

# A SOLEMN QUESTION

## A SERMON

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“How shall we escape; if we neglect so great salvation.” Hebrews 2:3

THE apostle was writing to the professed church at large; and among them were many, from what had occurred in times past, and from some things that then existed, of whom he stood rather in doubt. He saw a tendency in many of them to let one truth slip, and then another truth slip, and by degrees be absorbed in attending to the doctrines, and ceremonies, and inventions of men: to the neglect of vital experience, to the neglect of God’s truth, and consequently to the neglect of his salvation. If “the word spoken by angels was steadfast, and every transgression and disobedience received a just recompense of reward, how shall we escape, if we neglect so great salvation?” How shall we escape the judgments due to us? how shall we escape our transgressions being set down to us? how shall we escape our sins being written against us as with an iron pen? how shall we escape the penalties that are due to us, if we neglect the only way in which those penalties are met, the only way in which sin is ended, the only way in which we can have any access to God? The apostle does not here mean that salvation is conditional, nor does he for a moment mean that a real believer can become a lost man; but professors are of a mixed kind; there are some that are mere professors, others that are real possessors. So that such scriptures as these are not conditional, but discriminating. And the apostle well knew that where the work of grace was going on, such would give the more earnest heed to the things they had heard, lest at any time they should let one truth slip, another truth slip, and then they themselves slip down into some delusion, prove their profession to be at last only a profession, and thus instead of being saved, be lost at last. For as we go on through this world, this world loses, relatively speaking, its value, and the comforts and pleasures of this world in a great measure lose their value. Afflictions perhaps will not decrease, but rather increase; infirmities will not decrease, but rather increase; troubles, adversities, losses, griefs, and sorrows of various kinds will not decrease, but rather increase; and then the Lord overrules this to make us drink more largely of the river of his pleasure, to make us seek more earnestly fellowship with himself, and to make us prize more highly the everlasting gospel.

Now as the apostle here refers to the Old Testament age, and evidently to the salvation that God wrought from Egypt, I shall this morning make use of that salvation to bring out clearly the salvation of Jesus Christ. I will therefore first notice *the great salvation*; secondly, *the fatal neglect*; what it is fatally to neglect; and then, thirdly, I will ask you kindly to suffer in conclusion *the word of exhortation*.

