

Beginning to Sink

by Alan Redpath

The sermon emphasizes the importance of faith and trust in God, highlighting the dangers of spiritual decline and the need for surrender to Christ in times of crisis.

Duration: 50:14

Scripture: Matthew 6:33, Matthew 8:26, Matthew 14:22, Matthew 14:30-32, Matthew 16:24

Topics: "Struggle"

Description

In this sermon, Dr. Ireland Redpath discusses the story of Peter walking on water in Matthew 14:30. He highlights how Peter's defeat was reversed when Jesus took him by the hand and lifted him up. Redpath emphasizes the importance of crying out to the Lord for help in times of trouble, even if it is a short prayer. He also addresses the pressures and distractions of daily life that can cause us to lose focus on what truly matters. Overall, the sermon encourages listeners to rely on Jesus and trust in His ability to hold us in the midst of life's storms.

Transcript

This is Dr. Alan Redpath's message given at the CBMC dinner entitled Beginning to Sink. Well now, I want to turn you, in your thinking at least, if not in your personal New Testaments, which you may not have with you, to the 14th chapter of Matthew's Gospel. You know, it's extraordinary, isn't it, how often you read a passage of Scripture like this, which I suppose if we've been to Sunday school, we've heard from years and read it a hundred times and more, then suddenly we read it again and something hits us right between the eyes.

Well, that happened to me just recently in reading this very familiar portion, and I thought the long since got all out of it I could, but I suddenly read these words in verse 30. But when he, that is Peter, saw the wind boisterous, he was afraid, and beginning to sink, he cried, saying, Lord, save me. And immediately Jesus stretched forth his hand and caught him, and said unto him, O thou of little faith, wherefore didst thou doubt? And when they were come into the ship, the wind ceased.

Just three words really hit me between the eyes. These are they, beginning to sink. And I thought to myself, how vividly those words would describe the spiritual condition of so many people today, beginning to sink.

Old standards that we once adopted have been let go by the board. Old disciplines that we once practiced have been forgotten. And somehow or other, there's been a slackening of our hold upon God, a loosening of our devotion to him, a carelessness in the cultivation of our inner life.

And it just didn't mean to happen, but it has happened through the years. With some people it happens suddenly, through tragic failure. With most other people it's happened gradually, but we've begun to sink.

I remember a few months ago, speaking to a businessman in my church in Edinburgh, a very wealthy man, judged by his dress, the way he was dressed. And he came up to me and he was quite evidently moved by what he'd heard, that in the service. And he said to me, you know, everything you said this morning lived in my experience twenty years ago.

But he said, you know, I'm in charge of a big business, and I have three hundred men under me, and I have to get to work every morning at six, and I get them on the road, and I'm never back home until nine at night, and I'm always exhausted. And it's been a huge success, he said. As a matter of fact, he said, I'm a millionaire now, but I shall never forget the few words with which he closed his statement to me.

He said with a lump in his throat, but oh God, what a price I've paid, beginning to sink. A successful failure, a successful businessman who'd made his money, but he'd lost out in the thing that really matters. And you know, the peril is there for every one of us.

I find everywhere I travel today, that people are on a rat race, from Monday morning until Saturday night, they're put on a conveyor belt, and they have to get at it, and go to it, and work like anything. Home times, family times, examinations, business pressures, all these things spell out for us, beginning to sink. And though we never intended it to happen, it has happened.

Well now, what did Peter do when he was in a mess like that? Well, he just cried out to the Lord, Lord save me. Well, that's a very short prayer. As a matter of fact, it could scarcely have been shorter.

But in the circumstances, I doubt whether it could have been much longer. Because I suspect that the water was up to his chin at the moment. So he would only just time to say, Lord save me.

And gentlemen, I do thank God for short prayers. We're not heard in heaven for our pious phraseology, and our correct dotting of I's and crossing of T's. But we are heard in heaven when, with a sense of peril, and personal imminent danger, we cry, Lord save me.

How often I have prayed like that. How often I've prayed like that when I've been facing pressures in the ministry, which have been far too much for me, and I just couldn't cope. Lord save me.

Lord keep me sane. Don't make me, don't let me make a wrong decision. And when the enemy would come in like a flood, when I just feel absolutely overwhelmed, Lord save me.

