

Labor In Vain

by C.H. Spurgeon

C.H. Spurgeon teaches that all human efforts to attain salvation apart from faith in Christ are futile, emphasizing the necessity of trusting solely in Jesus for eternal life.

Scripture: Jonah 1:12-13, John 3:7, Romans 3:20, Hebrews 7:25, Psalm 22:1

Topics: "Salvation", "Human Effort", "Faith in Christ"

Description

In 'Labor In Vain,' C.H. Spurgeon expounds on the biblical story of Jonah to reveal the futility of human efforts to attain salvation apart from faith in Christ. He vividly illustrates how moral reform, religious rituals, and intellectual assent cannot bring peace or eternal life. Spurgeon passionately calls listeners to abandon self-reliance and rest solely on the sovereign grace of Jesus for true deliverance and spiritual calm.

Transcript

"Jonah said unto them, Take me up and cast me forth into the sea; so shall the sea be calm unto you: for I know that for my sake this great tempest is upon you. Nevertheless the men rowed hard to bring it to the land. But they could not: for the sea worked and was tempestuous against them." Jonah 1:12,13.

THESE mariners manifested most commendable humanity. They were not willing, even though it were to preserve their own lives, to cast overboard an innocent man. Therefore they first used their best endeavors. And when these failed they made a solemn appeal to God, entreating Him not to lay upon them innocent blood—and then, since necessity has no law, Jonah, as a last resource was given up to the boisterous element, but not till every effort had been made to save him. We should be very careful of human life, doing nothing which even indirectly may destroy or injure it.

And if we should be jealous over life, how much more anxious should we be concerning men's souls! And how watchful lest we should do anything by which the least of the human family may have his eternal interests endangered by our example or teaching! God give us Divine Grace, like these mariners, to row hard that if possible we may bring the ship to land laboring that none around us may be left to perish.

I shall not, however, dwell upon that aspect of the text. Our Savior selected Jonah as one of His peculiar types— "There shall no sign be given," said He, "to the men of this generation but the sign of the Prophet Jonah." We believe, therefore, that we are not erring if we translate the details of the history of Jonah into spiritual illustrations of man's experience and action with regard to Christ and His Gospel.

We have before us a picture of what most men do before they will resort to God's remedy. That remedy is here most fairly imaged in the deliverance of the whole ship's company by the sacrifice of one on their behalf.

I. Our first observation is that SINNERS, WHEN THEY ARE TOSSED UPON THE SEA OF CONVICTION, MAKE DESPERATE EFFORTS TO SAVE THEMSELVES. The men rowed hard to bring the ship to land. The Hebrew is they "dug" hard, sending the oars deep into the water with much exertion and small success. The tempest so tossed the sea about that they could not row in a good and orderly manner. But they desperately tugged at the oars, which the towering waves rendered useless by too deep a digging.

Straining every sinew they labored by violence to get the ship in safety to the haven. Brethren, no word in any language can express the violence of earnest action with which awakened sinners strive and struggle to obtain eternal life. Truly, if the kingdom of God were in the power of him that wills and him that runs, they would possess it at once! Since they struggle, however, in an unlawful manner, the crown of victory will never be awarded them. They may kindle the fire and rejoice in the sparks, but thus says the Lord, "This shall you have of My hand: you shall lie down in sorrow."

Let us notice some forms of the fleshy energy of men straining after self-salvation. The most usual is moral reformation. We have seen the drunkard, when conscience has been awakened, renounce his cups altogether. He has gone further than temperance and has espoused total abstinence. And proceeding further still, it often happens that in the excess of zeal, he vomits forth furious words against all who go not the same length of abstinence as himself.

Yonder man was given up to blasphemy, but now an ill word never comes from his tongue—and he is therefore content with himself because he no longer curses God. Another has followed an ill trade, or has been in the habit of neglecting Sunday worship. Conscience has mercifully led him to give up his ill connections and attend a place of worship. Is not this well? It is, indeed, well. But it is not enough! It is marvelous how far men will push their reforms. And yet how little solid peace such purging can secure. For what is the sinner after his reformation but the blackamoor washed clean, a blackamoor still?

