

Who Can Tell

by C.H. Spurgeon

C.H. Spurgeon illustrates through the story of Nineveh that even in the direst sin and judgment, God can use the weakest instrument to bring about repentance and salvation.

Scripture: Jonah 3:9, Matthew 25:30, Mark 9:44, Luke 16:23, Revelation 14:11, 2 Corinthians 12:9, Romans 8:38

Topics: "Repentance", "Divine Judgment", "God's Sovereignty"

Description

In 'Who Can Tell,' C.H. Spurgeon explores the story of Nineveh to remind believers of God's sovereign power to bring repentance and mercy even in the face of great sin and impending judgment. He challenges listeners to examine their own lives, recognize the brevity of life, and respond with repentance and faith. Through vivid illustrations and biblical truths, Spurgeon encourages trust in God's ability to use even the weakest instruments for His mighty purposes.

Transcript

"Who can tell if God will turn and repent, and turn away from his fierce anger, that we perish not?"—Jonah 3:9.

THIS WAS THE FORLORN HOPE of the Ninevites: "Who can tell if God will turn and repent, and turn away from his fierce anger, that we perish not?" The book of Jonah should be exceedingly comfortable to those who are despairing because of the wickedness of their times. Nineveh was a city as great in its wickedness as in its power. If any of us with little faith had been bidden to go round about her, and "tell the towers thereof, and mark well her bulwarks;" if we had been commanded to go through her streets and behold her both in the blaze of the sun and in the light of the moon as her inhabitants indulged in vice, we should have said. "Alas! Alas! the city is wholly given into idolatry, and it is girt about with a wall of sin, as stupendous as its wall of stone." Suppose that the problem had been given to us to solve—how shall this city be moved to repentance? How shall its vice be forsaken and the God of Israel worshipped by all its inhabitants from the highest to the lowest? If we had not been paralyzed with despair, which is the most probable, we should, nevertheless, have sat down carefully to consider our plans. We should have parcelled it out into missionary districts; we should have needed at least several hundreds, it not thousands, of able ministers; at once, expenses would have to be incurred, and we should have considered ourselves bound to contemplate the erection of innumerable structures in which the Word of God might be preached. Our machinery would necessarily become cumbrous; we should find that we, unless we had the full resources of an empire, could not even begin the work. But what saith the Lord

concerning this? Putting aside the judgments of reason, and all the plans and schemes which flesh and blood so naturally do follow, he raises up one man. By a singular providence he qualifies that one man for his mission. He sends him down into the very depths of the sea, where the weeds are wrapped about him, he comes up from the great deep, and the awful descent has steeled his soul and completely covered him with the armor of courageous faith. Who need tremble at anything on shore who has passed the bowels of a fish and yet survived? He comes into the city, his eyes almost starting from their sockets with the recollection of the great judgment which had passed over his head, and in stern inflexible manner, with shrill monotonous voice, he begins to cry, "Yet forty days and Nineveh shall be overthrown!" Is this, O God! is this thy way? Is this the means with which thou wilt accomplish the great event? Wilt thou make Nineveh repent at the bidding of one man? Shall yon sallow man fresh from the sea—shall his voice be sufficient to stir this great city? O God! if thou hadst come forth in thy fiery chariot, if thou hadst spoken with thy thunder, if thou hadst shaken the earth with thine earthquakes then might Nineveh feel, but surely this one man is not sufficient for the deed. But as high as the heaven is above the earth, so high are his ways above our ways, and his thoughts above our thoughts. So skillful is he that with the weakest instrument he can produce the mightiest workmanship. That one man begins his journey. Already the inhabitants flock to listen to him. He proceeds—the crowd multiplies. As he stands at the corner of the alleys, and the lanes, every window is thrown up to listen, and the streets are thronged as he walks along. Still on he goes till the whole city has begun to shake with his terrible voice. And now the King himself bide him come into his presence, and the fearless still propounds the threatening of God. Then comes the effect. All Nineveh is wrapped in sackcloth; the cry of man and beast go up in one terrible wailing to God. Jehovah is honored and Nineveh repents. Ah! My brethren, we see in this rich grounds for hope. What cannot God do? Think not that he needs to wait for us. He can accomplish the greatest deeds by the meanest instrumentality. One man, if he willed it, would be sufficient to stir this giant city. One man, if God decreed it, might be the means of the conversion of a nation, nay, a continent should shake beneath the tramping of one man. There is no palace so high that this one man's voice should not reach it, and there is no den of infamy so deep that his cry should not be heard therein. All we need is that God should "make bare his arm," and who can withstand his might. What though he grasp but the jaw-bone of an ass yet is his arm mightier than Samson's, and not only would it be heaps upon heaps, but city upon city, continent upon continent. With the meanest instrument would God slay his thousands and overcome his myriads. Oh church of God, never fear; remember the men that God has given thee in the days of yore. Look back to Paul; remember Augustine; think ye well of Luther, and of Calvin; talk ye of Whitfield, and of Wesley, and remember these were but separate individual men, and yet through them God did a work, the remembrance whereof still rolleth on and shall never cease while this earth endures.