And it's so wonderful that God hears a man when he's at the end of his rope. I shall be telling you in a few minutes just how he recently heard me when I was at that experience. But the thing that intrigues me is, how does God go about delivering people who are up against it, who really are overwhelmed with pressures, and really have lost their spiritual horizons, and spiritual things have dimmed out on them, and they haven't got any spiritual horizons at all.

And when they're really absolutely overwhelmed, does God do anything for us? Well, how did he go about delivering Peter? That's what intrigues me, because I have found in my experience now that it's exactly the same with all of us. And the first thing that Jesus did for this man was that he rebuked his doubts. For we read, When he saw the wind boisterous, he was afraid, and cried, saying, Lord, save me.

And Jesus said to him, O thou of little faith, wherefore didst thou doubt? Now you see, there is Christ penetrating to the root cause of sinking. A breakdown of the man's personal relationship with God. Unbelief.

Without faith, it's impossible to please God. But anything's possible to the man who really trusts. But here is a man who, in a crisis, has removed his confidence from the only one who can cope with the storm.

And he started looking elsewhere for his confidence and trust. You can't possibly live without trust. Without faith.

In any area of life. It's a sheer impossibility. Everybody lives on faith.

A friend of mine who is a vicar in the Church of England came over to Australia a year or two ago, he told me. And he decided to come by ship, sensible man, and take a rest and relax. And when he got down to the boat in Southampton, he imagined that he'd booked a single cabin.

But when he got there, he found another fellow in his cabin already. Unpacking. So this man, who was a vicar in the Anglican Church, began unpacking his cases with one eye on his belongings and the other eye on this man.

And the more he looked at him, the less he liked him. So just at that minute, this other fellow went out of the cabin. So he took the opportunity of packing up all his valuables in a little package.

And then in a few moments, the other fellow returned. So the vicar went out of the cabin and went in search of the purser of the ship and found him. And he said, Excuse me, but I thought that I had a single cabin on this boat.

I found that I have a travelling companion. And the more I look at him, the less I like. I feel I can trust him.

Would you mind caring for my valuables on the voyage? So the purser was really quite happy to do so and took them from him with a smile and locked them away. And then he turned round and smiled at him and said, I'm delighted to look after your belongings, sir. And it may interest you to know that your travelling companion has just been here and said exactly the same thing.

You see how absolutely impossible it is to live without faith. But you see, when a man stops trusting God in a situation, in a crisis, I mean, when he's really up against it and he's got something to cope with that's beyond him, when he stops trusting God, it isn't that he stops the principle of faith. But it is that he puts his faith in the wrong object.

He starts trusting someone or something less than the only one who has power to see him through. That's what happened, as the Bible tells us, in the dawn of human history. And the question, Hath God said, Thou shalt not eat of the fruit of every tree? was the question which was sown into the mind of Eve and caused her to doubt.

But she didn't stop believing. She didn't stop believing God, but she started believing the devil. God hath... Thou shalt not surely die? And instead of believing God's truth, she believed the devil's lie.

And the experiment proved disastrous to the whole human family. For unbelief led to rebellion. And that's the root problem in the world today.

We don't like being told it, of course, but man is a rebel at heart. You know, if ever the history of 1967 is written, it will be recorded as a year of great achievements, scientifically and medically. Things have happened in the last year which never happened in history before.

Heart transplants, for instance, with varying degrees of success. And the soft landing on the moon, all sorts of tremendous things. But still, with all the authority of the book behind it, the Lord says, Except a man be born from above, he cannot see the kingdom of God.

Cannot see it, cannot understand it. Because at heart, he's a rebel. It's perhaps difficult to believe that and very hard to accept it.

But we all assent to it. Because not one of us likes the idea of authority other than our own. And S-I-N, which is a very familiar word in the Bible but very unpopular today, has a center letter which is I. And that's the trouble.

When we have the wrong person in control, it leads to wrong actions and wrong decisions. Of course, you know, in Britain, just now, for a long time, we've had what we call a constitutional monarchy. You know what that is? Of course, you Australians.

It means that we have a queen who is number one, but she doesn't make any decisions. Harold Wilson and company do that, for better or worse. And the government make the decisions.

