

Life of John Newton, 1

by Ian Murray

The sermon explores the life of John Newton, highlighting his dramatic journey from a troubled youth to a significant Christian figure.

Duration: 45:16

Scripture: Psalm 130:3, Matthew 6:33, Matthew 7:7, Luke 11:13, Romans 3:23

Topics: "Divine Providence", "Personal Conversion"

Description

In this sermon, the speaker recounts the story of John Newton, a man who experienced a life-changing event during a storm at sea. Despite the ship being severely damaged, it miraculously stayed afloat. Newton initially made a lighthearted comment about discussing the incident over a glass of wine, but his companion responded with tears, recognizing the seriousness of the situation. As the storm continued, Newton found himself contemplating the existence of Jesus and the necessity of mercy. Eventually, he turned to the New Testament and began to seek evidence for the truth of the gospel.

Transcript

We turn this morning to an 18th century figure, and I want to speak to you on the life of John Newton, who was born in 1725 and died at the age of 83 in 1807. There are two reasons why I choose Newton's life particularly. Firstly, because it has its own fascinating interest.

His personal history was charged with drama, and it is both moving and instructive. A modern secular writer has said of Newton's life that it enshrines one of the most fantastic fairy tales that was ever the true story of a human being. Now in the second place, and more important, Newton became one of the most outstanding writers on practical experimental Christianity.

William Jay, who was a famous minister in Bath, said that John Newton was the most truly Christian man that he ever knew, and Newton's gift to the world was not the same kind of gift as the Puritans and Reformers and others had. It was not his calling primarily to give mental knowledge and instruction, so much as it was his gift to apply the truth in a practical experimental way. To give you one of his sayings, which is characteristic of his emphasis, he says a scholar may know the name of a maid's broom in 20 different languages, but a maid may know how to use that broom better than any scholar, and so with a Christian.

It is not how much we know, but how we use that knowledge and what we are as a result of the truth that we know, and this was John Newton's great contribution, and will ever remain so through his writings and

through his letters. Now he was born, as I say, in July 1725 on the 24th day of that month. His mother was a sweet, pious Christian.

His father was a seafaring captain in the Mediterranean trade, so he certainly knew his father. At any rate, his father was always to him a distant and reserved and rather awesome figure, but his mother was the one who watched over his early life, who taught him when he was four years old. Isaac watched him, who taught him the short of catechism, and more than anything else taught him in the scriptures, so that before he was seven years old, there were considerable portions of these scriptures and catechism and hymns that he had committed to memory.

She was a dissenter attending one of the non-conformist London churches, but then when her son John, their only son, was only six years of age coming up for seven, she was taken seriously ill with consumption, and an old school friend offered to nurse her in her home at Chatham in Kent, between Maidstone and Rochester. So on account of the severity of his mother's illness, neighbours took the young child, John, and his mother was taken to this home in Chatham, but there, instead of recovering, she died before Newton was seven years of age. There followed for him a lonely and difficult childhood.

His father was generally away. His father married again. There were other children born, but Newton was never really in the centre of a family life.

He went to school, a boarding school at Stratford, and then at the age of ten, left school and joined his father on board ships. So from the age of ten to sixteen, John Newton sailed the high seas with his father, and he tells us that those years were years of great struggle for him. He had imprinted upon his memory the truths that his mother had taught him, and yet he was surrounded by the wilderness of an 18th century ship.

It's true that he was often under his father's eye. He lived in his father's cabin, but he also says that when he was out of his father's sight, he joined often in cursing and in forgetfulness of God. I often saw, he says, a necessity of religion as a means of escaping hell, but I loved sin and was unwilling to forsake it.

Then he tells us when he was in his mid-teens of a day when the ship that they were on stopped from the German coast at the time at Middelburg, and Newton on his own wandered through the town, quite an old medieval city, and there he bought something which radically affected the next years of his life. It was a book, and if anyone ever speaks of the evil influence of a bad book, it's John Newton. The book was Shaftesbury's characteristics.