With this by way of preface, I shall now somewhat turn aside from the narrative, to address myself to those who are trembling on account of sin and who are in the same position as the men of Nineveh, and like them anxiously desiring mercy.

I shall notice briefly this morning three things. First, the miserable plight in which the men of Nineveh found themselves; secondly, the scanty reasons which they had for hope; and then, thirdly, I shall observe that we have stronger reasons to compel us to pray, and more comfortable arguments to urge us to trust.

I. First then, I shall consider the men of Nineveh, as representing many here present, as to THE DOLEFUL PLIGHT IN VICE THEY FOUND THEMSELVES. The men of Nineveh were like those in the days of Noah. They were married and given in marriage: they ate and they drank: they builded and they planted. The whole world was their granary, and the kingdoms of the earth their hunting ground. They

were rich and mighty above all people, for God had greatly increased their prosperity; and they had become the greatest nation upon the face of the earth. Locked in security they fell into great and abominable sins. Their vices probably rivalled those of Sodom. If they were not worse even than the Eastern cities of the present day, they were abominable beyond description. How suddenly were they however startled from their security and convinced of their sin? The preaching of that one strange man had brought them from the height of their splendor to the depths of sorrow. Now was their boasting cut off; the sound of their mirth had ceased; and they began to weep and lament. What was their miserable plight? I take it, it consisted in three discoveries; they now discovered their great sin; then again, the shortness of their time, and in the next place, the terrible character of their destruction. Would that ye would discover the like ye careless sinners, ye that slumber in Zion, ye that fear not God, neither turn from your evil ways. Would I say that in the first place, some prophet-voice would stir you to remember your sins, for are they not many and exceeding great? Let each man among us look to his life, and who is there here that need not blush? Some of us have been moral. We have by the training of our youth and by the restraints of grace been kept from the immoralities of others, but even we are compelled to lay our mouths in the dust. While looking into our heart, we discover it to be a nest of unclean birds, full of all manner of evil and loathsome things. We have been as visions in our hearts as the worst of men have been in their acts. But there are too many who cannot even plead that they have been moral, though this would be but a poor excuse for the want of love to God. Look, men and brethren, look to your lives; who among us hath been free from murmuring against God? Who is he that hath loved his neighbor as himself? Who is it that has never been angry without a cause? Who has never cursed God in his heart, even if he hath not done so with his lips? Who among us have always scrupulously kept our eye from lust and our heart from covetousness? Have we not all sinned? If our iniquities could now be revealed; if on every man's brow were written his sin, which of you would not put his hand upon his forehead to hide his iniquity from his fellows? It will be of essential service to many of you if you will read over your lives. Turn, I beseech you, to the pages of your memory, and let the black, blotted, misspelled pages now be read again. Think not that the preacher understands how to flatter his congregation. It has become fashionable in these times to look upon our hearers as all being good and excellent—would not this be a lie and a falsehood before Almighty God? Are there not here those that can indulge secretly in vices which we must not mention? Are there not those who do that to their fellows in trade which they would despise in others? What! are none of you covetous? Do none of you over-reach or defraud your neighbors? Do none of ye practice the common frauds and tricks in trade? Are none of ye liars, and none deceivers, none slanderers who bear false witness against your neighbors? Am I so happy as to have a spotless congregation here? I cannot flatter myself that such can be the truth. No, our iniquities are great and our sins are hideous. Oh, that we were all ready to confess, each man for himself, the iniquities which we have done! Surely, if the Spirit of God shall but shine into our hearts and show us the evil of our ways, we shall find ourselves in a sorrowful condition indeed, and shall be ready to cry out before God, even as Nineveh did of old.

