scarcely speak with any of our Brethren without discovering that they have lost some connection or friend.

Alas, that unhappy vessel has sunk with a more precious freight than ever loaded Spanish galleon and her wreck has brought a greater loss to our city than if she had carried untold gold! We cannot help thinking of this dire affliction and, therefore, we had better think of it with some practical purpose. I believe that this sudden grief comes, like every other event, from God, and comes as a voice from God to this, our city—a voice which, we trust, will be heard and regarded. "The Lord's voice cries unto the city and the man of wisdom shall see Your name: hear you the rod, and who has appointed it." (Micha 6:9). We are of the mind of that old Prophet who said, "Shall there be evil in a city, and the Lord has not done it?" (Amos 3:6).

Comes there anything in the form of calamity upon the sons of men without the permission, control and overruling of the Lord? Assuredly not! "The Lord kills and makes alive: He brings down to the grave, and brings up." I know that many minds are so stunned by this tremendous blow that they can hardly think of God in connection with it and half wish to believe that the Omnipresent was not there! The problem staggers their reason and they are unable to leave it among the mysteries of faith. As yet they have not gained the confidence of Job who denied that affliction comes out of the dust, but attributed it to the Lord, saying, "He takes away: who can hinder Him?"

Even some who love the Lord and trust Him are somewhat of the mind of Mary and Martha when they said, "Lord, if You had been here, my brother had not died," while others who should know better would timidly conceal their belief in an overruling Providence, lest the ribald world should scoff at them. Let them scoff, I say! Our God is none the less glorious because His ways are far above and out of our sight! It is an atheistical thought which would put God out of any place—if He is not everywhere, He is nowhere—Omnipresence is an essential of the Godhead! If His hand rules not over evil, it is not Omnipotent and thus it lacks another essential attribute of Deity. It would be dreadful to suppose Him to have a limited dominion! "His kingdom rules over all."

We are not as those who believe in two co-existent forces, each supreme, one of whom shall create disasters and the other shall distribute blessings. The Prince of Evil is, according to our faith, subordinate to the great Lord of All! Thus says Jehovah, by the mouth of His servant, Isaiah, "I form the light, and create darkness: I make peace, and I create evil: I the Lord do all these things." He reigns in the calm summer's day and gives us the precious fruits of harvest, but He is equally present and sovereign in the hurricane which destroys, or the blight which desolates. His Providence speeds the ship to its desired haven, but it is equally His Providence which sinks the ship and its mariners to the bottom of the sea! It is His power which looses the bands of Orion and binds the sweet influence of the Pleiades—His are the lightning as well as the sunbeams, the thunderbolts as well as the raindrops.

He is able to make the Heaven as iron and the earth as brass so that our land shall not yield her increase. He can call for a famine and break the whole staff of bread, for famine, pestilence and war are as rods in His hands. God is everywhere and in all things His hand is present—in the things which seem to us to be evil as well as in the events which appear to us to be good, God is at work! He does no wrong, for God is not tempted by evil, neither tempts He any man! But we speak of physical evil which causes sorrow, pain and death among men and we say that certainly God is there. If not a sparrow falls to the ground without our Father, we are sure that no great calamity can befall us apart from Him.

He is not far from us in our deepest sorrow and however we may trace a calamity to the carelessness or the mistake of men, these are but the *second* causes, and we see behind all mere detail the permission of the Lord. If it were not so, mourners would be deprived of the greatest reason for submission and the surest source of consolation. Even where a terrible event is the result of crime, God is not excluded! He shares not the guilt, but He overrules the act. Think of the crucifixion of our Lord and remember that though the sin of it lay heavy upon those who perpetrated it, yet the grand design of it was God's! Read Peter's words in Acts—"Him, being delivered by the determinate counsel and foreknowledge of God, you have taken and by wicked hands have crucified and slain."

Who shall deny that God was at Calvary, though sin there reached its culminating point? We freely admit that we do not understand this and, therefore, we do not attempt to explain it—but we believe and adore! Happily, we need not attempt to justify the ways of God to man, for He asks no defense at our hands and deigns not to give any account of His matters! This is our only resolve, "Though He slay me yet will I trust in Him." Now, the question which has very naturally suggested itself to many is this—If there is a Providence, why does it permit these terrible evils? It is dreadful that human life should be lost on such a scale! God is Omnipotent, nobody doubts that, why, then, does He not interfere to save?