I would have the Ethiopian clean by all manner of means. But I would not let him fancy that the soap and the niter will make him white. I would have the leopard tamed and caged, but this will not remove his spots. Moral reforms are excellent in themselves, but they are dangerous if we rest in them. Let even a corpse be washed, but let no man dream that the most careful washing will restore it to life. "You must be born again" rings out the death knell of all salvation by human effort. Unless reforms are founded in regeneration, they are baseless things which fail in the end for want of foundation. They are deceptive things, affording a transient hope, which soon, alas, must melt away.

Ah, my Hearer, you may go on improving and reforming, but all your present and future amendments can never wipe out the old score of sin. There stands the black catalog of your sins, engraved as in eternal brass! The gloomy record remains unaltered and unalterable by any deeds of yours. Something more potent than your tears and change of life must take away the sins of your departed years. Beware, then, of thinking that you are getting the ship to land—no matter how hard you row with these oars of human resolution.

Others add to their reformation a superstitious regard to the outwards of religion. According to the sect with which they unite, they become excessively religious. They reverence every nail of the Church door and every panel of the pulpit. There is not a brick in the aisle which is not sacred to them, nor even tile on

the roof! Every rubric, every "Amen," every vestment and candlestick has to them a world of sanctity about it. They are not content with the ordinary days of worship, but the Church bell rings every morning. And well it may, for if men are to earn salvation in God's House, they had need be there all day and all night, too!

Even in a Protestant Church, men row very hard with multitudinous observances and superstitious performances, but when you get into the Romish Church, the labor in vain comes to a climax! There are vows of poverty, celibacy, silence, passive obedience and a thousand other tortures! If the Moloch whom they worship is not satisfied he ought to be. We heard but the other day of a gentleman giving up all his goodly heritage, selling his broad acres and pouring all the purchase money into the coffers of the monks and priests in order that at last by rowing hard in this way he might get the ship to land.

It is remarked of the Hindus that they give vastly more to their idols than we bestow upon the cause of God and I suppose it is true—but then they also are rowing hard to get the ship to land. All they do is for themselves. Self is always a mighty power in the world. Do but teach men that they can gain their own salvation by their own doings and mortifications and offerings and I would expect to see the treasury filled! I would expect to hear the whip constantly going upon the shoulders. But I should despair of seeing anything like holiness surviving in the land. Superstition is hard rowing but the ship will not come to the land by it. Men invent ceremony after ceremony. There is this pomp and that show—this gaudy ornament and that procession. But the whole matter ends in outward display, no secret soul-blessing results flow from there. Priests and their votaries may go on piling up human inventions ad infinitum, but they will forever fail to ease the conscience, or give rest to a disturbed soul. Man's awful necessities crave something more than the husks of superstition!

You will find another form of the same thing among ourselves. Many persons row hard to get the ship to land by a notional belief in orthodox doctrine. This superstition is harder to deal with, but quite as dangerous as the belief in good works. It is quite as legal an idea for me to think to be accepted by believing good doctrine as to expect to be pardoned for doing good works. Yet we have scores of people who, if they can get hold of the Calvinistic creed at the right end—if they become masters of it and know how to argue against Arminianism—if they become not only sound Calvinists but a little sounder still, having not only the sixteen ounces to the pound but two or three ounces over and above, so as to make them ultra-Calvinistic—why then they fancy that all must be well!

"I never can hear a preacher," this man will say, "who is not sound. I can tell at once when there is a grain of free will in the sermon." This is all very well, but he who boasts thus may be no better than the devil! No, he may not be so good, for the devil believes and trembles—but these men believe and are too much hardened in their own conceit to think of trembling. Away with the idea that believing sound doctrine and chaining ourselves to a cast-iron creed is vital godliness and eternal life! Orthodox sinners will find that Hell is hot and that their knowledge of predestination will not yield a cooling drop to their parched tongues.

