

“YOUR ROWERS HAVE BROUGHT YOU INTO GREAT WATERS”

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*“Your rowers have brought you into great waters.”
Ezekiel 27:26.*

THIS was spoken by the Prophet concerning Tyre, that great mercantile city where all the commerce of the East found its outlet towards the West. Tyre, when the Chaldeans invaded Palestine, had greatly rejoiced at the fall of Jerusalem. She said, “Aha, she is broken that was the gates of the people: I shall be replenished now she is laid waste.” It was a cruel and selfish exultation. After a while the city in the sea came to feel the weight of the great oppressor’s arm, for thus said the Lord, “I will bring upon Tyrus, Nebuchadnezzar, king of Babylon, a king of kings, from the north. He shall set engines of war against your walls and with his axes he shall break down your towers.” For 13 years the city endured a siege under Nebuchadnezzar and it was concerning this calamity that the Prophet said, “*Your rowers have brought you into great waters.*” The merchant princes of Tyre had so managed the affairs of the State that they brought the Tyrians into desperate straits. They had incited them to stand out against the great king and they discovered, in due time, that they were striving against a power too strong for them. Their policy had been a mistake. Comparing Tyre to one of its own galleys propelled with oars, the Prophet declares, “Your rowers have brought you into great waters.”

All the glories and the woes of Tyre are now over. “What city is like Tyrus, like the destroyed in the midst of the sea?” That page of history has long ago been turned over to give place to the rise and fall of other cities and empires, but the prophetic expression is still full of power. To many persons in our own day we may well cry with Ezekiel, “Your rowers have brought you into great waters.”

I. First and foremost, this is truly applicable to SINNERS WHO ARE BEGINNING TO TASTE THE RESULT OF THEIR SINS—ungodly persons who have chosen their own ways and followed their own devices—and now, at last, are finding that the way of transgressors is hard. Sinners may go unpunished for many a bright hour of the morning of life, but as the day grows older, the shadows fall and their way is clouded over. I meet with many who may be well assured that God will ultimately punish sin because the first flakes of the endless fire shower have begun to fall upon them and they cannot escape. They are now beginning to reap the first ripe ears of that awful harvest whose sheaves of woe shall fill their bosoms, world without end. In those who sin with the flesh, the result of their vices is seen and felt to a horrible degree *in their own bodies*. Many a man bears in his bones the sins of his youth. Around us are many who already wish that they had never been born because of the condition into which their wantonness has brought them. The sin which at first seemed a dainty luxury, sweet to their palate, has now developed into a corrosive poison in their heart, eating their flesh as with fire and burning up their spirits. Lust was their pilot—the siren of pleasure lured them on and now they are wrecks—breaking to pieces on the rocks. Despondent, ashamed, haunted with nameless terrors, afraid to hope, they dare neither live nor die. They are overcome with alarm as they look forward, for if it is darkness behind and night around, tenfold blackness lies before them by reason of their transgression and their sins. O sinner spent with sin, “Your rowers have brought you into great waters.”

Certain transgressors are beginning to feel the result of wrong-doing *in their circumstances*. They have brought themselves from wealth to poverty by drunkenness, dishonesty, or vice. The owner of a fair estate is compelled to herd with the lowest of the low in a filthy lodging. He who was educated for a profession and is skilled in learned languages—employs his superior knowledge to beg and cheat—and even then remains in loathsome rags. Not even in this world does sin pay its servants good wages! Drunkenness and idleness clothe a man with rags—these are the livery of sin. Those

godly men who spend their lives in the painful business of seeking out the fallen often harrow our feelings with the dread stories of those who are truly prodigals, not merely in parable, but in literal fact, who have wasted their substance in riotous living and now, if it were possible, would be glad to fill their belly with the husks that swine eat and no man gives to them.