Added to this however the Ninevites had information as to the shortness of their days. "Yet forty days and Nineveh shall be overthrown." How fixed and definite the date! Six weeks shall scarcely run their round," says the Prophet, "ere ye must die, and perish miserably." To an hour was the time described, "yet forty days." How would the Ninevites count the days with terror, and watch each rising and setting sun as if these were the black milestones upon their dreary road to death! "Ah," saith one, "but ye will not tell us that our days are only forty." Nay, men and brethren I am no prophet. I cannot tell how many your days may be, but this one thing I can say, it is possible that there are some here who have not forty days to live! There may be some among you who have not so long a respite as even Nineveh itself. Suppose now I should be able to take you to that great city. If I could have shown you its massive ramparts and its

stupendous fortresses; if like Jonah I could point to them and say, "In forty days this city will be an overthrown," which would require the greatest stretch of credulity to believe this prophecy or that which follows, "In forty days your body shall crumble back to dust?" Which I say would require the greatest stretch of faith? whether is the easier of these twain, to send you to death, or to uproot a city? What art thou, man, but a heap of animated dust? A worm may destroy thee, a grain of sand may be sufficient to take away thy life. Feeble is the thread of life, a spider's web is a cable compared therewith. It is but a dream, a child's whisper may break it, and we may awake in another world. "Forty days!" surely that was a long and distant period compared with what may be the date of your death. I have been long enough preaching in this place to look back now on many who have gone from this spot to the place appointed to all firing. Many, many are the faces which this day I miss as I look along your ranks and cast my eye around this gallery. There are not a few who I remember to have passed from the land of the living and to have gone to another world—and some how suddenly, how rapidly! I have been startled at it often myself. I have seen some here on the Sabbath, and by the Tuesday or by the Thursday the message has come, "On what day can you bury such-and-such a one?" "Bury her!" "Yes sir, bury her, she is gone;" and I have said, "How strange it seems that she should be dead who so lately was living in our midst!"

Forty days I add is a long lease compared with that which you have any reason to conclude that God has bestowed on you. But what if it were forty years, how short a time even then. If ye will but look with the eye of wisdom, how rapidly our years revolve. Are you not startled even now to see the sear leaf in your path? It was but yesterday that the fresh green buds were seen. It seemeth but a month ago since first we saw the wheat starting up from the ground, and lo the harvest is over and gone and many of the birds have disappeared and the tints of autumn are succeeding the verdure of summer. Years seem but months now and months but days, and days pass so rapidly that they 'flit like shadows before us. O! men and women, if we could but measure life it is but a span, and in a time how short, how brief every one of us must appear before his God. The shortness of time should help to arouse us, and then, let me add the third thing which startled the Ninevites was this, the terrible character of the judgment. Doubtless one part of the effect of Jonah's preaching may be traced to the singular vagueness of his prophecy. He says, "Yet forty days and Nineveh shall be overthrown." By whom, he does not tell us. How he does not deign to reveal. It is to be overthrown, that is all. Whether some mighty nation should invade it, or whether an earthquake should swallow it up quick, or whether by plague or pestilence the whole city should be emptied, or whether an intestine quarrel should cut off the population, he says not. The very vagueness and indistinctness of a prophecy adds to its terror, just as men can never bring their minds to think of spectres in the plain daylight, but always conjure up such things in hours of shade and gloom. The gloominess of the message made men tremble. And oh! ye that are not reconciled to God, men without religion, without hope and without God in the world, how terrible is the judgment that shall come upon you! It is not for me to attempt to describe it. Scripture only speaks of the life to come in indistinct terms. Terrible are they in their vagueness. Jesus saith, "These shall go away into outer darkness, where there is weeping, and wailing, and gnashing of teeth," and anon he speaks of torment as a place "where the worm dieth not, and the fire is not quenched." and then he describes it as "a bottomless pit," and as "a fire" that "never shall be quenched." Ah! my brethren, we know but little of the wrath of God which shall certainly come upon the wicked, but we know enough to let us understand that it is too terrible for human ear to hear. If hell had been fully described to us in this time-state, this life itself would have been but the vestibule of eternal torment. I question whether any eyes could bear to read such a description as God might have given. Both our ears would have tingled, and our hearts would melt like water, at the sound thereof. Oh! sinner, it is enough for me to say to you this day, "Except ye repent, ye must perish with a terrible overthrow. God, even God himself, shall draw his sword and bathe it in your blood. He shall drive