Condemning other people—cutting off the saints of God right and left—is but poor virtue and to have these blessed doctrines in the head while neglecting them in the heart is anything but a gracious sign. If you can "a hair divide between the west and north-west side," do not therefore fancy that your fine gifts and profound orthodoxy will ensure you an entrance into the kingdom of Heaven. Ah, you may row with those oars, but you will not get the ship to land—you must be saved by Sovereign Grace through the operation of the Holy Spirit upon the heart—or you will not be saved at all. As it is not by doing that we are saved, neither is it by subscribing to creeds. There is something more than this needed before the ship can reach

the port.

Perhaps, in this congregation, we have other subtle methods of endeavoring to do the same thing. The pastor has noticed that many are resting upon their own incessant prayers. Ah, my poor Hearer, you know your need of something, you can hardly tell what. You have heard the subject of salvation explained to you a hundred times and now when it comes to the pinch you do not understand it after all. I thank God that you have learned how to pray—that your sighs and cries and groans come up before Him. But I sorrow because you trust in your prayers and rest in them. Remember that you will no more be saved for the sake of your prayers than for the sake of your good works.

If your knees become hard as the knees of St. James are said to have been—hard like the camel's through long kneeling—and if with the Psalmist you could say, 'My throat is dried, my eyes fail,' yet all this, if you look to it and do not look to Christ, will never avail you. I knew what it was for months to cry out to God and to find the heavens above me as brass, because I had not understood clearly the soul-quickenings words, "Believe and live," but dreamed that by praying I could get myself into a suitable state to receive mercy, or perhaps move the heart of God towards me!

Whereas that heart needed no moving towards me, it was full of love from before the foundation of the world. Pray, my dear Brethren. Let me never discourage you in that. But do let me beg you not to sit still, or recline upon your prayers, for if you get no further than your prayers, you will never get to Heaven. There is more wanted than crying to God! More wanted than earnest desires, however passionately they may be breathed. There must be faith in Jesus or else you will row hard with your prayers, and you will never bring the ship to land.

Then there are others who are toiling by—I scarcely know how to describe it—a sort of mental torture. Oh, the many who say, "If I could feel as I ought to feel. O, Sir, my heart is as hard as a nether millstone. And yet I do not feel that it is hard—I wish I did. I would give my eyes if I could repent. I would give my right arm if I could but weep for sin! I would be satisfied to be a beggar, or to lie rotting in a dungeon if I could but feel that I was fit to come to the Savior! But, alas, I feel nothing! If I did but feel my unfitness—did but know my own unworthiness—I should have hope. But I am made of such Hell-hardened steel that neither terrors or mercies can move me. O, that I could repent! O, that this rock could give forth streams like that Rock which Moses smote in the wilderness of old! O, that I could but bring my heart to melt into something like desires after God and Christ! Oh, I am everything but what I should be!"

Now, my dear Hearer, you will row very hard in this way before you will ever come to land, for self-righteousness lies at the bottom of all this. You want to save your heart from hardness and then come to Jesus, which is much as to say you wish to save yourself and then come to Him to put the finishing stroke upon you. You have a secret attachment to your own goodness or you would not be so eager to compass a fitness—you should at once do as you are bid and rest alone on Jesus. Your business is not with self, but with Jesus! With Jesus, just as you are. However hard your heart may be—however destitute of feeling you may have become—this, though it should be subject for lamentation, should never keep you from resting in Him who is able to save to the uttermost them that come unto God by Him.

I tell you, your trying to get your heart into a right state, your trying to repent, your trying to be humble is all labor in vain. It is all going the wrong way to work. Your business is with Christ! He can soften, cleanse and sanctify, but you can do none of these, try as you will. Come as you are to my Lord Jesus, hard-hearted and all, and the sea shall soon be calm for you. While you row with your own oars, the sea will only work

and be the more tempestuous.

Various are the shapes which this carnal energy assumes. I have met with many who are in this kind of case. They are constantly starting objections to their own salvation and trying to answer them. They have comfort for a moment and they say, "Yes, this is very sweet, but"—and then they will spend a week or two in trying to split up that but. When they are rid of this but, a mercy will come to them from another quarter and they are sure to meet it with, "Ah, blessed be God for that, but." They are always pulling away at these buts.