Many a broken-down sinner has, in this house, found his way back to the Great Father. Oh, that it may be so during this service! Sorely tossed about in sickness and in need, both of them the result of your sin, you are in a sorry plight at this hour. “Your rowers have brought you into great waters.” You would not take Christ to be your Pilot in your youth—you were too proud to accept your father’s God, your mother’s Savior—you must have your own way and follow your own devices! And now the desperate tugging of your passions have brought you into deep waters, indeed. You said in your pride, “I will not be tied to my mother’s apron strings,” but you are now a captive, fastened with bonds of steel to one who will be no mother to you, but a destroyer! You gave up your boat to pirate rowers and now look where they have brought you! The waters about you are dark and tempestuous and no port is near. One thing you can do, and I would have you do it—warn others lest they come into your place of danger! With broken health and lost estate, at least be humane—when you are most in your misery, call to yourself the young who have not yet known your evil ways and charge them to shun your course! If you cannot be an example, I would use you as a beacon. “Though hand join in hand, yet shall not the wicked be unpunished”—and you are a proof of the same. “Your rowers have brought you into great waters.”

Others who have not yet been afflicted by any outward Providence are beginning to feel the sting of sin upon their conscience. This will, I trust, be used for their good. I trust the Lord has a kind intent towards them and is condemning them in the inward court of conscience that they may not be judged and condemned with the godless world at the Last Great Day. The Lord’s eyes perceive many that once were at ease in their iniquities who are now sorely troubled by their own reflections. Like the troubled sea, they cannot rest. Their memories are constantly casting up the mire and dirt of their former transgressions. There is no peace for them, day or night. They know that they must die. They have also heard of judgment to come—the blast of the trumpet of doom is sounding in their ears and, therefore, they cannot sleep at night, nor be at rest by day. A tempest is hurrying up. Black masses of clouds hang overhead. Thunder mutters from afar and the lightning lights up the sky. Sin is always before them. It casts ashes into their bread and gall into their drink. Their merry comrades cannot make them out, for they were once as wild as any. Men wonder why it is that for them there seems to be no music in the lute, no pleasure in the bowl, no joy in the dance. They know not the voice which cries to the troubled one—“Your rowers have brought you into great waters.”

O Soul, you have now come where your sins compass you about and shut you in on every side! They seemed as if they were all forgotten, like dead men, out of mind, but they have risen again and in their rising you have fallen! As a man pursued by wolves in the steppes of Russia seeks to escape from the hungry pack which hurry on so swiftly, so are you trying to escape from your sins—but all in vain! You hear their howls behind you as they chase you with untiring feet—what can you do? The sins of 20 years ago are upon you! Fierce sins of your hot and youthful blood which seemed so harmless then—they are demons now from which you can not hide! What would you give to forget them? But they will not be forgotten! The devourers are near you; their hot breath comes upon you! Their fangs are in your flesh! They taste your blood! Verily, you have made a poor business of life to become the prey of such horrors! At a time of life when many a Christian man is in full vigor of usefulness, you are worn out and near death—and near Hell! Your sins are upon you. Even now they overtake you and what will you do? O gallant boat of the silken sail and the painted hull, where are you now? “Your rowers have brought you into great waters.”

Listen to me, then, while I speak to you words which may seem harsh, but they are all meant in love to you. Listen, I say, and take warning from your present sorrows.

If the waters are great, today, what will they be before long? If now you cannot bear the wages of sin, what will you do when they are paid to you in full? “What will you do in the swelling of Jordan?” What will you do when they wipe the clammy sweat from your brow and tell you that a few more gasps will send you into eternity? O man, woman, however great the waters are now, they are as *nothing* compared with what they will be at the last! You are only running with the footmen now and yet they weary you! What will you do when you contend with horses? When the Lord shall walk

through the sea with His horses, through the heap of great waters—what will become of you? Your case is lamentable. My heart weeps for you. “Your rowers have brought you into great waters.”

Learn, I pray you, this piece of timely wisdom. Your rowers have brought you into no quiet waters. They have found you no harbors of delight—shall they any longer be your rowers? Do this one thing to your own soul if you have any sense left, or any pity for yourself—cry out against those who are ruining you! Now say, “I will go no further with these rowers. God helping me, the helm shall be reversed.” If such is your resolve and the great Pilot shall come to your help, you will never drink again of the accursed cup and you will shun the company which has lured you to your present wretchedness! Hear me while I cry to you, “Escape for your life! Look not behind you!” for maybe you will never have another hope of escaping—but you will, from this day on, drift from bad to worse, till the worst of all shall come. “Your rowers have brought you into great waters”—have no more to do with them! Oh that the Spirit of the Lord may help you to break the oars and cast the rowers into the sea!

