The Voice of Jesus in the Storm!

By Newman Hall

"When they saw Him walking on the lake, they thought He was a ghost. They cried out, because they all saw Him and were terrified. Immediately He spoke to them and said: *Take heart! **It is I!** Do not be afraid.*" Mark 6:49-50 (Matthew 14:22-33; Mark 6:45-50; John 6:15-21)

Is it *stormy weather* with you? Do cares, disappointments, afflictions, bereavements, as a heavy cloud, deluge you with sorrow? Do spiritual troubles assail you as a hurricane, and drive your harassed soul hither and thither? Do the winds and the waves beat upon *your frail bark*, so that it seems about to sink? "O afflicted, tempest-tossed, and not comforted" — listen to the voice of Jesus, who comes to you in the storm, walking upon the waters, and says, "It is I! do not be afraid!"

The design of religion is to sustain us in this poor world. This world is indeed a *valley of tears*, but the *Man of sorrows* has visited it that we may rejoice. We are surrounded by causes of alarm, but the gospel bids us to fear not. And that, which alone can enable us to take heart amid sorrows, and of courage amid perils, is *the presence of our God and Savior*. To believe in Him as always *near*, always *kind*, always *mighty* to save — is the true and sole antidote to fear and grief. It is only in proportion as we recognize His voice, as that of a *friend*, saying, "It is I!" that we can comply with his exhortation, "Take heart! Do not be afraid."

The disciples were once in a *storm* on the Sea of Galilee. Their Master had been miraculously feeding five thousand people, on five loaves and two fish. The people were so astonished at His power, that they resolved to make Him their King. But as He had come not to reign, but to *suffer* — He urged them to return quietly to their homes, and He Himself retired to a mountain to pray. Meanwhile, Jesus "*made* His disciples to get into a ship, and to go before Him unto the other side" of the lake. It is most likely that they did not understand the reason of this request. It seemed strange to them. Why should He be left to disperse the multitude alone? Why should they be deprived of His company? If He wished retirement, why could they not wait on the shore until He came from the mountain? How could He follow them, if they went away with the ship? But they were *commanded,* and this was sufficient.

Even so, Christians still have to do and to suffer many things, the *reason* of which is hidden from them. But an obedient disciple will *not* say, *"Why* has this been appointed me to do? *Why* has that been given me to suffer? — for until I comprehend the reason I will not obey the command." Oh, no! His language will rather be, "Lord, *what* will you have me to do?"

If the head of a family, or the commander of a ship, or the general of an army, often gives orders which, though not explained, are promptly obeyed — shall we presume to sit questioning the will of Jesus, instead of making haste to keep His commandments? May we not expect to hear Him reprovingly say to us, "What is that to you? Follow you Me!"

But the Christian's *duty* not only sometimes baffles his *reason*, but also *opposes his preferences*. How much more willingly would the disciples have remained in the company of their beloved Master! How much they perhaps imagined they were losing, while, deprived of His company, they were in the ship alone!

Just so, in obedience to duty, the Christian may still seem to be a loser, not only in temporal, but even in spiritual respects. His opportunities of growth in grace may appear to be curtailed by a course which, otherwise, he would not hesitate to pronounce his duty to his Savior. It is his duty still.

Apparent unfavorable consequences do not diminish the obligation of an obvious command. And he who most scrupulously adheres to the *path of obedience* will most successfully travel in the path of improvement too. *Duty* is identical with *privilege*. However delightful and profitable the company of Jesus must have been, the disciples gained far more by being *obediently absent* than *rebelliously near*. Obedience is the best kind of nearness to Jesus.

The evening on which the disciples embarked was calm and fair. The day had *not* been stormy — or else the five thousand could not so comfortably have sat upon the grass at that miraculous feast. It was after the disciples had left the shore, that "the sea was getting rough because of a great and violent wind that was blowing!" They therefore must have anticipated a safe and pleasant voyage.

Thus how often do *storms* visit believers — when only *calm weather* is expected! The *brightest beginnings* are not sure harbingers of continued blessings. The morning sun may be undimmed — but black thunderclouds may conceal his rays at noon. The finest day — may be followed by the stormiest night; and the ocean, now without a ripple — may before long writhe beneath the lashings of the tempest!

Just so, our dearest treasures may suddenly be taken from us, and our fairest hopes are *withered in the bud*. Sunshine and calm are treacherous — they cannot always last. Do not sailors expect to encounter gales and tempests, and therefore provide themselves with anchors and all other things that may be of use in such emergencies? How foolish are they who *voyage on the perilous ocean of life* without the Christian's hope "as an anchor of the soul, sure and steadfast!" We should be *prepared* for storms, that we may not be overwhelmed with surprise and terror when they come. But *if Jesus is with us*, the most terrific tempest cannot harm us. But the profoundest calm is infinitely perilous without Him.

Behold the frightened disciples in their storm-driven boat! They have to *struggle with difficulties*. The favorable breeze with which they weighed anchor, has changed to an opposing gale. They have taken down their sail as no longer of any use, and they are now tugging at the oars! "He saw the disciples straining at the oars, because the wind was against them." Moreover, the night "was now dark!" They were in danger too, for their little vessel was "in the midst of the sea, tossed with waves." Worse than all, they were *alone*, for "Jesus had not come unto them."

This is a suitable *representation* of the circumstances by which *believers* are still often tried. What contrary winds and tides have they to contend with! What darkness surrounds them! What perils threaten them! And sometimes, even Jesus seems withdrawn!

The stormy gales of trouble blow from various quarters. Bitter disappointments, grievous losses, perplexing cares, anxious apprehensions, pinching poverty, the injuries of foes and, far worse, the slights of friends. Painful diseases, suspension of beloved activities, prostrated strength, debilitated faculties, weary wakefulness, gnawing pain. *Heartbreaking bereavements*, tearing from us those with whom our very life was bound together, leaving a blank which nothing earthly can fill. A *wounded spirit*, bending beneath the burden of mounting anguish, or severe conflicts with the great adversary of souls, or harassing temptations, or awful terrors of mind, gloomy doubts, dark despondency. Oh!, what *black clouds* do such stormy winds as these often cause to gather round the believer, so that scarcely a ray of light can struggle through to cheer him as he is tossed up and down amid the billows!

Was this to be *expected?* Am I not a disciple, under the special protection of Jesus? Has He not promised to defend me from all harm? Has He not told me that His angels have charge over me, and that no evil thing shall happen unto me? If He were my Protector, my Savior, my Friend — then could such troubles as these assail me? They assailed the disciples. Though Jesus was then bodily on the earth, yet *they* did not escape the storm. But Jesus was not unfaithful or forgetful.

Do not be then, O reader, surprised if sometimes you also are "in the midst of the sea, tossed by the waves." Who expects the ocean to be always calm? *Discipleship* is distinguished by *exposure* to troubles, rather than *exemption* from them. "We must through much tribulation enter into the kingdom." Christ has promised to *deliver* us out of the storm, but not to secure us from encountering it. "There has no temptation taken you but such as is common to men; but God is faithful, who" (not *will preserve you from trial,* but) "will not allow you to be tempted *above that you able,* but will with the temptation also make a way of escape that you may be able" (not to *avoid* it, but) "to *bear* it." "Knowing that the same sufferings are being experienced by your fellow believers throughout the world" — in all ages. The saints now in glory, have all toiled in rowing amid similar billows. Though never *shipwrecked*, they were all *tempest-tossed*. The elder Brother himself did not escape! He was made like to His brethren — in all points tempted as we are! "Beloved, think it not strange concerning the fiery trial which is to try you, as though some *strange* thing happened unto you!" (1 Corinthians 10:13; 1 Peter 4:12, 5:9).

These *storms* may often rise against us — *even when we are acting in direct obedience to the will of Christ!* The disciples had not set sail without His express *command* — yet the tempest assailed them. He *knew* that the wind would arise. He Himself *permitted* it to blow. Nevertheless, He told the disciples to go over to the other side!