Shaftesbury was an 18th century deist, a free thinker, as they were then called. They believed that there was a creator, and that the creator had set the universe in being, rather like an inventor would set a machine in motion, and thereafter the course of events and of the world was to be governed by man. There was heaven, and there was no hell.

Morality consisted of very few items, and it was more or less extraordinarily similar to the humanism of today, in a somewhat different dress. But Newton says that that book worked on his mind like a slow poison, and gradually there was destroyed within him the conviction of truth. Shaftesbury was a very clever writer, and he wrote beautiful prose.

And he wasn't so much a downright atheist as a man who suggested that it was the mark of a brave man to be prepared to doubt, that the man who had to know everything for a certainty was a man of a small

mind. But a truly thinking man, and a man who was prepared to face the world, was a man who was ready to encounter doubts, and he insinuated doubts. And he did it through his books with many people.

Such was the afternoon outing which Newton had in Little Bern. Now by the time he became 17 years of age, his father was despairing of him. He was showing no aptitude as a seaman.

He had become introspective and moody. He would sit on the deck and brood, and be absorbed with his imagination. His father thought he was indolent and unprepared for work.

So his father made an arrangement that he would go to a new career on a plantation in Jamaica. Although he was 17, there was great need for Englishmen, and he was offered, through a friend of his father's, quite a good post in Jamaica. Of course Newton was only being directed by his father, but this was arranged.

He was to sail upon Liverpool in the month of December in 1742. There was a coach from London to Warrington once a week, and it was arranged that he would catch the coach of the next week to Warrington. Then he would complete his journey on foot.

And then something happened. The people who had entertained his mother when she was dying were a family called the Catlets, and they lived, as I told you, in Chatham. John Newton had never met them, but he had heard of them, and he had a week to fill before he caught his coach to Warrington.

His father sent him on a message to make them, and Newton, remembering the Catlets lived in Chatham, asked permission to visit them, and so he did. And this was a great turning point. In the Catlet home was a young lady by the name of Mary, nicknamed Polly.

She was 13 years old, and from the moment that Newton saw her, he fell desperately in love with her. He said, I was impressed with an affection for her which never abated or lost its influence a single moment in my heart from that hour. Now although Newton seemed somewhat indolent to observers, he was in fact very determined and also impetuous and quite inventive.

So he did not tell the Catlets that he was due to catch the Warrington coach, and the days glided by until he was quite sure that it was too late to catch that coach from London. But then he consoled himself that the ship wasn't sailing for another fortnight to Jamaica. He could wait another week and risk his father's wrath.

But having waited the second week, he decided Jamaica was impossible. Four or five years away from Mary, the thing was unthinkable. So he actually stayed in Chatham for three weeks until he was sure the ship had gone, and then he faced his father's wrath.

His father forgave him although he was extremely angry with him, and packed him off again to sea. So he had a year in the Mediterranean, in Venice, and other places, and then back to England. And then he more or less repeated the same thing.

This was a year later, December 1743, visited Chatham. I won't say he overstayed his time because apparently he was very welcome in the home. The mother of the family had been a great friend of John Newton's mother, but his father again was intensely angry with him.

That brings us up to February 1744. Newton was just waiting for another ship, and as he was sauntering along the waterfront one day, he was press ganged into the navy. Now in that year, 1744, war broke out

with France, and as most of you probably well know, the navy had at that time power to impress any able-bodied men that they cared to.

So that you would get these gangs of men under an officer, and when they saw anyone who looked like a seaman, or was wearing a dress which suggested he had been at sea, they would seize him and take him on board ship. And this is what happened to Newton. In a flash of an eye, he was taken by these men, put on board a tender called the Betsy, and then taken out to sea to a man of war, the Harwich.

Well, Newton had been a sailor as we've been saying these many years, but he'd never been on board a naval vessel, and they were a rather different proposition. For one thing, they were very much larger. The average merchant ship of those days would have a crew of perhaps 25 or 30 men, whereas a ship, a man of war of the size of the Harwich, was over 900 tons, and it had a crew of 350 men.