Remember, also, that they have rowed you into the stormy waters, but they cannot row you out of them. You can find no rest by continuing in sin, neither can you save yourself from your present forlorn condition. O man, cry mightily unto God! He will hear you! He has revealed a way of deliverance for you in the Person of His dear Son—all your hope lies there! Have you not heard of Jesus, who can still the wind and bring your vessel into an instant calm? While there is life in you, there is hope in Christ for you! You are not yet in torment—not yet in Hell—still does His good Spirit strive, with the chief of sinners dwell. Therefore, though the sun is gone down for this day, I pray you suffer it not to rise again until you have committed your soul into the hands of your Redeemer! In desperate jeopardy of eternal destruction, cry unto the mighty God for succor and He will make bare His arm and rescue you from your destructions! Despair not! There is a Savior, and a great one, and He has come here to seek and to save that which was lost! Trust in Him who is mighty to save. By the terror of your destruction, I beseech you believe in the great salvation. Cry—

*“Jesus, lover of my soul,
Let me to Your bosom fly,
While the nearer waters roll,
While the tempest still is high!
Hide me, O my Savior, hide,
Till the storm of life is past!
Safe into the haven guide
Oh receive my soul at last.”*

I have spoken very feebly, but I pray the Lord to bless it to every unconverted person within these walls.

II. And now, secondly, I think that I see another ship. It is not black with the grime of the world. It resembles the gilded barge of a mighty prince, but still, for all that, its rowers have brought it into great waters. This represents THE SELF-RIGHTEOUS BROUGHT INTO DISTRESS. Many men are fondly persuaded that either they need no saving or that they can save themselves. Either in whole or in part, their natural goodness, or their benevolent actions, or their careful attention to external religion will secure their safety. They suppose that by going to hear the Gospel, by participating in sacraments, by contributing towards Church work and the like, they will find themselves borne securely towards the desired haven. This ship is rarely built. It resembles that to which Ezekiel likens Tyre—“They have made all your planks of fir trees from Senir: they have taken cedars from Lebanon to make a mast for you. Of the oaks of Bashan have they made your oars; they have made your benches of ivory inlaid in boxwood, from the isles of Kittim. Of fine linen with embroidered work from Egypt was your sail, that it might be to you for an ensign; blue and purple from the isles of Elishah was your awning.” There is no end to the gallant show which self-righteousness can exhibit! No ship of Tyre can excel it.

Yet to this glorious ship a trying voyage is appointed. Alas, my Friend, your rowers have brought you into great waters. I would like you to think of the difficult journey which lies before you. The proposal is that you shall row yourself by your good works across yon sea of sin to the Port of Glory. Before you enter upon a matter, it is well to count the cost. Do you not know that if you are to be saved by obedience to the Law of God, your obedience must be absolutely perfect? If there is a breach of one single commandment, although all the others should be scrupulously kept, yet the Law is broken and the course of it descends. If you have a chain and you break one link, it is of no further use. It is idle to say, “All the other links are strong.” The miner would not risk his life upon a chain with one dangerous link—and the

strength of the whole chain must be measured, not by its strongest, but by its weakest part! Do you think, my Friend, that you can perfectly keep the Law of God? Can you do it as long as you live? I should like you to think what great waters the rowers are proposing to take you into if you are to win salvation by an obedience which shall never fail or falter! You see from Holy Scripture that God gave His Son Jesus Christ to die for us that we might be saved by His Grace. Do you suppose that this gift of Jesus was a superfluity? There would have been no need for that great offering on the part of our Lord Jesus Christ if men can save themselves by their own merits! Calvary is a blot upon the Character of Deity if salvation by self is possible! His own Son put to death without a stern necessity for it were the grossest charge that could be brought against the Great Father! You certainly are attempting a very singular work if you are to perform that which cost the glorious Son of God His life! Great waters, dear Friend—waters too great for your frail vessel.

