

The Cry of Jonah Out of the Belly of Hell

by J.C. Philpot

J.C. Philpot explores Jonah's profound despondency and faith amidst his disobedience, emphasizing God's mercy and presence in times of distress.

Scripture: Psalm 139:8, Isaiah 66:1, Jonah 2:4, Matthew 23:21, John 2:19, 1 Corinthians 10:11, 2 Corinthians 4:18, Colossians 2:9, Hebrews 12:2, 1 Peter 1:7

Topics: "Salvation By Grace", "Faith In Distress"

Description

J.C. Philpot preaches about the struggles and faith of Jonah, highlighting the mercy of God in portraying imperfect saints in the Scriptures, such as Noah, Lot, and David, to teach us about salvation by grace and provide warnings against sin. Philpot delves into Jonah's disobedience, despair, and eventual faith in looking towards God's holy temple, symbolizing the human nature of Jesus Christ. He emphasizes the importance of faith in times of distress, the rarity of true spiritual experiences, and the discernment God grants to His people to distinguish between genuine faith and deceitful religious practices.

Transcript

Preached at Zoar Chapel, London, on July 16, 1843, by J. C. Philpot

"Then I said, I am cast out of your sight; yet I will look again toward your holy temple." Jonah 2:4

It is a great mercy for God's people that the account which the Holy Spirit has given of the saints in the Scripture is very different from the opinions which men form of them by nature. If we attend to the conceptions that the human heart naturally forms of saints, we would believe them to be a kind of intermediate being between us and angels, far removed from all the frailties, sins and imperfections of humanity, never overtaken by slips and falls, but continually walking in the "beauty of holiness".

But God has not recorded such imaginary saints in the Scriptures; and to beat down these foolish ideas, he has given us an account of the drunkenness of Noah, the incest of Lot, the unbelief of Abraham, the peevishness of Moses, the adultery of David, the idolatry of Solomon, the pride of Hezekiah, the cowardice of Mark, and the cursing and swearing of Peter.

But why has the Holy Spirit left on record these sins and slips of the saints? I believe chiefly for three reasons. First, that it might teach us that they were saved by grace as poor, lost, and ruined sinners, in the same way as we hope to be saved. Secondly, that their slips and falls might be so many beacons and

warnings, to guard the people of God against being overtaken by the same sins, as the Apostle speaks, "All these things happened to them for examples, and are written for our admonition" 1Co 10:11. And thirdly, that the people of God, should they be overtaken by sin, might not be cast into despair; but that from seeing recorded in the Scripture the slips and failings of the saints of old, they might be lifted up from their despondency, and brought once more to hope in the Lord.

Of all the recorded prophets, Jonah perhaps stumbles us naturally the most. His disobedient, rebellious conduct before the Lord so signally chastised him; and his impetuous language after he had received such a chastisement, and such a deliverance, when he said, "I do well to be angry, even unto death," have often stumbled those who know neither the depths of the human heart, nor the heights of God's super-abounding grace! And yet, I believe, there are many of God's family, who have felt comforted and encouraged, not only by Jonah's rebellious conduct, but also by his perverse and unbecoming words. Not that they dare justify the one, nor approve of the other; but those who really know themselves, and have a deep sense of their baseness and abominable vileness before God, are sometimes enabled to derive a little sweetness from seeing to what lengths God's people who are evidently his saints, and even his inspired prophets, have been permitted to go.

I need hardly, perhaps, remind you, that the words of the text were uttered by Jonah when he was in the whale's belly. It was there he spoke them in the bitterness of his soul; it was there that these words of sad despondency, and yet of strong faith, burst from his lips, "Then I said, I am cast out of your sight, yet I will look again toward your holy temple!"

But before we enter upon the words of the text, it may be desirable to trace out a few of the steps by which Jonah came into this spot--and then we shall, if the Lord enable us, see something not merely of the perverseness of a saint of God when left to himself, but we shall also perceive something of the exercises of godly fear in the midst of that perverseness.

We read Jonah 1:1-2, "The word of the Lord came unto Jonah, the son of Amittai, saying, Arise, go to Nineveh, that great city, and cry against it, for their wickedness is come up before me."