And the lowest of the crew, who were in the, what they called the cockpit before the mast, they were crowded in like animals, and often men were put on board naval vessels as an alternative to being hung, if they were criminals. And all kinds of the riffraff of society were crowded into the depths of these ships, and it was indeed a tremendous transition for Newton. He wrote at once a note to his father, thinking that his father could use his influence to obtain his release, but his father could do no such thing.

The most that his father could do was to get him prompt promotion, so he was elevated from the cockpit to the rank of a midshipman, and took his place in the gun room on the Harwich. Well, that was a considerable rise in his fortune, but it was still a great shock, and the shock was increased when he learned soon after that the Harwich was bound for the East Indies, and it might be away for four or five years. Newton took the risk, went on shore one day, borrowed a horse, drove a road to Chatham, paid his last farewell to Mary Catlett, and back to the ship.

I don't know, it's not recorded what exactly happened on the visit, but her parents by this time were evidently thoroughly alarmed at the ardor of Newton's affection, considering, I suppose, the youth still of their daughter, and the meeting terminated apparently with Mary Catlett's parents informing him that he was not to visit there again. At any rate, not until he had his father's permission to marry, so he went back to the Harwich. The Harwich sailed down through the English Channel to the East Indies, but by the time she was passing the coast of Devon, there were certain repairs evidently needed, and unexpectedly she pulled into Plymouth, and here Newton was overcome once more with his infatuity.

The captain had certain things that he wanted collecting from the shore, so he put so many sailors in a longboat, and because many of them were men who had been impressed, he was determined that none should desert, so he put Newton in charge of them as a mixture. Well, you have anticipated correctly, but John Newton actually deserted this man of war. No sooner was the boat in Plymouth than he found the road to Dartmouth and began to walk.

His father was in Dartmouth at the time on another ship, and Newton evidently was persuaded that if he could reach his father, his father would be able to do something to secure his transfer from the Navy, but alas, he never got to Dartmouth. He had walked about a day and a night, and was met by a party of soldiers on the road. They recognized him easily enough as a sailor and probably a deserter.

He was taken back to Plymouth. They brought me back to Plymouth, he said, and I walked through the streets guarded like a felon. My heart was full of indignation, shame, and fear.

He had good reason to be afraid. Naval discipline in those days was particularly brutal. He was imprisoned, first in Plymouth, then he was taken back on board the ship in chains.

The next day, the whole ship's company, 350 men, were assembled on the deck. The ship's carpenter was appointed to put up the gratings, as they were called, and upon these gratings men were tied before they were flogged with a cap of nine tails. A man might be given a hundred lashes on each, a new bosun would give a dozen, one bosun would give a dozen, and then another, and we don't know how many newton had, but he was fearfully flogged, stripped of all his rank, and then with his wounds thrown back down into the cockpit before the mind.

He tells us he was full of despair and rebellion, and as the English coast disappeared at last out of sight, he was tempted to throw himself into the deep and die, and he says there were only two things that prevented him, in his own thought. One was thinking of what Mary Catlett would feel on hearing such news, and the second was his rage against the captain. Though I had well deserved all I met with, and the captain might have been justified if he had carried his resentment still further, yet my pride at that time suggested I had been grossly injured, and this so far wrought upon my wicked heart that I actually formed designs against his life, and this was one reason that made me willing to prolong my own.

Well he was exposed now to all the insults of the crew, his former friends on the upper decks ignored him completely, and he was the object of general contempt and ridicule. He says at this time he had abandoned all faith in the scriptures. On the harwich I met with companions who completed the ruin of my principles.

His conscience was silence and scripture, which he had learned as a child, he says he now began to use as a subject of jokes. The harwich pulled in at Madeira. It was quite early in the morning, and Newton was still in his hammock, when one of the midshipmen came down and saw him in his hammock, told him to get up at once, he was slow in getting up, and this man cut it down, they cored down with his sword so that Newton landed on the deck.

He went up aloft, and as soon as he got there he saw it was a little rowing boat alongside, and one of the men from the harwich was being put down into the boat, and two men were being brought up. Now this was something that often often happened. A naval boat could stop another merchantman, and it could demand two seamen, perhaps that were more able-bodied, or perhaps which had gifts in carpentry or gunnery or something, and that is what had happened.