Look, Sirs, you who have been resting in your own righteousness, have you never once sinned? Take even *today* to pieces—has no evil thought, or wrong desire, or wanton imagination defiled its hours? Have you never spoken a sinful, unkind, untruthful, or proud word? Do you claim to have been absolutely perfect before your Maker from your childhood? Surely, you must have a brow of brass to make such a boast! What does He say to you? “There is not a just man upon earth, that does good, and sins not.” “All we like sheep have gone astray.” “If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us.” Verily, my Friend, “Your rowers have brought you into great waters.” If you are to be saved by your works, look where you are! Any day you may slip and stumble—and then what becomes of all your past life? For, “When the righteous man turns away from his righteousness and commits iniquity, all his righteousness that he has done shall not be mentioned: in his trespass that he has trespassed, and in his sin that he has sinned, in them shall he die.” If this is your style of standing before God, it is a poor standing, indeed! Can you ever be sure that you will be safe in an hour’s time? Come, my Friend, can you be sure that you have *done* enough, *felt* enough, *prayed* enough, *given* enough alms and gone a sufficient number of times to the Meeting House, or to the Church? Can you be sure that it is well with you even *now*? And if your faith is in a *priest*, can you be sure that he who baptized you and confirmed you had the apostolic succession? Can you be sure that he that gave you the sacrament was truly ordained? When you lie dying, a thousand questions will haunt you! You will have to ask yourself about this, that and the other—and on your present way of going to work you can never be sure!

The religion of self-righteousness never proposes such a thing as security. It does not give the quiet of faith, much less the deep repose of full assurance. “Your rowers have brought you into great waters.” Uncertainty follows uncertainty and the wind of fear tosses the billows of doubt. You will have to slave your fingers to the bone with incessant efforts and then never have done. Your life will be one perpetual treadmill and you will never be an inch the higher. You might as well attempt to sail across the Atlantic on a sere leaf of autumn as hope to reach Heaven by your own works! You have no good works—you are incapable of good works! Your motive is tainted and it pollutes all you do. Self-salvation is your aim and, therefore, you are serving yourself and not your God. The *motive* is the essence of the deed. Now, the grand motive which makes virtue, virtue, is absent in the selfish heart. The motive of love is necessary to acceptance with God and you know nothing of it. As of now all your labor comes of a joyless servitude—it is slave’s work for a slave’s wage—and the wage you will get, because you are a sinner—will be no more than death when all is done. “Your rowers have brought you into great waters.”

I remember when I reached those same terrible seas. I used, as a youth, to think, sometimes, that I was as good as other lads and, perhaps, I was, for I had not fallen into the grosser vices. I fancied that if *anybody* was saved by a moral life, I might be. But oh, when God lifted the veil of my nature and I saw what my heart really was, I sang another tune! I had been down into the cellar of my heart a great many times in the dark and it seemed pretty fair, but when the Holy Spirit opened the shutters and let in the light, what loathsome abominations I saw there! My life, too, no longer appeared to be the goodly thing I had imagined it. Ah, no, my comeliness was turned into corruption! Let but a man get the Light of God streaming into His soul, convicting Him of sin, of righteousness and of judgment to come—and all reliance upon self, in any form, will seem to him to be the most hateful of crimes! What crime is there that is more like the pride of Lucifer than the pride of a wretched rebel who talks about *meriting* Heaven and finding entrance among glorified spirits without washing his robes in the blood of Jesus—under the pretence that they were never foul? Does he imagine that he will be admitted to the courts of the Eternal King to sing his *own* praises and thus insult the Lord? While oth-

ers come there through rich and free and Sovereign Grace and, therefore, rapturously adore almighty love, is he to reach the blissful shores to magnify his own excellence?

I tell you, Sir, that if you have put to sea in the boat of self-righteousness, however strong the rowers who tug those three banks of oars and make the vessel leap through the waves, the day shall come when you will hear a voice across the waters crying, “Your rowers have brought you into great waters: the east wind has broken you in the midst of the seas.” The voyage is too great for you! Shipwreck is sure! May God give you Grace to shun the attempt! Flee from your own works to Christ’s work! Place your trust where God has placed His love, namely, in the Lord Jesus! Then shall you have good works, indeed, but they shall be the *cargo* which you carry, not the *ship* which carries *you*. They shall then be grounded upon the motive of gratitude and not of selfishness. And then shall real virtue be possible to you—virtue based on love to God. When you are delivered from your sin and safe in the righteousness of Christ, then will you say, as each Believer does when his heart is warm with affection—

*“Loved of my God, for Him again
With love intense I burn!
Chosen of Him before time began,
I choose Him in return.”*

Thus have we seen two gallant ships in grievous straits and we have hearkened to counsels by which we may avoid their dangers. May God bless my simple words!