That shall suggest to us the first point of our discourse this morning—that miraculous interpositions in the affairs of this life are not to be expected and we may not hope, literally, to use the words of our text and say, "He sent from above, He took me, He drew me out of many waters." Still, secondly, we shall note that, according to our text, Providential interpositions of another kind are vouchsafed. And thirdly, and best of all, gracious interpositions are given for the salvation of men. Though the Lord does not, nowadays, send from above and take His servants and draw them by miracle out of the waters of the river, yet does He lift us up from the depths of trouble! And especially does He bear us up from the deeps of sin to our eternal salvation, for thus says the Lord, "I will bring again from Bashan, I will bring My people from the depths of the sea."

I. First, then, MIRACULOUS INTERPOSITIONS IN THE CALAMITIES OF THIS LIFE ARE NOT TO BE EXPECTED. I am not standing here as an advocate for God to defend His Character because He does not thus interpose, for to objectors His only answer is, "No, but O man, who are you that reply against God?" If you will accuse your Maker, He will not care to answer you. You who have forged the accusation may fashion an answer, if it seems good to you. Yet there is a difficulty which none can deny and that difficulty lies in a fact. Why is there any evil at all, seeing that the good God is almighty and sits upon His Throne? This is the old puzzle which none can answer.

The Negro put it in a very natural form when he asked the missionary, "If God is so much stronger than the devil, why does He not kill the devil and make an end of his mischief?" Just so—that is the top and bottom of the matter. There is the question, but who can answer it? A fool may raise in an hour more objections than the wisest man could remove in a century! Now, the cleverest theory will not alter facts. What you and I may think is a very small matter, may not be, compared with what really is—and it is quite certain that there is moral evil in the world and that there is also a God! It is also evident that there is *physical* evil in the world and yet love is supreme and that the Almighty permits fire and water to destroy His creatures and does not interpose to rescue them—and yet He is full of tenderness and pity.

There are some, of course, who will dare to condemn their Maker and call Him by I know not what horrible names. I have even heard such a word as, "monster," hissed from between proud lips! Again I say it is not worth our while to answer such objectors because such persons are not pervious to explanation nor willing to receive it. And then, again, it is a small matter to the Most High what such persons may think of Him. He does as He pleases and asks no leave from His creatures! But now, for just a minute, let us consider the question which we trust is modestly proposed. Suppose that every time a great danger threatened, we might expect a miraculous interposition from Heaven, what then? The

supposition is not absurd, for there might be such an interposition—we must admit the possibility since God is almighty.

The train is thundering along the iron way. It will dash into another and many lives will be destroyed. But if the Lord willed it, He could put His hand upon the engine and stop it in its full speed! The vessel freighted with 800 lives is about to sink—but if the Lord willed it, He could buoy it up in the hollow of His hand! Yet He does not move! The iron road is strewn with the dead, the river is gorged with corpses! We do not know all the reasons for this non-interference, but yet we think we can see a little, which little we will think upon.

First, such interpositions would change the whole arrangement of the world—it would not be the same place at all. The Lord has made this world and He governs it by certain fixed laws. If those laws were variable and were continually being altered, it would be another form of creation altogether and man had need to be another creature! His physical, moral and even *spiritual* condition would be changed from top to bottom! It was the Lord's arrangement that He should put forth His power in certain ways which we call the Laws of Nature and, by that arrangement He abides. There is no such independent *force* as "Nature," as some are always dreaming! Nor is there any energy in mere Laws of Nature apart from God's own power!

You may write all the laws you like, but there is no power in *laws*—there must be power in the *king* to carry out the laws! All power emanates from God, be it what it may. He is the source and fountain of all the forces which operate throughout creation, but He has been pleased from the beginning to determine that His power shall usually go forth in certain ways and under fixed laws and regulations. He can suspend those laws when He pleases. He can quench the violence of fire, stop the mouths of lions and make water to stand upright as a heap—but He has not often done so—and in these days He *never* does so. I think we can, in a measure, see why, for if such were the case continually, the whole plan and purpose with which He made the present world would have been abandoned and another mode of power would have taken its place.