you from his presence amidst the thunders of his wrath and the lightnings of his vengeance. He shall smite you with his omnipotence, and shall spend himself in punishing you, and your torment shall be without end, and the smoke thereof shall go up for ever and ever. I speak not this day to you that are unbelievers in the word: with you I will have nothing to do this morning; but to you who are believers in the revelation of the Bible—who profess to be nominal Christians, with you I have to deal. Oh sirs, if ye believe this book, if ye are impenitent, how tremendous is the doom which awaits you; how fatal shall death be to you, and how terrible the last dread day of judgment! And all this is coming on apace. The chariot wheels of God's justice have axles which are hot with speed, the black coursers are covered with foam as on they drive. Perhaps, as here I stand and speak alas, too coldly on things which should make any man boil over with enthusiasm—perhaps death may even now be fitting his arrow to the string, and you may be his victim, and this sermon may be closed, as Paul's sermon was, with some one's falling dead like Eutychus, in the window in his sleep. God grant it may not be so, but nevertheless there is cause enough for each one of us to tremble and to bow before the God of Israel. Thus have I spoken on the first point: O Holy Spirit, bless the word!

These Ninevites however took heart and hope. They said, "Let us proclaim a fast, let man and beast cry mightily unto God, for who can tell but he may turn from his fierce anger that we perish not."

II. Now the second point was, THE SLENDER GROUND WHICH THE NINEVITES HAD FOR HOPE. And now regard attentively, for I long this morning for you all in the bowels of Christ, that ye also with a far better hope may be enabled to imitate the example of the men of Nineveh. You will notice that in Jonah's message, there was no proclamation of mercy made. It was one short sentence of doom. 'Twas like the great bell of St. Sepulchre's Church tolling out the hour of the execution of a criminal. There was not so much as a note of mercy. 'Twas the trumpet of the Judge, but not the silver trump of Jubilee. No mercy glanced from Jonah's eye, no pity was in his heart. He was sent with a thundering commission and he dealt it out in a thundering fashion. "Yet forty days and Nineveh shall be Overthrown." I think I see the king of Nineveh sitting down with his nobles at a council of state, and one of them would say, "We have little hope of mercy, for if you will observe Jonah never offered us any. How terribly he spoke. There was not so much as a tear in his eye. I am persuaded that Jonah's God is very just and severe. He will by no means spare us; we shall be cut off." But the king's answer to his councillor was, "Who can tell? you only think so, but you cannot say it, let us yet hope, for "Who can tell." My dear hearers, 'tis no Jonah that addresses you. My language to-day shall be rather that of Isaiah, "Come now, and let us reason together, saith the Lord: though your sins be as scarlet they shall be as white as snow; though they be red like crimson, they shall be as wool." Oh cannot you say with Nineveh's king, "Who can tell?" Will not you go home to your chamber and pray, for "Who can tell?" Will you not go to the Bible and search for a promise, for "Who can tell?" Will you not go to the cross and trust in the flowing blood, for "Who can tell?" You may be forgiven yet, accepted yet, and one day yet sing God's praises before the throne above. Another thing which would cut off the hope of the Ninevites very much was this, that they knew nothing of God except, it may be, some dreadful legends they had heard of his terrible acts. One of the councillors of the king deeply learned would say, "O king, live for ever! The God of Jonah is a terrible God. Hast thou not heard what he did in Egypt; how he destroyed Pharaoh and his chariots of old in the Red Sea? And hast thou not heard what he did to Sennacherib when he cut him off and his hosts? Hast thou never heard the thunder of his power, and the might of his terrible acts? Surely he will have no mercy on us." But the king answered—"Who can tell?" Thou dost not know. It is but a surmise. "Who can tell?" But oh, my hearers, we are on a vantage ground here, for you know that God is merciful. Many and many a time have we assured you from the lips of God himself, through this written word, that he delighteth in mercy. You have

