

“AM I A SEA, OR A WHALE?”

NO. 2206

A SERMON
INTENDED FOR READING ON LORD’S DAY, MAY 31, 1891,
DELIVERED BY C. H. SPURGEON,
AT THE METROPOLITAN TABERNACLE, NEWINGTON,
ON BEHALF OF THE BRITISH AND FOREIGN SAILORS’ SOCIETY,
ON THURSDAY EVENING, MAY 7, 1891.

*“Am I a sea, or a whale, that You set a watch over me?”
Job 7:12.*

JOB was in great pain when he thus bitterly complained. These moans came from him when his skin was broken and had become loathsome, and he sat upon a dunghill and scraped himself with a potsherd. We wonder at his patience, but we do not wonder at his impatience. He had fits of complaining, and failed in that very patience for which he was noted. Where God’s saints are most glorious, there you will find their spots. The weaknesses of the saints lie near their strength. Elijah is the bravest of the brave, and flees from Jezebel; Moses is the meekest of the meek, and speaks in passion; Job is the most patient of men, and cries, “I will not refrain my mouth; I will speak in the anguish of my spirit; I will complain in the bitterness of my soul.” As part of his bitter complaint, he said, “Am I a sea, or a whale, that You set a watch over me?”

He seemed to be watched and whipped, and then watched again. It seemed to him that God concentrated all His strength upon him in afflicting him. He was beaten black and blue, and whereas other culprits had forty stripes save one, he had fifty stripes save none. He was spared no suffering, and he cries at last, “I am watched, and checked, as if I were a great sea needing always to be held in bounds, or a terrible sea monster needing always a hook in its jaws. Lord, why do You harass me thus? I am such a poor, insignificant thing, that it seems out of Your usual way to be so rough upon one so feeble. The raging ocean, or the mighty leviathan, may need such watching, but why do You spend it on me? Am I a sea, or a whale, that You set a watch over me?”

I shall not moor myself to Job’s sense of the words, but I shall spread my sail for a voyage further out to sea. This sort of talk may have been used by many a man who is now within hail of my voice—may have been used by sailors now before me.

Let me point out the channel along which I shall steer in my discourse. We shall begin by saying that *some men seem to be narrowly watched by God*. They think that the Lord’s eye is as much fixed on them as though they were great as a sea, or huge as a whale. My second point will be that *they do not like this watching*. They complain about it, and wish they could get rid of it. Therefore they argue against it with God. Our third head is that *their argument is a bad one*. They think they are very hardly done by, but the fact is, that *all they complain of is in love*. See, my mess-mates, the way I shall try to steer, but if the heavenly wind blows me out of my course, don’t be surprised if I tack about, and go nobody knows where.

I. I have, first, to say that **SOME MEN SEEM TO BE ESPECIALLY TRACKED AND WATCHED BY GOD**. We hear of persons being “shadowed” by the police, and certain people feel as if they were shadowed by God; they are mysteriously tracked by the great Spirit, and they know and feel it. Wherever they go, an eye is upon them, and they cannot hide from it. They are like prisoners under arrest—they can never go out of reach of the law. They cannot get away from God, do what they may. There are men who have been in this condition for years, *and they know what I mean*.

All men are really surrounded by God. He is not far from every one of us. “In Him we live, and move, and have our being.” “Where shall we flee from Your presence?” to the heights above, or to the depths beneath? To oceans frozen into ice, or seas whereon the sun shines with burning heat? In vain we rise or dive to escape from God. “You God see me,” is as true in the watches of the night as in the blaze

of day. God is with us, and we are always beneath His eye. Yet there are certain people to whom this is clearer than it is to others.

