

R. A. Torrey



R. A. Torrey (1856-1928) was a Congregational evangelist, teacher, author, born in Hoboken, New Jersey. He was educated in Yale University and Divinity School. After a period of skepticism he trusted in Jesus Christ as Saviour. Soon after he pastored in Ohio and then in Minnesota. In 1889 Dwight L. Moody called Torrey to Chicago to become the superintendant of the school which became known as the Moody Bible Institute. He also served as pastor of the Chicago Avenue Church, now the Moody Memorial Church, for twelve years. Between 1902-1906 Torrey and Charles Alexander conducted a very fruitful evangelistic outreach in Australia, Tasmania, New Zealand, India, China, Japan, Britain, Germany, Canada, and the USA. From 1912-1924 Torrey was dean of the Bible Institute of Los Angeles during which he pastored the Church of the Open Door. His remaining years involved holding Bible conferences, teaching at the Moody Bible Institute, and other endeavours. (Adapted from "The Wycliffe Biographical Dictionary of the Church, Elgin S. Moyer, Moody Press, 1982)

A Question That Should Startle Every Man Who is not a Christian

"How shall we escape, if we neglect so great salvation?" Hebrews 2:3

I have a text to-night which I believe God has given me for this hour, a text that ought to startle every man and woman in this building who has not accepted the Gospel of Christ. You will find it in Hebrews ii. 3: "How shall we escape if we neglect so great salvation?" I wish that that text would burn itself into the heart of every man and woman in this house who is out of Christ, "How shall I escape if I neglect so great salvation?" I wish that every man and woman that may go away from this place to-night without definitely having received Christ as their Saviour and Lord and Master would hear it ringing in their ears as they go down the street, "How shall we escape if we neglect so great salvation?" I wish that every one that may lie down to sleep to-night without a definite assurance of being forgiven through the atoning blood of Jesus Christ and of acceptance before God in Him, would hear it all through the night, "How shall we escape if we neglect so great salvation?" Our text sets forth the folly and guilt of neglecting the salvation that God has sent to us in and through His Son Jesus Christ, and that is my object to-night. My sermon is all in the text-the folly and guilt of neglecting the salvation that God the Father has sent through His Son and in His son Jesus Christ.

You notice I say not merely the folly but the guilt. There is many a man who thinks that perhaps it may be a foolish thing not to accept Christ, and admit

the folly of it, but he has never realized the guilt of it. But I shall endeavour to show you to-night in the unfolding of this text that it is not merely an egregiously foolish thing, but that it is an appalling wicked thing to neglect this salvation.

1. THE GREATNESS OF THE SALVATION.

We see the folly and guilt of neglecting this Salvation, in the first place, by a consideration of the greatness of the salvation. "How shall we escape if we neglect so great salvation?"

1. We see the greatness of the salvation first of all in the way in which the salvation was given. God sent His Son, His only Son, down into the world to proclaim this salvation. As we read in the preceding chapter, "God, who at sundry times and in divers manners, spake in time past unto the fathers by the prophets, hath in these last days spoken unto us by His Son whom He hath appointed heir of all things, by whom also He made the worlds; who, being the brightness of His glory and the express image of His person, and upholding all things by the word of His power, when He had by Himself purged our sins, sat down on the right hand of the Majesty on high." Have you ever thought of it in the light of the context, that when God in infinite condescension, the great and infinitely holy God, sent down His own Son to proclaim pardon to the vilest sinner, if you and I neglect this salvation we are pouring contempt upon the Son of God, and upon the Father that sent Him? If God had spoken this salvation by the lips only of inspired prophets, it would have a right to demand our attention. If God had gone above prophets, and had spoken this salvation by the lips of angels sent down from Heaven, it would have a still greater right to demand our attention. But when God, in His infinite condescension, sent not merely prophets or angels, but sent His own son, the only begotten one, the express image of His person, God manifest in the flesh, to proclaim this salvation, and you and I do not heed it, we are guilty of the most appalling presumption and defiance of God. "He that despised Moses' law died without mercy under two or three witnesses," but how much sorer punishment you and I shall receive if we neglect this greater salvation.

