

## **The Divine Summons**

Scripture: John 3:1-10

Code: 43-14

Now open your Bible, if you will, to the third chapter of the gospel of John. This, of course, is a critical chapter in all of holy Scripture. It sets the tone for our understanding of salvation, and the truth of this chapter, of course, is built upon throughout the rest of the New Testament. Let me read these ten verses. I want them to be in your mind, and then what I'm going to say this morning will be a kind of an appendix or an addendum to what we've already covered in these verses.

"Now there was a man of the Pharisees named Nicodemus, a ruler of the Jews; this man came to Jesus by night and said to Him, 'Rabbi, we know that You have come from God as a teacher; for no one can do these signs that You do unless God is with him.' Jesus answered and said to him, 'Truly, truly I say to you, unless one is born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God.' Nicodemus said to Him, 'How can a man be born when he is old? He cannot enter a second time into his mother's womb and be born, can he?' Jesus answered, 'Truly, truly I say to you, unless one is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God. That which is born of the flesh is flesh, and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit. Do not be amazed that I said to you, 'You must be born again.' The wind blows where it wishes and you hear the sound of it, but do not know where it comes from and where it is going; so is everyone who is born of the Spirit.' Nicodemus said to Him, 'How can these things be?' Jesus answered and said to him, 'Are you the teacher of Israel and do not understand these things?'"

As we've been saying, five times in those brief verses there's a reference to being born again, or born from above. Either is fine, and both are accurate translations. We need to be born again. That is, having been born physically, we need now to be born spiritually. That birth comes from above. In a sense, our first birth, of course, was a direct creation of God as well, even in the physical sense. And so it is with our second birth that comes down from above. There is, however, no human aid to that birth, as there is in physical birth. It is a divine work of God. That is why it is referred to as being born of the Spirit, born of the Spirit.

It is the work of the Holy Spirit to give us life. That's what "born again" means. And the reason the Lord uses this analogy is because it expresses to us the fact that we have no participation in this birth. You had nothing to do with your first birth, your physical birth. And you will have nothing to do with your spiritual birth. It is a divine work of God. Theologians call it monergistic rather than synergistic. You don't participate in it. I didn't participate in it. No person who is born again makes a contribution to that. There isn't a way to make that happen. That is a divine work of God.

To look at it in perhaps an unforgettable illustration, remember what I said about Lazarus. Lazarus is dead. He's in the grave. He's been dead four days. His body is in a state of decay. The Lord comes to his tomb and raises him from the dead. He does it by a call. He says, "Lazarus, come out!" And Lazarus comes to life, comes out of the grave a new creation. The grave clothes are taken off of him; he is fully alive.

We are a race of Lazaruses, spiritually dead. God gives us life and He does it through a call, through a call. Jesus gave life to Lazarus, and He declared that life through calling him out of the grave. And so it is with those who are given life by the Holy Spirit. It is by a divine call. God speaks and life comes to us.

I want you to think about it that way because that's a very important way in which the New Testament refers to God making us alive, giving us life. It is by a divine call. When we talk about being called of God, we are first and foremost talking about the call to come to life, to come out of the grave. It is a call to reconciliation, yes. It is a call to justification, yes. It is a call to redemption. It is a call to enter into the eternal kingdom of God. It is a call to sonship with all its rights and privileges. It is a call to love and service and obedience to the Lord. It is a call from bondage into freedom. It is a call to joy and peace. It is a call to holiness. The gospel call is referred to by the writers of the epistles as a high call, a holy call, a heavenly call. It is clearly a rare call. It is an undeniable call. It is an irreversible call.