The queen doesn't. Hands off. And the longer the monarchy exists, the more remote it becomes.

The less it has to do with the managing of affairs. That's a constitutional monarchy. And the strange thing is that in the spiritual realm, most of us imagine that we can get away with that sort of thing.

Sort of pay a visit to church once a Sunday and then live more or less as pagans through the week. And that's okay. But, you know, you can't.

Because the essence of the Christian gospel, the very heart, the genius of it, is the dethronement of myself and the enthronement of Christ as Lord. And that's what makes a man a Christian. Nothing less than that.

It's not his intellect. It's not his creed that he signs. It's not his doctrine that he believes.

He can sign the most correct statement of doctrine, but that doesn't make any difference to him. It's what's in his heart, what's going on inside. Has that man got a secret history with God? Has there something happened in his life in which himself has got off the throne? And instead of himself, now there's Jesus Christ.

Of course, the enthronement of self, of self in our lives, takes different shapes and forms. I remember many years ago when my elder daughter, who is now a missionary in Africa, was a child of eight. Her boyfriend came to see her one morning.

He was nine. And, oh, it's all off now. Actually, this incident settled the whole affair.

But he came and started to gut up on the gate beside her where she was swinging. I was looking through the window, and she obviously didn't approve of him that day, so she pushed him off. She gave him a dig with her elbow.

And he fell on the back of his head. Well, no Englishman takes that from a girl for nothing. So he got up and slapped her face.

And what was my amazement in looking out the window to see my daughter, who I always thought was very placid, catch hold of this chap by the scruff of the neck with both her hands and shake him like a rat. And they both fell off the gate, and they had a stand-up fight. And I had to go and rescue him, because, well, hello, he was out of it completely.

When I'd got the thing settled, I said to myself, what on earth started all that? Well, it was just a question of two young people who were a bit jealous of each other. Every right to the gate, as much as you have, it's as much mine as yours. They were jealous of each other and got in a bad mood, and the only answer to it was a stand-up fight.

Now, gentlemen, don't think me very childish, will you? But that's at the root of international conflict, you know. And to bring it nearer home, that's what causes the queue at the divorce court, and that's what wrecks marriages. Two people who haven't learned to live in submission to one another, in respect for one another, that's the cause of so much disaster just because there's this big capital I in our lives.

So let's, you see, what happened to this man Peter. His doubts were rebuked. Now, why, says the Lord to him, why, why did you remove your trust from me and put your trust in something else? And Peter's doubts were rebuked.

I have a shrewd suspicion that the trouble was that not only had he started putting his trust in himself, but he'd got his eyes on waves and winds and storms and problems and was majoring on them and was giving very little attention to the Lord. And I have a feeling, gentlemen, that that's your problem, and it's certainly mine. I don't speak to business people as a minister.

I speak as a friend, as one of you, and there's nothing I have found in the ministry so possible that I substitute work for worship. And I got my priorities all wrong. And I find that over and over again we've got overwhelmed with problems and pressures of business life and home life and stresses and strains, and we've forgotten about Christ, we've taken the rise of God, and we've found ourselves limited and working within the limited circle of our own resources.

And frankly, the battle's been just too much for us. We haven't got what it takes. And we've been beaten.

And we've gone down. Wherefore didst thou doubt? Now notice something else here, because the first thing was that Jesus rebuked his doubts. And I have a feeling that in this meeting tonight there are some men, gentlemen here to whom God is speaking right now.

Why on earth did you remove your trust from God? Why on earth did you stop trusting? You remember the childhood faith, the adolescent faith of your life, of your youth. And why, why did you allow pressures of family and business and all sorts of other things to crowd it all out? And why have you got in such a tangle that you're almost at the end of yourself? Wherefore didst thou doubt? But look, something very exciting I

see here. Peter's defeat was reversed.

Jesus took him by the hand and lifted him up. Immediately he cried, Lord save me. A hand was stretched out and got hold of him.

And he began to feel the upward pull and the downward drag was reversed. And he found himself in the control of someone who was master in the storm. And who was able to hold him in the midst of it.