Just so, we should never interpret *duty* by *success*. The *opposition* which assails us in the course of obedience, is no evidence that we are mistaken. He who gives laws to His servants, is the *controller of all events*. It may be His will that in the very act of obedience, we should encounter *storms*. He foreknew every trial we should meet with — when He laid down the route we should pursue. We must not dare to turn back.

The disciples, when the wind became contrary, might have wished to return to shore, especially as Jesus was there. But they had been commanded to go to the other side; and so they continued rowing, even though they made little or no progress. They were not responsible for the contrary wind that stopped them — but they were responsible for striving to obey the will of their Master.

Even so, no difficulty must daunt us in the way of obedience. Let the prow of our vessel be ever turned toward the point of duty — however terrible the gale, however mighty the waves which beat against it. Though they may seem to force us back, yet, if we persevere in obediently struggling against them, we are really making rapid progress. Christ secures deliverance and success to every faithful disciple. Better, infinitely better, to suffer the loss of all things in obeying Jesus — than to purchase the universe by retreating from the storm! Better to perish in the tempest-than to seek safety in a disobedient flight. "For whoever will save his life shall lose it; but whoever will lose his life, for My sake, shall find it."

But while the disciples are battling with the winds and the waves — *where is Jesus?* In the mountain, alone with His Father, spending the night in prayer. Are His afflicted followers *forgotten?* When were they ever absent from His considerate thoughts, His loving heart? Doubtless He is *interceding* for them.

Just so, He intercedes for you, afflicted, tempest-tossed reader! Most consoling truth. "He ever lives to make intercession for us!" By night and by day, in the tempest and the calm, His all-prevalent prayer arises, "Father, keep them from the evil!" believer, you are never forgotten by Him.

The *hands of Moses* grew weary as he was praying for the Israelites, and when they drooped, Amalek prevailed. But a mightier than Moses is here, who never is weary, and whom the Father hears always. He bears your name upon His heart; you are *engraved on the palms of His hands*; in every storm He is on the mount, and His intercession renders your deliverance certain!

Do not think that because the wind is boisterous, and the storm continues long — that He intercedes in vain. Your *not sinking* proves that His advocacy prevails. If you expect to travel through this world without storms — you will be very disappointed. But do not charge His mediation with inefficacy. Expect *supporting grace*, and *final deliverance* — and your hope shall never make you ashamed. He prays not that our day may *never* be stormy; but, in answer to His intercession, we may always be confident that "as our day — so shall our strength be."

Jesus not only *prayed* for His disciples, but also *watched* them in the tempest. They could not see Him. They might think themselves beyond His sight; for they had a distance of upwards of three miles. And as we are told, the night was dark, their small vessel could not be seen from the shore. Yet the eye of Jesus was on it! He saw every wave that broke over it. He beheld the poor disciples in dismay, laboring unavailingly at the oars. He understood all that was in their hearts. "He saw them straining at the oars." And does He not see *you* also, storm-driven reader? Do not think your case is unknown to Him. Every secret anxiety, every heart-buried grief — is watched from His throne on high! He knows all your difficulties, sorrows, afflictions, and temptations. You shall not perish by any oversight of His. When He sees that the *fitting season* has arrived, He will appear for your deliverance!

This manifest interposition may be *delayed*. It was not until the *fourth watch* in the night that the disciples beheld their Savior. How long those hours appeared! Until three o'clock in the morning they been straining at the oars against the furious winds and waves. Perhaps they unbelievingly thought they were quite *forgotten* by their Master, and *abandoned* to the raging storm.

And still it often happens to afflicted believers, that Jesus seems to *delay* His promised help. It is delay in appearance only. Was He not assisting His disciples most effectually while *watching* them from the shore, and *interceding* on their behalf? Were they not preserved from destruction, though as yet they had not seen their deliverer? Were they not saved *in* the storm, though not *from* it?

Thus Jesus is ever present to protect *us,* even though we may not see Him. Troubles may appear overwhelmingly great, and spiritual darkness benights our souls, without one ray of comfort to dart across the gloom. And this may continue days, months, years! Jesus may delay to *reveal* Himself, but not to *support* and *sustain* His disciples. And for that very *delay*, He has the kindest, wisest reasons.

Oh, to say from the heart, "My times are in *Your* hands!" To believe them to be in the *best* hands! To wish them in no other hands! And therefore not to *murmur* or be *dismayed*, even though until the fourth watch in the night, we are allowed to continue straining at the oars, because the wind is against us! *His time is the best time.* The hour of deliverance will certainly arrive. "For the vision is yet for an *appointed* time; though it tarries, wait for it; because it will surely come, it will not tarry."

When at length Jesus did appear to His storm-tossed disciples, the **manner** of His coming was so unexpected and strange that, instead of joy, their first emotion was *terror*. He approached them *walking on the waves!* Who would have expected Him *thus?* It was a prodigy never witnessed before. Notwithstanding former displays of His power, the disciples doubtless regarded the intervening sea an impassable barrier between them and their divine Master. This was the last direction to which they would turn, in expectation of beholding Him. And when He did come, making the very waters, which they thought must keep Him absent, the path by which He approached — their terror was such that they did not recognize their Deliverer, but imagined that they saw a ghost.

Ah!, how often do we *limit* the Holy One of Israel! We too often think of Him as like to ourselves in His resources! We regard as an impossibility that which presents to Him no difficulty. We despair of help from the very quarters where, perhaps, He is that moment advancing to our support! *We presume to prescribe to the Almighty.* Instead of praying for His aid, and leaving to His loving wisdom the manner of it — we too often determine in our own minds the *method* by which the hoped-for assistance will be given. *Disappointed* in our expectation, we perhaps *murmur* that our prayers have been disregarded — though at the very time we are receiving in some other way the aid we sought.

Is not strength to *bear* a burden as much an answer to prayer as its *removal?* Is not grace to persevere in supplication, amid surrounding *gloom*, as much a proof of our Savior's faithfulness as if the sunshine dispersed the darkness? May not a still deeper sense of our vileness and helplessness, be an answer to prayer for spiritual growth, still more valuable at some seasons than even the joy and peace we coveted? Though the enemy may not have left us, yet is it no mercy to be enabled to sustain the conflict, and "having done all, to stand"? And though the storm may continue to rage, and the calm is long delayed — yet is it not a proof that Jesus is with us, so long as the waves are not allowed to *overwhelm* us?

Like the disciples, who "cried out for fear, saying: It is a ghost!" — we often mistake the form and presence of our Lord! We look with apprehension — on what should disperse our fear. Our best blessings, and the answers to our most earnest prayers — cause us alarm and grief. What shortsighted, blind and ignorant creatures we are! How we mistake the *intentions* of our dearest Friend! How often we tremble — when we should take heart! How often we mourn and complain — when we should abound in thanksgiving!

Oh, help us, gracious Savior, to leave with You the *manner* of Your appearing! However strange, however terrible the outward shape — may we recognize the presence of our ever-faithful Friend! Nothing is impossible with You! Still You often walk upon the waters. What *we* most dread as distressing and ruinous — You may select as the best method of effecting our deliverance! Though the tempest is high, and though the night is dark, yet let us adoringly recognize and hail You, walking to us on the boisterous waves of affliction!

The terror of the disciples was speedily allayed by the encouraging voice of Jesus, "It is I; do not be afraid! It is no ghost, none of the powers of darkness; it is I — your Master, your Protector, your Friend — do not be afraid!" What *consolation* this must have afforded to that affrighted crew!

Just so, there is nothing that can so allay the grief of afflicted believers as hearing Jesus say, "It is I!" In every calamity, in every grief, He is present. We are never alone. *Our best Friend is always near!*

And He is not only *with* us in the storm, but He *sends* and *controls* it. We are too apt to attribute our troubles to *secondary causes* alone, losing sight of *Him* without whom not even a sparrow falls to the ground. Men say, "This was an accident," or "That was owing to the operation of the laws of nature," or "An enemy has done this." But Jesus says, *"It is I!"* Whatever may be the truth respecting human agency and natural laws, there is a *supreme controller*, without whose permission and direction no event transpires! Though man's free agency is not invaded, nor the ordinary course of nature impeded — most absolutely true is the Savior's own declaration, "My Father works hitherto, and I work." In every event, important or trivial in the estimation of man, He speaks and says "It is I!" In *poverty*, "It is I!" In *sickness*, "It is I!" In *anxiety*, "It is I!" In *bereavement*, "It is I!"