The Lord here gave Jonah a certain command. What that particular command was, does not very much concern us at present--suffice it to say, that it was contrary to Jonah's fleshly feelings, thwarted his natural inclinations, and was a burden laid upon him heavier than he could bear. What was the effect, then, of this command on Jonah? He disobeyed it. God did not supply him with strength to obey it; it was the Lord's will at that time to teach him another lesson; therefore he withheld from him the strength by which alone he could comply with his command. And that strength being withheld, disobedience was the inevitable consequence. But how did this disobedience work? "Jonah rose up to flee unto Tarshish from the presence of the Lord, and went down to Joppa" Jonah 1:3. Now in this very rising up of Jonah to flee from "the presence of the Lord", we see, as I have before hinted, the workings of godly fear in the midst of his perversity and rebelliousness.

What is implied here by the expression, "the presence of the Lord"? It does not mean the universal presence of God, whereby he sees all things in heaven and earth. Jonah knew well that he could not escape from that, for "if he ascended up to heaven, God was there; if he made his bed in hell, he was there also" Psalm 139:8. But by "the presence of the Lord" here must be intended his manifested presence, such as is made known in the assemblies of the saints, and which at that period was manifested at Jerusalem and in the temple.

Often, then, in experience, the first step which a child of God takes, when he cannot, through the perversity of the flesh, obey God's commands, is to withdraw himself from "the presence of the Lord". He shuns and forsakes the places where it is conspicuously manifested, his raw and tender conscience being unable to bear it. He withdraws himself, for instance, from a heart-searching ministry; from any deep or close experimental preaching, such as may lash his conscience; from the company of God's deeply taught and exercised people; from those who are walking in the light, life, and fear of the Lord. The manifestations of God's power and presence in them is a continual reproof to him; it rebukes his carnality, and checks his worldly plans. He cannot bear the lashes of conviction which this "presence of the Lord" produces, and yet is unable to walk in the path which conscience points out. He withdraws himself, therefore, from the cause of these stings and reproaches, and flees away from this continual source of guilt and condemnation.

But in the midst of all this inconsistency we see marks of life. Hypocrites living in sin can sit under the most heart-searching ministry; they can rest satisfied and contented under the most experimental preaching--their conscience is seared; and, therefore, the sharpest rebukes, and the keenest reproofs cannot touch them. Thus the very withdrawing of Jonah from "the presence of the Lord", instead of being a mark against him, is rather a mark for him, as it showed that his conscience was not seared as with a hot iron, but that it was still tender in God's fear.

After Jonah then had thus withdrawn himself, as much as he could, from those things which wounded and lashed him, he goes down to Joppa; and finding "a ship going to Tarshish, he pays the fare thereof, to go with them unto Tarshish, from the presence of the Lord" Jonah 1:3. Thus a backslider buries himself in the world, as soon as he gets away from everything that stings and pierces his conscience.

But did the Lord leave Jonah there, and let him fulfill his intentions? No! "The Lord sent out a great wind, and there was a mighty tempest in the sea, so that the ship was likely to be broken." Here was the beginning of Jonah's chastisement, the commencement of the Lord's visibly taking notice of his disobedience. But what effect does it produce on Jonah? Apparently none whatever; he is stupefied. Having withdrawn himself from "the presence of the Lord", his conscience, though not dead, is become to a certain extent callous. The very storm that frightened the superstitious mariners, and made every man cry unto his god, did not alarm him. He was gone to sleep. He did not perceive, and therefore did not tremble at, the first manifestations of God's wrath.

Thus a living soul, when he gets into a backsliding state, and withdraws himself from an experimental ministry and the company of God's family becomes to a certain degree "hardened through the deceitfulness of sin". So that when God sends affliction, and deals out troubles, he at first often does not feel it; like Jonah, he is asleep, and the conscience is callous.

What a strange thing, that the very mariners, who worshiped false gods, and had no religion but a few superstitious ideas, should be more alarmed at the tempest, than the prophet of God himself! So, when our hearts begin to grow hard, and the conscience has lost its former tenderness in God's fear, the very things that frighten others seem to have no effect on us. The judgments of God and the manifestations of his anger, which terrify even those who make no profession of religion, pass us by unfelt, and leave us unmoved.

But time, I see, will scarcely permit me to run through all the steps which eventually brought Jonah into the whale's belly; yet one thing I must just touch on, and that is, the effect which was produced on his

conscience, when at length it was effectually aroused. God would not allow him to continue sleeping on; he causes the storm to become heavier, and the ship-master awakes him out of his sleep. And when they proceeded to cast lots, "to know for whose cause the evil had come upon them", "the lot fell upon Jonah".

God's finger singled him out from all the rest. And now, when his conscience is awakened by this distinct pointing of him out, and the wrath of God is flashing into his soul, he is penetrated through and through with a sense of his disobedience, and he feels the hand of God to be gone out against him. And then what follows? Doubt, despair, and overwhelming despondency. "Take me up," he says, "and cast me forth into the sea". I have sinned against God! Cast me out, "for I know that for my sake this great tempest is upon you".