Some are singularly aware of the presence of God. Certain of us never were without a sense of God. As children, we could not go to sleep till we said, “Our Father which art in heaven.” As youths, we trembled if we heard God’s holy name blasphemed. As men, engaged in the cares of life, we have seen the Lord’s goodness, all along. We delight to see Him in every flower that blooms, and to hear His voice in every wind that blows. It has made us happy to see God in His works. “The fool has said in his heart, No God,” but this folly we never cared for. We knew that God was good, even when we felt we had offended Him. He has taught us from our youth, and manifested Himself to us. Softly has the whisper fallen on our ear, “God is near you; God is with you; God has an ear to hear you; God has a heart to love you; God has a hand to help you.” I have known those who, even when they have sinned and gone against their consciences, have never at any time quite lost a sense of the nearness of God, even though its only fruit was fear—a fear which has torment.

With others, God’s watch is seen in a different way. They feel that they are watched by God, because *their conscience never ceases to rebuke them*. The voice of conscience is not pitched to the same key in all men, neither is it equally loud in all people. Conscience can be made like a muzzled dog, and then it cannot bite the thief of sin. Conscience can grow like a man with a cold, who has lost his voice. But it is not so with all men, even after years of sin. Some have a naturally tender conscience, and while living in sin they are never easy. They make merry all the day, for “they count it one of the wisest things to drive dull care away,” but dull care, like the chickens, comes home to roost at night. The sailor in company is jolly, but if he has to keep a lone watch beneath the silent stars his heart begins to beat, and his conscience begins to call him to account for the follies of the day. He starts in his sleep; he dreams over his past sin and the judgment to come, for conscience will wake even when the rest of the man sleeps. “You were wrong,” says conscience, and his voice is very solemn.

Even great sin in certain men has not prevented conscience speaking out honestly to them. Again and again the inward monitor cries, “You were wrong, and you will suffer for it.” We read that “David’s heart smote him”; the heart deals us an ugly knock. When the blow is within us it tells. I am addressing some who, though they do not feel pleased about it, yet must know that there is a something within that will not let them sin cheaply. God has a bit in their mouths, and a bridle upon their jaws, and every now and then He gives a tug at it, and pulls them right up. They are not at home in sin. They have not yet got their sea legs upon the ocean of vice. They sing the songs of the devil with a quake and a shake, which shows that the music does not suit them. Thus God has set a watch upon them; they carry a detective in their bosoms.

In some this watching has gone farther, for *they are under solemn conviction of sin*. They are convinced of sin, of righteousness, and of judgment to come. God’s custom-house officer has boarded them, and their smuggling is found out. I remember when I was in that state myself—a criminal who dared not deny his guilt, but dreaded punishment. I would not go back to that condition for a hundred worlds. *Then* there was no rest for me. I was only a youth, but boyish sports lost their relish for me, because I knew that I was a sinner, and that God must punish sin. I awoke in the morning and my first act for many a day was to read a chapter of the Bible, or a page of some awakening book, which kept my conscience still awake. The Holy Spirit put me in irons, and there I lay both day and night. My bed was at times a very weary place for me, because the eyes of God’s anger seemed to be ever watching me. I knew I had offended God, and I had not yet found out the way of reconciliation by the blood of Jesus Christ.

Now, it may be that I speak to some here, who have been to the ends of the earth, and they have said, “Well, when we get away where the Sabbath bell is never heard, we shall get rid of these fears, and take our swing in sin.” They sailed off, and as soon as they reached port, they hurried to a place of vicious amusement, where no one knew them. But the dog of fear howled at their heels, and merriment seemed mockery to them. On the lone ocean the very stars pierced their hearts with their rays. At length their mess-mates began to notice it and call them Old Sobersides. “Jack, what ails you?” was the frequent question, and well it might be, for Jack was very heavy, and it is hard to be merry with a broken heart. In some such fashion as this the man feels that God has set a watch upon him, and that he has become like a sea which never rests, or a whale which roams the waste of water, and knows no home. God watched him, and though he would gladly have run the blockade, he could not find an hour in which his vessel was left alone.