Remember, too, that whatever the plan of God is, it is now being carried out under the shadow of the Fall. There had been, I suppose, neither pain, nor sickness, nor sighing, nor death had there been no sin. If it had been possible for a race to have multiplied from the glades of Eden and to have gone forth into a wider Paradise as pure and holy as Adam first came from his Maker's hands, I can believe that there would have been no famine, no war, no catastrophe of shipwreck by sea, nor of accident by land. However multitudinous the human race might have become, its records would have been all unstained with agonizing details such as those which blacken the broad-sheets of today.

But, alas, man has fallen and to a race in such a condition it would not be consistent that everything should be of sunlight and summer—there must now be heard the roar of the storm and the cry of death as the fruit of sin. Render calamity impossible and what mark would there be of the Divine displeasure for man's revolt? Wherein, indeed, would sin differ as to its consequences from obedience and holiness? Think for a little and you will see reason for God's staying His hand from rescue. Furthermore, if interpositions were given to save the lives of only godly men, as some would have it, then *this world* would become the place of judgment which it is not intended to be.

It still remains among many persons as a superstition that if there is an accident and people suffer, there must have been some special *sin* in the victims of the disaster! And yet our Lord has told us that the men upon whom the tower of Siloam fell were not sinners above others—and the Galileans who were slain by Pilate were not sinners above other Galileans. I pray you dismiss from your minds the idea that a sudden death is necessarily a judgment! Never draw any inference from the destruction of a building, or the wreck of a ship, or an explosion, or anything of that nature as to the character of the persons who perish, for if you do, you will be guilty of cruel injustice!

What if some gracious man is spared? Ascribe the deliverance to Providence, but do not suppose that those who perished were less gracious than he is! You shall find that men of bad character sometimes escape where saints are left to die. Because I said the other day that Providence had saved a certain godly woman, foolish persons drew the inference that I condemned those who perished! No sentiment could have been further from my mind! I ascribe to Providence death as well as life and draw no inference as to the character of the person! What if a man has found a watery grave in the Princess Alice? Do not therefore imagine that God was angry with him, for he may now be in Heaven and, at any rate, the same wreck carried down with it many of the Lord's beloved!

Now, if God were to interpose and save His own people whenever they were in danger, this world would become the place of judicial separation which it is *not* and is not meant to be! Judgment is reserved for the world to come. When Christ shall descend from Heaven with a shout and sit upon His Great White Throne—then will He separate the tares from the wheat—but now they are to grow together. Then will He put the goats on the left and the sheep on the right, but for the time being they feed in the same pastures. One event happens to them all—as it happens to the fool, so it happens to the wise! This is not the land of judgment, but of long-suffering! This is not the place where God gives sentence, but where He waits patiently. There is a judgment of *nations* in this world. But that of individuals, with rare exceptions, is reserved for the final account.

Beloved, note once again that if God were to interpose in the case of all calamities, it would involve many evils. For, observe, if next year the majority of farmers should refuse to sow the fields—if over whole *nations* the land should be left to produce only weeds—there would be great scarcity of corn. Suppose that in such cases God should interpose and cause harvests suddenly to grow by miracle so that our teeming millions might escape starvation? What would be the consequence? Why, it would encourage idleness everywhere! Men would say, “The Lord is too good to let us starve and, therefore, we may allow the plow to rust and dance away the hours.” Would that be well?

Suppose, again, that when a contagious disease comes into a district, the Lord miraculously prevented it from being fatal, although the carelessness of men may have left fever lairs in rotting, overcrowded houses enough to pollute the very air! Suppose, I say, that we all neglected sanitary laws and then knew that a merciful God would not let the poor people die of fever, or of cholera? Then the filthiness of our cities would increase till they became huge dunghills and man, who is great enough, now, at polluting rivers and defiling God’s earth in every imaginable way, would go on to turn the whole earth into one monstrous globe of rottenness! But now even pests and plagues and fevers have their good side—they are watchmen to sound an alarm, prophets to give us warning! They arouse man to discover the laws of his being and thus they benefit the race.

Suppose, again, that whenever there is a likelihood of there being an accident, God were to send an angel at once to interpose and avert the collision or the wreck! What would happen? Why then, of course, every railway and steamboat company might go in for accidents in any quantity, seeing they would be harmless, and might even become attractive! There would be no reason for keeping a watch at the ship’s bow and no necessity for brakes or signals. There would be no longer any need to be careful about human life, but we might, each one, be as reckless as he pleased and gratify himself with experiments which could not end fatally! Such a state of things would destroy many of the virtues and render many vices harmless.