And when with much reluctance they had taken him up, and cast him into the sea, God did not leave him there, for he "had prepared a great fish to swallow up Jonah--and he was in the belly of the fish three days and three nights". But in this dreadful spot, the very "belly of hell", as he calls it, Jonah begins to come to himself. His disobedience, and the consequence of it, the anger of God, were so opened up to his soul, "when the depth closed him round about", that he was overwhelmed with distress.

In Jonah's state, temporal and spiritual, we see marks, not merely of his being a child of God, but of God's merciful dealings toward him, in not allowing him to do what he pleased; he would not allow him to "go down to Tarshish", to bury himself in the world, and forsake vital godliness. Nor will God allow any of us, whose hearts he has touched by his fear, to do so. We may lay down our plans, and say, "we will do this, or that thing"; but God will disappoint every plan we make, which will not be for our spiritual good, and for his eternal glory.

When every proposed plan, then, is disappointed, and the frown of God is sensibly felt in the conscience, the soul sinks into distress and despondency; and then is the time when the Lord begins to show forth the power of his mighty arm, and to work according to his own eternal purpose.

Without further preface, then, we come to the words of the text, breathed forth by Jonah, when he was in that dreadful and distressed condition--"Then he said, I am cast out of your sight; yet I will look again toward your holy temple."

We may observe here two leading features-

I. Jonah's despondency- "I am cast out of your sight;"

II. Jonah's faith, working in the midst, and in spite of his despondency- "Yet I will look again toward your holy temple."

I. Jonah's DESPONDENCY. "Then I said, I am cast out of your sight." What do these words imply? What is it to be "cast out of God's sight"? They imply a deep feeling of being cast out from the manifestation of God's presence to the soul. And thus poor Jonah, when he spoke these words, uttered them in the very bitterness of his heart; he felt that he was cast out of God's gracious presence.

But he must have known something experimentally of the sweetness of God's manifested presence; he must have tasted that heaven was in it, and that all his happiness centered there. He must have enjoyed this in order to know if God's presence were not felt in the soul, there was but one barren scene of gloom and death; and that to be "cast out of his sight", was the commencement of hell upon earth.

Now here a living soul differs from all others, whether dead in sin, or dead in a religious profession. The persuasion that in God alone is true happiness; the feeling of misery and dissatisfaction with everything else but the Lord, and everything short of his manifested presence, is that which stamps the reality of the life of God in a man's soul. Mere professors of religion feel no misery, dissatisfaction, or wretchedness, if God does not shine upon them. So long as the world smiles, and they have all that heart can wish, so long as they are buoyed up by the hypocrite's hope, and lulled asleep by the soft breezes of flattery, they are well satisfied to sail down the stream of a dead profession.

But it is not so with the living soul; he is at times panting after the smiles of God; he is thirsting after his manifested presence; he feels dissatisfied with the world, and all that it presents, if he cannot find the Lord, and does not enjoy the light of his countenance. Where this is experienced, it stamps a man as having the grace of God in his heart. And thus Jonah, having tasted the sweetness, and realized the blessedness of the manifested presence of the Lord, when cast out of his sight, cried as if "out of the belly of hell".

And do not all God's people feel a measure of this when sunk deep in distress and despondency? It is not indeed always the fear of the pains of hell, of its sulphurous flames, and ever-burning fire- though these may have their solemn weight and power- but to be banished from the presence of God, in which their soul desires to find eternal bliss and joy, never to behold his glory, or be swallowed up in the everlasting contemplation and boundless enjoyment of his presence; it is in this that much of the anguish of the distressed soul consists. It is not so much the fear of punishment, or the mere pangs of slavish dread, but the feelings of a child banished from his Father's house.

To be cast then out of God's sight, implies the being banished--I do not mean eternally, but in experimental soul feeling, from the manifested presence and enjoyment of God.

But what are the prominent feelings in being thus "cast out"?

1. That of guilt. The God-taught soul knows the Lord's pure eyes cannot look on sin, and that he cannot behold iniquity but with abhorrence. Therefore "to be cast out of God's sight", implies a burden of guilt lying on the conscience; that our sins are so numerous, our backslidings so aggravated, our iniquities so dreadful, that we dare not come into the presence of him whose holy and pure eyes cannot look on us with acceptance.