Certain men are not only plagued by conscience and dogged by fear, but *the providence of God seems to have gone out against them*. Just when the man had resolved to have a bout of drinking, he fell sick of a fever, and had to go to the hospital. He was going to a dance, but he became so weak that he had not a leg to stand upon. He was forced to toss to and fro on the bed, to quite another tune from that which pleases the ballroom. He had yellow fever, and was long in pulling round. God watched him, and put the skid on him just as he meant to have a breakneck run downhill. The man gets better, and he says to himself, “I will have a good time now.” But then he is out of berth, and perhaps he cannot get a ship for months, and he is brought down to poverty. “Dear me!” he says, “Everything goes against me. I am a marked man,” and so he is. Just when he thinks that he is going to have a fair wind, a tempest comes on and drives him out of his course, and he sees rocks ahead. After a while he thinks, “Now I am all right. Jack is himself again, and piping times have come.” A storm hurries up; the ship goes down, and he loses all but the clothes he has on his back. He is in a wretched plight; a shipwrecked mariner, far from home. God seems to pursue him even as He did Jonah. He carries with him misfortune for others, and he might well cry, “Am I a sea, or a whale, that You set a watch over me?” Nothing prospers. His tacklings are loosed; he cannot well strengthen his mast; his ship leaks; his sails are torn; his yards are snapped, and he cannot make it out. Other people seem to get on, though they are worse than he is. Time was when he used to be lucky too, but now he has parted company with success, and carries the black flag of distress. He is driven to and fro by contrary winds; he makes no headway; he is a miserable man, and would wish that the whole thing would go to the bottom, only he dreads a place which has no bottom, from which there is no escape, if once you sink into it. The providence of God runs hard against him, and thus he sees himself to be a watched man.

Yes, and God also watches over many *in the way of admonition*. Wherever they go, holy warnings follow them. They cannot escape from those who would be friends to their souls. They seem to be surrounded with a ring of prayers and sermons and holy talks. The boy said, “If I could get away from my mother I should be free! I have been tied long enough to her apron strings. I am old enough to do as I like. If I can get away from my father’s chidings and prayers, I shall have a fine time of it.” So the boy ran away and went to sea, and when he got on board, a good old sailor tackled him, and talked to him about his soul, and then another pleaded with him. The boy said to himself, “Why, I have got out of the frying pan into the fire. I came here to be out of the way of religion, and here it is!” I have known a sailor to go from port to port, and wherever he has landed there has been some gracious man or woman waiting to lead him to Christ. May it be often so! May the Bethel flag be found flying in all waters, till every runaway says, “Why, I am watched wherever I go!” May it be as it was with our dear friends, Fullerton and Smith, on board the steamboat! Mr. Fullerton spoke to a rough man, and asked him if he was saved, and the man was angry, cross, vexed, and went to the other side of the vessel. There he complained to Mr. Smith, “That man over there asked me if I was saved; he is a fool!” “Very likely,” said Smith, “but then, you see, he is a fool for Christ. I think it is better to be a fool for Jesus than to be wise for the devil.” He began to plead with him, when the man cried out, “There is a regular gang of them; I cannot go anywhere but they are on to me.” It has been made hot for some of you by the British and Foreign Sailors’ Society, which has placed missionaries in so many ports. “There’s a gang of them,” and wherever you go you stumble on an earnest Christian man, who will not let you alone. If I could stir up Christian people here, I would make it hard for sinners, so that wherever they went they would find a hand outstretched to stop them from going to destruction. Oh, that each one might be met with tears and entreaties, that thus each one might be snatched from the waves of fire and landed on the rock of salvation! Some here present have had to dodge a great deal to keep out of the way of gospel shots. Their track has been followed by mercy, and they have been pursued by swift cruisers of grace. They have been like fish taken in a net—surrounded on all sides, and neither able to pass through the meshes, nor to break the net, nor to leap out of it. Oh, that the net of Christ’s love may so entangle you all, that you may be His forever!

That is our first point; there are some men who seem especially watched of God.

II. Secondly, we notice that **THEY ARE VERY APT TO DISLIKE THIS WATCHING**. Job is not pleased with it. He asks, “Am I a sea, or a whale, that You set a watch over me?” These people, to whom God pays such attention, are foolish enough to murmur that they are so hedged in, and they are vexed to be made to feel that God has His eye upon them.