I cannot suppose a world regulated upon such a system! I can imagine God divinely interposing and suspending His own Laws, now and then, as pleases Him, for some great purpose of instruction—but it appears wise and good for all concerned that, having made man what he is, the Creator should rather leave him to take the consequence of violating the fixed laws of matter than make those laws variable and uncertain. Again, dear Friends, Divine interpositions of a miraculous sort would not be attended with the advantage to the ungodly which we might suppose. If there were miracles of mercy on the behalf of God’s people to snatch them from a watery grave, or from the devouring element of fire, or from the deadly consequences of a collision, then we might expect to have and, naturally should have, miracles of judgment, too!

If you get into the wilderness and manna falls from Heaven and water leaps from the rock, remember you have also entered a land where the earth opens to swallow up Korah, Dathan and Abiram—and where the very sand breeds fiery serpents to sting to death the rebels against God! You cannot have the mercy-wonder interposing without having the judgment-wonder side by side with it! And on the whole it is a more lenient mode of dealing on God’s part to let sinners alone and to let one event happen to all men for a while because the long-suffering of God leads the sinner to repentance and the sorrow that falls upon the child of God is blessed to him. If all accidental deaths were *punishments*, it would be a far more terrible state of things than that which is now before us—and therefore the matter is best as it is.

If we had wonders of miraculous deliverance often before us, they would not impress mankind as we imagine. If God were always suffering the wicked to drown or burn and always snatching the righteous from the midst of every danger, men would not think much of it before long—they might be slightly impressed at first but, by-and-by, they would harden their hearts. In Egypt there was light in the houses of the Israelites when all was dark with the Egyptians and God

smote Egypt heavily while He was blessing Israel. But this fact did not affect Pharaoh, for he only hardened his heart the more. When in the wilderness the Israelites, murmuring against God, saw some of their companions swallowed up and destroyed, it very little affected them, for soon after, they began murmuring against Moses and charged him with destroying the people of God!

All things considered, the arrangement is best as it is and the Lord knows it is so and, therefore, continues the method of letting His physical Laws take their course although occasionally it may destroy hundreds of lives. Neither would it be so great a gain to the godly, as some imagine, always to have their lives spared in times of danger. We have to die some day, Brothers and Sisters, and we have nothing here below which might make us anxious to postpone the hour of our departure. It is as well to die one way as another—at least there is small choice in the modes of death. If one were asked by what death he should glorify God, he might be long in the choosing and would probably choose that which would be most painful.

Some are afraid to go to sea lest they should be drowned and yet there is little reason for the fear. When a captain was asked whether he was not afraid to go to sea he said, “Not at all.” “But your father was drowned, wasn’t he, Captain?” “Yes.” “Your grandfather was drowned?” “Yes.” “Your brothers have been drowned?” “Yes.” “Are you not afraid to go to sea?” “No,” he said, “not at all, for I may ask you the same question. Your father is dead?” “Yes.” “Where did he die?” “In his bed.” “And his father, where did *he* die?” “In his bed.” “And his father?” “In his bed.” “And your brothers, where have they died?” “In their beds.” “Are you not, then, afraid to go to bed?” Certainly we must die *somewhere* or other and we shall not die one single minute before the ordained period!

I am a sufficient believer in predestination to feel sure that every bullet has its billet and that no death can befall the man whom God ordains to live. God has appointed all things and His people are safe everywhere, whether they live or die. “Surely there is no enchantment against Jacob, nor divination against Israel.” The powers of darkness cannot harm us though they put forth all their craft and power! The Lord has declared that he who has made God his refuge shall abide beneath His shadow and, therefore, we may go where duty calls us without trembling and we may die when God bids our spirit return without the slightest fear!

We ask no immunity from death! Why should we be absolved from it? It is better to die than to live full often, inasmuch as it is better to be in Heaven than to remain in banishment below. So there I leave that matter of the non-interposition of God to think very briefly of interpositions which do occur.