2. Another prominent feeling is, that of filthiness. When the Lord by his blessed Spirit opens up the depths of a man's corrupt heart, and takes away the veil of self-delusion that is spread over it by nature, he covers him with shame and confusion of face, and makes him feel that he is too black and filthy, too vile and polluted to be admitted into his sacred presence. Thus we feel "cast out", as being too filthy to come into God's sanctuary.

3. Another prominent feeling is that of misery and wretchedness. When Jonah uttered these words, he spoke them in the anguish of his soul. Perhaps there is no feeling more bitter for a living soul to experience than to be "cast out of God's sight". If we are in trouble, and the Lord is by our side, he makes trouble light. If we are passing through heavy scenes of tribulation, and the Lord sensibly lays his everlasting arms underneath the soul, he bears it up. If the body is afflicted, if all things appear to be against us in providence, if there be family trials and sorrows, if the Lord be but present, if he but supports the soul, and speaks comfort to the heart, all these things can be borne; "for the spirit of a man can sustain his infirmity, but a wounded spirit who can bear"?

But when, in addition to all the afflictions and troubles of this mortal life, God himself seems to frown on the soul, when he appears to take no notice of it, and neither to hear nor answer its prayers; and when, instead of pouring oil and wine into the bleeding wounds, it seems as though he were rather pouring into them venom and poison, this is indeed to be experimentally "cast out of God's sight".

4. But another prominent feeling, is that of most complete helplessness. What a different thing it was for Jonah to withdraw himself from the Lord's presence, and for God to withdraw his presence from Jonah. He easily enough withdrew himself from the Lord, but when he would come back, and return to his former position--when he would gladly once more bask in the Lord's smiles; when he would once more cry from the bottom of his heart "my Father"; when he would once more enjoy the tokens of adopting love; when he would once more look upon the canceling of his sins, and the blotting out of his transgressions; when he would once more creep into the very bosom of a covenant God, alas, there was no approach. His helplessness, impotency, and inability blocked up the way; and the Lord not drawing, but rather repelling him, every approach served only to drive him farther and farther back.

Thus, these four prominent feelings, guilt, filth, wretchedness, and helplessness, were all at work together in Jonah's troubled mind; so that when he spoke these words he uttered them full of anguish of spirit. And that which he doubtless felt to be the bitterest ingredient of all, was, the conviction of that great truth which the Lord afterwards spoke by Jeremiah, "Have you not brought this on yourselves by forsaking the Lord your God?" Jeremiah 2:17

Whatever exercises the soul may have to pass through; whatever afflictions may be heaped on our head; whatever trouble the mind may be in, we must come to this--that we must justify the Lord in all his dealings with us, and say to him, "We have deserved all this, and ten thousand times more." We dare not charge God with iniquity, and say to him, "We have not merited this at your hands." And this is the bitterness to the child of God, that he knows whatever he suffers, he has justly and richly merited it all.

And now, my friends, have you ever felt this soul bitterness, and known what it is to be experimentally "cast out of God's sight"? Is this the most painful feeling that you have ever passed through? Did your natural afflictions ever equal the sorrow you have felt from this? Did temporal trials ever weigh so heavily in the balance? Whatever worldly afflictions and troubles a man may pass through--I believe this firmly in my conscience--that they are nothing compared to spiritual trials. I have passed through my share of natural trouble, but I never found any natural trouble like spiritual trouble. Spiritual sorrows, temptations, and exercises so outweigh natural troubles, that they are not to be compared with each other.

Now if you have been companions with Jonah in his despondency, you will be able to look at-

II. Jonah's FAITH. "Yet I will look again toward your holy temple." Jonah 2:4

I think the case of Jonah approaches as near to suicide as any instance in the Scriptures. Jonah, it is true, did not throw himself overboard; but he said, "Take me up, and cast me forth into the sea." He was preserved, miraculously preserved, from the damning sin of suicide. But he seems to me to have sunk into as much despondency of mind, as if he had actually leaped from the bow of the ship into the boiling waves; the difference is, he permitted himself to be thrown in by the hands of others--and God miraculously preserved him; with these two points of difference only did he escape the fatal sin of self-murder.

But in the midst of all his despondency, we find he had faith living and working in his heart--as Deer says, "It lives and labors under load; though damped, it never dies."

This blessed grace of faith was not merely alive, but lively in the midst of all the burdens and exercises that lay upon it; and it was in the exercise of this living faith that he said "Yet will I look again toward your holy temple."