Do you know what they would like? *They want liberty to sin*. They would like to be let loose, and to be allowed to do just as their wild wills would suggest to them. They would cast off every restraint and

have their fling of what the world calls “pleasure.” They would climb from sin to sin, hand over hand. They would like to empty all the cups on the devil’s sideboard, and be as merry as the worst of men when they are taking it free and easy. That is why they would send their consciences to sleep, drown their fears, and escape from chastening providences and warning admonitions. They would like to live where no Christian would ever worry them again with wearisome exhortation. They demand liberty; liberty to put their hands into the fire! Liberty to ruin themselves! Liberty to leap into hell before their time! Liberty! What destruction has been worked in your name! Free thinking! Free living! Free loving, and all that! What misuse of terms! What a libel upon the name of freedom, to use the word “free” in connection with the slavery of sin! Yet, I am speaking to some who say, “That is just what I want. I want to cut myself clear of all this hamper which blocks me up from having my own way.” Ah me! This is the cry of a man who is bent on soul-suicide!

They also wish that they could be as hard of heart as many others are. Some men can drink any quantity, and yet do not seem as if they were greatly affected by it, and many a young sailor has wished that he could pour down his grog without a wink, after the style of the old toper. He meets with a foul-mouthed being who can swear till all is blue, while he himself has only dropped an oath or two, and then felt wretched. The young man begins to wish that he was as tough as old Jack, and as much a daredevil as he. The hardened profligate is foolishly envied, and looked upon as a man of “pluck.” But is it true bravery to ruin one’s soul? Is it manly to be wicked? Is it a great gain to have a seared conscience? We don’t envy the blind because they cannot see danger or, the deaf because they cannot hear an alarm, and why envy the hardened old sinner because he has become spiritually blind and deaf? There are monsters, both on land and on sea, whose very breath is pestilent, and whose talk is enough to choke up a town with vice, and yet certain young men, whom God will not allow to descend into such rottenness, are almost angry that they are restrained. A tender conscience is a great possession, but these simple ones know not its value. They wish that they could have a heart as hard as the nether millstone. Ah, poor souls! You know not what you wish; for you have no idea how deep is the curse that lies in a callous conscience. When God gave Pharaoh up to hardness of heart, it was a tremendous punishment for his pride and cruelty; and, short of hell, there is no judgment that God can inflict like letting a man have his own way. “Let him alone” says God, “he is joined to idols,” and if the Lord says that, there is only one other word more dreadful, and that is the final sentence—“Depart from Me, you cursed, into everlasting fire, prepared for the devil and his angels.” O you beginners in vice who cannot yet stifle the cries of your suffering consciences, I pray that you may see your folly, and no longer do violence to your own mercy.

Men do not like this being surrounded by God—this wearing the bit and kicking strap—because *they would drop God from their thoughts.* If tomorrow we could hear, by telegram from heaven, that God was dead, what crowds would buy the newspaper! It would be the greatest relief in the world to many a godless wretch if he could feel sure that there was no God. To some of us this news would be death; we would have lost our Father, our Comforter, our Savior, our all. Alas! Many wish that there were no God, and if they cannot persuade themselves that there is none—and it is very hard for a sailor to do *that*—yet they try to forget Him. If God is out of mind, He is as good as out of the world to the careless sinner. When God comes with inward fears, and awakens conscience, and sends cross providences, so that the man feels pulled up and made to pause; then he knows that there is a God, for he feels a power which works against his sin, from which he cannot get away. He longs to be clear of this secret force, but it wraps him about on every side. He does not read his Bible, and yet Scripture rises in his memory. It is long since he bent his knee in prayer; he has almost forgotten what his mother said to him when she lay dying, but still he feels that there is a God, and, somehow, that belief sounds a trumpet blast through his soul, summoning him to his last account. Come to judgment! Come to judgment! Come to judgment! The call rings in his ears, and he cannot get away from the terrible sound. Then it is that he cries “Why am I thus? Am I a sea, or a whale, that You set a watch over me?”