These big waves come sweeping up to the side of their vessel and they try to dig their oars into them. Friend, if you are never saved until you, an unpardoned sinner, have answered all objections, you will never be saved because there are a thousand objections to the salvation of any man which can only be met by one argument and that is the blood of Jesus. If you will go here and there seeking answers to the devil's suggestions of unbelief you may travel the whole world and end your fruitless task in despair.

But if you will come to Jesus, if you will see Him like another Jonah thrown out of the ship for your sake. If you will but see Him lost that you may be saved, then a peace which passes all understanding shall keep your heart and mind by Christ Jesus.

II. We will now take the second point. Like these mariners, THE FLESHY EFFORTS OF AWAKENED SINNERS MUST INEVITABLY FAIL. The text says, "The men rowed hard to bring it to the land. But they could not." With all man's rowing after mercy and salvation, he can never find it by his own efforts. For this good reason, first of all, that it is contrary to God's Law for a sinner to get comfort by anything he can do for and by himself. Here is the law—"By the works of the Law there shall no flesh living be justified."

That rule, then, fixed and fast as the laws of Nature, shuts out forever all hope of the attainment of joy and peace by anything that we can do, or be, or feel—for all these the Law already claims of us. How mad then will it be on our part if we run counter to a Divine Law! Success is impossible in so perverse a course. I do well, therefore, if I discourage all the efforts of awakened consciences to find peace anywhere except in the work of Christ. Let a man labor ever so earnestly, yet if he goes against the laws of Nature, you know his labor is lost.

Here is an oven to be warmed for hungry persons need bread. See the workers yonder, how they toil, bringing snow with all their might to heat the oven. "Well," you say, "do not discourage them. Do not discourage their earnest activity. It is a pity when you see people really determined to do anything, to discourage their efforts." Ah, it is a pity, indeed, except when these efforts are foolish. If I see them bringing snow to heat an oven I know they will never do it, work as hard as they may.

And when sinners bring their own works to yield them spiritual comfort, I know that they are spending their labor for that which profits not and I must and will discourage them! Some years ago certain persons engaged in a speculation to sink a coal mine in a part of England where coal was never found. Prospectuses were issued. Directors obtained. And shareholders duped! And the workmen began to sink their shaft. Now it was absolutely certain—any geologist could have told them so—that they would not find coal, let them dig to doomsday.

Suppose you and I had gone there and seen them digging and had laughed at them, or told them it was all of no avail? Wiseacres might have replied, "You ought not to discourage coal mining, you ought not to discourage men who are working so very hard." I would say, "I would not discourage coal mining in any

place where there is coal to be had. But for these poor souls to throw away their sweat and their money for that which is not coal—I will discourage them in that insane enterprise and think I do them good service."

When we see men struggling after eternal life through their own efforts, we know eternal life is not to be had there. We are glad that they are awakened to anything like effort, for anything is better than spiritual sloth—but we are grieved to see them laboring in the very fire, toiling where success can never crown their endeavors. There is no salvation by the works of the Law—why then look for it there? If you dash your head against the law of Nature, the law of Nature will not change for you. And if you labor in opposition to the irreversible Law of God, you will pay the penalty of it in your utter failure.

The ancients fabled that it was one of the tortures of Hell to which the daughters of Danaus were condemned, that they should fill a tub without a bottom with buckets full of holes. Behold the picture of the self-righteous man's undertaking! He may labor, he may toil, but he is filling a bottomless tub with leaky buckets. And work as he may, though he drop down dead in the attempt, success is impossible. O that he knew it to be so and would trust in the Lord Jesus! Besides this, the man cannot succeed in obtaining salvation by his own efforts because in what he is doing he is insulting God! He is casting dirt in the face of Christ! He is denying the whole testimony of the Holy Spirit.