The language of the New Testament makes much of the fact that our regeneration came in response to the call of God, the call of God. And I am saying that word repeatedly because I want you to see this word as it unfolds in the rest of the New Testament, so that whenever you read the New Testament this word in particular will come off the page with new and fresh meaning. This is a call that is a divine summons; it is a divine subpoena to come to life, to come into the family of God, into the kingdom of God, into the court of God to stand before God and to be declared forgiven and righteous and free forever from any judgment or any condemnation. Theologians have talked about this call and they have attached many adjectives to it. It has been called an effective call, an efficacious call, an irresistible call, a powerful call, a determinative call, a decisive call, a conclusive call, an operative call—and all of those are certainly suitable and fitting. It is a call to salvation. It is a call to life.

I want you to turn to Romans 8 as we add a bit of an appendix to our study of John 3. And I want us to begin to unfold what the New Testament says about this call so you understand the full wonder of it.

Romans 8 is very familiar to us—in verse 28 particularly, a verse that we love and apply many times in our Christian experience. “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.” God works everything to our good because we are called by Him.

If you go down into verse 29, you read, “For those whom He foreknew, He also predestined to become conformed to the image of His Son, so that He would be the firstborn among many brethren; and these whom He predestined, He also called; and these whom He called, He also justified; and these whom He justified, He also glorified.” There you have a very clear definition of the absolute efficacious nature of being called. We are predestined, called, justified, and glorified. Whoever God predestined, He called. Whoever He called, He justified. Whoever He justified, He will glorify. It all began with predestination, and it ends with being conformed to the image of His Son. This is the divine purpose. And as that purpose unfolds throughout redemptive history, God causes everything to work together for good, to bring about the end result from His original predestination. Within the plan of God, from predestination to eternal glory, is calling and justification. All who have been chosen will be called; all who are called will be justified; all who are justified will be glorified.

And in the eleventh chapter of Romans, a wonderful promise for us who have been called, verse 29, Romans 11, “The gifts and the calling of God are irrevocable.” “The gifts and the calling of God are irrevocable.”

We’re talking about a call that is an absolute effective call. Whom He called, He justified and glorified. Now let’s talk about the word “call.” Simple word in the English language. *Kaleo*; it even sounds like the English word, *kaleo*. It means “to summon someone” to oneself, to one’s presence, “to call someone” to come to you. The word is descriptive, so descriptive that believers are identified as the called. We are literally “the called”; so that you take the verb and turn it into a noun. All of us have been called and we are, according to Romans 8:28, “the called.” In fact, that’s what a church is. The true church is the gathering together of the called. The word for “church”—we love the word “church”—it doesn’t tell us anything about who we are, the English word “church.” But the English word “church” is a translation of the Greek word *ekklesia*. *Ekklesia* is from *ekkaleo*, it means “the called.” *Kaleo* with a preposition at the front—*ek*, meaning “out of”; we are “the called out.” We have been called out of the grave. We’ve been called out of death, called out of ignorance, called out of blindness. We are the called. The church is *ekklesia*. It is “the called out,” “the called out.”

It would be wonderful if there were an English word that better explained that work of God than the rather static word that is the word church, ‘cause it’s also used to describe organizations and buildings. So let’s refer to ourselves as often as we can think to do it as the called, the called. And to help you familiarize yourself with that, let me take you on a little run through the epistles of the New Testament. We can start in Romans where the epistles begin. Romans chapter 1; Paul, verse 1, identifies himself as “a slave of Jesus Christ, called”—called individually, of course. And then he goes down to talk about the redeemed. He talks about those who, in verse 5, have received grace and the obedience of faith among all the nations for His name’s sake. And then verse 6, “Among whom you also are the called...the called of Jesus Christ.” Verse 7, “You are the beloved of God in Rome, called saints.

In 1 Corinthians chapter 1, Paul again demonstrates how familiar this language is. First Corinthians 1, “Paul, called as an apostle of Jesus Christ by the will of God, Sosthenes our brother, to the [*ekklesia*, to the called out ones] of God which is at Corinth, to those who have been sanctified in Christ Jesus, saints by calling,” “saints by calling.” Go down to verse 9, “God is faithful, through whom you were called into fellowship with His Son, Jesus Christ our Lord.” And when I’m reading this word “called,” I want you to be thinking about Lazarus. It was the call, “Lazarus, come out,” that brought him from the grave. And it is this same call that has given us life.