his promise for it, nay, you have his oath for it. Jehovah lifts his hand to heaven, and swears by himself. "As I live, saith the Lord, I have no pleasure in the death of him that dieth; but had rather that he should turn unto me and live." Come, then sinner, for "who can tell;" he is a merciful God. Do what Benhadad did of old, when he and his army had been routed, and he alone was left with a few of his nobles. He said: "Let us put ropes on our necks, and go unto the king of Israel, for we have heard that the kings of Israel are merciful kings." Do you the like with Jesus. You have heard that he is merciful and full of compassion. Come to him now; trust in his blood, and "who can tell;" this day your sins may be blotted out? "Who can tell?" This day you may be washed in the blood of Christ, and made white as Adam in Paradise. "Who can tell?" This day the Lord may make your heart leap with joy, while he whispers—"Thou art mine, and I am thine." "Who can tell?" Drowning men catch at straws—this is no straw—this is a solid rock: lay hold on it and be saved. "Who can tell?"

But once again, the people of Nineveh lacked another encouragement which you and I have. They had never heard of the cross. Jonah's preaching was very powerful, but there was no Christ in it. There was nothing about the Messiah that was to come—no talking of the sprinkled blood—no mention of a great sin-atoning sacrifice—and therefore the men who were in the council of the king, might have said—"Surely we have never heard that any satisfaction has been offered to the injured justice of God. How therefore can he be just and yet the justifier of the ungodly? "Ah," said the king, "who can tell?" and on that slender "who can tell?" they ventured to cry for mercy; but oh, sinner thou art answered this day, that "God hath spared not his own Son, but freely delivered him up for us all, that whosoever believeth on him might not perish, but have everlasting life. For God so loved the world that he sent forth his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth on him might not perish, but might be saved. For there is now no condemnation to them that are in Christ Jesus." Come sinner, come to the cross, for God can be just, and yet the justifier of the ungodly. I say, this should make thee ask—"Who can tell?" He may wash me clean, he may accept me, and I may yet be able to sing with the loudest of all the voices of his children—

"I the chief of sinners am,

But Jesus died for me."

And now shall I tell you what I think was the hope which the poor king of Nineveh really had? I have set before you his discouragements, and now I will set before you his encouragements. They were very slender, but still they seemed to have been sufficient. Perhaps the king said in his heart, or he might have said to his councillors—"Sirs, there is one thing which ye cannot deny, we are come to the worst, and if we repent and cry for mercy, at least that cry will not be to our disadvantage. We shall be none the worse off even if we are not heard."

Now sometimes I have known a trembling sinner take comfort even from that. The words of our hymn suggest the full idea.

"I can but perish if I go,

I am resolved to try;

For if I stay away I know,

I must for ever die."

If you seek not Christ; if you repent not of sin; if you put not your trust in him, perish you must. That is certain. If you go, and are rejected, at least you are none the worse off. Try it, and you shall find out that you are much the better, for you shall not be rejected. Remember the cage of the three lepers at the gate of Samaria. They were sitting there without food to eat, and at last the pangs of hunger were strong upon them. One of them said to his fellows, "Let us go now to the host of the Syrians. If they kill us we shall but die; if they save us alive, we shall live, but if we stay here, perish we must. So, as there was nothing to lose, and there might be something to gain, they risked it. Oh, sinner, would to God the Lord would teach thee as much wisdom as this. Go to him just as thou art, and say, "Lord, sink or swim, I take thy cross to be my only trust. If thou wilt not save me, if I perish in the stream, yet will I perish clinging to the rock of my salvation, for no other trust and no other hope have I." Oh that you may be led to do even this, and ye shall not be disappointed.