Ah, my Hearer, if you could save yourself, why was it necessary that Christ should die for you? If your prayers could avail, why did He sweat great drops of blood? Why, Man, if there were any merit in your mortification, or your reformation, what need that the Prince of Life and Glory should veil Himself in ignominy and suffer a death of shame? You do, in fact, say by your fleshly attempts, I want no Savior, I can save myself! You do, in fact, scoff at the great Atonement which God has made in the Person of Christ!

This insult will ruin your soul, except you turn from it. Repent of it, I pray you. Humble yourself and receive Jesus' finished work. If scorning the Jordan, Naaman had gone to Abana and Pharpar, he might have washed not only seven times but seventy times seven! He might have earnestly persevered in the constant immersion, but he would have remained a leper to his dying day. If you scorn the Atonement and neglect God's great command to believe and live. If you go about to try and feel, or be, or do, you will use these Abanas and Pharpars to your own damnation! And to your own salvation never.

I pray you, do not insult God by looking for balm in Gilead, or for a physician there. There is no balm in Gilead, there never was any. There is no physician there, or else the daughter of my people would long ago have been healed. Men would long ago have saved themselves. You must look higher than the Gilead of human energy. You must look higher than earth's physicians. You must look to the hills where comes our Help, the great mountains of a Savior's work and merit!

There are many other reasons why it is impossible that a man can ever get comfort in the way of works and feelings. The principal one I will mention is because that is the way of the curse. He who is under the Law is under the curse. So long as I stick to the Law, do what I may, I am under the curse of the Law and consequently under the curse. And how can I expect in the way of the curse to find the eternal blessing? Oh, folly, to choose the way of the curse as the way of blessing! But the best proof of it all is experience. Ask either saint or sinner and you shall find that peace was never obtained in the way of the flesh. Turn to the Christian and he will tell you, "Therefore being justified BY FAITH, we have peace with God."

He will tell you that when he turns away from faith and looks to himself his darkness begins at once. He will assure you that he never walks in perfect light and true comfort except when he keeps his eyes fast

fixed upon the great Sacrifice of Calvary. I know, Brethren, whenever I am dull and drooping as to my eternal interests, it is always because I have thought more of my graces than of Christ's Grace, or more of the Spirit's work in me than of the finished work of Christ on my behalf. There is no living happily but by depending wholly upon Christ. A sinner resting upon his Savior as his only hope is blest.

Now, if this is the experience of all saints, and if no sinner living will dare to tell you that he can get his conscience quiet by his own works—why do any of you try? Heaven bears witness that salvation by faith is certain—Hell bears witness that works do but ruin us. O, hear the double testimony and lay hold upon eternal life through the Person of Christ Jesus! O my dear Friend, if you are really panting for salvation, go not round and round these dreary performances of your own doings! It must all end in misery, disappointment and despair. "They rowed hard to bring it to land. But they could not."

All human work which does not begin and end in the Lord Jesus must be a failure. All your works have been failures with you up to the present and so it will be to the end of the chapter. Give it up and God help you to try His method, for it is sure and efficacious.

III. Now, with very great brevity, I will bring you to the third point of the sermon which is that THE SOUL'S SORROW WILL CONTINUE TO INCREASE SO LONG AS IT RELIES UPON ITS OWN EFFORTS. What is the effect of all that the creature does before it believes in Christ? It may be overruled for good, but much of its effect is mischievous. The good effect which flows from it lies in this—the more a man strives to save himself, the more convinced will he become of his own impotence and powerlessness.

I thought that I could turn to God whenever I pleased till I tried to turn to Him. I thought repentance a very easy thing till I began to repent. I dreamed that faith in Christ must be mere child's play till I had to groan, "Lord, help my unbelief!" As for the Law, when we attempt to keep it, we groan under a heavy burden which we have no strength to bear—

"How long beneath the Law I lay in bondage and distress! I toiled, the precept to obey, But toiled without success."

Oh, it is hard serving the Law! He is a cruel taskmaster. The whip is always going and the flesh is always bleeding. It is hard service. Weary and faint, we fall down under it and feel it to be a load intolerable to be borne. Well is Haggi chosen as the type of the Law, for indeed it genders unto bondage.