II. PROVIDENTIAL INTERPOSITIONS ARE FREQUENT AMONG GOD’S PEOPLE—they can often say, “He sent from above, He took me, He drew me out of many waters.” Divine interpositions come in the way of deliverance from floods of trouble. Have you experienced them? How strikingly has God delivered some of us! What remarkable preservations of life have we enjoyed—not *miraculous*, certainly—but full of wonder for all that! We have as much reason to praise God for our deliverances as if the Laws of Nature had been suspended, for we have been quite as completely preserved. What helps we have had in the hour of sorrow when, one after another, our beloved have been taken from us, or when they have gone to the very edge of the grave and yet have been spared to us!

How often have we been helped in business troubles and saved from impending failure or serious loss! In times of slander, when our character has been belied, how graciously has God brought to light our innocence! I say again, not by *miracle*, but yet very marvelously has our God delivered us! In answer to prayer, God works in His own way for the good of His people without stopping one single wheel of Providence. Without violating one single Law of Nature, God is able to work the same end as we sometimes wish He would work by a miracle! He will not quench the violence of the flame, but yet a precious life shall be snatched from a burning house!

He will not prevent the water from drowning and yet in how many cases in answer to prayer have vessels been saved and the lives of men preserved by unexpected incidents! He will not stop the ordinary run of business, nor alter the way in which the world goes on and yet He knows how to help the poor, to bless the struggling tradesman and to bring up the righteous from deep distress. A miracle is a rough procedure, after all, if I may dare say so, compared with the Lord’s present methods! The grandest achievement of all is for the Lord God to work miraculous results *without* miracles—to produce by common means, in answer to the cry of His servants, that which appears to be impossible without a suspension of natural laws!

See how the Lord allows all the forces of Nature to drive on in their ordinary course and yet the outcome of it all is that His servant is delivered and His prayers answered! God does this by varied ways. We have known some who have been brought out of deep waters by having health suddenly restored to them, or by having the health of those upon whom their maintenance depended renewed. This is God's mercy and let Him be praised for it! Sometimes circumstances have greatly changed—a man has been going downhill for years as to his business, but something quite unexpected has happened and he has just as gradually risen to a position of comfort. My Friends, believe in the unexpected! I was about to utter a paradox and say expect the unexpected! Believe that God will do for you something which you know nothing about!

The Lord always has a plan in reserve. You think He has reached His last and you will be left to perish, but it is not so. At the right moment He will bring forth some new and surprising stroke of wisdom which He did but postpone to the particular moment so that when He performs it and draws His servant out of deep waters, the praise and the glory will the more fully redound to His name! We have known the Lord save His servants in the hour of trouble by touching the hearts of their enemies—those that were most unkind and cruel have suddenly become the most generous and thoughtful! At other times enemies have died or have been put to confusion like the wicked Haman when he plotted the destruction of the Jews. The Lord has hanged up Haman that His chosen might be delivered! Mordecai has gone from the king's gate to the king's house and Haman has ascended from the king's table to the king's gallows!

I cannot instance all the ways in which the Lord makes clear the pathway of His people, but this I know, that often in our lives some of us have had to pause and sing, "He sent from above, He took me, He drew me out of many waters." Some will not see the hand of God, but I guarantee you, Brethren, those who have been delivered out of the deep waters will see it! Their experience teaches them that God is yet among us. Others may talk about "Laws of Nature," as if God were gone to sleep and had left the world wound up like a watch to go without Him—but those who have been in sore affliction and tribulation and have been brought out of it will forever bless and extol Him who is a very present help in trouble!

Yes, my Brothers and Sisters, the way by which we have come is as full of God as this city is full of men! There are deserts which the foot of man has never trod, but there is no wilderness where the foot of God has not been. What do you say, my beloved Friends? You are not fanatics, neither has the enthusiasm of devotion carried you out of your minds, but are you not conscious of distinct Providential deliverances? "Conscious of them," you say, "indeed, if we did not speak of them with joy and thankfulness, the very stones of the street would cry out against us for our wicked silence! Many and many a time has He sent from above and rescued us! We are, like Moses, drawn out of the waters and like he, we would be servants of the Lord."