Once more, there are some who do not like to be shadowed in this way, because *they want to have their will with others.* Shall I speak a sharp word, like a two-edged sword? There are men—and seamen to be found among them—who are not satisfied with being ruined themselves, but they thirst to ruin others. They lay traps for precious souls, and they are vexed that their victims should escape them. They are angry because certain poor women are not altogether in their power. Woe unto the men who lead women astray! I have heard of sailors who, in every port they enter, try to ruin others. I charge you to remember that you will have to face these ruined ones at the day of judgement. You sailed away, and they never

knew where you went, but the Lord knew. It may be, when you lie in hell, eyes will find you out, and a voice will cry aloud, “Are you here? You are the man that led me to perdition!” You will have to keep everlasting company with those whom you dragged down to hell, and these will forever curse you to your face. I say there are men who would like to have full license to commit wantonness, and they are grieved that they are hindered in their carnival of sin. May God grant that you may be stopped altogether, and instead of lusting to pollute others, may you have a desire to save them! May God grant that the channel of evil may be blocked for you, and may you be piloted into the waters of repentance and faith!

This is why some kick against God. I fear these people will be much vexed with me for speaking so plainly, but you must not think that it will alarm me should you be angry. I am rather glad when fellows get angry with my preaching. “Oh,” I say to myself, “those fish feel the hook in their jaws, and so they struggle to escape.” Of course a fish does not like the hook which lays hold of him. These angry hearers will come again. You people with whom the sermon goes in at one ear and out at the other, you get no good whatever, but a man who fires up with wrath, and says, “How dare that fellow speak thus to me?” is sure to listen again, and it is very likely that God will bless him. But whether it offends you or pleases you—I repeat my warning—I charge you, do not drag others down to hell with you. If you must go there yourselves, seek not to destroy those around you. Do not teach boys to drink and to swear, neither tempt frail women to commit uncleanness with you. God help you to shake off all vice, for I know that vile habits are often the reason why men kick against the restraint of God’s loving hand.

III. And now I have got to the very heart of my text. The third part is this—that THIS ARGUMENT AGAINST THE LORD’S DEALINGS IS A VERY BAD ONE. Job says, “Am I a sea, or whale, that You set a watch over me?” Listen. *To argue from our insignificance is poor pleading*, for the little things are just those against which there is most need to watch. If you were a sea, or a whale, God might leave you alone, but as you are a feeble and sinful creature, which can do more hurt than a sea, or a whale, you need constant watching. In life, men fall by very little things. One does not need to watch against his dog one half as much as against a horsefly, or a mosquito, for these will sting you when you least expect it. The little things need most watching; therefore it is poor reasoning when we complain that God watches us as if we were a sea, or a whale.

After all, *there is not a man here who is not very like a sea*, or a sea monster in this respect, that he needs a watch to be set over him. A man’s heart is as changeable and as deceitful as the sea. Today it is calm as a sea of glass, unruffled by a breath of air. Oh, trust not yourself upon it, for before tomorrow’s sun is up, your nature may be rolling in tremendous billows of passion. You cannot trust the sea, but it is more worthy of confidence than your heart. Here you are tonight, and oh, how good you look as you sit and listen, and then stand up and sing! Ah, my men! I should not like to hear you if you take to blaspheming your Maker, as many do. When you are down in the forecabin with a little band of praying men, how very good you feel! Let us see you when you are on shore, and there is plenty of grog about. It is easy to have a calm sea when there is no wind, but how different is the ocean when a gale is blowing! We are all very well when far away from temptation, but how are we when the devil’s servants are around us? Then, I fear, that too often good resolutions prove to be—