III. But now, very briefly, there is a third case, THE ERRORIST IN HIS DIFFICULTIES. This is a very common sight in these wayward times. I might say to many a man who has ventured out to sea under the strong impulse of curiosity, trusting to his own proud intellect, “Your rowers have brought you into great waters.” The only safe course for a thoughtful man is to trust in God and to accept the Scriptures as Infallible Truth of God. There is our anchor! Every mind needs a fixed point—we must have Infallibility somewhere—my Infallible Guide is Holy Scripture. I know of no other anchor. The Revelation of God to man, in the Person of the Son of God, even Christ Jesus, is the one and only hope of men. And the Word of the Lord in which we have the Divine testimony to the appointed Savior is our oracle and court of appeal.

But there are men who cannot abide this and, first of all, I think that they begin to get into great waters *when they resolve to be guided by their own judgment* and their own intellect, without submitting to the teachings of Christ. It is proud and dangerous work to set up to be your own guide. You are undertaking a very large responsibility when you refuse to sit at Jesus’ feet and prefer to assume the teacher’s chair. If you will rely upon your own wisdom, wit and will, you choose a highland road—rough, rugged and full of perils. You cast away the possibility of that sweet peace which comes of reposing on superior wisdom. You miss, in fact, that joy of faith, that sweet rest of mind which is the reward of the lowly of heart. Simple trust in Christ is, to me, the wellspring of comfort. To believe because the Lord speaks is rest to my heart! I could not live except as I leave questions with God and accept His Word instead of all reasoning.

O my wise and thoughtful Friend, do you know what will soon happen to you? You will probably fall under the domination of another’s intellect—you will become the shadow of some greater man. The man who will be guided by nobody is usually guided by someone more foolish or more knavish than himself. I have seen both cases. I have seen a man of superior abilities crouching at the feet of a semi-idiot who seemed, to the other, to be a profound mystic! And I have also seen the deep, designing man of brazen impudence towering above an abler man and cowing him into submission. He swore that he would be independent and to be so he cast off all old beliefs and fettered himself to foolish lies. He would not stay at home with his father to partake of the joyous heritage, for he longed for freedom. Alas, before long a master sent him into his fields to feed swine. He could not believe the simplicities of the Truth of God, but now he groans beneath the monstrosities of superstition!—

*“Hear the just law, the judgment of the skies!
He that hates Truth shall be the dupe of lies,
And he that will be cheated to the last,
Delusion, strong as Hell, shall bind him fast.”*

The man has given up the old doctrine because it was difficult and has accepted new doctrine which is 10 times more difficult! He would not be credulous and now he is a hundred times more so. Creation staggered him and he tries to believe in evolution! Faith in Jesus seemed hard, but he must now accept Agnosticism. The difficulties of unbelief are 10

times greater than the difficulties of faith. We may require a great stretch of faith to accept all that the Holy Spirit teaches, but once believe in His faithful Word and you have found a way of life! If you do not do this, you have continually to enlarge the gullet of your credulity and remain forever receptive of mere wind which can never fill the mind. Unbelief calls you to go from improbability to impossibility, from extravagance to romance, from romance to raving! I appeal to candid persons who have ventured from the moorings of faith to sport upon the waves of modern speculation, whether they are not conscious of a great loss? When faith evaporates, there is a speedy departure of spiritual power. The new notions intoxicate, but they do not sustain. The near approach to God is gone when the old faith in the Atonement is shaken—and the enjoyment of hallowed communion ceases when the din of perpetual controversy frightens away the dove of peace!

I have heard it remarked that the modern “apostles,” when they preach, often discourse very prettily—for they are clever men—but all sense of enjoyment of what they preach is lacking. They are not, themselves, feeding upon what they hand out. There is no beaming light upon their faces as of men who are enamored by the doctrines they proclaim! Small delight can their teachings cause them and you see that it is so. They are not heralds arrayed to adorn a banquet, but surgeons gathered to an operation! Well may they be without enjoyment, for there is nothing to enjoy. Who smiles as he sits down to a meatless, marrowless bone? Who rejoices as he lifts a shining cover which has nothing beneath it? In the dogmas of modern thought, there is not enough mental meat to bait a mousetrap! As to food for a soul, there is none of it—an ant would starve on such small grain! No Atonement, no regeneration, no eternal love, no Covenant—what is there worth thinking upon? “They have taken away my Lord and I know not where they have laid Him.”