Whatever is the *nature* of the storm, from whatever *quarter* the hurricane may blow — still Jesus says, "It is I!" Not merely when the waters are smooth, reflecting every shadow on their mirrored surface, while an unclouded sun diffuses light and gladness all around — but when the dark *clouds* gather, and the night is *black*, and the *tempest* howls, and the *thunder* rattles, and the *waters rage*, and hideous gulfs yawn as if to swallow up the despairing disciple. Even then amid the gloom, may Jesus be seen by the *eye of faith*, walking in majesty upon the waves and, amid the raging storm, His "still small voice" of mingled dignity and love may be heard saying, "It is I; do not be afraid!"

Oh, to recognize Christ more vividly in all our troubles! — to lose sight of human agency in the absorbing contemplation of Jesus! *Regrets and murmurs will never end, if we look only or chiefly at secondary causes.* "If I had not done this — if I had been more prudent in that — if such a one had not been so unfaithful and unkind" — oh, how endless may such false reasoning become! What *discontent* they will occasion! How difficult will it be to feel *resigned*, when we blame others or ourselves as the sole causes of our troubles!

Let me look away from inferior agencies and secondary causes. *Jesus sends the storm!* Did He *ordain* this affliction — and shall I not be submissive to His authority? If He sent this *poverty* — ought I not to welcome it? If He ordered this *disappointment* — should I regret it? If He has commissioned this *sickness* — shall I not patiently endure it? If He has allowed *enemies* to assail me — shall not hatred to my enemy be forgotten in submission to my Friend? If He has *bereaved* me, and earth appears a blank in the absence of those so dear, though I cannot but mourn — shall I murmur? If *He* mixes the cup of affliction — shall I not drink it? May I not be sure that it is *wisely* and *kindly* mixed, and though it may be bitter — that life and health must result from the draught?

Not beholding God in the storm, or entertaining false conceptions of Him, is a prolific source of *fear*. Some other form is seen in the tempest, which inspires alarm. Men are afraid of *fate*, or *chance*, and behold *phantoms of evil* all around. An assassin lies in ambush at every turn. Each cloud that gathers conceals an enemy, and the muttering of the tempest is the voice of a foe. Thus, *superstition is full of fears*, in proportion as it fails to recognize the one sole object of religious reverence.

How great a truth is there in the saying of Solomon, "In the fear of the Lord is strong confidence, and his children shall have a place of refuge!" Fear of God, and courage are allied. *If we rightly fear the true God, we need fear none besides.* What can harm us, if He is our Protector? Whose enmity need we dread, if He is our Friend? Why should the *storm* distress or frighten us, if Jesus is there to shield us from injury, and even to make the fury of the winds and waves conducive to our good? We cannot *escape* from the storms of life; but those storms lose their power, not only to injure, but also to alarm — when we hear the voice of Jesus saying, "It is I; do not be afraid!"

As *the only reason why the disciples should not fear*, Jesus simply said "It is I!" — as if this was quite sufficient to banish alarm. It was unnecessary to assure them of their safety; or what He would do to effect it. It was enough to let them know that it was He! *His presence was a sufficient guaranty for deliverance.* And does not this assurance, "It is I," involve *everything needed to calm the fears and soothe the sorrows of afflicted believers* still?

"It is I!" It was the voice of **POWER**. It was the voice of the One whom it is recorded that "all things were made by Him!" — the One who said, "All power is given unto Me in Heaven and in earth" — the One whom the elements of nature reverently obeyed, and who at that moment was manifesting His supremacy, by suspending His own laws, while He walked upon the sea. It was the voice of the One who obviously was able to do everything that was necessary for the safety of the disciples. The storm might be furious — but He could control it. The waves might be boisterous — but He who marched upon their foaming crests could curb their violence. He could, by a word, either *still* the tempest — or *preserve* His disciples in the midst of it.

And it is the same voice of Omnipotence, which still speaks amid the storms of our lives. He who *made* the storm — can *control* it. It is as true in reference to troubles of every kind, as it is of the elements of nature — that "fire and hail, snow and vapors, stormy wind — all fulfill His word. He has established them forever: He has made a decree that shall not pass. The sea is His, and He made it. He set for it bars and doors, and said, Hitherto shall you come, and no further; and here shall your proud waves be stopped." And surely He who "commands and raises the stormy wind, which lifts up the waves thereof," is equally able to "make the storm a calm, so that the waves thereof are still."

Afflicted disciple, Take heart! He who speaks to you *in* the tempest *raised* it, and can *control* it! The Friend who bids you to fear not — is the God by whom all things were made. He who appears for your support has but to speak, and it is done — to command, and it stands fast. His word is as mighty when it speaks for the comfort of His afflicted people, as when it said, "Let there be light — and there was light." Is anything too hard for the Lord?

But the recognition of this voice as one of *power* is not alone sufficient to take away our fear. It might increase it. For He who speaks is *the God whom I have offended* by my sins, and whose power enables Him only the more effectually to secure my punishment. If He can control the storm — then He may direct that lightning to scathe me, and those boisterous waves to engulf me. The acknowledgment merely of *the God of nature* is not enough to calm the agitated breast. Until I can hope for pardon, the very perfections and attributes that render Him *glorious* — render Him *dreadful* too! His infinite majesty, His unlimited sovereignty, His boundless might — are all arrayed against my sins! I must behold Jehovah, as the God of mercy and grace — I must see Him in the person of his Son, before my fears can vanish. And it is *Jesus,* Immanuel, God with us, who says "It is I! Do not be afraid!"

"It is I!" It was the voice of **LOVE**. The disciples at once recognized it as such. It was their *best Friend* who addressed them, whose tenderness had been uniform, who always made allowances for their infirmities, who bore with their provocations, and sympathized with their sorrows. They had never witnessed any act of His life that was not marked by love. None who sought His support were ever rejected by Him, and to no sincere supplication did He ever turn a deaf or an indifferent ear. They were therefore perfectly sure that His *power* would be put forth to help them.

The same *voice of love* speaks in the storm still. He addresses us — of whom it is written, "Like as a father pities his children, so the Lord pities those who fear Him. As one whom his mother comforts, so will I comfort you. Can a woman forget her nursing child, that she should not have compassion upon the son of her womb? Yes, she may forget, yet will not I forget you."

It is the voice of "the Consolation of Israel" who was "anointed to bind up the broken-hearted, and comfort those that mourn," and of a sympathetic High Priest who has compassion on His redeemed people. What could more emphatically *prove His love* — than coming to this world of sorrow and sin to suffer and die for us, when we were enemies to God? He left His habitation in glory — for the foul stable. He left the homage of angels — for the insults of men. He left the smile of His Father — for the temptations of the devil. He left the raptures of Heaven — for the groans of Gethsemane. He left the splendors of His heavenly throne — for the ignominy of the cross. He left the brightness of the celestial glory — for the darkness of the tomb!

And why was this? It was love that prompted the sin-atoning sacrifice. Love to the undeserving, to the rebellious, to those who then crucified Him, and to those who now pierce Him by their sins! And love still prompts His intercession at God's right hand. Having done so much to save us, will He allow us to perish in the storm? "He who spared not His own Son, but delivered Him up for us all — will He not with Him also freely give us all things?" Will the love that has already effected so much, fail us in any extremity? May we not feel every doubt dispelled, when we recognize it to be *Jesus* Himself who says, "It is I"? The scepter He grasps is omnipotence — but we need not be afraid when the hand that wields it is love! The winds and the sea obey Him; but the voice to which the universe pays homage, says to every trembling disciple, "It is I! Take heart."

The God that rules on high,
And thunders when He please;
That rides upon the stormy sky,
And manages the seas;
This awesome God is ours,
Our Father, and our Friend!