Now my dear sir, that's what I need. And that's what you need. I'm old enough now and have been through much enough, enough of life to know that I just haven't got what it takes.

Unless there's someone, another hand can come and take hold of me. You see, if I may put it like this, I have here a barrow pen. When I bought this pen, the advertisement said, I bought it in New York, I think, this pen will write on butter and also will write in your bath.

Well, I found that all very interesting because I never write on butter and I certainly don't want to write in my bath. I'd be grateful if the thing would write on paper sometimes. But I got this pen and you see, if I may just adopt a very sort of childlike illustration, I have it here and I try and make that pen stand up with one hand, but it's impossible.

The more I try, the more it collapses until I put another hand on top of it and then the pen is steady. You see, with one hand it can't be done. It can't be done from underneath, but when another hand comes from above and steadies it, then the pen is absolutely upright.

Now you know that's abstinence. You see, the more we try to stop ourselves sinking, the more we go down. The more we think we can do something about it, the more we fail.

And we desperately need not just a visit to church, not just a kind of joining a, like an almost playing church and joining a social club, not that, but we need a Lord who can come in and control us and save us and deliver us and give us mastery in the storm. That's what I need. And that's what you need.

And Jesus, immediately Peter cried, Lord, save me. He stretched out his hand and Peter experienced the upward pull. But may I say, if you're going to do that, if he's going to do that, he must take control.

He must be Lord. A predecessor of mine in Charlotte Chapel in Edinburgh, you may have heard of him, because I believe he was over in this part of the world, Dr. Graham Scroggie, was once speaking to a young lady after a service in his vestry who had been stirred by what he'd said. And then he said to her, why don't you yield your life to Christ? And she said, because I'm afraid of two things.

Well, he said, what are they? Well, she said, one, I play a piano in a jazz band and I think perhaps God might ask me to give it up. And what's the second thing? Said Dr. Scroggie. Well, she said, I think it's possible God might call me to be a missionary and I'd have to go through life without a husband.

So Dr. Scroggie opened his Bible at Acts chapter 14 and verse 10, that wonderful story where Peter was having a a siesta on a rooftop at Joppa before lunch and he was feeling hungry and a strange thing came down from heaven when he went to sleep and it had lots of food on it and the voice said to him, rise Peter, kill and eat. And the voice, Peter replied, not so Lord, for I never, excuse me, but it's a very dangerous thing to say never to God. I never eat anything, calm and unclean.

And Dr. Scroggie showed this lady how absolutely incongruous it is to say in the same breath, not so, and then say Lord. No servant dictates his terms. You can't talk like that.

He said, let me leave you for ten minutes and after ten minutes I'll come back again and cross out in your Bible, not so, or cross out Lord, but you can't have all three. So he came back ten minutes later and the Bible had been stained with a tear but the two words, not so, were eliminated. And in that lady's life, it was Lord.

Interesting enough, she did become a missionary for thirty years in northern India. And interesting enough too, she got a husband. Of course, that doesn't necessarily follow, but she did.

Not so, Lord. You see, when I'm just sinking and I've reached the end of my tether and I'm prepared to say, Oh Lord, save me, because I can't do a thing about it, then the Lord is prepared to meet us. But I've found in life that the more I go on thinking I can do something and sort of do it myself, a self-service kit, you know, and work my own passage, the more I get into trouble and the more I think.

But when I, I guess, get to the end of my rope and I'm beaten, it's a wonderful experience to know God moving in. I was travelling recently from New York to Chicago on a day that, well, you would never see in this country, I'm sure. It was wintertime.

I'd been to a convention in New York and it was very late, about eleven o'clock at night, and all the planes were cancelled. It was snowing heavily and it was very cold. About midnight, announcement came, plane leaving for Chicago.

So everybody dashed for it and I got on board and I was the last passenger to get in. And I sat down on the last seat at the back. I mean, the whole plane was full.

The cockpit was open, we saw the crew sort of doing their final check-up and I looked out the window and I saw four men with a ladder on the wings, wiping off snow and defrosting it. And then I suddenly remembered that somebody told me just a few days previously that the weight of a four-engine jet plane, fully loaded with passengers and gas, was 250,000 pounds. And I thought to myself, I do hope this chap gets this thing off the ground.