God's holy temple was at Jerusalem; and this temple was typical, as I observed before on a recent occasion, of the human nature of the Lord Jesus Christ. It was not, then, to the literal temple that Jonah looked. The building of stone could not profit him, as he lay in "the belly of hell", but he looked beyond the temple to what the temple represented. He looked through the natural building to that which it symbolized. His faith turned toward the human nature of the Lord Jesus, which was to be in due time united, indissolubly united to the Godhead, so as to form one glorious Person, "Immanuel, God with us;" the Mediator, the only Mediator between God and man.

But how did the temple represent the human nature of the Lord Jesus? First, in it God dwelt. As the Lord said, "Whoever shall swear by the temple swears by it, and by Him who dwells therein" Matthew 23:21. It was in the temple that God dwelt, in the cloud on the mercy-seat; and so in the human nature of Jesus Christ, which is spotless and holy, does God dwell, "for in him dwells all the fullness of the Godhead bodily". And secondly, everything in the temple was connected with, and had relation to the Lord Jesus, as Mediator between God and man. The mercy-seat, sprinkled once a year with atoning blood, the holy of holies, the bronze altar on which the sacrifices were continually offered, and in a word, everything connected with the temple, had a spiritual and typical reference to the Lord of life and glory.

Jonah then, in "looking toward the holy temple", looked to all that the temple represented and symbolized. Thus, in the midst of all the sinking of his soul, and the distress of his mind, he cast a despairing yet believing look, for we may conjoin the two apparently contradictory expressions, towards God's holy temple--the Lord Jesus Christ.

Now, in order to do this, the eyes of his understanding must have been spiritually enlightened by the Holy Spirit. Faith must have been given to him by God himself to look toward this only Mediator; the efficacy of his atoning blood must have been seen and felt; the glory of his justifying righteousness must have been beheld; the dignity and beauty of his Person must have been divinely realized and not only must faith have flowed out toward him, but hope must have anchored on him, and love been firmly fixed upon him.

And thus, however low Jonah sank in trouble, he lost not his acquaintance with divine teachings. Did he go to Joppa? He did not lose them there. Did he fall asleep in the hold of the ship? He did not lose them there. Did the storm rage, the winds blow, and was Jonah cast into the billows? He did not lose his faith there; yes, when he was come into the very "belly of hell", he did not lose it even there. The Lord had given him living faith; and he who first kindled the divine spark in his soul, kept it secretly alive, brought it forth into fresh exercise, and never let the holy flame expire. This living faith keeps the soul from utter despair, however low it may sink in distress and trouble. Faith, hope, and love, formerly kindled and realized in the soul, held it up from utterly sinking in the deep waters. And thus, in the midst of the soul's despondency, and of its sharpest exercises, there is often a blessed "Yet I will look again toward your holy temple."

Now this word "again", shows that Jonah had looked there before; that it was not the first time his eye had been fixed by faith on the Person and work of the Mediator; and that it was not the first time his soul had

received benefit from Jesus' blessed mediation.

But what is contained in the expression "look"? There are various kinds of looking. There is, for instance, the look of mere speculation; but that will not profit us. There is the looking by the eye of sense, as the Jews, who crucified Jesus, looked on his bleeding and agonized body; but that look did not profit their souls. There is the looking on him as revealed in the letter of God's word, a seeing the name of Jesus in the Scripture, and a reading of many texts that speak of the efficacy of his atoning blood and righteousness; but that will not profit us. All this is merely a looking after the flesh; but the Apostle says, "though we have known Christ after the flesh, yet now henceforth know we him no more". But the looking that profits the soul, that saves it, delivers it, and brings it out of every hole into which it may be sunk, is the look by faith.

But Jonah's look was not exactly that- it was indeed a believing look; but it was rather a longing, lingering, and almost despairing glance, that did not bring him out of the distress into which he was sunk, nor relieve him from the despondency with which he was overwhelmed. It was as though he would take one last look, as though he could not entirely sink into despair; and as if one look more would keep him from being entirely swallowed up, from being altogether a castaway. It was not then such a confident look as could deliver him out of "the belly of hell"; it was but just sufficient to bring into his heart a little support, and to keep hope and love alive in his soul.

Now, I believe many of God's people are just in that state; they have not sufficient faith to bring them out of their trouble; the Lord does not sufficiently make known the riches of his grace to burst asunder every chain and fetter in which they are entangled. He does not see good to break the neck of every temptation, and bring the soul out of the despondency in which it is lying; but he gives just sufficient faith to preserve alive his own work in the soul, and thus keeps it looking again and again toward "his holy temple". By this look, strength indeed is imparted to support the soul, yet not sufficient completely to deliver it out of the exercises, temptations, and distresses that it may be burdened with.