"It is I!" It is the voice of **WISDOM** as well as love. It might be asked, "Why should not the power that can control the tempest, have forbidden it to arise? Why should not the love which tells us not to fear, have kept far from us all occasion of fear?" There is love in *sending* the storm, no less than in appearing to us in the midst of it. Afflictions are themselves proofs of God's kindness — the kindness of a wise Father, who does not withhold chastisement when He sees it to be for His children's good.

Love, not directed by wisdom, is often injurious to the objects of it. But the love of Jesus is such, that whatever is calculated for the advantage of His people, is sure to be bestowed. "They shall not lack any good thing." And are not *afflictions* among the best of good things — if they tend to alienate us from earth, and to fix our affections more on Himself? Is not the tempest an inestimable blessing — if it brings us more obviously into the presence of Jesus? If when all was serenity, we were becoming indifferent to the company of our divine Friend — should we not praise Him for the *storm* that opens our eyes to watch for His appearing, and our ears to listen to His voice? Are not our *heaviest trials* among our *greatest mercies* — when they reveal Jesus to us more vividly, and draw us to Him more closely?

Jesus knows that trials are **necessary** for us. Though the way to glory has numberless and incomparable delights — yet He Himself has told us to *expect storms*. "Here on earth you will have many trials and sorrows!" The experience of believers of all ages testifies that:

The path of sorrow, and that path alone,
Leads to the land where sorrow is unknown.

In some *form* or other, at some *time* or other — suffering we should *expect*, suffering we shall have. Those who appear exempt, are so for a *season* only. When the *calm* seems most profound — the *tempest* may be gathering. The darkness, however deep, the waves, however wild — are no disproof of Christ's love; but they are *illustrations that His love is wise*. "He does not afflict willingly, or grieve the children of men." If the trial were not *necessary* — He would not send it.

"Now, for a season, if *need be,* we are in heaviness through manifold trials." There is always a "need-be," though we may not fully perceive it. *Trials remind us that this world is not our home.* If we met with no sorrows in our pilgrim way — we would be still more prone than we are at present to forget that *better land* towards which we are journeying. The inconveniences of the road, continually tell us that we are only strangers and sojourners in this poor world.

We are also taught our frailty — made to feel the insufficiency of earthly things to give us lasting and full enjoyment — and led in our misery more earnestly to seek the aid of our divine Comforter, and to "look to the Rock that is higher than I."

Faith is strengthened by trial. Every Christian grace becomes more vigorous by exercise. Therefore, we are taught by the apostle Paul to "rejoice in our sufferings, because we know that suffering produces perseverance; perseverance, character; and character, hope." The apostle James speaks in similar terms: "Consider it pure joy, my brothers, whenever you face trials of many kinds, because you know that the testing of your faith develops perseverance. Perseverance must finish its work so that you may be mature and complete, not lacking anything." The apostle Peter also encourages believers to patience and cheerfulness in affliction, by the thought that "Now for a little while you have had to suffer various trials, so that the genuineness of your faith — being more precious than gold that, though perishable, is tested by fire — may be found to result in praise and glory and honor when Jesus Christ is revealed." (Romans 5:3, 4; James 1:2-3; 1 Peter 1:6-7).

Not that the *beneficial effects* of the storm are always felt while it continues. The mind may be too much agitated by terrors, too much debilitated by sympathy with a diseased body — to be conscious of any immediate advantage. And thus, for our encouragement, we are told that "no affliction for the *present* seems joyous, but grievous: nevertheless, *afterward* it yields the peaceable fruit of righteousness to those who are exercised thereby."

So in a tempest, the gale from which the mariner dreads destruction — often drives the vessel onward in her course. This may not be perceived while the storm is at its height. But *afterwards,* when the sky becomes clear — *afterwards,* when the necessary observations can be taken — it is often found that much more progress has been made during one tempestuous night than many previous days of calm.

This is always the case with the storms that assail the believer. They invariably speed him onward towards his desired haven. And though, while the winds are howling and the waves roaring around, he may say, "All these things are against me!" and fears being driven farther from port. Nevertheless, *afterwards,* he discovers with thankfulness that the winds he dreaded, have been wafting him onward in his voyage. And that the waves which seemed to threaten him with death — have only borne him heavenward.

"It is I!" Yes; the *result* proves it was Jesus. How many of His people in all ages have echoed the sentiment of the Psalmist, "It was *good* for me that I have been afflicted!" It is this that He intends. "Whom the Lord loves He chastens, and scourges every son whom He receives. If you endure chastening, God deals with you as with sons." *Children* seldom see, at the time they are corrected, what advantage can result from it. They may think it hard . . .
to be denied this gratification,
to submit to that exercise of discipline,
to be made to apply themselves to a course of tedious study,
or to take nauseous medicine when they are ill.

But it is *wise love* in the parent that imposes present pain for the sake of permanent advantage.

Earthly fathers may err, but our heavenly Father never. What He does is *always* "for our profit." "We know that God causes all things to work together for good to those who love God, to those who are called according to His purpose." Then let us not *murmur* at the storm. "Would we be *children* — and not be chastened. Would we be gold — and not be tried. Would we be Christians — and not suffer?" John Owen

The *bush* which Moses beheld on Horeb was not consumed although in flames — for God was there; Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego came forth from the midst of the burning fiery furnace unhurt — because the Son of God had walked with them there. Even so, the afflictions that Christians suffer cannot so kindle upon them, as that one hair of their head shall be injured!

We may have to endure even *fiery* trials, but we know that the furnace is heated, not to consume, but to *purify*. In the language of Malachi, "He shall sit as a refiner and purifier of silver." Does the craftsman throw the precious metals into the flames — and then forget them? No, for they are too costly! He is concerned and careful, respecting them. He sits patiently at the door of the furnace, intently watchful. As soon as he sees *his own face* reflected from the molten metal within — he knows that the process has been successful, and he abates the fury of the flames.

In the same way does Jesus watch the *furnace of affliction* in which His people are being purified, not allowing them to suffer injury and loss — but only waiting to see His own image reflected from their hearts. They come forth as gold seven times purified.

"Shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword — *separate* us from the love of Christ?" The very contrary — they *unite* us more closely to Him. "No, in all these things we are *more than conquerors* through Him who loved us." *More than conquerors* — not merely remaining in possession of the field, but coming forth unscathed from the conflict — and not merely unscathed, but invigorated. He is indeed a conqueror who, resolutely resisting an attack, wards off every blow so that he suffers no injury; and who, though the conflict may be stern, overthrows, disarms, and tramples under foot his assailant. But if with a generous hand he raises him from the ground and, not content with overcoming his body by superior velour, subdues his spirit also by superior love — he gains a victory yet more complete. By mastering the foe, he becomes a conqueror; but by converting that foe into a friend, he becomes "more than conqueror."

Such is the victory of the believer. The trials by which he is assailed are not only deprived of all power to injure, but become the principal occasions and instruments of his invigoration, comfort, and salvation! However foreboding their appearance — they are bearers of Heaven's most precious blessings! They wear the aspect of *foes* only at a distance, and in the beginning of the fight. Soon the Christian warrior embraces them as *friends*; and the weapons that seemed pointed against him are by faith reversed, and become ranged around him for his defense. "In all these things he is *more than conqueror,* through Him who loved us."

The faith, which recognizes in all events the voice of Jesus, is the spiritual chemistry that transmutes all baser substances into gold! However otherwise valueless, even though pernicious and destructive, they now become a precious treasure.

In the calculation of his *wealth* — the believer may include his heaviest trials and keenest sorrows. The apostle Paul says, "All things are yours, the world, life, death, things present, things to come — *all* are yours." Men do not reckon *losses* among their possessions. These "all things" are therefore *gain* to those of whom it may be added "and you are Christ's."

Afflictions therefore, the *frowns* of "the world" as well as its *smiles*; the *sorrows* of "life" as well as its *joys*; the sad separations and painful approaches of "death," as well as the heavenly summons it conveys; the storms and struggles of "things present," as well as the calm and the repose of "things to come" — ALL are ours!