Well, presently we taxied off to the runway. It was still snowing and we stopped at the end of the runway and the four men got on board again, at least on the wings. And once again they scraped off the snow and the ice.

And then there was a roar from all four engines. And if you travel economy class in a jet, boy, it's a roar right enough. And it gradually increased speed until I believe at about 210 miles an hour the pilot pulled a stick.

And the nose went up in the air and the plane began to climb. And it soared and soared and soared until it reached 35,000 feet in a starlit, moonlight night. And I was back in Chicago in about an hour and a half.

It was a law. A law that came into operation when the power in the four engines of those planes was such that they overcame the law of gravity that held the plane on the ground. And the law of aerodynamics lifted it up.

And as long as that maintained full power, the plane just soared right through the sky. And listen, the law of the spirit of life in Christ hath set me free from the law of self and sin. When I say, Lord, and I mean it, Lord, save me, at that very moment, he comes in with his Holy Spirit to counteract the things that get me down.

And I begin to experience the thrill of the upward pull. My dear sir, have you found that in your life? Oh my, religion becomes an exciting thing then. Life becomes an adventure with God.

It becomes thrilling when you really begin to know the upward pull. Oh, but you must say, when Jesus is Lord. I have just time, if I may, to intrude.

I almost call it that, a word of personal testimony. But you know, the first time I came to know Christ as my Savior, when I heard the message of the Gospel, as a young businessman in training for the accountancy profession, if you had met me then, you would have said he's the least likely fellow I've ever met to be a Christian. Because all my life was spent for fun and games, dances and shows, and particularly rugby football.

I was playing for our northernmost county, Northumberland, and I had hopes of getting a cap for England. And I just loved rugby, and especially all the thrill of the nightclub, and the party after the match, and everything that went with it. But when I was in training to be an accountant, there was a man in our office who was different from everybody else, I'd never seen anyone.

For our northernmost county, Northumberland, and I had hopes of getting a cap for England. And I just loved rugby, and especially all the thrill of the nightclub, and the party after the match, and everything that went with it. But when I was in training to be an accountant, there was a man in our office who was different from everybody else, I'd never seen anybody like him.

The office hours were nine till five, he got there at quarter to nine, and he stayed till half past five. And we stopped about eleven o'clock every morning for something stronger than coffee, but he never did. And then we stopped at three o'clock for tea, and he never did.

And we had an hour for lunch, we took two, but he only took one. And at four o'clock we all wanted to get home to play golf, or something, see, but he didn't. And we got mad with him.

Absolutely furious with him. Especially I did, because I had to work with this fellow, I was sort of out on audits with him. And I remember a dozen of us, one day in the city of Newcastle, ganging up over glasses of beer, and vowing that in six months' time we'd knock the religion out of them.

And we really launched a hate campaign, and I had to report him to the senior partner for not keeping office hours correctly. And that was perfectly true, he'd get them to do well. And the only answer I got from my partner, the senior partner was, if you fellows kept office hours like he did, we could do with half the staff around here.

Of course, that's what we hoped and we feared, you see. And all the effort we made, with various clients reporting him for some bad ordaining of books, it all fell apart. We couldn't make him mad, couldn't make him lose his temper.

And I remember, in a little country public house in the north of England, staying with him. It was the only, I was going to say, hotel, but inverted commas, it was nothing more than a pub, with one bedroom, where

there was a paint factory stuck out in the country because of the smells of the place, and we had to audit the books. And I had to spend nights as well as days in this cellar.

Only one room. Two beds, fortunately. One of them I shoved in one end of the room, and one in the other.

And do you know, gentlemen, I'm not kidding you, the first night we got into that bedroom, it was about half past ten at night, he knelt down to pray. So I thought, well I sure am as good as he is anyhow, so I knelt down as well. And it was a hard wooden floor like this, there wasn't any carpet.

Do you know how long he was there? Fifty minutes. Fifty minutes! Well I was determined not to be outdone. I was absolutely exhausted, I'd got housemaid's knee and cramp, but I stayed down when he got up, just a little longer, to assure him that I was better than he was, and then I went to bed.