They have taken away the light, the life, the love, the liberty of Free Grace and they have given us nothing to replace them but pretty toys which they, themselves, will break before many days are past. O Sirs, it is all very fine to be amused in the heyday of our health with “bubbles from the brunnen” of superior intellects, but times will come when the soul will have to do business on great waters and then it will need substantial help. When a man comes face to face with eternity, he demands certainties about which his heart has no shadow of question.

I have lain by the hour together consciously looking into death in as bitter suffering of body and mind as a man might well endure and I tell you nothing will then satisfy the heart but the atoning Sacrifice! Nothing will avail to clear the sky but a distinct view of Jesus as a Substitute and a vicarious Sacrifice for human sin! Nothing cheers me at such times but the Eternal Covenant, ordered in all things and sure; promises founded upon the faithfulness of God; Grace given by the Sovereignty of God to guilty and undeserving men! You may do with lighter things, but I must have these and nothing less! Grace, with Omnipotence and Immutability to back it, will bear my spirit up and nothing else! But if you will let go the old Gospel. If you will go from one new theory to another—after a short time you will come into misery of the direst order! I have seen men give up, first of all, the communion of saints. Then all belief in the Word of God. After that, they have gone into the common pleasures of worldlings and so they have drifted and drifted till, at length, the seat of the scorner, the song of the drunkard, or the stews of the unchaste have afforded them carrion suited to their taste. How many who only meant to go a little from the old ways of the Truth of God have gone too far aside even for themselves? Truly, my speculative Friend, “Your rowers have brought you into great waters.”

I am not intending to follow you. You are so wise that I am satisfied to be a fool, because I would wish to be the reverse of what you are. I am content to be weak, for your strong mind is bringing you small profit. I would not, at any time, rest my soul’s eternal hope upon a theory, or upon the workings of my own brain. I need a firmer foundation. On the Truths of God revealed in this Book, on the clear and certain verities of Holy Scripture I dare risk my soul for time and for eternity, without the shadow of a doubt! I would earnestly entreat you to do the same, lest, by-and-by, your rowers bring you into great waters!

Why, to me it seems very great waters to be brought into to be forced to say that I know nothing! One walking with me observed, with some emphasis, “I do not believe as you do. I am an Agnostic.” “Oh,” I said to him “that is a Greek word, is it not? The Latin word, I think, is *ignoramus*.” He did not like it at all. Yet I only translated his language from Greek to Latin! These are strange waters to get into, when all your philosophy brings you is the confession that you know *nothing* and the stolidity which enables you to glory in your ignorance! As for those of us who rest in Jesus, we know and have believed something, for we have been taught eternal truths by Him who cannot lie! Our Master was not known to say, “It may be,” or, “It may not be,” but He had an authoritative style and testified, “Verily, verily, I say

unto you.” Heaven and earth shall pass away, but not one jot or tittle of what He has taught us shall cease to be the creed of our souls! We feel safe in this assurance but should we quit it, we should expect, soon, to find ourselves in troubled waters.

IV. Now I pass on to dwell for a moment upon another sight which is as sad as any of the others—perhaps more sad. Behold THE BACKSLIDER FILLED WITH HIS OWN WAYS. O wanderer from the Lord your God, “Your rowers have brought you into great waters.” I have seen and talked with some to whom this text has become an awful truth. There are some here, tonight, who, if I brought them upon this platform and they had the courage to speak, could unfold a tale of measureless misery which they have brought upon themselves by departing from the Lord! Look at yonder woman! She once rejoiced in the Gospel as one that finds great spoil. It is 30 years ago, but at that time she knew the Truth of God and loved it. She was the joy of the pastor who brought her to Christ, for she was earnest, intense, devoted. There were years of gracious walking and then there came a temptation. She grew cold in heart. She was poor. She was infatuated. She turned aside—she was wretched and found comfort in the glass. Drop the veil. It is many years ago since that fall and she plunged on in suffering, misery and sin such as I will not attempt to describe. She became a mere wreck! Death stared her in the face. She returned to us and said, “Let me be taken into the Church before I die, for I have never lost, after all, the life of God in my soul but, oh, I stepped aside and from that day sorrow has pursued me. Restore me to the Church, for I am, by Grace, restored to God.” As you looked at her, you said, “Poor weather-beaten boat! It was an ill day for you when your rowers brought you into these great waters.”