First, then, I notice *the great salvation*. I need not say that if it be a salvation from hell, from all iniquity, from the wrath to come; and if salvation means also an assimilation to the Son of God; and if salvation means also preservation through the wilderness; and if salvation means also, which it certainly does, eternal glorification, itself shows that it is indeed a great salvation. But will we look at the Old Testament salvation, the temporal salvation, to set forth this eternal salvation; and I do this because I shall have to go to the temporal salvation to show up clearly what it is fatally to neglect God's salvation. Now that salvation from Egypt was, in the first place, by promise; secondly, it was discriminating; thirdly, it was divisional; and lastly, upon this part, it was entire. First, the salvation from Egypt was by promise. You all of course distinctly understand that the Jewish dispensation was a mixed dispensation, having some things in it conditional, and some things in it unconditional. The deliverance of the people from Egypt was unconditional; there is never an *if*; or a *but*, or a *maybe* connected with that. That was a part of that economy that was absolute, and therefore the more beautifully sets forth the salvation that is by the Lord Jesus Christ. First, then, it was by promise. The Lord said to Abraham in Genesis 15, "I am the Lord that brought you out of Ur of the Chaldees, to give you this land to inherit it;" and in the latter part of the same chapter he shows that this land was given unto Abraham's seed. Now Abraham said, "Lord God, whereby shall I know that I shall inherit it?" and the Lord taught him to offer sacrifice, and that sacrifice was to be the pledge, the assurance of inheriting the land. This sacrifice of course, like all the others, pointed to Christ Jesus the Lord. Now this deliverance from Egypt was promised to the literal descendants of Abraham; but the eternal salvation of the Lord is promised to the spiritual descendants of Abraham; for "they that be of faith are blessed with faithful Abraham." So, that the promise was given to Abraham by sacrifice. Just dwell upon this a moment; it is worth your while, because it brings before us with vividness the great truth that every promise that God has made in relation to eternal salvation, and every blessing thereof, is in Christ. As in Genesis 15 the Lord gave the promise by sacrifice, taught Abraham to offer sacrifice, and thereby was the promise made good; so, you will find that the promise of eternal salvation is in Christ Jesus. Hence the apostle, when he speaks of his apostleship, refers to it in this very light. "Paul, a servant of God, and an apostle of Jesus Christ, according to the faith of God's elect, and the acknowledging of the truth which is after godliness, in hope of eternal life, which God, that cannot lie, promised before the world began;" and we know that that promise was Christ Jesus the Lord. And then in another place, when he would bring this matter before us, he says that the Lord has saved us and called us, not according to our works, but according to his own purpose and grace which was given us in Christ Jesus before the world was. As that promise, then of the literal was to the literal descendants of Abraham, so the promise of eternal salvation is to the spiritual descendants of Abraham. Is it so with us, then, this morning, that we are brought to know that we are sinners, and brought to know that we are sinners, and brought to know our need of the one sacrifice Christ Jesus; and do we rest our hope there? If so, then that is an evidence that the promise belongs to us; for when the Lord gave the promise to Abraham, Abraham believed, and it was counted unto him for righteousness. The apostle dwells very much upon this, it's being given by promise, and I must dwell upon it just for a few moments, to make this matter clear. You will see in Romans 9, that the apostle distinguishes between the Israelite after the flesh and the Israelite after the spirit. He says that those that are after the spirit are children of promise; that is, they are brought to know that unless the Lord himself positively and freely undertook their eternal salvation, they could have no hope. It must be entirely of the Lord. If these blessings were to be attained by the doings of the creature, then faith, the apostle says is made void, and the promise of none effect. But he says, God gave it to Abraham by promise. Can anything be more beautiful or more suited? If you have but a

knowledge of your need, and are brought to see that the promise of eternal salvation is unto every one that believes, if that is the case, then you are a child of promise, reconciled to God according to the promise of his blessed word. Let us trace out the experience of the man to whom the promise belongs. The apostle sets it before us in a very beautiful way. He says, "The word of faith speaks in this way, that if you shall confess with your mouth the Lord Jesus and shall believe in you heart that God raised him from the dead you shall be saved." Here are the achievements of the Lord Jesus Christ, he having accomplished the warfare, and brought in as we so often say, the double-grace here, and glory hereafter. "For with the heart man believes unto righteousness," that is, unto Christ's righteousness. Let us be careful here. "If you shall confess with your mouth the Lord Jesus and shall believe in you heart that God raised him from the dead, you shall be saved. For with the heart man believes unto righteousness; and with the mouth confession is made unto salvation" Now to make confession unto salvation is to acknowledge that it is by promise, is to acknowledge that it is entirely by the good pleasure of God; that you have neither worth nor worthiness, nor any right, or title, or claim whatever, but that it is free and full love and favor; he has undertaken to save. Thus, it is that the heart believes unto righteousness. "For the scripture says, whosoever believes in him shall not be ashamed." Here then is a salvation that delivers us from all shame. There is nothing to be ashamed of; the atonement of Christ takes all sin away, the righteousness of Jesus Christ takes all condemnation away, and his truth takes all uncertainty away, and the immutability of our God takes all danger away, "For there is no difference between the Jew and the Greek; for the same Lord over all is rich unto all that call upon him. For whosoever shall call upon name of the Lord shall be saved." But how shall we escape if we neglect the origin of our salvation? The origin of our salvation is in the good pleasure, the yea and amen promise of the blessed God. True experience of divine teaching will drive us into this and give us to see that it was the Lord himself from eternity going forth on our behalf, and undertaking by a sworn promise in Christ Jesus, and confirmed by his sacrifice, that that is the origin of our salvation. If we do not know the origin of it, we shall misunderstand all the after parts; but if we rightly understand the origin of it, then our confidence will be in the Lord alone. Then secondly, this salvation is discriminating. Hence, when the Lord looks forward to that beautiful circumstance of the paschal lamb, speaking of that night he says, "Against any of the children of Israel shall not a dog move his tongue, against man or beast; that you may know how that the Lord do put a difference between the Egyptians and Israel." The difference he there put was a great difference, the one to death, and the other to life; but what was the difference that the great God put between the Egyptians and Israel compared with the difference which he puts between the soul that is saved and the soul that is lost, between Lazarus in heaven and the rich man in hell? It is one part of your privilege to recognize the infinite difference that grace has made between you and others. And if you do not like to dwell so much upon that part, then take another view, which amounts to the same, the difference that grace has made between your present and your former state. Look back at your blindness, when you saw not your sinner-ship; look back at your deadness, when you had no heart to pray to God or to seek his face; look back at the time when you hated his name and his people, especially his ministers; and perhaps some of you, the more you could ridicule and degrade them before men, the more you liked it. What a change! The enmity is slain, the blindness is taken away, and now your delight is in the name, the truth, and the salvation of the Lord. Not a dog shall move his tongue against you. What a sweet thought for us, who know that our sins are innumerable. What an awful array of witnesses we should have, every one of us, I am sure I should, against us when we came to the bar of God! Every sin of heart, lip, and life would witness against us. What an awful scene! How silent we should be, how dumb we should be struck, but for the Paschal