*“False as the smooth, deceitful sea,
And empty as the whistling wind.”*

It may be that I speak to one who has undergone a dreadful change. Once you led others in the way of righteousness, but now you draw them into evil. Once you sailed under the Bethel flag, but now the old Pirate of the infernal lake is your captain. You have gone back to your old ways, and have again become the slave of the world, the flesh, and the devil. Your religious profession had no foundation. Ah me! You need not say, “Am I a sea, or a whale?” for seas and sea monsters are more to be trusted than you are. The sea is immeasurable; and, as for you, your sinfulness is unsearchable. Your capacity is almost without measure; your mind reaches far, and touches all things. Man’s mind can rise in rebellion against the God of the whole earth, till, like the raging waves of the sea, it threatens to put out the lights of heaven. When man is in a rebellious state he will rage in his thoughts as though he would wash away the shores of heaven, and beat like the surf upon the iron rocks of hell. A man is an awful mystery of iniquity when left to himself. You cannot fathom his pride, nor measure his daring. Deep down in his mind there are creeping things innumerable, both small and great beasts; for all manner of evils and sins multiply in the heart like fishes in the sea. Do not say, “Am I a sea, or a sea-monster, that You set a watch over me?” for the Lord may answer, “You are more capacious for evil than a sea, and more wild than a sea monster.”

I shall now go further, and show that, by reason of our evil nature, *we have become like the sea*. This is true in several ways, for, first, *the sea is restless, and so is our nature*. “The wicked are like the troubled sea, when it cannot rest, whose waters cast up mire and dirt.” You need not go far to find hearts always agitated, always seeking rest, and finding none. They know not Christ, and until they do know Him, they cannot rest. They are always seeking a something; they know not what. They run first in one direction, and then in another, but they never follow the right thing. When they are thoughtful no good comes of their thoughts. Their waters cast up—what? Pearls and corals? No; “mire and dirt.” I do not need to explain those words. If any of you have to keep company with these restless beings, you know how foul-mouthed they can be. They cast up worse things than mire and dirt when they are stirred up. Oh, say not, “Am I a sea, or a whale?” Think of yourself as being as restless as a whale when the harpoon is in him; as restless as the sea when a storm is moving its lowest depths.

Let us say, next, that *the sea can be furious and terrible, and so can ungodly men*. When a man is in a fury, what a wild beast he can be! A landsman looks on the sea when it has put on its best behavior, and he says, “I should not mind going on a voyage. It must be splendid to steam over such a sea! I feel I shall make a splendid sailor.” Let him look at that same ocean by and by. Where is the sea of glass now? Where are the gentle waves, which seemed afraid to ripple too far upon the sand? The sea roars and rages and raves. The Atlantic in a storm is terrible, but have you ever seen a tempest in a man’s nature? It is an awful sight, and one which causes gracious eyes to weep. What a miserable object is a man with the drink in him! He was as decent a fellow as one could talk with, but now that the drink has mastered him the devil has come on board and you will do well to give him a wide berth. The same is true of passion. Concerning angry men our advice would be, “Put not to sea in a storm, neither argue with a man in a passion.” You do not know what he will do, and he does not know himself. Such a man will be grieved enough when he sobers down, but meanwhile, while the storm is on, he cares for nothing. His eyes flash lightning, his face is black as tempest, his mouth foams, and his tongue rages. In his case, “The sea roars, and the fullness thereof.” When you feel the Lord’s restraint, you need not ask, “Am I a sea, or a whale?” for your own heart may answer, “You can be more furious than the sea itself.”

Think, again, *how unsatisfied is the sea*. It draws down and swallows up stretches of land and thousands of tons of cliff, but it is not filled up. “All the rivers run into the sea, yet the sea is not full.” Huge Spanish galleons went to the bottom, with thousands of gold and silver pieces on board, but the sea was never the richer. When, on some dreadful night, our coasts are strewn with wrecks, and hundreds of lives are lost, the devouring deep is never the more satisfied. The sea is a hungry monster, which could swallow a navy, and then open its mouth for more. Are not many men made of the same craving sort? If you gave them half a world they would cry for the other half, and if they had the whole round globe they would weep for the stars. Man’s mind never rests in sweet content till God Himself satisfies it with Himself. O man, without true religion it is your fate to go forever hungry and thirsty, or, like the sea, yeasting and foaming, after you know not what.