III. Now, thirdly, INTERPOSITIONS IN MATTERS OF GRACE ARE THE CHIEF OF ALL. As best I can, I should like to conclude with a few words upon this subject. God does not, even to save the souls of His chosen, violate any of His Laws. "The soul that sins, it shall die." "Every transgression shall have its just punishment and reward." Yet the Lord would save His people. How should He make these two things agree—how should He be just and yet the Justifier of the ungodly? It is in the Person of our blessed Lord Jesus Christ that we see how one Law has been made to counteract and yet to honor another—to remove its direful consequence—and yet to make it honorable!

You remember that the law of the Medes and Persians could not be altered—and there was a law made by Ahasuerus that on a certain day the people of all countries might gather themselves together and kill the Jews. Haman had promulgated this royal edict far and wide and the king could not alter it. Mark the wise method by which the cruel law was met—they made another law which was that the Jews might defend themselves—might slay those who tried to kill them! And the Jews could take all their property for a spoil. This met the case, though no edict was revoked.

Now God does not and never will alter His Law that sin must be punished! But forth comes another Law that, inasmuch as the first sin was committed by a *representative* man, a representative man should be permitted to come in and bear the penalty which was a consequence of the sin! This has been done! No Law of God has been broken and yet God's mercy has had free course! Now let us think a minute or two upon this great salvation and how it is described in the text. "He sent from above." Oh, blessed Lord, the whole race of man was sinking in the old vessel of the Covenant of Works which had been cut in pieces by the first sin! They were all going down, en masse, to destruction!

Then You did send from above! But who was He that was sent? Not the brightest of the cherubim nor the chief of the angelic band, but HE came—the Messenger of the Covenant, whom we delight in—the Son of God, the Only-Begotten of the Most High, the brightness of His Father’s Glory! He was the Messiah, the Sent One, and He descended from above that He might work out our redemption! Brethren, let your hearts leap for joy as you behold the Messenger of the Covenant of Grace, even Jesus Christ, the adorable and ever-blessed Son of the Highest!

Now, note the next word, “He took me.” When we had lost all hold on God, then did this blessed Messenger take hold on us. He accepted us as the Father’s gift to Him and accepted a charge as the great Shepherd of the sheep that He would keep and preserve those whom His Father gave Him though they were ready to perish! Then what a hold He took on us! He took not up angels, but He took up the seed of Abraham by becoming a Man! Baby in Bethlehem, Laborer at Nazareth, suffering Man at Gethsemane, You have taken, indeed, a hold on us, such as You would not relax in life or death! “The Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us,” and so being sent from above He took hold upon us.

Then what a wondrous drawing took place after that grip had once been given! He drew us out of many waters, entering into them, Himself, plunging into the rivers of grief and infirmity and then into the waters of the curse, being “made a curse for us.” Descending deep, as it were, into the very depths of Hell to bring up the Lord’s jewels, that they might be delivered from the Pit! Oh, the matchless lifting up which He gave to us when He drew us out of many waters by His own suffering life and agonizing death!

Fix your eyes, Brethren, upon the work of Jesus! See the human race all sinking! Behold how hopeless and helpless it is and see Him descending, walking the waters, snatching with His own right hand sinking men and women from the billows of destruction and landing them on the Rock of Ages, putting a new song into their mouths! As you feel that you are partakers of this deliverance, let each one of you say, “He sent from above, He took me, He drew me out of many waters.” This was the great deed, itself, but, just a minute, I ask you to remember the application of it to your own experience. Do you remember when you felt everything sinking beneath you?

My own self-wreck will help me to describe your experience. I had sailed on gallantly in the good vessel of my own works, hearing music and full of delight, never dreaming of danger! But suddenly the Law of God came along, moving unswervingly in its terrible course and it cut into the vessel of my works, as though it had been vanity itself! Down it began to sink and I with it! I looked around for something I could lay hold upon, but nothing availed. The priest was there and offered me his inventions, but I knew him of old and knew that he would sink as well as I. What, then, could he do for me? Ceremonies were there, but I knew that they prove bubbles to a man who trusts in them. Hopes of salvation by self-mortification were there and the like, but they clearly could not bear the weight of such a sinner as I was.

I sank, I sank, nor had I will or wish to be saved, nor did I struggle for life! Yet Jesus came, whose will of Grace precedes our will, whose purpose of love outruns our desire for salvation. “He took me.” Well do I remember His grasp! He took me and made me more conscious of my danger than I had been before. He took me, by His Holy Spirit, and I knew that He had taken me, for I began to feel His grip tightening upon me! He drew me gradually to look at Him, to trust Him and to leave myself and all my hopes entirely in His hands. Then He drew me right out of the many waters and made my heart sing for joy!