Besides, the king would add, "It is true that Jonah did not say that God would have mercy, but then he did not say he would not." There was a cry from Jonah's lip, "Yet forty days and Nineveh shall be overthrown" but he did not say, "God will not have any mercy at all." So the king said, "Who can tell, then?" if any could have told him, Jonah would. Was he not a fierce looking man; if there had been any thunders in store, would he not have dealt them out in his terrible fury of prophecy? "Surely," said the king, if he stopped there, and did not add, "I will have no mercy, this is a happy token. Who can tell? If Jonah did not tell, we cannot."

And now, sinner, I would thou wouldst catch hold on this. But thou hast something stronger and firmer still, for there is mercy proclaimed to thee this day. God is not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance. These are his own words and he himself expressly invites you to come to him. He says "Whosoever will, let him come, and take of the water of life freely;" and he gives you his word for it—"Him that cometh unto me I will in nowise cast out." Salvation is free as the air we breathe to every convinced sinner. If thou knowest this day thy need of Christ, take him, he is thine. He is a fountain open for the thirsty. All the preparation thou needest is simply a burning thirst. Then come and drink, and none can say thee nay.

"From the Mount of Calvary,

Where the Saviour deigned to die,

What transporting sounds I hear,

Bursting on my ravished ear!—

Love's redeeming work is done,

Come and welcome, sinner, come!"

Well, then, if thou art invited, "Who can tell?" Come, come and try, for "Who can tell?"

Yet, I think, the greatest confidence which the king of Nineveh would have would be derived from the following suggestion. "Oh," said he, "if God had meant to destroy us without giving us an opportunity of pardon, he would not have sent Jonah forty days beforehand. He would have given us no time at all. He would simply have given a blow and a word, but the blow would have been first. He would have overthrown the city in his wrath without a single message. What did he to Sodom? He sent no messenger there. The sun rose and the fire descended from God's terrible right hand. Not so Nineveh; it had its

warning. And now, sinner, turn thou this to good account. Thou hast had many a warning. Thou art this day warned, nay, more thou art affectionately invited to come to Christ. The voice from the cross is speaking, and each trickling drop of blood crieth, "Amen."

"Come and welcome, sinner, come!"

Now, if the Lord were unwilling to forgive, would he have sent his servants to warn and to invite? If there were not bowels of mercy with him, would he not have said, "Let them alone, they are joined unto idols, let them perish?" It is no small prophecy of God's good intentions to a man when God sends to him a faithful minister. Oh, my hearers, I cannot speak to you with eloquence. I cannot address you with the fervid words of such an one as Whitfield, but this I can say, and God is my witness, I have not shunned to declare the whole counsel of God, whether man would hear, or whether he will forbear. If ye perish, it is not because I have kept back any part of that which I have received of God, who hath sent me. I have broken through the trammels of creed and system that I might free my head of the blood of all men. I have not been content to run in the track of an old and narrow creed, if I felt that it kept me from earnestly pleading with you, and warning you to flee from the wrath to come. I have endangered many a friendship, and brought upon my self no little shame, because I must and will, in this matter, deal earnestly with your souls. 'Tis no child's play to preach. It shall be no child's play to give an account of preaching at the last great tremendous day. You are warned; in God's name I conjure you, ere the gates of mercy are shut upon you—ere life shall end: now, now bethink yourselves. Now may the Spirit of God bring you to your knees, now drive you to prayer, now lead you to faith in the sprinkled blood of the Lamb of God which taketh away the sins of the world. Sinner, remember! if thou perish thou destroyest thyself. Behold, God willeth not thy death, but he bids thee come now. Nay! he doth, as it were, pray thee to return. He says, "Return, ye backsliding children of men." "Oh Israel, return unto me." He says again, "Come, now, let us reason together; though your sins be as scarlet they shall be as wool; though they be red like crimson they shall be white as snow." Would that I could draw you! Oh that I had chains on my lips that should bind you in golden fetters to the cross of Christ. Come, sinner, for "who can tell?" Nay, I change the sentence. "I can tell"—if ye turn, he will turn unto you. Come ye to him, and he will accept you, for he is a God ready to forgive, and now, this day, he is ready to cast your sins into the depths of the sea, and remember them no more for ever.