And he came across to my bed, and sat down beside me and said, Redcliffe, do you ever think about anything seriously? Well I thought that was a crack. I said, what do you mean? And then you just asked me a question that would send the heckles up of most men. Do you want to be saved? That's the diplomatic approach.

The tactful sort of edging in. He just went bald-ouser at me and said, Do you want to be saved? But you see I'd lived with a chap for two years, I'd been in the same office, I'd seen his consistent life, his clean living, his clean tongue, his refusal to use bad language, and especially blasphemy, and tell filthy stories. I knew that there was something to be saved from, when I was in his company, and I couldn't be neutral.

And he began to tell me the story about the cross. And the first night, in that little country pub, I yielded my life to Christ, and for six months, every Wednesday, we went to a brethren meeting, you see I had a good beginning, and we had a Bible study. And do you know, that afterwards, we had to walk along the banks of a river to catch a train for about two miles, and we never said a word, because it was dawning upon me that to be a Christian, was not just playing a church, it wasn't just being a sort of religious hypocrite and sham, it involved discipleship, it involved a totally different principle of life.

If any man would come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow me. I could see it, it didn't need him to tell me at all, that this Christian life was a challenge, that it called for something, that it meant totally different living. And on the one hand, there was discipleship, on the other hand, rugby, football, shows, dances, and all that.

The two wouldn't agree. And I remember telling that fellow one day, after six months, I'm fed up with your religion, you can keep it. Too many fascinating alternatives, thank you.

I'm finished. And all he said to me was, well, you'll never be happy till you're right with God. Nonsense! I qualified as a chartered accountant, got a good job on ICI staff, and started going up a ladder.

But I was desperately unhappy. I went every night, on one occasion, for three weeks in succession, to a different nightclub in London, to try and forget about God. But I couldn't.

Nothing would erase the memory of that night, in that little public house, where I had knelt, and received Christ as my Saviour. Oh, my! I had sunk so far down, that it wasn't funny. But I was determined not to come back again.

I remember that one day, he came down from Glasgow, he was, at the time, director of the largest provision store in Glasgow, came down to see me, he took me out for lunch. Never talked religion, talked about everything else, but not religion. And when we went away, separated, he shook hands with me, and he said, well, don't forget, will you, that it's possible to have a saved soul, and a wasted life.

A saved soul and a wasted life? Hmm. The next day, I was to travel up to Liverpool, in Lancashire, to play football, against Lancashire for Northumberland, played the match, went to a team dinner party, and then to a show, and a dance, and all the time, a saved soul and a wasted life. A saved soul and a wasted life.

Several weeks later, I played in a trial game, for the North versus the South, from which teams, there would be picked the team for England. Played like anything, played my life out that day. Two minutes from the end of the game, I thought I was going to make it, because I had the ball in my hand, and clear run, 75 yards, and I ran as hard as I knew how, but I was dead beat, and I couldn't make it.

Two pairs of feet came after me, and I was tackled and brought down, and then after the game was over, I saw the English selection committee, choosing the English team, and I thought, well, now there's one of them, a friend of mine, he'll certainly put a good word for me, and I waited and had some tea, and was just going away, when they all broke up, having chosen the English team, and my friend came and said to me, putting his arm round my shoulder, he said, I hope you'll play county football for a long time yet, but he said, you haven't got what it takes for international rugby, you haven't got the speed, you haven't got the stamina, and do you know, I just wept like a kid. I hadn't cried at what I'd forgotten how to do that for years, and I must have embarrassed him terribly. Why? Because I knew I was beaten.

I knew. Oh, yes. I'd gone deep, deep, sinking, sinking, so far down, forgotten all spiritual horizons, or tried to let God out.

Nightclub shows, dances, miserable, miserable, that's how I knew I was a Christian. For before I was a Christian, I enjoyed all that, now I hated it. And that Saturday night, my dear sir, I'm not trying to be dramatic, but I tell you, it's only the grace of God that rescued me.

I walked round Trafalgar Square in London, you may know it, nearly out of my mind, a saved soul and a wasted life. Oh, God, what can I do about that? And in the very words that Peter used, Oh, Lord, save me! And I came to the end of myself, and from sinking sands he lifted me, with tender hands he lifted me, from shades of night to planes of light, oh, praise his name, he lifted me. And I finished with this.