Human nature is like the sea for mischief. How destructive is the ocean, and how unfeeling! It makes widows and orphans by the thousands and then smiles as if it had done nothing! Terrible havoc it can work when once its power is let loose! Do not talk of the destructiveness of the sea; let the reckless sinner think of the destructiveness of his own life. You that are living in sin, and vice, what wrecks you have caused! How many who set out on the voyage of life, and bade fair to make a splendid passage, have gone upon the rocks *through you!* A foul word, a loose song, a filthy act, and a merry craft have become a wreck. Conscience can fill in the details. Ah me! One cannot say to God, “Am I a sea, or a sea monster?” or He might well reply, “No shark has devoured so many as the drunkard in his cups, the swearer in his presumption, and the unclean in his lust!” Ah me! I could weep to think how much of mischief any one of you who are unconverted may yet do! The Lord deliver you from being left derelict, to cause wreck to others!

We must not forget that *we are less obedient to God than the sea is*. Nothing keeps back the sea from many a shore but a belt of sand, and though it rages in storm and tempest, the sea goes back in due time and leaves the sand for children to play upon. It knows its bounds and keeps them. When the time comes for the tide to rise, the obedient waters march upon the shore in unbroken ranks, and fill up every creek. They do not linger behind their time. When the moment comes to stay where they are, they rest at flood. Then comes the instant to begin the ebb, and no matter how boisterous the waves may be, they fall back at God’s bidding. What, after all, is more orderly than the great sea? Would to God we were like it in this! How readily this great creature yields! A little wind springs up, and its waves answer at

once to the breath of heaven. When the sun crosses the line, the equinoctial gales know their season; while at all times the great currents cease not the flow which God has appointed them. The sea is obedient to the Lord, and so was that great fish of which we read just now, “The Lord spoke unto the fish, and it vomited out Jonah upon the dry land.” As for us, we refuse to obey, and when left to ourselves, what law can restrain us? Is there anything in heaven or earth which a proud sinner will not venture to attempt? God blocks up the road to hell with hedge, and ditch, and chain, but we break over them. He digs a trench across our way, and we leap over it. He piles a mountain in the road, and as if our feet were like hinds’ feet, we leap upon the high places of presumption. A man will go against wind and tide in his determination to be lost. O sea! O sea! You are but a child with your father, as compared with the wicked and rebellious heart of man! It is a bad argument, then. We need to be looked after. We need to be watched. We need to be kept in check, even more than a sea or a whale. We need the restraining providence and constraining grace of God to keep us from deadly sin.

IV. Last of all, I would remark that ALL THEY COMPLAINED OF WAS SENT IN LOVE. They said, “Am I a sea, or a whale, that You set a watch over me?” but if they had known the truth they would have blessed God with all their hearts for having watched over them as He has done.