Were we wise, we should not wish to part with one of them; for who deliberately impoverishes himself? If we saw we as God sees, we would understand *how* they were all working together for our good. But though "we walk by faith, not by sight," we may be as certain of the result, since God declares it. The storm is ours!

"There shall no evil befall you, neither shall any plague come near your dwelling" (Psalm 91:10), is a promise to the fullest extent verified in the case of all who "dwell in the secret place of the Most High." To them sorrows are not "evils," and sicknesses are not "plagues." "The shadow of the Almighty," extending far around those who "abide under it" alters the character of all things which come within its influence. Joys are enhanced — and sorrows become joys. The day is brighter, and the night itself is turned to day. Passing through this medium, the *lightning*, which would have blasted — now only serves to render luminous the path, gilding it with glory; and the *poisonous stream*, in such an atmosphere as this, not merely loses every noxious quality, but, as it murmurs by the believer, refreshes, heals, and strengthens him.

Thus the storm is terrible *in appearance* only. The winds and waves, which beat on the vessel, instead of weakening, make it stronger and more seaworthy. The buffeting of the billows renders its timbers the more compact. The voyage will be the more prosperous, and the admission into the peaceful harbor at its termination the more triumphant. "For so an entrance shall be ministered unto you *abundantly* into the everlasting kingdom of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ."

Trials, however evil in themselves, become invaluable blessings *when inflicted by a Father's hand*. Of all the children of God now in glory, it is true that "He led them forth by the *right* way, that they might go to a city of habitation." It was often a *rugged* way, a *dark* way, a *mysterious* way, a *stormy* way — but always the *right* way.

It is so still. I may experience it to be a *valley of tears* through which I pass, but whatever grief I feel, whatever difficulties I encounter, it is the *right* way, for it is *my Father's way* — and who so wise and kind as He?

It is the way to "a city of habitation." Every step is necessary to take me nearer to that heavenly home. The very *toils* of the journey will result in bliss — and how soon will they be over! What a *bright dawn* will follow the few dark hours during which we may be "tossed by the waves, straining at the oars, the wind being contrary!" "Weeping may endure for a night — but joy comes in the morning." How short the night, when compared with the eternal day of which that morning is but the harbinger! Yes, amid the tumult and terror of the tempest, Jesus, rendering all things subservient to our welfare, bids us to take heart, saying, "It is I; do not be afraid!"

God moves in a mysterious way
His wonders to perform;
He plants his footsteps in the sea,
And rides upon the storm.

You fearful saints, fresh courage take,
The *clouds* you so much dread
Are big with mercy, and shall break In blessings on your head.

Judge not the Lord by feeble sense,
But trust him for His grace;
Behind *a frowning providence*,
He hides *a smiling face*.

Moreover, the voice that speaks to us in the storm, is that of one who has Himself been tempest-tossed. He was once the "man of sorrows," to a degree which none of His followers can lay claim. There are no trials which they endure, with which He is not experimentally familiar. He knew what it was to suffer bodily privation. "He had nowhere to lay His head." He was hungry and thirsty. He endured the torture and ignominy of the scourge and the cross. "He was despised and rejected by men." His own friends "forsook Him and fled." He endured unutterable anguish of spirit. "It pleased *the Lord* to bruise Him." "*He* put Him to grief." "Being in an agony He prayed more earnestly." His soul was "exceeding sorrowful, even unto death." He "sweat great drops of blood." On the cross He exclaimed, with a bitter cry, "My God, My God, why have *You* forsaken Me?"

These were real afflictions, real agonies, real temptations. It was not a fictitious storm that burst upon Him. It was not the mere *appearance* of tempest. The conflict was not imaginary. He was without *sin* — but not without a *struggle* against sin. He overcame, not because there was nothing to resist, but because love to His Father was supreme in His bosom. The pain of hunger and thirst in the desert was real and acute. The inducement to appease that pain was real.

So also the agony of the cross was real, and He must have shrunk from it. But submission to the will of His Father was a stronger principle. Yet the struggle was severe. Else it would not be true that in "all points He was tempted like as we are." *There is no degree of suffering, or conflict, which He did not endure.* The wind never blew against any bark so furiously as against His! The night was never so dark, the waves never so boisterous — as when He encountered the storm!

What strong consolation is thus presented to afflicted disciples! Jesus is as able to feel for our distress, as to deliver us out of it. His is a true sympathy. We do not suffer alone. He bears our grief. What encouragement to "come boldly to the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy and find grace to help in time of need" — when we know that "We do not have a high priest who is unable to *sympathize* with our weaknesses, but we have one who has been tempted in every way, just as we are!" The sorrows, which oppress us — weighed more heavily on Him. The foes we battle with — more fiercely assailed Him. We but *taste* the bitter cup of affliction; He *drained* it! Only a *few drops* of the tempest fall upon us — it *rages* on Him!

If then *He*, the holy, harmless, undefiled, did not escape the storm — shall *we* wonder or murmur or repine at affliction? In us there is *much dross* to be consumed; but in Him there was none. If He suffered, not for Himself, but for us — then shall not we be content to suffer for ourselves? He consecrated the *path of sorrow* by His own sacred footsteps, and thus conferred on it a peculiar dignity. As the *thorns* that lacerated His brow composed a *crown*, so there is henceforth *a majesty in grief*, which no earthly joys can boast. The King of kings wore a *diadem of pain*, and appeared on earth, not as the man of gladness, but "the Man of sorrows." Let us rejoice in being conformed unto our Lord.

Should not the *servant* be like his *Master?* If *He* encountered storms — is it fitting that *we* should enjoy unbroken calm? If He led through *rugged ways* — shall we think to traverse only *flowery meadows?*

It is a joyful thing to be a sharer with Christ in *anything*. All enjoyments wherein He is not — are bitter to a soul that loves Him; and all sufferings with Him, are sweet. The worst things of Christ, are more delightful than the best things of the world. His afflictions, are sweeter than its pleasures. Love delights in likeness, not only in things pleasant, but also in the hardest things.

When He was sought to be made a *king* — He escaped; but when He was sought to be brought to the *cross* — He freely yielded Himself! And shall I creep back from what He calls me to suffer? Has He not gone through all before, and made all easy and lovely? Has He not *sweetened* poverty, persecution, hatred, disgrace, and death itself. Has He not *perfumed* the grave, and turned it from a pit of horror into a sweet resting bed?

"It is I!" Jesus calls our attention to *Himself.* He says *not,* "Take heart; *you* are skillful, strong, persevering, and well able to cope with the storm" — but "Take heart; it is *I!*" Our rigging may be rent, our sails torn, our rudder lost, our vessel dismasted, leaky, and almost a wreck; but when Jesus says *"It is I,"* we cannot sink. With Him, nothing can injure us — without Him, nothing save us!

A babe and Christ can master the universe. But the babe does nothing, and Christ everything. In our carnal pride we would be doing everything — pumping, rowing, shifting the sails, as though by our own efforts we could escape. But Christ will make us know how *vain* are all our labors without Him. He *alone* can save.

When the angel of destruction smote Egypt's firstborn, but passed over the houses of the Israelites — the feeble infant was as safe as the vigorous man was — *if the blood* was sprinkled on the doorposts. The *strength* of the vigorous man could not have defended him. The helplessness of the feeble infant could not have endangered him. Just so, the blood of Christ is our *only and all-sufficient safeguard*.

When Jesus was in the ship with His disciples, the weakest of them was as safe as the strongest, for the security of all was the same — the presence of their Lord. So if He is with us in the storm, our safety is not affected by anything in ourselves, but is absolutely guaranteed by Him.

"It is I!" Whatever our unworthiness, however weak our faith, *Christ* is our deliverer; and "He is able to save us to the uttermost." *A helpless disciple, holding the hand of a mighty Savior, will come forth unhurt out of every storm!* Jesus says, "My grace is sufficient for you: for My strength is made perfect in weakness." With the apostle let me respond, and say, "Most gladly therefore will I rather glory in my infirmities, that the power of Christ may rest upon me. Therefore I take pleasure in infirmities, in necessities, in distresses — for when I am weak, then I am strong!" (2 Corinthians 12:7-10).