You know how it begins—first of all, that holy, joyful walk with God is lost. You used to sing from morning to night for joy of heart, for, like Enoch, you walked with God! Alas, that music came to a close. It did not seem much—merely to lose rapturous enjoyment—but it was much in itself and it meant more. Then there came a loss of relish for the means of Grace. The services were long and the ministry grew dull. The Prayer Meeting was not worth attending and weeknight services were too much of a good thing. Secret prayer was neglected and the Bible was unread. The forms of religion were kept up longer than the enjoyment of it, but there was no life, no power in them. After that there came a general fault-finding with Brothers and Sisters in Christ—a constant quibbling at this and that. Nothing was good enough. The soul was drifting and it fancied that the Church and the world were no longer what they were, just as men in a boat fancy that the shore is moving. How many endeavor to be blind to their own declensions by pretending to see fault and falsehood in other people! Then there came a distaste for Christian company—godly people were too commonplace and prosaic. The love of something “brighter” called them away from solid conversation. Occasionally they were found in places doubtfully virtuous and unquestionably irreligious. Songs other than those of Zion began to be relished and teachings not of the Bible were listened to.

All the while there was an inward unrest and there was a yearning of the spirit for better things. The man felt, every now and then, that he was losing sight of shore and floating into dangerous places. He was uneasy as to where the currents would carry him and he did not feel safe under his new pilot. Then on a black day there were rocks ahead—rocks from which, in former years, his vessel had steered clear with ease. And now a current and a wind drove the ship that way and before he was well aware of it, the man was wrecked! To quit our figure, the sin which the man once hated he now played with. He did not mean to yield, but he gave way a little and soon became the slave of appetite. He that sat at the sacramental table was now to be seen intoxicated. She that would have communed only with believers in Christ was now found in very dubious society.

At last it went further—it came to actual and open sin—and ruin followed. I cannot tell how long that sinner may remain in his sin. How long David continued impenitent I need not mention, but oh that he had never fallen into it! Oh that he had never idled that day away upon his bed so as only to rise at eventide to see a sight that led him to rush head-long into foul transgression! O Brothers and Sisters, when you begin to get a little away from Christ, you do not know how far you may yet go, nor how soon you may commit the grossest crimes! There may be some here, tonight, who once were preachers of the Gospel, or earnest Sunday school teachers, or Christian women devoted to the cause of God, but now, alas, they are separated from the fellowship of the Church, aliens from the commonwealth of Israel, outcasts from the communion of saints!

O Friend, “Your rowers have brought you into great waters.” Oh that He would come who owns your boat, who shed His blood for you! Oh that He would step into your vessel and take the helm and turn you around, tonight, by a

great stroke of His almighty Grace, and turn your head to the Port of Peace! Do you ask, “Will He receive me again?” Listen to His voice! He says to you, “Turn, O backsliding children, says the Lord; for I am married unto you.” Take with you words and come to Him at once, for He is ready to receive you. Do not linger! But O backslider in heart, before you become filled with your own ways, come home, come home and say, “Return unto your rest, O my Soul.” Remember that if you are a child of God you will never be happy in sin! You are spoiled for the world, the flesh and the devil. In the day when you were regenerated there was put into you a vital principle which can never die nor be content to dwell in the dead world. You will *have to come back* if, indeed, you belong to the family—prodigal as you are, you are still a child! Though you return with every bone broken, you will *have* to return!

He that is married to you has not forgotten the marriage bond. Though you have forsaken Him and defiled yourself with many lovers, yet it is written, “He hates putting away.” He cannot endure divorce! His almighty love will win you back. He cannot and He *will not give you up*. Read those memorable passages in Jeremiah and Ezekiel, where the Holy Spirit uses that simile which I scarcely dare use tonight, where the most defiled and corrupt of adulterous souls are still bid to come back to their first husband because the marriage bond still holds good and the Lord will neither let them go nor suffer them to continue in sin. “Your rowers have brought you into great waters.” Oh for a steersman to guide you into port! Return, return! I leave my text and those to whom it applies with the God of all Grace. May He bless you all, for Christ’s sake! Amen.

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