And well was blazing Sinai chosen as its representative, for even Moses said, when standing upon that mountain, "I do exceedingly fear and quake." To be clean divorced from all legal hope is a blessed preparation for Gospel marriage with Christ. It was well that rowing hard made the mariners feel their inability to cope with the tempest—and it is best of all when creature efforts produce a clear discovery of creature weakness.

Another good result will sometimes follow. The man passionately striving to save himself by keeping the Law finds out the spirituality of that Law, a spirituality which he never saw before. He has given up outward acts of sin, but all of a sudden he is startled to find that even though he has given them all up in open fact, he is still condemned for allowing the thoughts of them in his heart! Even a look may be fornication, though no act of sin shall follow it. He remembers that even the wish of his heart may be theft. And that covetousness is not only straining after another man's goods, but envying him the enjoyment of them.

Now he finds the work is impossible, indeed, for he might sooner hold the winds in his fist than control his passions, or with his breath blow the sea into a calm sooner than he could restrain the impetuous propensities of his nature. O, Brethren, it is a good thing when we find that the Commandments of God are exceedingly broad—when we see the sharpness of this great axe of the Law and how it cuts at the very root of the tree and leaves us no green thing standing wherein we can boast!

So far so good. Fleshly effort, overruled by Divine Grace, has helped us to the discovery of the grandeur and dignity of the Divine Law. But I am afraid that much of this toil and labor is very mischievous because it makes unbelief take a firmer grip. It is easier to comfort a soul who has been a short time in darkness than it is to comfort one who has given way a long time to an unbelieving state of heart. I remember one, I believe she is in darkness now and if I remember right it is ten years ago since she first fell into these doubts and fears. I am sometimes afraid she will never see the Light because it has become chronic with her.

Giant Despair's prisoners do not all escape. He has a yard full of bones, remember. These are the relics of willing prisoners who would not be comforted and put out their own eyes to avoid the Light. I believe that some sinners make excuses for themselves out of their despair and that they let their doubts and fears grow till they cast a thick shadow, like Jonah's gourd. And then they sit down with a miserable sort of comfort beneath the leaves. "There is no hope, therefore will I go on in my sins. There is no hope for me, therefore let the worst come to me. I can but be damned. I will fold my arms and sit still."

Oh, this is a damnable temptation! It is one which ruins multitudes I am sure! This is Satan's man-trap! Beware of it! This is the devil's stocks in the inner prison—he is to be pitied who is laid by the heels in them. While you are rowing hard to get your vessel to land and standing out against the gracious plan which God has ordained, you are letting the nightmare of unbelief grow into a dread reality! You are letting this deadly incubus rest more terribly upon your hearts. O, Sinner, I pray God deliver you from this work-mongering, this horrible trying to save yourself by something homegrown and home-spun. If we could cut off the head of your self-righteousness, we would have hope of you! If you would give up all attempts to deliver yourselves and leave the case in Christ's hands, the thing would be done!

But while you are thus doubting and fearing, you are sinking deeper in the mire. And it is harder to get you out now than ever it was. Remember this one thing, that while the sinner is thus straining himself to get to Heaven by his own righteousness, his day of wrath is getting nearer. He is adding sin to sin. He is accumulating the fuel for his own burning, filling the sea of wrath in which he must be drowned forever. "What? When I am praying, groaning and crying to God and when I am trying to mend my ways and do my best, do you say I am only doing mischief?"

I do say it. I say these things are good in themselves, but if you are resting in them, you are so flying in the teeth of God's great Gospel, so insulting the dignity of the great Savior that you are adding sin to sin! And among the firewood for your burning there shall be none so dry which shall burn so terribly as your own good wicked works, your own rebellious virtues, your own proud detestable righteousness which you set up in opposition to the merit, blood and righteousness of God's appointed Mediator!

Gold is good enough, but if you bow down before the golden calf I will hate the gold because you worship it. Your morality is good enough, but if you trust to it I will hate your morality because it is your destruction. Sinner, I pray you remember that your life is being shortened all the while you tarry in the plains of self. Time flies and you fade like a leaf, while your righteousnesses, which are but filthy rags, are crying out

against you! You are laboring without success. But more, you are losing time which might have been turned to better purpose. While you are spending your money for that which is not bread, you are getting nearer and nearer to the dread famine when there shall be no bread to buy.