"It is I!" This was *the voice the efficacy* of which the disciples had often witnessed. That voice had said, "Arise, take up your bed, and walk!" and the poor cripple was made whole. That voice had said, "Be opened!" and the ears of the deaf were unstopped. That voice had said to the leper, "Be clean!" and "immediately his leprosy departed from him." That voice had said, "Go out of him!" and the demoniac was restored to his right mind. That voice had said, "Arise!" and "he who was dead sat up, and began to speak." That voice had just blessed the five loaves and the two fish — and twelve baskets full of fragments remained after five thousand had feasted. And the disciples had been before in a storm, when Jesus was asleep in the back part of the ship. They were in jeopardy, for "the ship was covered with the waves." But when Jesus rebuked the wind, and said unto the sea, "Peace; be still!" the wind ceased, and there was a great calm. Might not the disciples reasonably dispel their fears, when that voice, which had always been so mighty said, "Take heart! **It is I!** Do not be afraid"?

Afflicted believer, is the *voice* that addresses *you* altogether strange? Can you not call to mind many a storm in which it has dispelled your fears and soothed your sorrows? Does not the history of the Church in all ages testify to the wonderful deliverances Christ has effected for His people! Have not His followers always been tossed with tempests? Yet has not the Lord delivered out of them all? It is not more certain that Christians have always been an afflicted people — than that Jesus has always been with them to preserve them amid the tempest. How great the cloud of witnesses who testify to His constant care and unchanging love! How innumerable the multitudes who have come out of *great tribulation* — and now, clothed in white clothing, ascribe salvation to God and the Lamb!

Yes! It is a voice that has never spoken in vain! Take heart, afflicted disciple! Think what He has already done for you! He groaned, bled, and died for you. You were . . .
lost — but He found you,
an *enemy* — but He reconciled you;
a *captive* — but He freed you;
blind — but He cured you;
dead — but He quickened you.

He *has* . . .
washed you from your guilt in His own blood,
clothed you with His own white robe of righteousness,
renewed your corrupt nature,
imparted to you His sanctifying and comforting Spirit,
introduced you to the Father — and you became His adopted child.

He *now* . . .
intercedes for you,
is preparing a mansion of glory for you, and
has given you a title to an incorruptible, undefiled, unfading inheritance!

How often has He spoken to you in tones of tenderness! How has your heart burned within you as He has walked with you along the way! What peace and joy have you experienced while He has held converse with your soul! Has not He turned your mourning into dancing, your night into day, and your tempest into calm already?

Having done so much for you — *will He now leave you to perish?* May you not with confidence use the same argument with which Manoah was comforted by his wife, when, having been visited by the angel of Jehovah, he feared they would be destroyed? "If the Lord were pleased to kill us, He would not have received a burned offering and a food offering at our hands, neither would He have showed us all these things."

Would Jesus have done so much for you already — would He have *called* you by His grace, *renewed* you by His Spirit, *comforted* you by His love, and *preserved* you to this day — if He intended now to abandon you? If He sought you when a stranger — will He not take care of you now that you are a child? If the *foe* was loved — how much more the *friend!* "If, when we were *enemies,* we were reconciled to God by the death of His Son, how much more, *being reconciled,* we shall be saved by His life!" *Will He refuse* . . .
to answer the prayers He Himself has prompted,
to fulfill the hopes He Himself has inspired,
to honor the confidence He Himself has encouraged,
to complete the work He Himself has begun?

No! Former mercies are a sure pledge of the future inheritance! Former deliverances are a certain pledge of final safety! Amid the howling of the storm, let this be your song —

His love in time past forbids me to think
He'll leave me at last, in trouble to sink;
Each sweet Ebenezer I have in review
Confirms his good pleasure to bring me quite through.

How unreasonable is it for a disciple of Jesus to *worry!* We are told to cast all our cares on Him, "for He cares for us." How unnecessary to do that for ourselves — which is so much better done by Him! He has undertaken to do all for us which not only our safety but our happiness requires. His infinite *love* prompts Him always to choose what His infinite *wisdom* sees to be best for us — while His *infinite* power enables Him to accomplish it.

Are we not perfectly safe then in such keeping? Suppose we could control the elements, and that for some important object we had called forth a storm. If we were in a vessel that could not sink, we should contemplate the raging waters with pleasure, knowing that they were fulfilling our own intentions, and that a perfect calm would ensue the moment that we gave the word. But this is actually true; only the ruling of the storm is in the hands of Jesus, instead of our own. Shall we be less courageous on this account? Doesn't He know much better than we, the special purposes for which the storm is needed, and the precise moment when its violence should be allayed? Should we not rely with fullest confidence on His watchful care, and rejoice, however loud the tempest, that it can accomplish only our good, having no power to do us harm?

"It is I!" Oh, how should all *worries* subside at the sound! Are they caused by the cares of this life? Jesus says, "Do not worry about your life, what you will eat or drink; or about your body, what you will wear. Is not life more important than food, and the body more important than clothes? Look at the birds of the air; they do not sow or reap or store away in barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not much more valuable than they? Who of you by worrying can add a single hour to his life? "And why do you worry about clothes? See how the lilies of the field grow. They do not labor or spin. Yet I tell you that not even Solomon in all his splendor was dressed like one of these. If that is how God clothes the grass of the field, which is here today and tomorrow is thrown into the fire, will he not much more clothe you, O you of little faith? So do not worry, saying, 'What shall we eat?' or 'What shall we drink?' or 'What shall we wear?' For the *pagans* run after all these things, and *your heavenly Father knows that you need them*."

"And we know that God causes all things to work together for good to those who love God, to those who are called according to His purpose." "The angel of the Lord encamps round about those who fear Him, and delivers them.… Those who seek the Lord shall not want any good thing.… Many are the afflictions of the righteous, but the Lord delivers him out of them all!"

Why then should Christians fear? And if Jesus cares for the *body* — then how much more will He supply the needs of the *soul!* Is not His assurance, "My grace is sufficient for you," encouragement enough in every extremity? Has He not undertaken *everything* for His redeemed people? Is He not made to us "wisdom, and righteousness, and sanctification, and redemption?" However "poor and wretched, and miserable, and blind, and naked" in ourselves — are we not "complete in Him?" What could He say that He has left unsaid, to calm our apprehensions? "O afflicted one, tempest-tossed, and not comforted, I hid My face from you for a moment; but with *everlasting kindness* will I have mercy on you. For the mountains shall depart, and the hills be removed; but My kindness shall not depart from you, neither shall the covenant of My peace be removed, says the Lord that has mercy on you. The one who formed you says: Do not be afraid, for I have ransomed you. I have called you by name; you are mine. When you go through deep waters, I will be with you. When you go through rivers of difficulty, you will not drown. When you walk through the fire of oppression, you will not be burned up; the flames will not consume you. For I am the LORD, your God, the Holy One of Israel, your Savior!"

He is *faithful* who has promised. He cannot deny Himself. Heaven and earth shall pass away, but His words shall not pass away; and He has said of all His people, "I give them eternal life, and they will never perish — ever! No one will snatch them out of My hand!"

Let us but *believe* these promises, and there will be a great calm. As when the disciples "received Jesus into the ship, the wind ceased, and immediately they were at the land where they went," so when we by faith fully receive Christ into our hearts, the raging of the storm is over. The *external* troubles may continue, but can produce no tempest *within*. The believer is "kept in perfect peace whose mind is stayed on God."

One of the martyrs, exposed to public derision in an iron cage, is reported to have said to a bystander, who expressed surprise at the cheerfulness he manifested, "You can see these bars, but you cannot hear the music in my conscience!" Just so, the world, looking only at the outward affliction, may see no abatement of the hurricane, and may wonder at the composure the Christian exhibits in the midst of it. They hear the thunder, and the roaring of the winds and waves — but cannot hear the voice of Jesus saying, "It is I," which so cheers the tossed disciple. They can see the outward trouble, but not the inward consolation of the life "hidden with Christ." It is "the peace of God, which passes all understanding."