Lamb, the atonement of Christ, that takes away the sins of the world. Here, then, is the difference; the others have nothing but sin laid to their charge; these have no sin laid to their charge; all their sin was laid to the charge of the Lamb of God, and they are eternally free. "Who shall lay anything to the charge of God's elect? It is God that justifies." It is, therefore, a discriminating salvation. So that if we are saved, we shall, as an evidence of it, appreciate the difference, and we shall be very solemn and earnest in that difference. Oh, I hope the day will never, never come when I shall be left to do as some men have been left to do, and that lately; they have glided off by slow degrees away from the sovereignty of God, away from the sovereignty of grace, and away from the poor tried people of God, and have cast in their lot among the low doctrine men, and want to persuade us that they are not changed. Don't tell me that. They may want to persuade me so; but tell me the company a man keeps; and how can a man be at home where there are not living evidences of the grace of God? Now what does the Lord say upon this question of difference? Exodus 19:4, "You have seen what I did unto the Egyptians;" as though the Lord should say, You know I might have done the same unto you. Are you better than they? No, in nowise. You have seen what I have done to the rich man, how he is lifting up his eyes in hell; and you have seen in the word of truth what I will do at the last day to all that shall be found at my left hand. Are you better than they? No: in nowise. You have seen what I did unto the Egyptians, and how I bare you on eagles' wings and brought you unto myself." What an infinite and eternal difference is here. But, thirdly, this salvation is also divisional. Hence the time came when the Lord fulfilled providentially with the Egyptians and the Israelites what he will fulfil spiritually with the lost and the saved. "God said, Let there be light, and there was light." He has shined into our hearts, and given us light, the light of the knowledge of his truth. "And God saw the light, that it was good;" and so we see that Jesus Christ is the light, and that he is good; that God's truth is light, and it is good. "And God divided the light from the darkness." So, it is; the child of light must be severed from the child of darkness. Some of you that think of marrying in darkness, you are going to marry a young man or a young woman that has got nothing stamped on the soul but the image of the devil; that has got nothing in the soul but darkness, sin, and death. But he is a very nice man; she is a very nice woman. Never mind that; they are carnal, and the carnal mind is enmity against God. "God divided the light from the darkness." You may try to get grapes of thorns; it will be something new if you should succeed. You may to get figs of thistles, it will be something new if you should succeed. God's plan is the best, depend upon it, to divide the light from the darkness. For myself, I have been an advocate for this division of light from darkness ever since I have known the Lord. Compromising God's truth has always had a terror to my mind. I hate, loathe, and abhor the least deviation whatever from God's eternal truth, because I know so well that if salvation were not just what it is, there would be no hope. Well might Moses say, "O foolish and unwise!" Well might the apostle say, "O foolish Galatians! Having begun in the spirit, are you now made perfect by the flesh?" "And God called the light Day, and the darkness he called Night." The word "night" signifies "turning away;" and so it is with the natural man. He says, I do not like that gospel at all; I will turn away from it. But the day means action, and so on; and the man that is alive is turned towards the light, and is active in the ways of the Lord. Just so with the Israelites and the Egyptians; God divided the light from the darkness, and the Egyptians were in the dark. They knew not that in that cloud was omnipotence; they knew not that in that cloud there was eternity, because there was the eternal God; they knew not that there was in that cloud the angel not merely of the typical but of the everlasting covenant. That cloud to my mind represents God's truth; and the natural man does not know what there is in God's truth as the spiritual man does.