2. In the second place, the greatness of this salvation is seen in the way in which it was purchased- This is a costly salvation. It was purchased by the shed blood, by the outpoured life of the incarnate Son of God. Ah, friends, when God in wondrous love went to that extent that He sacrificed His very best, when God went to that extent that He gave His own and only Son to die on the cross at Calvary, that He might purchase your salvation and mine, if you and I neglect so great salvation we are pouring contempt on the precious blood of the Son of God. "He that despised Moses' law died without mercy under two or three witnesses," but how much greater

punishment shall he merit who under foot the Son of God, and counts the blood of the covenant wherewith He was sanctified an unholy thing, and insults the Spirit of Grace (Hebrews x. 29,29).

3. Again, the greatness of this salvation is seen in the third place by a consideration of what it brings. It brings pardon for all our sins, it brings deliverance from sin, it brings union with the Son of God in His resurrection life, it brings adoption into the family of God, it brings an inheritance incorruptible and undefiled and, that fadeth not away, laid up in store in Heaven for us, who are kept by the power of God, through faith, unto a salvation ready to be revealed in the last time. When you think that God has put at our disposal in Jesus Christ all His wealth, and is ready to make us heirs of God and joint heirs with Jesus Christ, who can measure the guilt of neglecting and of turning a deaf ear to this wonderful salvation? Suppose that on his coronation day King Edward had ridden down to the East End of London, and seeing some wretched little boy on the street, clad in rags, with filthy face and hands, his great heart of love had gone out to that wretched boy, and he had stopped the royal carriage and said, "Bring that boy here," and they had brought the boy, and he had said, "I want to take you out of your poverty, out of your squalor and rags and wretched home; I am going to take you to the royal palace and adopt you, as my son." Then suppose the boy had turned said, "Go along, I don't want to be adopted as your son; I would rather have my wretched crust of bread, I would rather have my rags and filthy home than live in your old palace; I don't want to go to be your son."

But when the great King of Glory, the King of Kings and Lord of Lords, the great Eternal Son of God comes to you and me, in our filth and rags and sin, and wants to take us out of our filth and sin and rags of unrighteousness, and says, "I want to adopt you into my family and make you an heir of God and a joint-heir with Me," there are some of you men and women in this building to-night who, by your actions, are saying, "Go away with your salvation, go away with your adoption into the family of God; I would rather have the crust of the world's pleasure and the rags of my sin than all the royal apparel of righteousness and glory which you offer me." Oh, the daring, damning guilt, of any man or woman who neglects so great salvation!

II. ONLY SALVATION.

A second thought which the text suggests is that our folly is great in neglecting this great salvation because it is the only salvation that is open to us. As Peter puts it in Acts iv. 12: "There is none other name under heaven given among men whereby we must be saved." It is salvation in Christ, or it is no salvation at all. A man is in a burning building. If there

were one way of escape by a fire-escape, and another by a great broad stairway, he would have a perfect right to neglect the fire-escape for the easier escape by the stairway. But there was no way of escape but the fire-escape, how great would be his folly in neglecting it. Men and women, you are in a burning building, in a doomed world. There is just one way of escape; that is by Christ. In Christ any one can be saved. out of Christ; no one shall be saved. By Christ, or not at all. There is a class of men to-day who say, "Give up your Bible, give up your Christ of the Bible." and we turn to them and say, "What have you got to give us in place of our Bible; what have you got to give us in place of the Christ of our Bible?" Now we know by personal experience that the Bible and Christ bring forgiveness of sins and peace of heart, for they have brought them to us. We know that they bring deliverance from sin's power, for they have brought it to us. We know that they bring joy unspeakable and full of glory, for they have brought it to us. We know that they bring pardon and a firm assurance of eternal life, for they have brought them to us. We know that Christ makes us sons of God, and if sons, then heirs of God, and joint heirs with Himself. What have you got that will bring us the same, that will bring us pardon and peace and set us free from the power of sin? What have you got that will bring us joy unspeakable and full of glory? What have you got that will bring us the assurance of eternal life? Have you anything? No, you have not. Well, then, please, we are not quite so great fools as to give up a book and a Saviour that bring us all these for nothing. Salvation in Christ, or salvation not at all. Point me to one saved man in London that was not saved by Christ. I have been away round this round earth. I have been in every latitude and almost every longitude, north and south; I have talked with all kinds of people, of all races and all classes, but I have never yet found a saved man, who had a glad assurance of salvation and practical deliverance from sin's power, that was not saved by Jesus Christ; neither has anybody else.