It had requisitioned two seamen from another boat, and then of course the naval vessel gave two of its own crew who were less competent, and this man was being put into the ship, into the rowing boat. Newton at once pleaded that he might also be put off the ship, and it was granted. There was about, I don't know, ten minutes, quarter of an hour between the time that he was sleeping in his hammock and the time that with his few belongings he was in a boat bound to the other ship.

He had only one book, he says, with him. That was a book of Euclid and geometry, a few other possessions, and that was all. Now the new ship was a trading vessel to the west coast of Africa, to the Guinea coast, or the slave coast as it was often called.

There was at that time from London and Bristol and Liverpool, tremendous trade with Africa, and mainly in slaves. There were about 8,000 English seamen employed on the slave route. Boats went down to Guinea, then crossed the Middle Passage over to the West Indies or Carolina, took across their slaves,

and they brought back from America cotton and other produce.

And it was said of those 8,000 seamen that perhaps as many as 1,500 died every year as a result of the climate and the rigors of what they were exposed to. But of course that was very little compared to the figure of the deaths among the slaves. There was perhaps an annual trade in slaves of something like 15,000 men.

No, I'm sorry that figure is wrong, let me give it to you correctly. John Newton said, writing later, if the English ships purchased 60,000 slaves annually upon the whole extent of the coast, the African coast, the annual loss of lives of slaves cannot be much less than 15,000 a year. He tells us of one ship upon which there was no epidemic.

It sailed across from Africa to Carolina. It had 218 slaves on board, and of that figure 62 died. And when an epidemic came, it was often far higher.

Now there were some good captains of these vessels, and some who maintained strict discipline. There were others who were obviously indifferent and cruel. Newton tells the story of one ship in which a young woman, a young mother was taken as a slave with a child just a year old.

The child was crying and obviously terrified, and it was dealt with by throwing it into the sea. And Newton said they would have thrown her in too except that she was too valuable. So there were appalling horrors, and these horrors were practically unknown in England.

It was once men crossed the equator and reached these foreign parts that some of them became more like bullets. And it wasn't until 40 years later that the slave trade became a matter of common knowledge, and then action was taken. Well Newton arrived then on the Guinea coast, and by this time his character had degenerated to its almost at the lowest point.

He became a little lower, but he couldn't have gone much lower. The admonitions of conscience, the warnings of conscience, which from successive repulses had grown weaker and weaker, at length he says entirely ceased. And for a space of many months, if not for some years, I cannot recollect that I had a single check of conscience.

At times I have been visited with sickness, and have believed myself near to death, but I had not the least concern about the consequences. Now on this small ship with some 25 men, Newton made himself a considerable difficulty of a captain. John Newton had a great facility for rhyme and verse, as we shall later know, but at this stage he used it for quite different purposes.

He composed a song about the captain of the ship, and it was so clever and humorous that the whole ship's crew was singing it in a short time. And that was not the kind of thing which happened on board ships in the 18th century. The captain died suddenly on the west coast of Africa, and the mate was put in command, and this mate could see at once that he and John Newton could not be on the same ship.

Or at any rate, Newton was desperately afraid that if a naval vessel drew near, the mate would immediately make sure he was put on boarding. So when they came to the coast, Newton asked Lee to join an English trader which they were carrying back as a passenger. This trader said he would be responsible for Newton, and Newton then landed on the coast of Africa, and there he was to stay for two years.

In later life, Newton said that he believed that one reason why God allowed him to land on the coast of Africa was that in isolation he would be less peril to other people, because by this time, he says, he not only sinned with a high hand myself, but made it my study to tempt and seduce others upon every occasion. He was not given too much drink, and he retained the virtue of honesty. But apart from those two things, he was a man who broke the law of God at apparently almost every point.

He became then the assistant of this English trader who was a slave collector. He went up the rivers, made journeys inland. The further inland you went, the cheaper the slaves became.