Shall the apostle tell you what there is in the cloud of truth? He speaks of it in this way: "I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ, for it is the power of God unto salvation." If you had gone to Pharaoh and said, Pharaoh, that cloud is the power of God unto the salvation of Israel, he would have laughed at you, he would have despised you; but his laughing and his despising would not have altered the fact. There stood the fact, that the cloud was darkness to the Egyptians; they knew not that God was in it. But to the Israelites it was light, rays of light coming out of the hand of Jehovah; every movement of his hand threw a light upon the path of the Israelites. There was the hiding of his power from the Egyptians; they knew not that he was there. And so, the prophets when they went forth. Little did the two fifties that came presumptuously to Elijah think of the power that dwelt in the testimony of that solitary man. And so, of the apostles when they preached the glorious gospel of God. Little did people think what power dwelt in that testimony; that they could shake the foundations of prisons, that they could lose the prisoners, open the iron gates, make great men tremble, and be the means of casting devils out, bringing souls to God. "And the Egyptians and the Israelites came not near each other all the night." I must say a word here, because there are some of you that I very much respect. I hold you in the highest respect, and pray for you; but you do not savingly know the Lord. You have attended here for a long time, but your state as a sinner has never been a real burden to you, your lost condition has never been a matter of concern to you. You hear the sound of my voice, and you like the things I say, as far as you can in a confused sort of way see them; but you come not into the sorrow; and sighing of the true Israelite, nor do you know what it is, ere you are aware, to be carried away into fellowship with God as with the chariots of Aminadab; and you do not feel the importance of abiding even unto blood if needs be by every new covenant truth as the only way in which your soul can be saved. So that you are still in the dark, though you are in the light. Well, do not run away; still come: or if you do not come here, go somewhere else, where you can hear the word; you cannot do better. I believe there are but few of you that are regular attendants here that do not know the Lord; and may the Lord open your eyes and make you concerned, and bring you into the light. I cannot think that those of you that have attended here so long, yet do not savingly know the Lord, I cannot think the Lord will let you go on without giving you a knowledge of his name. I have known several instances of people attending the old Surrey Tabernacle for years, and nothing done; but by and by affliction has set in, and God has turned that which they have been hearing into spirit and life, and has brought them to know his blessed name. I will notice one circumstance. A very nice sort of person came for a long time, and said at last, "I shall not go any more; it is no use; I will give up my sitting." "No," said the wife, "I don't feel that I can give up the sitting; I will keep your sitting on. Perhaps the Lord will someday bring you; I do not like the thought of your being lost; I do not like the thought of you dying in this ignorance." Well, the sitting was kept on; and after a few months he came again, and the very first sermon was an arrow of conviction to him. He said, "Well, I feel that the word has come home to me this morning for the first time." God convinced him of his state, turned him into a praying man; on he went for a few months, till the Lord brought him into gospel liberty; and one day he met with an accident that caused his death. So, you see the Lord knew, though the man was in the full bloom of life and health, the Lord knew how he would die, when he would die, all about it; so that his past hearing had not been in vain; the things that he had heard in times past now became of blessed use to him. But I must notice lastly upon this part that the salvation also was entire. See how complete it was. David, speaking of this very circumstance of their salvation, says, "There was not one feeble person among them." So, give me the promise that is in Christ, the yea and amen promise, that will make me strong in the faith, giving glory to God. Give me the paschal lamb, expressive thus of discriminating grace, and all my sins taken