If you drop down into verse 23, “we preach Christ crucified, [admittedly] to Jews a stumbling block and to Gentiles foolishness, but to those who are the called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God.” He can preach the gospel and it will be foolishness, and it will be a stumbling block until it hits the purpose of God, and they will come to life. Verse 26 then, “Consider your calling, brother,” “consider your calling.”

How did it happen? Verse 27, “God has chosen.” Verse 28, “God has chosen.” That’s why you were called. Called by the sovereign choice of God. In Galatians chapter 1, Galatians chapter 1, Paul again introducing himself at the beginning of his epistle, and this is very often at the opening of epistles because it identifies the believers to whom he writes. He is concerned about the churches in Galatia because there is some serious compromise going on in their lives. They have fallen into confusion and so in verse 6 he says, “I am amazed that you are so quickly deserting Him who called

you by the grace of Christ.” That’s, that’s a saving call; again, “Him who called you by the grace of Christ.” Again, God has called you; don’t defect from obedience to all that call implies.

In the wonderful letter to the Ephesians, chapter 4, verse 1, Paul again identifying himself as the prisoner of the Lord says, “I...implore you to walk in a manner worthy of the calling with which you have been called,” “the calling with which you have been called.” Verse 4, he identifies it again, “There’s one body, one Spirit, and you were called in one hope of your calling.”

In Colossians chapter 3, again the language doesn’t deviate from this one verb. Colossians 3 talking about what it is to be raised in Christ and seated at the right hand of God, and to have died and our life being hidden with Christ in God, Christ is now our life. We’ve been regenerated. That’s the language of regeneration. But down in verse 15, “Let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, to which indeed you were called in one body; and be thankful.”

First Thessalonians chapter 2, you can see that this language is in every one of these epistles. I’m not giving you every incident of it, just some samples. It’s all talking now to the Thessalonians in chapter 2, and verse 12 says, “Walk in a manner worthy of the God who calls you into His own kingdom and glory.” There’s absolutely no equivocation on this language. There’s no attempt to backtrack. There’s no attempt to sort of waylay any confusion or offense that this kind of language might stir up. It is straightforward; it is glorious language. It is celebrated, and it is to produce obedience and worship.

Second Thessalonians chapter 2, this is one of the great little duet verses in the New Testament, 2 Thessalonians 2:13 and 14, “We should always give thanks to God for you,” “thanks to God for you.” Because the reason you are who you are is because of what God has done—“Brethren, beloved by the Lord.” That’s where it starts, the Lord decided to set His love on you, “because God has chosen you from the beginning for salvation.” “He has chosen you from the beginning for salvation through sanctification by the Spirit and faith in the truth. It was for this He called you through our gospel, that you may gain the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ.” You have all of the work of redemption summed up in two verses. It starts with love and then choice, and then calling, and then salvation, and then glorification. And at salvation comes the work of the Spirit to produce faith in the truth. This is the reason He called you, to bring you to eternal glory. That’s back to Romans 8. Predestined, called, justified, glorified, irrevocable, and no one is lost.

Let’s hear a word from the writer of Hebrews. The writer of Hebrews, chapter 3, verse 1; this is a beautiful statement. Hebrews 3:1, “Therefore, holy brethren, partakers of a heavenly calling,” “holy brethren, partakers of a heavenly calling.” How did we get to be holy? How did we get rid of our corruption, our wretchedness, our fallenness, our depravity? How did we become holy brethren? We received a heavenly calling. Heaven called us out of death, out of darkness, out of ignorance, out of blindness into life and light and truth.