While you are trying to get this fool's oil with which to keep your lamps burning, the Bridegroom is coming and the midnight is hastening when you shall have to say, "Give us of your oil, for our lamps are gone out." There shall be no time, then, for you to buy for the darkness shall have come upon you and the door shall be shut and the Bridegroom's supper shall have begun. O that I could have some power to induce you not to follow any longer these fine ways of yours, these proud deceptive plans! O that you would receive God's plan of redemption and enjoy the peace which it brings!

IV. We will try to explain God's plan and then we have done. That is our fourth point—THAT THE WAY OF SAFETY FOR SINNERS IS TO BE FOUND IN THE SACRIFICE OF ANOTHER ON THEIR BEHALF. Here is Jonah. Leave out the fact that he was sinful and he becomes an eminent type of Christ. "Take me up and cast me into the sea and the sea shall become calm under me." Substitution saves the mariners—Substitution saves sinners. This is the essential oil of Gospel Truth. Jesus Christ says to His people, "I am cast into the sea. There in that depth I sleep for a while, like Jonah, to rise again on the third day. But My being cast into the sea makes a deep calm for you." How very simple this process was. They take Jonah—he himself desires it—he is thrown overboard and the deeps swallow him up.

Ah, poor Jonah, what a fall! What a terrible descent! What a frightful end to his prophetic career! Down he goes. Did I not see huge jaws opening amid the billows? Was he not devoured by some terrible monster! Poor fellow, he must have our pity! But how strange it is! Why the wind has ceased—it has dropped dead! And the waves seem to be playing now where they were battling fiercely a moment ago! No, the sea is glassy! We need not the oars any longer! Up with the sails, we shall soon be safely in port!

An odd thing this, the drowning of one becomes the safety of all. Mariners, let us sacrifice to Jonah's God. Ah, it is a strange and marvelous thing! It is that which sets angels singing and makes the redeemed spirits wonder on forever, that Jesus came down into this ship of our common humanity to deliver it from tempest. The vessel had been tossed about on all sides by the waves of Divine wrath. Men had been tugging and toiling at the oar. Year after year philosopher and teacher had been seeking to establish peace with God. Victims had been offered and rivers of blood had flowed and even the first-born of man's body had been offered up.

But the deep was still tempestuous. Then Jesus came and they took Him and cast Him overboard. Out of the city they dragged Him. "Away with Him! Away with Him! It is not fit that He should live!" Out of all comfort they had cast Him long ago—now from society they cast Him, too. From pity they cast Him! From all sympathy they cast Him! And at last from life itself they hurled Him, while God stands there to help them to cast Him into a sea of woes. As He, Jesus, dies there is a calm. Deep was the peace which fell upon the earth that dreadful day. And joyous is that calm which yet shall come as the result of the casting out of that representative Man who suffered—the Just for the unjust to bring us to God!

Brethren, I wish I had better words with which I could fitly describe the peace which comes to a human heart when we learn to see Jesus cast into the sea of Divine wrath on our account. Conscience accuses no longer. Judgment now decides for the sinner instead of against him. Memory can look back upon past sins, with sorrow for the sin it is true, but yet with no dread of any penalty to come! It is a blessed thing for a man to know that he cannot be punished, that Heaven and earth may shake, but he cannot be punished

for his sin!

If God is unjust I may be damned. But if God is just I never can be. That is how the saved sinner stands. Christ has paid the debt of His people to the last jot and tittle and received the Divine receipt. And unless God can be so unjust as to demand twice payment for one debt, no soul for whom Jesus died can ever be cast into Hell. It seems to be one of the very principles of our nature to believe that God is just. We feel it and that gives us our terror at first. But is it not marvelous that this very same first principle, the belief that God is just, becomes afterwards the pillar of our confidence and peace?