Let us then reply to the *promises* of God, in the exulting language of *faith*. Let songs of praise arise from the ark in which we are securely borne along amid the storm. "God is our refuge and strength, an ever-present help in times of trouble. Therefore we will not fear, though the earth give way and the mountains fall into the heart of the sea, though its waters roar and foam and the mountains quake with their surging!" "Why are you downcast, O my soul? Why so disturbed within me? Put your hope in God, for I will yet praise him, my Savior and my God!" "O LORD God Almighty, who is like you? You are mighty, O LORD, and your faithfulness surrounds you. You rule over the surging sea; when its waves mount up, you still them."

"It is I!" This is enough to satisfy every doubt, to quell every fear, to meet every difficulty.

Am I guilty? Jesus receives the chief of sinners!

Am I helpless? Jesus is able to save to the uttermost!

Am I lost? Jesus "came to seek and to save the lost!"

Have I no merits? Jesus is "made to us righteousness!"

Have I nothing? In Jesus, "all fullness dwells!"

He died for me;
He lives to intercede for me;
He watches over, strengthens, supports me.

He . . .
guides me in darkness,
cheers me in sorrow,
defends me in danger, and
is preparing a place for me in Heaven!

If He is with me, then what can injure me?

If He is for me, then who can be against me?

The winds and the waves may roar around, but they have no power to harm me while Jesus says, "It is I!"

And when the last storm of life assails me, He will still be at hand. "Yes, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil. for You are with me; Your rod and Your staff they comfort me." It will not be a dark valley, if His form appears in it; it will not be dreary, if His voice is heard. There is no such thing as *death* to the believer. "He who believes in me will live, even though he dies; and whoever lives and believes in me will never die."

Jesus, by His own dying, extracted the *sting* from death, and deprived it of all power to injure. "He destroyed death, and delivered those who through fear of death were all their lifetime subject to bondage." We can echo the sentiment of a departing saint, who said, "I can smile on death, because Jesus smiles on me." Or rather death disappears — and Christ alone is seen. He holds the *keys* of the invisible world, and is present at the deathbed of every saint, to liberate the spirit from the corruptible body, and to receive it into the "house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens!"

Let this be our consolation when we mourn over those who *sleep in Jesus*. It is not an *enemy* who has done this. It is no *frightful monster* who has torn that dear one from our loving embrace. It was a Brother's arms that received the departing spirit. He commits the important office to no inferior messenger, far less to an enemy. "*I* will come again, and receive you unto Myself." The dying Stephen beheld Him, when he said, "Lord Jesus, receive my spirit."

Yes, it is Jesus! In that chamber of anxiety and tears, where the feeble tide of ebbing life is watched so tenderly, and all is being done that skill and kindness can suggest to delay the dreaded moment of separation, Jesus is saying, "It is I!" In that darkened abode, where the activity of love no longer holds back the floodgates of grief, Jesus whispers, "It is I!" At that sad funeral procession, each advancing step of which seems as though it were conveying the mourners to their own burial, Jesus — as at Nain — touches the casket, and says to the widow, the fatherless, the friendless, "It is I." At the open grave, where with that dead body are to be sepulchered so many living joys and hopes, Jesus — as at Bethany — stands among the mourners and, while weeping with them, allays their sorrow, saying, "It is I."

Yes, it is Jesus who has taken away the departed spirit, to the full enjoyment of a love still tenderer than theirs, in a world where . . .
tears are never shed,
and pain is never felt,
and death is forever unknown!

Let us then be consoled by the thought of the instantaneous and perfect bliss of those whose separation from us we lament. Amid the storm, in which we lose sight for a season of those who were dearer than life itself,

This is the solace to our sorrow given,
That they were borne on tempest's wing to Heaven!

This consideration should be enough to sustain our minds when a similar tempest bursts upon us. Death to the disciple, is Jesus. Every symptom of increasing disease only proves that Jesus is nearer. The *clouds* may seem dark, the *thunder* terrible, the *waves* overwhelming — but they only betoken the near approach of our heavenly Friend! He speaks amid the tumult, and says, "It is I! It is I, who, having prepared your mansion, have come to take you to Myself! "Take heart; it is I; do not be afraid!" Shall we shrink from His embrace? Shall we not rather rejoice that our deliverance draws near, knowing that to depart and be with Jesus is far better?

The author, being recently at Scarborough, during tempestuous weather, observed early in the morning *two small fishing vessels* approaching the harbor. The crews had been exposed to the gale for several days, and their strength and provisions were nearly exhausted. How eagerly they longed for the plenty, and security, and repose, which seemed now so near! But such furious breakers raged round the pier, that it was obvious to those on shore that to attempt an entrance would be destruction. The cliff was hastily scaled, a beacon kindled, and signals made that they must stay out to sea. In a few minutes the warning would be too late. There was a moment's anxious suspense. Then the little vessels were seen reluctantly to alter their coarse and, disappointed in their hopes, their exhausted crews had again to face the storm!

How happy the contrast in the case of the disciple of Christ! The fury of the tempest, instead of driving him from his strong refuge, makes him only the more welcome there. *The harbor of Christ's love is always accessible!* The greater our distress — the readier our entrance! And the final resting place — the Heaven of glory, where that love is fully manifested, and where those who enter are secure from all future perils — is full in view when the great and final tempest bursts over us. How invitingly does it spread itself out before *the eye of faith!* How perfect the peace, how unbroken the calm, how ineffable the bliss — which are experienced there! No tears are shed, no pain is felt, no temptations assail there! The beacon blazes, not to repel, but to allure! Jesus bids us not be dismayed!

For the last time, He says, "Take heart; it is I!" No disciple ever suffered shipwreck in endeavoring to enter there. The tempest that rages outside, only drives the laboring vessel more quickly in. Those furious waves only bear the soul more rapidly home. That hurricane only wafts the spirit more triumphantly to God! How brief the *struggle* — how long the *repose!* After you have suffered a short time — then *eternal glory!*

Of the accumulated trials of the longest life, we may say, with such a prospect, "For our light and momentary troubles are achieving for us an eternal glory that far outweighs them all. So we fix our eyes not on what is seen, but on what is unseen. For what is seen is temporary, but what is unseen is eternal!." "O death, where is your sting? O grave, where is your victory?"

Lord, I believe! Help my unbelief! Pity and pardon the fears of your poor, weak, trembling disciple! Help me to behold You more clearly, more constantly! May I hear Your voice both in the *tempest* and the *calm*. Let the kind assurance, "It is I," always be enough to gladden my heart.

Often have You said, "Come unto Me, all you who labor and are heavy laden; and I will give you rest." Lord, I would now accept Your gracious call. I bring You nothing but a burden of guilt and wretchedness! Naked, vile, undone, just as I am — I come! And I know You will not cast me out. From the midst of the furious waves, I look up to You! I am come into deep waters! The winds are boisterous, the tempest is high! Outward woes, inward conflicts — assail my feeble bark! I must soon sink, without Your promised help! Save me, O God, for the waters are come in unto my soul! Let not the water-flood overflow me, neither let the deep swallow me up! The sorrows of my heart are enlarged: oh, bring me out of my distresses! Lord, save me — or I perish! Rebuke the waves! Bring me out of many waters! Let the light of Your love disperse the darkness! Let the thunder of the storm be hushed by Your voice, saying, *"It is I; do not be afraid!"*

Jesus! lover of my soul,
Let me to Your bosom fly,
While the nearer waters roll,
While the tempest still is high.
Hide me, O my Savior, hide,
Until the storm of life is past:
Safe into the haven guide:
O receive my soul at last!"

HAVE I NO FATHER?

I was once in an awful storm at sea. We were for many hours tossed about in sight of dangerous rocks. The steam engines would work no longer; the wind raged violently, and around was heard the terrific roar of the breakers and the dash of the waves as they broke over the deck.