Peter, 1 Peter 2, again all the writers of the New Testament celebrate our calling. This is really one of the richest of all of the texts on this subject. First Peter 2:9, “You are a chosen race”—talking to the *ekklesia*, the called out ones—“You are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for God’s own possession, so that you may proclaim the excellencies of Him who has called you out of darkness into His marvelous light.” That is unmistakably clear. How did we get to be a special people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for God’s own possession who could proclaim His excellencies? How did that ever happen?

He called us “out of darkness into His marvelous light; for you were once not a people. Now you are the people of God. You once had not received mercy, but now have received mercy.” This is the call of God. Verse 21, “You have been called for this purpose.” And he just talked about suffering—called to suffer for Christ to be glorified with Christ.

When you think about who you are as a Christian, maybe Christian is certainly one way to define yourself, and maybe it's fine to think of yourself as a part of the church of Jesus Christ. But I think to narrow that down to know that you have been called by God to life from the dead, because He set His love upon you before the world began, gives a fresh understanding to that. Again in 1 Peter chapter 3, Peter encourages us to give blessing to people, not returning evil for evil, insult for insult, but to give a blessing. Why? “For you were called for the very purpose that you might inherit a blessing.” That looks at eternal glory. You were called to eternal glory; you were called to receive a blessing from God. While you're here, give blessing; don't give evil for evil; don't retaliate insult for insult. Blessed, God called you to give you eternal blessing.

And then in the last chapter of 1 Peter, chapter 5 and verse 10, Peter says, “After you have suffered for a little while”—that's the way it is in this life—“the God of all grace, who called you to His eternal glory in Christ, will Himself perfect, confirm, strengthen and establish you. To Him be dominion forever and ever. Amen.” That's a doxology. And boy, is every reason for a doxology because you have just read that your calling from God is forever secure, forever secure. He chose you because He set His love on you. He called you, justified you, and promises to glorify. Yes, you'll suffer in this world. But “the God of all grace,” just to remind you that this isn't about you, this is about Him. This isn't about you deserving to receive salvation, or to keep salvation. This is about all grace from the one who called you, and He called you not to a temporary salvation, but He called you to His eternal glory in Christ. And that's where you're going to be. That's where you're going to be. He called you to that.

Second Peter—can't resist this—Peter introduces himself as a slave, an apostle of Jesus Christ. And then he says in verse 1, quite interesting, “To those who have received a faith of the same kind as ours by the righteousness of our God and Savior, Jesus Christ.”

Where did you get your faith? Where did you get your faith? You received it. It was in the package when He called you forth. You received your faith. You received faith by the righteousness of our God and Savior Jesus Christ. It is a gift of God's grace. “Grace and peace then be multiplied to you in the knowledge of God and of Jesus our Lord.” Then look at verse 3, “Seeing that His divine power has granted to us everything pertaining to life and godliness.”

Now listen to that. By His divine power He granted us everything pertaining to life and godliness. What does that mean? Election, calling, regeneration, justification, sanctification, glorification, everything—He granted us everything through the true knowledge of Him who called us by His own glory and excellence.

Again there's that unilateral, monergistic work of God by which He calls us and gives us everything pertaining to life and godliness. Now do you understand that this is not some obscure designation of the people of God? This is how the writers of the New Testament epistles refer to us. Now this is not a general call. This is not an external call. This is not a call that a preacher or an evangelist makes.

This is an internal, inward call of God that cannot be resisted.

There is an external call. When I preach the gospel, when an evangelist preaches the gospel, when you give the gospel to a friend, when you witness to somebody and call them to come to Christ and to respond to Him and embrace Him and His gospel, that's an external call that humans make. And in that sense, you can take the language of Matthew 22:14 and the parable that Jesus gave where He said, "Many are called, few are chosen." You remember that the ones initially called to the banquet didn't come. That's an external call. The call of the gospel externally goes out and people reject that call. Many are called, few are chosen. That refers to the general call, the outward call, the external call.