You see, you get the upward pull when that happens, and then I'll tell you the most wonderful thing of all. When your doubts have been rebuked, and when you've had the upward pull, the defeat is reversed. Then, the dilemma is removed.

The last in order of treatment is usually the first in order of desire. Have you ever prayed, Oh, God, get me out of this mess. Oh, God, save me from this situation.

Oh, God, get me out of this jam. I just can't take it anymore. Get me out of it.

Oh, but God doesn't do that with us. We are more important to him than the circumstance. It's you he wants, and me.

All of our trust, our surrender, our faith. And I want to say something to you that I couldn't have said a few years ago, except in theory, but I can say it now from experience, the very circumstances in which I find

myself sinking, going down, are designed by the loving hands of our Heavenly Father to drive us to himself, so that we may know that only Jesus can. It's an awful thing to have to say this to you gentlemen as a minister of the gospel, but three years ago, you'd find this hard to believe, because you see me now.

Three years ago, a little over, I was on my back, unable to talk, unable to walk, unable to move. I'd had a cerebral hemorrhage, and I faced the extreme probability that that was the end. And of course, in an illness like that, all your inner defenses are right down.

You're reduced to charitably. You can't pray, spiritually, means nothing to you. Physically, mentally, you're as weak as a kitten.

And oh dear, all the memory of years of ministry came flooding back into my mind. Years when Christian work I had put before worship of God, when preaching had become my delight, and prayer had become exceedingly difficult, when my Bible had taken second place to work and service, and oh, I saw it all. But you know, after about six months of that experience, when I was helplessly weak, I was attacked by the most awful temptations, which I thought I'd got rid of as a young man.

Tempted to foul thinking. Tempted to vile temper. And my dear wife and daughter at home experienced a father who reverted to childhood, whose boiling point was at an all-time low.

And there came a point when I said, Oh God, please take me out of this. Get me out of this situation. Take me right home to heaven.

I don't want to stay here and be like a cabbage for the rest of my life. And just then, it seemed, I've had no visions, no revelations. I've never had any of those.

But it seemed a deep conviction came into my heart and something said to me, a voice that I had come to know, You're all wrong about this. This isn't an attack of Satan. This isn't some satanic attack upon you.

This is my doing. And it's taken me having to chasten you and knock you out and put you on your back in order to teach you once and for all that the only good thing about Alan Redcliffe always is the grace of God and Jesus in me, in my flesh dwells no good thing. And at that moment when I had learnt the lesson that there's nothing good in me, that I'm no different now, only a bigger sinner than ever.

But for the grace of God, more potential for evil but more capacity to receive of God's saving and keeping power. It's then that I really came through a crisis of really arteries of grace. Just giving up myself and holding tight to a living Christ who lifted me up.

And from that day to this, my, it's been thrilling. I've been on the upward grade. I'm better now than I was five years ago.

Stronger and fitter in every way. Provided I don't act as if I was only 25 anymore. And it's so wonderful to know that we have a Saviour who is able to save and able to keep and who's absolutely real in our lives seven days a week.

You see, I've got no use for religion. I'm fed up with it. Because religion, religion is the story of the attempt of men to find God.

But I've every use for New Testament Christianity which is a revelation of what God in Jesus can do for any man who comes to the end of himself and is prepared to say, Lord save me. Let's pray together.

Father, we do thank thee this morning, tonight, for thy great goodness to us.

For thy revelation to us in Jesus Christ our Lord. For his death upon the cross. For his blood that was shed to cleanse us from sin.

For the gift of his life, his Holy Spirit to indwell our hearts that we may be filled up with all the fullness of God. That each one of us can say, to me to live is Christ. It is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me.

And the life I now live, I live by faith in the Son of God who loved me and gave himself for me. Dear Lord, we may never meet again in this life. But we've met tonight.

We've looked into each other's faces. We believe that thou hast spoken to our hearts. And as we leave this room, may it be that some of us from the depths will say, Oh God, save me.

And will know the experience of the upward pull. The saving power of a living Lord who is the same yesterday and today and forever. We ask him in his name.

Amen. And may the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ and the love of God and the fellowship of the Spirit be with us all evermore.

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