III. And now, this shall bring me to the third point, namely, THE URGING OF DIVERS REASONS WHY WE SHOULD IMITATE THE NINEVITES IN REPENTANCE.

It was an old and a horrible custom of past governments, when a man was executed for murder, to allow him to be hung in chains, so that as often as any one passed by the gibbet they might learn, as was thought, the severity of justice. I fear, however, that they more frequently learned the brutality and barbarism of the age. Now, as these were hung in chains as warnings, I would translate this horrible figure into one that shall glitter with joy and delight. God, in order that you may know his mercy, has been pleased to preserve instances thereof, that so often as you look upon them you may be led to say, if such and such an one was saved, why may not I? It is needless for me to refer you to Old Testament and New Testament scriptures. You will remember well the pardon given to David! Surely you have not forgotten the mercy which God had on that chief of sinners, Manasseh! As for the New Testament pardoned sinners, from the thief on the cross to Saul of Tarsus, the chief of sinners, it sufficeth but to hint at them. And now this day behold before your eyes in this place, sinners once like yourselves, who have obtained mercy and are now forgiven. Amongst the thousands in this hall there are not a few who (say some two years ago or less) entered this place out of idle curiosity. I could describe some to you who had never

entered a place of worship for twenty or even thirty years. Some of them had been habitual drunkards, their lives had been the abodes of misery; some of them had been harlots, and led others into sin, beside destroying their own bodies and their souls. Into this place they crept, they came merely to listen to the preacher, of whom many a strange thing had been said. Their attention was rivetted. An arrow from the bow of God shot into their hearts and here they are this day. Without boasting I say it, they are my joy and my crown of rejoicing, and shall be such in the day of the appearing of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. If you, who have been like them, but are now repenting of your sins, could hear their testimony as I have done, you would never doubt of the mercy of God. If you could read the account that I have preserved of some of them—sailors, who in every part of the world have sinned—who have never touched upon land except to commit fornication and wickedness—if I could tell you on the other hand the dreadful iniquities into which some here have plunged in the days of their flesh, you would say, “Surely he is a pardoning God, and methinks that might entice you to come. Oh if there be any such here, and there are many such here, I know, if you are sitting in this hall to-day side by side with some trembling sinner, and you observe the tear dropping from his eye, be not slow to tell him, “I am one of the men that Mr. Spurgeon mentions.” The Lord has saved thee, and be not slow to take the hand of the penitent, and bid him come where you went, and bid him look for mercy where you sought it and found it. And I may say again, if I may speak for myself here to-day, if you knew my own character as it was before conversion, you need none of you despair of mercy. When I went to God confessing my sins to him, I felt myself to be the vilest sinner out of hell. Others might have praised me, but I had not a word to say on my own account. If the hottest flames of the pit had been mine eternal portion it was not one whit more than I deserved. But

“Tell it unto sinners tell,

I am, I am out of hell,”

And forgiven and accepted in Christ. Who then need despair? Who can tell? Come sinner, come, and say this in thine heart, and go and cry unto God in prayer, and lay hold on Christ by faith, saying, “Who can tell?” The innumerable instances of past mercies should stir us up to say, “Who can tell?”