III. TO MISS SALVATION ALL THAT IS NECESSARY IS MERELY TO NEGLECT IT.

In the third place, this text teaches us that to miss this salvation, and to bring upon ourselves the just and awful displeasure of a holy God for our light and contemptuous treatment of a salvation so wonderful, given and purchased at so great a cost, all that is necessary is simply to neglect it. "How shall we escape if we neglect, so great salvation?" In order to bring upon your head the awful displeasure of God, and to be lost forever, it is not necessary that you go into any outrageous immoralities; it is not necessary that you should be an arrant and blatant blasphemer; it is not necessary that you should abuse churches and preachers of the Gospel; it is not necessary that you should even positively refuse to accept Jesus Christ; all that is necessary is that you simply neglect. More people are lost in Christian lands by neglecting than in any other way. There are millions in

England to-day who are going through life neglecting, drifting into their graves neglecting, drifting into eternity neglecting, drifting into hell neglecting. That is all that is necessary to be lost. Here is a dying man, there stands a table by the dying man's bedside, within easy reach, and standing on that table there is a tumbler in which is a medicine that has power to save the dying Christian's life. The man has strength enough to put out his hand and take the tumbler and drink the medicine. Now what is all that is necessary for that man to be saved? All that is necessary is simply for him to put out his hand and take the tumbler and drink the medicine. Now what is all that is necessary for that man to be lost and die? It is not necessary that he should cut his throat or blow out his brains; it is not necessary that he should throw the medicine out of the window; it is not necessary that he should assault or insult the doctor or the nurse; it is not necessary that he should positively refuse to take the medicine; all that is necessary for that man to die is to neglect to take the medicine.

Men and women out of Christ, you are dying. Eternal death is at work in your souls to-night, but on that table, in that Book, in the Christ of that Book, there is a medicine that will save you, and save you to-night if you will take it. The medicine is within the reach of anybody in this building. Christ is nearer to you than the man or woman that sits next to you in that pew. All you have to do to-night to be saved is to put out your hand and take Christ. "To as many as received Him to them gave He power to become the sons of God." What is all that is necessary to you to perish eternally? Not to commit moral suicide; not to commit to-night some awful act of immorality; not to get up and curse Christ and the Bible; not loudly to proclaim that you are an infidel; not to refuse blatantly to take Christ; all that is necessary for you to be lost is simply to neglect. Here is a boat on the Niagara River, away above the Falls, towards Lake Erie, where there is scarcely any current. A man sits in the boat, being carried on very, slowly by the gentle current. There is a good pair of oars in the boat, and the man could take them and pull up the river towards the lake, or to either bank, if he liked; but the man sits there and is carried on, almost imperceptibly at first, and then faster and faster, until, before he knows it, he is in the swift current just upon the rapids, and he is being carried on towards the Falls. The oars are no good to him now, the current is too swift; he could not save himself if he would-but on the shore there are men who have seen his peril; they have run along the bank and have thrown a line good and strong. It falls right into the boat, at the man's very feet. What is all that the man has to do to be saved? All he has to do is to lay hold of the rope and they will pull him ashore, as has been done more than once on that river. What is all that he has to do to be lost? It is not necessary that he should take up the oars and pull with the current; it is not necessary that he should throw the oars overboard; it is not necessary that he himself should jump into the river; all that is necessary is simply for him to neglect to lay hold of that

rope that lies before him, and the swift current of the river will carry him on to absolutely certain death over the cataract.

Men and women, that is a picture of every man and woman in this building out of Christ. You are in a boat in a perilous stream, being carried towards the cataract of eternal perdition. There is no man who has the power to take the oars in his own strength and pull against that awful current; there is no man on earth who can save himself; but God has seen your peril, and, in the Gospel of His Son, has thrown out a rope. It has fallen at your feet to-night; all you have to do is to lay hold, and He will pull you safely on to the glorious shore. But what is all that you have to do to be lost? It is not necessary that you should jump into the current or pull with the stream, or refuse to accept Christ. All that is necessary is that you simply neglect, and that awful current that you are already in will sweep you over the cataract to eternal death and ruin.