If God is just, I, a sinner, alone and without a substitute, must be punished. Christ stands in my place and is punished for me. And now, if God is just, I, a sinner, standing in Christ, can never be punished! God must change His Nature before one soul for whom Christ was a Substitute, can ever by any possibility suffer the lash of the Law. I must confess I do not understand the atonements which some preach. An atonement which does not atone—a redemption which does not redeem—a redemption which intends to redeem all men born of Adam and yet leaves the major part in slavery—an atonement which makes full atonement for all human sin and leaves men to be condemned afterwards—I cannot comprehend that!

But I do understand a Substitution—Christ taking the place of the Believer—Christ suffering the quid pro quo for the Believer's punishment—Christ rendering an equivalent to Divine wrath for all that His people ought to have suffered as the result of sin. I right well and right joyously understand that the Believer, knowing that Christ suffered in his place, can shout with glorious triumph, "Who shall lay anything to the charge of God's elect?" Not God, for He has justified! Not Christ, for He has died, "yes rather has risen again." My hope is not because I am not a sinner, but because I AM a sinner for whom Christ died. My trust is not that I am holy, but that being unholy Christ died for me!

My rest is here, not in what I am or shall be, or feel, or know, but in what Christ is and must be! In what Christ did and is still doing as He stands before yonder Throne of Glory. O Beloved, it is a blessed thing to get right out of self. But many Believers seem to have one foot on self and one on Christ. They are like the angel with one foot on the sea and the other on the land—only being angels—they cannot stand on such a footing. Put both feet on the Rock, Beloved! Stand altogether on Christ!

Arminianism is one foot on Christ and the other foot on self. "Christ has saved me," says the Arminian. There is His foot on the land. "But," he says, "I must hold on. It depends upon me whether I persevere to the end." There is his foot on the sea. If he does not look out, that foot will give way. But how blessed it is when the Christian can say, "I am saved." There is no if, no but about it. There is nothing for me to do to complete my salvation. It is all done. There is not one jot or tittle left to complete the Covenant of my salvation. The Covenant of effectual Grace is all written out in the fair handwriting of my Savior with a pen dipped in His own blood, and it guarantees all spiritual blessings to me forever! The edifice has been built and there is not wanted a beam or a brick, or even a nail or a tin tack to complete it!

From its foundation to its top stone it is all of Grace and all perfect. My garment of salvation has been woven from the top throughout—there is not a rag of thread or stitch of mine wanted to complete it. "It is finished," said the Savior, as He dipped it for the last time in the glorious carmine of His own blood and made a rich royal robe for His people to wear forever! O Brethren, if there were one stone to be put to the walls of our salvation—one single trowel full of mortar to make the stones set firmly—it would be all undone, all in ruin. But the whole of it has been completed! Stone and mortar, from basement to summit—all has been completed by Sovereign Grace!

And what shall you and I do? Since Jesus has been cast overboard for us, let us now rest in perfect quiet. Let us enjoy the peace "that passes all understanding, which shall keep our hearts and minds through Christ Jesus." And then, having been saved in such a way as this, let us now go to work for God—not to win life, not to win Heaven—life and Heaven are ours already! But loved by Him let us now love Him with a perfect heart!

The man who has not attained to rest in Jesus is incapable of virtue. A man who does anything for his own salvation acts from a selfish motive, does everything for himself. He has no virtue in him. But the man who is saved, who knows there is nothing for him to do, either to put himself into salvation or to keep himself in it—knowing that all is now finished, having no need to do anything for self—he does everything for God and is holy in heart and life. Now he can sing with Toplady—

"Loved of my God, for Him again, With love intense I'd burn. Chosen of Him before time began, I'd choose Him in return."

Let us show that this is the true root of virtue. Let us teach men who say this doctrine is licentious that it is the most heavenly soil in which the fruits of the Spirit can grow! Like a genial sunshine is this doctrine to our fruits to ripen them! Like a heavenly shower to bring them forth! God give you, Sinner, to rest in my Savior! God give you, Saint, to live to your Savior and He shall have the praise in both cases. Amen.

Source: <https://sermonindex.net/speakers/ch-spurgeon/labor-in-vain/>

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