Do you not remember the time with yourself? As you look with wonder upon some friend who has been rescued from the great calamity of this week, I want you to feel that you may look with equal wonder upon *yourself*, for you have experienced a greater rescue! You have been delivered from sinking into the Pit that has no bottom—a sinking down in sin and into the lower depths of corruption! Jesus came from Heaven. He took you, He drew you out of many waters, therefore praise and bless His name! You were too anxious to hope and yet He taught you to hope in His mercy! You were too despairing to struggle, but He made you exercise holy violence to enter the kingdom! You were too weary and despondent to trust, but He led you to faith! His Divine Spirit worked all your works in you and here you are, sitting in this House of Prayer, this morning, to say, “He has delivered my soul from death, my eyes from tears and my feet from falling.”

Now, I should not wonder if since then you have been pretty nearly shipwrecked as to your spiritual hopes and have a second and a third time been rescued! You have begun to grow somewhat cold and you have wandered from the Lord and you have, therefore, dreaded the total destruction of all true religion within your spirit. Then you have cried out in fear, “I have been a hypocrite, or a mere formalist and shall perish, after all.” But when you were ready to give all up under

the temptation of the powers of darkness, the Lord has again restored you! Has He not sent from above and taken you out of the deep, yet again? Yes, blessed be His name, He has sought you and led you back to His ways! If I address a backslider who feels as if he were sinking deeper and deeper, I would pray for him that he may yet know how Christ can save a sinking Peter and bring a runaway Jonah to the shore again.

Last of all, we shall soon come into the many waters of death. Sooner, perhaps, than we think. To some, the stream of death is very shallow. We have known certain of the saints go over dry-shod, singing all the way. They can hardly have been conscious of death, nor have known when they were last on earth and when they were first in Heaven. But there are others who have to cross Jordan at a time when it overflows its banks and, like Christian in the “Pilgrim’s Progress,” they are up to their necks in the stream and need words of comfort. You remember how one said, “Fear not, Brother, I feel the bottom and it is good”? There is a rocky bottom all the way across! No slippery sand nor sucking mud, but sound rock from shore to shore—and however deep it is, it is never so deep as to drown a Believer’s hope nor destroy his soul!

Yet I can imagine the best of saints to be flooded with many troubles in their last hours—physical weakness, depression of spirit, temptations of Satan, family difficulties—all increase the swellings of Jordan. Do you know what will happen? He will send from above! He will take you and He will draw you out of many waters—and you shall rise to Glory! What a Heaven of heavens above others will you feel when you go right up from the depths to the heights! To leap right away from “de profundis,” to, “in excelsis”—from the death-sweat and the expiring faintness to the ecstasy and the ineffable Glory—how transcendent the bliss!

What an exchange it will be, Brothers and Sisters, for those who have grown old and decrepit, or for those who could scarcely say even a *word* to testify their dying faith, to find themselves, all of a sudden, rid of every ache and pain and all their withering flesh—and to be disembodied in perfect liberty, charmed with the Beatific Vision of their Lord from whom they are never to part again! Why, I think we might almost choose the death-road of the two! Some are very fond of expecting that their Lord will surely come in time to prevent their dying. Ah, well, you may be very thankful if it happens, but I do not think it is the way I shall go, nor can I say that I envy you the prospect in which you delight.

In Heaven you will come to us who die and ask us—“What was it to fall asleep in Jesus? What was the feeling of putting off the body? What was the joy of being made like our Covenant Head in death?” I do not say that you will regret that you did not descend into the tomb, but of this I am sure—none of us who shall sleep will think that you had any preference over us!—

*“Where should the dying members rest,
But with their dying Head?”*

If the Master went that way, descending into the sepulcher, and so up by the hill of Resurrection to the golden gate, we will not even envy Enoch and Elijah, though they were permitted to take the reserved route and enter the City by the rear gate! It shall be all well with us if we are resting in Jesus, for at the last He will send from above and take us and draw us out of many waters. To His name be praises! Amen.

Adapted from *The C.H. Spurgeon Collection*, Ages Software, 1.800.297.4307.