Some one put a little card into my hand one day, a short, narrow card, and on the one side were these words, "What must I do to be saved?" Underneath was written God's answer in Acts xvi. 31: "Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved." Then it said "Over," and I turned it over. On the other side of the card was this question, "What must I do to be lost?" and there was the answer in just one word "Nothing!" "Nothing!" You don't have to do anything to be lost. You are lost already; if you do not do something, and do it quickly, you will be lost forever. "How shall we escape if we neglect so great salvation?" To sum it all up, friends, all that is necessary to be lost to-night, all that is necessary to bring upon our heads the awful wrath of God for our light and contemptuous treatment of a Gospel proclaimed by the lips of His own Son and purchased by the atoning death of His own Son, all that is necessary is simply to neglect.

Years ago in Minneapolis, the leading paper was the Minneapolis Tribune, published in a magnificent six or seven-story building, the finest newspaper building at that time in the Northwest. I had occasion very frequently to go into the upper stories of that building to see editorial friends. There was one great defect in that great building which I had never noticed. The defect was this, that the stairway went right round the elevator shaft, so that if a fire broke out in the elevator shaft escape by the stairway was cut off as well. There was, however, a fire-escape outside. That very thing happened. There broke out a fire in the elevator shaft, and it commenced to sweep up the shaft, story by story, cutting off escape by the elevator and cutting off escape by the stairway as well. But they had a brave elevator boy who went up a number of times until he got a large number of men down from the upper stories, and almost all the rest escaped by the fire-escape outside the building. But away up in the sixth story there was a man, a dispatcher for the Associated Press, which is the largest news gathering

agency in the United States. He was urged to escape, but he refused to move. There he sat by his instrument, telegraphing to all parts of the country that the building was on fire. He could have gone out of the building by the fire-escape, and across the road to an instrument there, and could have done just as well; but, like a typical newspaper man, he wanted do something sensational, and so there he sat telegraphing the news. There had been a similar case above Johnstown in the time of the Johnstown flood, when the dam of the river was breaking. A woman out in a telegraph office at the bottom of the dam telegraphing down to the people at Johnstown that the dam was breaking and that they had better flee for their lives. But she sat there, because duty required her, until the dam burst, and she was swept down in the flood. This man, however, sat there quite unnecessarily, merely because of his desire for notoriety. "I am in the Tribune building," he telegraphed, "in the sixth story, and the building is on fire. The fire has now reached the second story; I am in the sixth." In a little while he sent another message: "The fire has now reached the third story." Soon he telegraphed: "The fire has reached the fourth story; I am in the sixth." Soon the message went over the wires: "The fire has reached the fifth story; I am in the sixth." Then he thought it was about time to leave; but, in order to do this, he had to cross the hallway to a window to reach the fire-escape. He went to his door and opened it, and, to his dismay, found that the fire had not only reached the fifth story,, but the sixth story, and that the hallway was full of smoke and flame, which, the moment he opened the door swept into the room. He shut the door quickly. What was he to do? The stairway, the elevator and the fire-escape were all cut off; but he was a brave man., and he went to the window and threw it up. Down below stood a great crowd, six stories down. There was no means of catching him if he jumped, and he stood there on the window sill, not knowing what to do. But presently he looked up. Above his head was a long wire guy-rope that passed from the Tribune building to the roof of a building across an opening. Below him was a chasm six stories deep, but he caught hold of the guy-rope and began to go hand-over-hand across that chasm. The people down in the street looked on in breathless suspense. On and on he went, and then he stopped. The people below could hardly breathe. would he let go? No. On and on he went, and again he stopped, and again the crowd below gasped, but only for a moment. His strength was gone; he was now obliged to let go, and down he came tumbling through those six stories of space, crushed into a shapeless mass below. All through mere unnecessary neglect!

Men and women, you are in a burning building tonight, you are in a doomed world; but, thank God, there is a way of escape, and one way only, in Christ Jesus. No one knows how long that way will be left open. But I beg of you, do not neglect it, and then when it is too late lay hold on some poor guy-rope of lame philosophy, and go a little way, and then let go and

plunge, not six stories down, but on and on and on the awful unfathomable depths of the gulf of despair. Men and women, turn to Christ to-night! "How shall we escape if we neglect so great salvation?"

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