So this man had a kind of depot on the coast, and then he made his journeys, and often took Newton with him. But after Newton had been there just a little while, he took seriously ill of one of these fevers that were so common, and the trader left him at the depot while he went inland. The person in charge of the depot was the trader's mistress, a black woman who lived with him as though she were his wife, and as soon as the trader was gone, she turned all her hatred upon Newton.

For some reason she disliked him bitterly. Then Newton's illness grew worse. She saw that he had no comfort.

He slept on a mat with a bit of wood for a pillow. The only food he got was by coming to her plate at the end of meals, and taking whatever scraps she cared to leave. And on one occasion he says that she handed the scraps of her plate to him, and he was so desperately weak he was unable to hold the plate, and the contents were spilled amongst the dirt on the floor to her great merriment.

And at night he would crawl out of his little covering to wash his shirt. He had only one shirt. He washed it and let it dry on his back.

He would scrape around digging up roots like raw potatoes to eat. And in this way he was indeed a prodigal reduced to the very death. The trader returned.

Newton complained of his treatment, and the trader did not heed it. In fact Newton became himself a kind of white slave. When he went on a journey with this man, if the man left him he would chain him to the deck without food.

He would just have a bit of a fishing rod, and he would live perhaps for a day or two days or more on simply the fish which he could catch out of the sea. After this had gone on for about a year, another English trader arrived, and the man who was treating Newton so badly was no doubt alarmed at Newton's condition, and allowed him to go into the service of this other man. And this was considerably better.

Newton's great hope was that he could make a lot of money quickly, and with that money he could go back and marry Mary Catlett. Suddenly one day a ship arrived at the shore where they were, and it was a ship belonging to Joseph Manistee, who was a merchant of Liverpool, and a friend of Newton's father. And the captain had been instructed to find Newton, and by this providence, for it was a remarkable providence on that great coastline, the ship had pulled in at the spot where Newton was.

Newton now was very doubtful about returning. He had no money, he didn't know what he would face on arriving home, but the captain of the ship by a succession of lies told Newton that relatives had died and left him money and so on. Newton was enticed back on board the and taken back to England.

Not at first to England, the ship, the Greyhound, was recrossed the Atlantic, it had a cargo of wood and beeswax, and then from America it recrossed to England. And then in March 1748 a great event occurred. On the night of the 20th of March, Newton went to bed as usual, and in the early morning of the 21st, he awoke to a tremendous noise, and to find that the cabin was awash with water.

A shout had gone up that the ship was sinking, and he and his companion in this cabin rushed to the deck. Newton was first up the ladder, but just as he was going through the hatch, the captain shouted to him to go back and bring a knife. So he turned round, his companion rushed on before him, and was immediately swept right over the side and drowned.

Newton came back up, and there followed a tremendous battle to keep this ship afloat. For nine hours Newton worked on the pumps, for 11 hours he stood roped to the helm. And if it had not been for the fact that the ship was carrying a cargo of wood and beeswax, it would certainly have gone to the bottom.

The side was ripped open, the waters flooded the deck, and yet amazingly it kept afloat. When this storm was still at its height in the early hours of the morning, John Newton said to his companion who was with him on the pumps, he said, this will give us something to talk about over a glass of wine in a few days. But his companion replied with tears, no, he said, it is too late now.

At nine o'clock in the morning when the storm was still at its height, Newton was speaking to the captain of what they had done, and he added, if this will not do, the Lord have mercy upon us. And it was the first expression, he says, of any desire for mercy, uttered, he says unconsciously, the first expression for many years. And as he went back to the helm of the ship, the words that he had spoken, so as it were, without thought, came with power to his conscience, what mercy can there be for me? I expected that every time the vessel descended into the sea, she would rise no more.

Well the ship survived, and on that 21st day of March 1748, John Newton's great deliverance came. When he stood at the helm of that boat, as it went up and down into the ocean, he says, I now began to think of that Jesus, whom I had so often derided. I remembered the particulars of his life and death.

A death was sin, not his own. But I remembered for the sake of those who in their distress should put their trust in him. And now, he says, I chiefly wanted evidence.