First, God’s restraint of some of us *has kept us from self-ruin*. If the Lord had not held us in we might have been in prison; we might have been in the grave; we might have been in hell! Who knows what would have become of us? An old Scotchman said to Mr. Rowland Hill, what I am quite sure would have been as true of me. He looked into Mr. Hill’s face so keenly and so often, that at last good Rowland asked him, “Why are you looking at my face so much?” “I was thinking,” said the Scotchman, “that if you had not been converted by the grace of God, you would have been a terrible sinner.” And, surely, this would have been my case. Nothing half-and-half would have contented me. I would have gone to the end of my tether. Is not the same true of some of you? How many times has the Lord laid His own hand on us to stay us from a fatal step! If we were checked in our youth, and brought there and then to Jesus, it was a gracious deed on God’s part. If we have been hindered during a sinful manhood, and have at length been made to bow before the will of the Lord, this also is great grace. Left to ourselves, we would have chosen our own destruction. Do you not think that God’s taking you apart, and giving you a tender conscience, and admonishing you so often, proves His great love to you? Surely someone has prayed for you. There is a mother here tonight. I hope she will not mind my telling you what she did last Tuesday when I was sitting in my vestry. She brought me a little brown paper parcel with £50 in it, and she gave it for the British and Foreign Sailors’ Society. She has a son whom she has not heard of for years. He went to sea, and she cannot find him, or get any tidings of his whereabouts, but she hopes that a missionary of this Society may meet him in some strange place, and bring him to the Savior. She prays that it may be so, and, therefore, she brings her self-sacrificing offering—a great sum, I am sure, for her—that she may help to support the good Society which, she hopes, may be a blessing to her boy. There are other sailors to whom God’s love is seen in their being followed up by a mother’s pleading. Ah, friend! The Lord would not have checked you so if He had not intended to bless you. That broken leg of yours is to keep you from running too far into sin. That yellow fever was sent to cool the fever of your sin. Your missing that ship caused you to miss shipwreck and death. These mishaps were all tokens of love to you. The Lord would not let you perish. He resolves to save you. You are one of His chosen. Christ bought you with His blood, and He means to have you for His own. If you will not come to Him with a gentle breeze He will fetch you by a storm. Yield to the pressure of His love. If you will be as the horse and the mule, which have no understanding, He will break you in and manage you with bit and bridle; but it would be far better if you would be ruled by love.

I think I see tokens of electing love upon you in those very things which you have kicked against. The Lord is working to bring you to Himself, and to Himself you must come. The prodigal son was driven home by stress of weather. If his father had had the doing of it, he could not have worked the matter better. His hungry belly and his pig-feeding fetched him home. The unkindness of the citizens of the far country helped to hurry him back to his father. Hardship, and want, and pain, are meant to bring you back, and God has used them to that end, and the day will come when you will say, “I bless God for the rough wave which washed me on shore. I bless God for the stormy providence which drowned my comfort, but saved my soul.”

Once more, and I have done. *God will not always deal roughly with you.* Perhaps tonight He will say His last sharp word. Will you yield to softer means? They say that oil poured on troubled waters will make them smooth; God the Holy Spirit can send to your troubled soul a lifelong calm. The winds and

waves on the Galilean sea all went to sleep in an instant. How? Why, when Jesus came walking on the water He said to the warring elements, “Be still.” The waves crouched like whipped dogs at His feet, though they had roared like lions before. He said to the winds, “Hush!” and they breathed as softly as the lips of a babe. Jesus is here at this hour. He that died on Calvary looks down on us; believe on Him. He lifts His pierced hands, and cries, “Look unto Me, and be you saved.” Will you not look to Him? Oh, that His grace may lead you at once to say, “He is all in all to me!” Here is a soul-saving text for you; “God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whosoever believes in Him should not perish, but have everlasting life.” Accept the Savior, and though you are as a sea, or as a whale, you shall no longer complain of the Lord’s watching you, but you shall rejoice in perfect liberty. He is free who loves to serve his God. He makes it his delight that he is watched of the Lord. The Lord bless sailors! May we all meet in the Fair Havens! May the flag of your Society bless every sea, because God blesses its missionaries! I wish for it the utmost prosperity, and I judge it to be worthy of the most generous aid of all Christian men. In all respects it is exactly to my mind. The Lord send prosperity to it! Amen.

PORTION OF SCRIPTURE READ BEFORE SERMON—JONAH 2.

HYMNS FROM “OUR OWN HYMN BOOK”—42 (VERSION 1), 590, 551.

Adapted from *The C. H. Spurgeon Collection*, Version 1.0, Ages Software.

**PLEASE PRAY THE HOLY SPIRIT WILL USE THIS SERMON
TO BRING MANY TO A SAVING KNOWLEDGE OF JESUS CHRIST.**

**By the grace of God, for all 63 volumes of
C. H. Spurgeon sermons in Modern English,
and 574 Spanish translations, visit:**

www.spurgeongems.org