And then again let me remind you—Oh, ye that are now conscious of your guilt, that your only hope for deliverance lies in the mercy of God. When a man knows that he has only one hope left how tenaciously will he cling to it. Some sick man has tried every system of medicine—he has spent nearly all his wealth, and now he has come to the last stage. He is trying the last system of medicine. If this remedy fail, die he must. Do you not readily imagine that he would use this with the greatest diligence, and be as obedient as possible to every command of the physician? And now sinner, it is Christ or hell with thee this day. If Christ save thee not, thou art a lost man. If the cross be not thy salvation, the jaws of hell must soon close upon thee. ‘Tis Christ or nothing. Nay it is Christ or perdition! Lay hold on him then; clutch him; he is thy last, thy only hope. Oh, fly to him: he is thine only refuge. If thou wert pursued by some fierce beast of prey: if there were but one tree on some vast plain, albeit, there were but a scanty hope of escape by climbing it, with what speed would thy feet carry thee to it. I see thee running and I come before thee and say, “Stop, why in such haste?” You rush past me crying—“Sir, ‘tis my only chance, ‘tis my only hope; I am devoured, I am rent in pieces if I find not shelter there.” It is your case today. Behold the roaring lion of the pit, athirst for your blood, is after you. Away to the cross; cling to it; there is hope; there is sure refuge. But apart from that thou art worse than rent in pieces; thou art destroyed for ever and ever.

But for thy encouragement, let me tell thee one other thing, and then I shall have done. Sinner, remember that while it will be a happy thing for thee to be saved, it will be a glorious thing for God to save thee. Men

object not to do a thing which is expensive to them, if it bring them in some honor. They will not stoop to do a thing which involves shame and scorn; but if honor goeth with a thing then are they ready enough to do it. Now soul, remember, if God shall save thee it will honor him. Why, wilt thou not honor him if he will but blot out thy sin? I thought when I was seeking mercy, if God would but save me there was nothing I would not do for him. I would be cut in pieces rather than deny him. I would serve him all my life, and he might do what he would with me in heaven. And do you not sometimes feel that if God would but save you, you would sing loudest of them all in heaven? Would you not love him; creep to the foot of his throne, and cast your crown before his feet, saying: "Lord, not unto me, not unto me, but unto thy name be all the glory." God delighteth to save sinners, because this puts jewels in his crown. He is glorified in his justice, but not as he is in his mercy. He appears in silken robes with a golden crown upon his head when he saves sinners. He wears an iron crown when he crushes them. Judgment is his strange work; he does that with his left hand, but his right-handed acts are those of mercy and of love. Hence he puts the righteous always on the right hand that he may be ready to pardon and ready to deliver. Oh, come then soul to Christ. Thou art not about to ask a thing which God is unwilling to give, or that which will slur his escutcheon, or blot his banner. Thou art asking for that which is as glorious to God as it is beneficial to thyself. Come humble soul and cry to Christ, and he will have mercy upon thee.

My only fear in conclusion is, that if any of you have received the slightest impression this morning you will go home and forget it. May I ask you now as a favor that if you have but got so much as a scar under the preaching of the Word, go home alone if you can. Say but little if you are obliged to walk with others, and go straight away to your chamber, fall there on your knees, make a confession of your sin, cry to God for mercy through the blood of Christ, and "Who can tell?" Who can tell—this very day there shall be high holiday in heaven over hundreds of sinners who in this Music Hall have first learned to pray—who in this place have first been led to consider their ways and turn to God. I hope our friends will all remain and no one move, while I pray that that may be the case, and all of you that wish it may be so, will solemnly say Amen after the few sentences of prayer I shall utter:—

"Lord, save us this morning. We confess our sin; we ask for mercy humbly through the blood of Christ. We pray thee do not deny us, but let us all appear at thy right hand at last. Here reveal with power, and let many be saved this morning for Jesus' sake." And the people said AMEN.

Source: <https://sermonindex.net/speakers/ch-spurgeon/who-can-tell/>

Grow in Your Walk with Christ

Listen and read messages that will stir your heart for Christ and point you to deeper repentance and devotion.

- 50,000+ Sermons from speakers past and present
- 3,900+ Classic Christian Books freely readable online
- 1,200+ Bible Translations and Commentaries
- Over 450k forum posts — Join our vibrant online Christian forum

www.sermonindex.net