At this frightful and trying time, while we lay, as might be said, *at the mercy of the waves*, I found great comfort and support from an apparently trifling circumstance. It was, that the captain's child, a little girl about twelve years old, was in the cabin with us. He had come two or three times, in the midst of his cares and toils, to see how his child was; and it is well known how cheering is the sight of a *captain* in such a time of danger. As our situation grew worse, I saw the little girl rising on her elbow and bending her eye anxiously to the door, as if longing for her father's reappearance. He was a large sailor-man. An immense coat, large sea boots, and an oilskin cap with flaps hanging down on his neck, were streaming with water. He fell on his knees on the floor beside the low berth of his child, and stretched out his arm over her, but did not speak.

After a while, he asked her if she was alarmed. "Father," the child answered, "let me be *with you* — and I shall not be afraid." "With me!" he cried, "You could not stand it for an instant."

"Father, let me be with you," she repeated.

"My child, you would only be more frightened," he said, kissing her, while the tears were on his rough checks.

"No, father, I will not be afraid if you take me with you. Oh!, father, let me be with you!" and she threw her arms round his neck, and clung fast to him. The strong man was overcome; he lifted his child in his arms, and carried her away with him.

How much I felt her departure! As long as the captain's child was near, I felt her to be a sort of *pledge* for the return and care of the captain. I knew that in the moment of greatest danger, the father would run to his child. I was certain that were the vessel about to be abandoned in the midst of the wild waves, I should know of every movement, for the captain would not desert his child. Thus, in the presence of that child, I had comforted myself, and when she went, I felt abandoned, and for the first time fearful. I rose, and managed to get on deck. The sea and sky seemed one. It was a dreadful sight; shuddering, I shrunk back, and threw myself again on my couch.

Then came the thought — the child is content; she is with *her father*, "and have *I* no father?" O God, I thank You! In that moment I could answer, *Yes*. An unseen Father, it is true; and faith is not as sight, and nature is not as grace; but still I knew I had a Father, whose love surpassed knowledge. The thought calmed my mind.

Reader, does it calm yours?

Oh!, cries the trembling soul, the storm is fearful, the sky is black; we walk in darkness, and have no light. "Be still, it is I; and know that I am God," says the Lord. Be happy, and know that God is your Father. "Fear not, for I am with you; do not be dismayed, for I am your God." All things are under the dominion of Christ, and *all things*, yes, even terrible things, shall work together for good to those who love God. Tempest-tossed soul, as the child clings to her father's bosom — so cling you to your God in the moment of your extremity — He will be with you, or to take you to be with Him!

"*Take heart! **It is I!** Do not be afraid!*"

But it is possible that some may read these pages that are **not followers of Jesus?** If you love sin, and the world — if you have not surrendered your heart to Christ, and are not by earnest prayer and humble reliance seeking to participate in the blessings He died to purchase — the *mere profession of religion* will be of no avail. You are exposed to storms. But while strangers to the love of Jesus, He does not say to you, "Take heart!"

You are in peril — awful, inconceivable peril! You are *voyaging on the ocean of life*, without a compass, a pilot, or a chart! You have no *rudder* to guide you, and no *anchor* to hold you in the storm! Terrible is the tempest that soon will burst over you! The waves will cover you! You will "sink like lead in the mighty waters," down to those depths of darkness and woe, where *hope* never enters, where *day* never dawns! You *ought* to fear! At present you may see no danger, and may be tossed by no billows. But there is peril in that *calm*. It is the torrent's smoothness before it dashes below. Destruction is before you, and the whirlpools of Hell yawn to engulf you! Indifference is insanity. To *take heart* is utter madness — terror befits you! Oh, that you might from the heart utter the cry, "What must I do to be saved?"

You are perhaps greatly afflicted, and need consolation — but there is none for *you* — because the Bible does not offer you any. Do not confound *sorrow* with *piety*, and imagine that, because you are in a *storm* — Jesus must be there to comfort and deliver you. He is only with *His disciples* in the storm. He has long invited you to join them, but, not desiring His company, and unwilling to comply with His requirements, you chose to sail in a vessel of your own, and now you must struggle through the waves as best you can. Do not think that eternity offers *you* any hope. Be not so deluded as to regard death as *a release from trouble*. A tempest far more terrible awaits you in the next world, than any that ever assailed you in this. There will be no pleasant harbor for *you* to enter. Your soul will be eternally suffering shipwreck, broken by the waves forever, beating on the rocks forever!

Is there then *no* comfort for you? Not while continuing what you are, "an enemy to God by wicked works." As such, you must not venture to seek consolation from Him; for "he *hates* all workers of iniquity," and "the *wrath* of God abides on you." Your condition and character must be changed. You must be *reconciled* to Jesus — before you can be *comforted* by Him. Until then, not a single promise in His Word applies to you. The load of your sins must be removed — before the burden of your cares can be lightened. Your sin and guilt must be your chief care. God is willing to heal every wound — but the deadliest *first*. God is willing to calm every storm — but the most terrible *first*. He has one gift to bestow infinitely greater than all the rest: the "unspeakable gift," Christ Jesus. Seek this first, and "all other things shall be added unto you."

You are perhaps anxious to obtain this. You feel all other troubles are light in comparison to the danger your *soul* is in. You wish to flee from the wrath to come. *Conscience* loudly accuses you. The *law* of God thunders out its curses. The sky seems black above, and destruction stares you in the face! You think, perhaps, that for you, there is no hope! You see God in the storm, preparing the lightning of His *justice* with which to strike you down to Hell! God is indeed in the storm, but it is in the person of His Son! Let your eyes gaze upon Jesus! For He is there, offering to screen you from the danger, and saying to all who flee to Him for safety "Take heart!"

To behold God as the *Creator* and the *Judge* cannot but fill us with *dismay*. He is a consuming fire. His justice will condemn us — and His powers overwhelm us. But the gospel has been revealed that this dread of God may be changed into confidence, and that, instead of *trembling at His wrath*, we may *confide in His mercy*. Nothing can give the sinner peace until he hears and understands the voice of Jesus saying, "It is I." We must see "God in Christ, reconciling the world unto Himself, not imputing our trespasses unto us" — before we can rejoice in God. Jesus is "the way, the truth, and the life. No man comes unto the Father but by Him." God requires perfect obedience. But how far have we come short of this! "If we say we have no sin, we deceive ourselves." "There is none righteous; no, not one." But the penalty of sin is death. "The wicked shall be turned into Hell." To *disprove* our guilt, and to *atone* for it by our own works, are equally impossible. To suffer the penalty of it, is eternal ruin. Where then is hope? In Jesus! He has perfectly obeyed, and fully suffered on our behalf. His righteousness and His death are put in the place of ours. "We have redemption through His blood" — "the blood of Jesus Christ cleanses from all sin" — and we are "accepted in the Beloved."

"Believe in the Lord Jesus Christ, and you shall be saved," is the only answer, and it is a sufficient one, to every anxious sinner seeking refuge from the storm. You must seek comfort in Christ, or you will seek in vain. But apply to Him, and you cannot fail. Say as Peter did when he began to sink, "Save, Lord — or I perish!" and He will put forth His hand at once. It is already held out to help you. Lay hold of it by faith — and salvation is yours. "Behold the Lamb of God, who takes away the sins of the world. Look unto Me, and be saved!" You are invited to regard Him not as the Creator, but the *Savior*; not as the Judge, but the *Advocate*; not as the Ruler, but the *Mediator!* When conscience accuses, hear Him say, "It is I! I, who has fully atoned for your sins! I, who have blotted them all out by My blood!" When the thought of God alarms, listen to His voice: "It is I! I, who have made peace by the blood of the cross! I, by whom the just God becomes the justifier of the ungodly!" When the painful conviction of shortcomings, after all our striving, overwhelms — again He says, "It is I! I, whose white robe will cover all your filthy rags! I, from whose perfect obedience, and not from your own unworthiness, you are to look for acceptance with God!" When a sense of weakness, and inability to cope with the many difficulties and dangers which surround us, depresses the mind, again His voice is heard, "It is I! I, who have engaged to perform all things for you! I, who will never leave you nor forsake you!"