The comfortless principles of unbelief were deeply riveted. And he says he rather wished than believed that the gospel record was a fact. And then speaking of a few days later, one of the first helps I received was in reading the New Testament from Luke chapter 11.

I was conscious that to profess faith in Jesus Christ, when in reality I did not believe his history, was no better than a mockery of the heart-searching God. But here I found a spirit spoken of, who was to be given to those who ask it. Upon this, I reasoned in this way.

If this book is true, the promise in this passage must be true. I have need of that very spirit, by which the whole was written, in order to understand it aright. God has promised here to give that spirit to those that ask.

I must therefore pray. And if this book is of God, he will make good his own word. If what I am writing should be read by our modern infidels, they would say, for I too well know their manner of argument.

But I was very desirous to persuade myself into this opinion. I confess I was. And so would they be, if the Lord would show them, as he was pleased to show me at that time, the absolute necessity of some expedient to stand between a righteous God and a sinful soul.

Upon the gospel scheme, I saw at least a poor adventure of hope. But on every other side, I was surrounded with blank, unfathomable despair. He wrote his testimony in many of his later hymns.

In evil long I took delight, unawed by sin or shame, till a new object met my sight, and stopped my wild career. I saw one hanging on a tree, in agonies of blood, he seemed to charge me with his death, though not a word he spoke. Or again, amazing grace, how sweet the sound, that saved a wretch like me.

And so on. And this day, the 21st of March, was a day which Newton remembered until his death. In his age of 83, he never forgot this day.

Well, after great difficulties, the ship arrived in Ireland. It was a battered wreck, came into Londonderry. He worshipped in church the next Lord's Day.

A week or so later, he was in Liverpool. And now, of course, the hope of Mary Catlett was everything in his eyes. Ah.

He had not heard from her for four years. And so he had no idea what to expect. But he had one encouragement.

His father had just sailed for Canada. But before his father left, he had heard of Newton's return to Ireland. It had come to him as a great surprise.

Like a voice from the dead, he thought Newton had died long ago. And out of affection for his son, he had gone to the Catlett's home in Chatham. And he had given his permission for marriage.

So that difficulty was over. But Newton's greatest difficulty now was in getting his marriage proposition conveyed to Mary Catlett. The trouble was that when he thought about what he would say to her, and even when he made notes about it, he was very eloquent.

But when he actually met her, he was completely tongue-tied. He says he went down to Chatham. But having got there, he left without accomplishing what he had set out to do.

So as soon as he got back to Liverpool, he determined that he would do it by letter. And this is what he wrote. I soon set off for London to see you.

That's Mary. See you I did, but little more. I was tongue-tied as formerly.

When I had just feasted my eyes, I returned to Liverpool at almost as great an uncertainty as before. I cannot say quite. For I saw so much generosity in your behaviour as encouraged me to hope on.

And I ventured afterwards to put it to a final issue to yourself by letter. When I received your answer, I kept it some time before I dare open it. When I did, I was transported to find you kind.

For though you wrote in the most cautious terms, I knew it was much in my favour that you would write at all, and that you desired, designed, I should understand it to be so. Well, Newton was age 23, and he had really lived the life of most people. At the age of 23, he was offered the captaincy of his own vessel.

Becoming wise, he declined it. He went back to the west coast on a voyage as mate, returned in 1750, married Mary Catholic, and then went to sea as captain himself. In 1751 then, 1754, he was a Christian slave captain.

You may wonder how that was possible, and perhaps you should have opportunity to return to it. But here he was as a young Christian, with no other Christians on board. Indeed, Newton at this time had scarcely met an evangelical Christian.

He went to a church in Charlestown in Carolina, where the gospel was preached, but he was so uninstructed in the scriptures, he said he couldn't even understand the sermon. But he gradually grew in knowledge, and on his last voyage, his third voyage, as captain, he met a trotsman by the name of Cluny, who was another captain, and this man was an earnest Christian. They would meet in their cabin and pray together.