Now "a full soul" who knows nothing of this inward experience, will not value such a look as this. To be kept on a low diet cannot suit those who would turn away from every table not spread with delicacies--and so the idea of being preserved barely alive will not suit those who know nothing of vital godliness. But when a soul is really taught the grand difference there is between faith and presumption; and the eternal and dreadful distinction between what a man can do for himself, and what God does in and for him; when it feels the amazing difference between what comes from God as a free gift, and what is stolen by the pilfering hands of the creature--then it begins to find that the communication of God's mercy and grace is not a thing constantly enjoyed in everyday profusion; that the table is not daily loaded with luxuries, but that the soul is kept alive from day to day, and preserved from actual starvation only by those crumbs and drops that God may be pleased to bless it with.

And, my friends, nothing but passing through a measure of soul exercises, temptations, and trials, will teach a man this lesson. There is no means so effectual naturally to teach a man what good food is, as to put him for some time on a starving system--to keep him on a low diet, to shut him up for awhile in a prison, or confine him within the walls of a workhouse. And so, spiritual hunger makes a man value gospel food, when he receives it as an answer to his prayers. When one is kept on short allowance; when God will not smile on the soul when we desire it; when he will not apply his promises when we want them; when one gets only a little here and a little there according to the Scripture definition, "line upon line, and precept upon precept; here a little, and there a little", I say, when a man is brought to this point, he begins to value

and enjoy those things which before he thought little of.

Nothing, I believe, can really comfort a God-taught soul, but the consolations that God alone can bless him with; the only food that can really satisfy a living man, is the bread of life that the Holy Spirit from time to time brings down into his heart; and his heart can only be established and kept at anchor, just as the Lord is pleased from time to time to favor him with testimonies. And these realities are very rare, while counterfeits abound. False Christs, notional religion, carnal security, may be had at every shop, and be picked up in every street; but real testimonies from God, gracious smiles of his favor, gospel food brought down from heaven, you may depend upon it, my friends, that those who know these things experimentally, will say that they are very rare indeed. It is only occasionally that the Lord bestows these favors; it is only when we have been long toiling, and can catch nothing, that we are enabled to cast our net on the right side of the ship.

And the Lord's people learn two things in this school- their own wretchedness without them, and the rarity and infrequency of them. They are unable to procure them for themselves; and yet they are unable to live comfortably and die happily without them. Thus they are brought to see that much that passes for religion is not true religion at all; that much that goes for true evidences and real hopes is nothing but lying refuges; that much is palmed upon men for the teaching of the Spirit which is nothing but delusion; that vital godliness is very rare; that there are very few people spiritually taught of God; that there are very few ministers who really preach the truth; and that Satan is thus daily deceiving thousands, and tens of thousands.

A living soul, however weak and feeble in himself, cannot be satisfied, except with God's own testimony to his heart. He cannot take up with a religion in the flesh; he cannot rest on the opinions of men, nor be long deceived by Satan's delusions. There is a principle of divine discernment in a God-taught soul. However carnal he may be, however buried in the world, he cannot rest long contented without God's blessing. If the Lord does not communicate some token and blessed testimony to his soul, he can have no solid happiness.

It is this conviction working underground, that mars all his fleshly consolation. It is this secret gnawing of conscience in a living soul that makes it dissatisfied with a religion that satisfies thousands. If his conscience is alive in God's fear, he knows he cannot deceive God, however he may deceive himself. He knows that there will be a solemn day of reckoning, that all shall stand before that great tribunal. He would rather, therefore, suffer a thousand hells here, than go to hell at last.

May we not be deceived then, for a deceived wretch is worse than any wretch. May we not be deluded by the devil, or our own hearts. And if we are brought into simplicity and godly sincerity, we never shall be deceived; God himself will not allow it; for the work of God in a man's heart will teach him the wretched deceitfulness of everything in the creature.

And this work God keeps alive in his soul, so that however low he may sink, however he may be exercised, whatever doubts and fears he may be plunged into, he will look again towards God's temple. He cannot give it up; he cannot cast away his hope, nor throw aside his profession. He holds on, and struggles and stumbles through all to "the end of his faith, even the salvation of his soul". And when the Lord, by his Spirit, lifts him out of his despondency and trouble, and brings him out of this trying path, he will see that it has been a safe path, and that the Lord has led him in it ultimately to make him a partaker of everlasting bliss!

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