away, that will make me strong in the Lord and in the power of his might. Give me this separation, this division by the cloud of truth, and let me know that there is in that cloud of truth that God that shall shine upon my path, and shine upon my soul, and make me feel that his presence is there. It may well be said, "There was not one feeble person among them," for it is his presence that can make the feeble like a giant. "In that day he that is feeble among them shall be as David, and the house of David shall be as God, as the angel of the Lord before them." So then, if we neglect this truth, despise it, and say there is nothing in it, why everything is in it. Hence, you Wesleyans, there may be some of you here this morning, you say, "I do not trouble myself about doctrine." But God is in his own truth; he is not in lies, you know God is not a liar, and God cannot lie; God does not dwell in lies and God will not sanction lies. In vain do we worship him if our fear towards him is taught by the precepts of men. God is in his own cloud of truth, his own cloud of witnesses. The Israelites had no salvation anywhere but by the power that was in the cloud. It was the power that was in the cloud that divided the sea that made the people strong; that showed them the way that brought them safe to the opposite shore, where they were constrained to acknowledge that the Lord has indeed triumphed gloriously. Is there any difficulty. I think not, in seeing all this in Christ Jesus? "How shall we escape, if we neglect so great salvation?" This salvation, then, was entire. See the 15th of Exodus, where Moses shows that the Lord would take care of them all through the wilderness, that is, those that believed, not the others; and that fear and dread should so fall upon the enemy that they should be still as a stone until the people passed over Jordan, "till the people pass over which you have purchased." Is not this the doctrine that "Jesus, having loved his own, loved them unto the end"? Is not this the doctrine, "I will never leave you; I will never forsake you"? Nor does Moses stop there: "You shall bring them in;" then he describes what he will bring them into, and sums up the whole in these beautiful words, "The Lord shall reign for ever and ever." Those who were right-minded abode by the word of the Lord and found everything just as the Lord said they should; Joshua bearing testimony that "not one good thing has failed us." We know what it is to sing from our very souls the meaning of the words that our good clerk sometimes gives out:

"Blessings more than we can give,  
Be Lord forever you."

What gratitude, what service is he not entitled to? His love is indeed infinite.

But, secondly, we must notice *the fatal neglect*. Now, what was the fatal neglect? If you can find out what those Israelites did who fatally neglected the temporal salvation, that will give you a clear view of what the professor does that neglects the one eternal salvation. Now the Israelite said, the misled Israelite said, I do not believe that this salvation from Egypt is of the God of Abraham; this Moses has deluded us; and as for this manna, my soul loathes this light bread; and as for that promised land, there is no certainty about it; and therefore, let us make a captain over us, and go back to Egypt. No, says another, we cannot do that, we won't be so bad as that, we will have matters respectable. If you will all unite, and give all the gold you have, I will do the same, and then we will make a golden calf, and go on respectably. As to that salvation from Egypt, we think nothing of it. And thus, they disbelieved that God was the author of that salvation, and they loathed the manna; that manna is a type of the bread of life, and the truth of God represents the bread of life; the man therefore that loathes God's truth despises the free grace heaven to which the saints shall come. Now this is fatally neglecting God's salvation. Come then, some of you tried ones, you