Cluny would exhort Newton to make an open procession, to begin to witness to the men of his ship, and this man Cluny had a great influence on Newton. And Cluny began to tell Newton what was happening in the churches. Newton had no idea.

Cluny told him of a man by the name of George Whitfield, who God had raised up to revive the church. He heard of others such as the Wesley, and of what was happening in different parts of the world. And as a result, when Newton came back to London in 1754, he began to attend upon the ministry of George Whitfield.

There are accounts in Newton of his visits to the tabernacle, which are enthralling. How he met Whitfield for the first time, how he wept under the preaching of the gospel, how at five o'clock in the morning he would hurry to the tabernacle for those early morning sermons, sit with those dense throngs of people under the gospel. Oh it was heaven on earth for John Newton in London in those days.

Just as he was to return on his fourth voyage, he collapsed, and the doctors strongly advised against him going back to Sydney. So instead he went to Liverpool, and at Liverpool he was there for eight years as the times master. A kind of role of watching the river Mersey and taking some customs responsibilities.

A general role that he was fitted for as a seaman. And there he remained as I say for eight years. He found Liverpool spiritually a very dark place.

There was a small Wesleyan witness. There was no reformed church. He begged Whitfield to come and preach in Liverpool, and Whitfield I think did on one occasion.

But spiritually it was very neat. John Newton joined the Baptists. He was not a Baptist, but he found his spiritual warmth amongst the Baptists.

And then came the day when he made a journey with his wife Polly, Mary, to Yorkshire. And in Yorkshire he came across the great revival. William Brimshaw of Howard, and Henry Benn of Huddersfield.

And this to Newton was like as he had seen in London, but in Yorkshire at that time hundreds upon hundreds were entering into the kingdom of God. Now Newton was busily studying the scriptures. But for some time he was convinced that he was not called to the ministry.

But now the thought began to increase within his conscience that it may be that that was his calling. It began by his concern for the lost around him. We read in his diary of the prayer that he offered to God for Liverpool, for Lancashire.

How increasingly they developed in his soul a love for people. This led in the year 1764 to his becoming the Curate of Alney in Buckinghamshire. Now I'm cutting the story short.

He applied to many bishops for ordination. First of all to the Archbishop of York. In every case they refused him.

Then he wrote in longhand an account of his conversion, his authentic narrative. And it came into the hands of Lord Dartmouth, who was an evangelical nobleman. Dartmouth was very struck with it.

And he was the patron of Alney Church. And as a result of Dartmouth's intervention, Newton became the Curate of Alney in Buckinghamshire. And so John Newton from the year 1764 to his death in 1807 was a preacher of the gospel of Jesus Christ.

I will conclude now this part of Newton's life with one or two lessons drawn from it. Let us first remind ourselves of the utter wretchedness and power of sin as exemplified in his life. And how sin gains its power from unbelief and from infidelity.

I gradually, he says, deviated from the principles in which I was educated till I became profligate and abandoned. The way of transgressors will always be hard. He speaks of being poisoned with infidelity.

Then he says, that became worse. I forsook God and he left me for a time to follow the way of my own heart. And he says how afflictions did not change him.

When he was starved and ill on the coast of Africa, he said he was like a tiger emaciated for want of food. But if food had been given him, he would have become as he did, as wild as ever. We learn from this record the power and grace of the Lord Jesus Christ.

I can see no reason why the Lord singled me out for mercy but this, that it seemed good to him. His reason, unless it was his reason to show by one astonishing instance that with him nothing is impossible. I stood in need of an almighty savior and such a one I found described in the New Testament.

He says on that March day in 1748, Christ met with him and I have reason to praise him for that storm. For the apprehension I had, first of sinking under the weight of all my sins into the ocean and then into eternity. All the evil that I suffered was the immediate result of my own folly and willfulness.

But the good I have experienced was wholly unmerited and for a long time unhopd for. How sweet the name of Jesus sounds, he wrote, in a believer's ear. Soothes his sorrows, heals his wounds and drives away his fear.

Amen.

Audio: <https://sermonindex1.b-cdn.net/2/SID2980.mp3>

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