are all tried ones, more or less, that know the Lord, do you not see this is something the real Christian cannot do. Can you disbelieve the yea and amen promise of God? No, no; you are as satisfied of it as you are of your own existence. Can you disbelieve and turn your back upon the salvation of Christ because it so complete? No, say you that is the very reason I hope in it. Can you turn your back upon it because of its sovereignty? No, say on; if it had not been sovereign, it would never have reached me. Will you turn your back upon it because it is divisional, separating you from the world? No, say you; that is one of the great reasons why I cleave to it; and so, at the last great day, salvation will place me on the Savior's right hand, and the glorious tidings come rolling down from his eternal throne. "Come, you blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you." And can you, because he has promised never to leave nor forsake you, despise that? Oh! dear no, says the real Christian, I could have no comfort at all without that truth, because I do not know who may forsake me on earth; The best friend I have on earth may forsake me; and therefore, if I thought; the Lord would forsake me, I should have no hope at all. So far from disbelieving and despising that, that is one of the reasons why I love the Lord. Thus, then you believe in the final triumph of his people. You cannot fatally neglect this salvation. Therefore, to neglect this salvation is to disbelieve it and despise it; and either to go away from it altogether, or else to adopt another religion, the golden calf. Moses, when he came down from the mount, looked about and examined all the parts of salvation, and for the life of him he could not find a niche, a pedestal, a vacant place, where this golden calf could be put to. Why he says, the Lord fills up everyplace; I do not know what to do with it. Ah say they, put in in God's place. No, that will never do; put the truth into the place of the calf, if you like, but never the calf into place of God. Well, he says, the only remedy is to grind it into power and strew it upon the water. Come, take a drop; how do you like it? Oh! it makes me so ill. Serve you right, too. Some of the right-minded, who were rather weak-minded, come take a drop, oh it has made me so ill; I am afraid I shall die. What shall I do? Do? Have no more to do with the golden calf; look to the God that brought you out of Egypt; look unto him that bore you as on eagles' wings and brought you to himself. So that some did recover from their fit; but there were others that so disbelieved, that thousands upon thousands fell in the wilderness. So, then, fatally to neglect this salvation is to turn from it and despise it. But if you have a heart to cleave unto the Lord, that is a proof that he is your God; and "You that did cleave unto the Lord your God are alive every one of you unto this day. I will not now dwell upon those partial neglects we see in some good people, neglects, though not fatal, are dreadfully detrimental, and are a great injury and dishonor to the Christian.

Lastly, *the word of exhortation*. I will suppose, then, there are some here this morning that have very little understanding of eternal things, and yet begin to have a little fear. Very well; here comes the exhortation. Genesis 19:17, "Escape for your life." That is weighty. "Your life;" but in this matter not merely your mortal life, but your precious soul is at stake. "Escape for your life; look not behind you." He that puts his hand to the plough, and looks back, and thinks of going back, is not fit for the kingdom. Never mind the past; look forward. "Neither stay you in all the plain; escape to the mountain," that is, to Christ Jesus, to Mount Zion, "lest you be consumed." There is the first part of the exhortation. Say you, who do you mean it for? To any one and every one that can take it. I will take to myself, I said to myself this morning. Have I escaped as for my life? I can truly say I have. Have I avoided looking back? In the fatal sense, I have. Have I escaped to the mountain, Mount Zion, Christ Jesus? I said to myself, I have.

“Lest you be consumed.” Ah, I know there is no other refuge. If I am found anywhere else but in the faith of Christ, I must be consumed. Then, said I, as I have thus been favored, I will tell the same to others. One more word of exhortation. Hebrews 12 “See that you,” that profess to belong to God (for the apostle saw a tendency to go away from the immoveable things of the gospel), “See that you refuse not him that speaks. For if they escaped not who refused him that spoke on earth, much more shall not we escape, if we turn away from him that speaks from heaven.” We profess to belong to him; let us see that we do listen to him. “Whose voice then shook the earth; but now he has promised, saying, yet once more I shake not the earth only, but also heaven. And this word, yet once more, signifies the removing of those things that are shaken, as of things that are made, that those things which cannot be shaken may remain.” God’s election of his people, divine predestination, the Savior’s standing on the vantage ground of the victory that his omnipotent arm achieved, the standing of the saints in eternal oneness with Christ in God’s immutable covenant; these things can never be shaken. “They that trust in the Lord shall be as Mount Zion, which cannot be removed, but abides forever.” Abide then by God’s truth; never mind an evil name, never mind reproach, never mind what devils may say, or men may say, or women may say, or parsons may say. And the apostle thus sums up the whole “Wherefore we receiving a kingdom which cannot be moved, let us have grace whereby we may serve God acceptably with reverence and godly fear.”