But when you come into the New Testament and you start with Romans, and you go through the rest of the New Testament, every time the word "call" appears in the category of the gospel, it is an internal, efficacious call from God that brings the dead sinner to life. That's how the New Testament writers refer to it. It is an unyielding subpoena from God to come into His court, to be made alive, to be brought into His court, not to be condemned, not to be judged, but to be declared forgiven and righteous and set free. And to be then adopted as a son and reconciled fully. It is God's sovereign, saving call as He exercises His own will and through His own magnificent grace takes the elect sinner into His presence to declare His forgiveness of that sinner and grant that sinner the very righteousness of Christ. Make Him a Son and promise him eternal riches in glory.

As wonderful as this is, it bothers some people. It does. They say, "Come on, God's not going to bring sinners to Himself kicking and screaming. He's not going to overpower them against their will and violate their choice." Some say God can't do that. He can't do it because He's given us freedom and we have freedom and free will and God can't violate that. "Oh," they say, "God can crack the lid of the casket so the dead person can get a little bit of glimpse of enough light and truth to believe. God can kind of open the mind just a little bit. But He can't force them. They have to have the opportunity, that's all, just the opportunity."

There's a book written, popular book written in recent times by a well-known theologian called *Chosen But Free*. And it presents the reality of the calling of God as really an unacceptable doctrine. He says it makes God into a dictator with power that crushes our freedom and drags us into His kingdom. Is that how you felt when you were saved? I don't think so. I think you couldn't get there quick enough. I don't think you now feel like the worst thing that ever happened to you was your salvation. Why in the world did God drag you kicking and screaming into this? That's completely an alien idea. You're so grateful every day of your life for the salvation that God gave you.

That kind of thinking is not biblical, not true, and not a fair representation of what the Bible teaches. No one is ever saved against their will, no one. You weren't saved against your will. I wasn't saved against my will. No one has ever been saved against his will. Anyone who has been saved has willed to be saved. Anyone who has repented and believed the gospel has willed to repent and believe the gospel. In fact, anyone who's been saved has had such a compelling, powerful desire to be saved that they literally push their way into the kingdom, Jesus said. They're compelled to this. They come with tears. They come pounding on the chest, "God, be merciful to me, a sinner." They're willing.

Why are they willing? Because God makes them willing. Psalm 110:3, "Your people will volunteer freely in the day of Your power." "Your people will volunteer freely in the day of Your power." When the Lord lets out the call, "Come forth," and life surges into your dead soul, that life activates your

will. That life produces repentance. That life produces faith. And you come not kicking and screaming, but you come weeping with joy.

So the question is, How does the sinner become willing? No sinner has what it takes to be willing. When I teach on the doctrine of human depravity, the nature of fallen man, I talk about man's problem in two ways. He is unable to be saved on his own and unwilling to be saved. Okay? Unable/unwilling—that's the essence of depravity. Not only can't he, he doesn't want to. That's Romans 3. "No man seeks after God, there's none righteous, no, not one." Ephesians 2, "Dead in trespasses and sins, walking according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that works in the children of disobedience." Romans 5:6, "Helpless" is the word used. Helpless, hopeless, can't understand the things of God; they're foolishness to him as we saw in 1 Corinthians 1 and 2. Second Corinthians 4, "Blinded by Satan, the god of this world who has blinded their minds."

"No sinner left to himself is either willing or able to come to God." Corruption is too profound, too far reaching, too comprehensive. God must come then in His sovereign power and summon us to believe. He must on the day of His power make us willing. It's not a kicking and screaming work which we resist; it's a gracious, powerful, supernatural, heavenly regeneration of our whole inner being that makes us willing in the day of that power.

Well, what about the freedom of the will? What about that? Aren't we free? Sure. You have a free will. Everybody in the world has a free will. You know, you make choices all the time. You made a choice to be here. You make choices all through the day. I don't think you live under some kind of horrible sense of overpowering compulsion, unless you're addicted to something. But just in general in life, you have freedom. But here's the problem. If you're not born again, if you are not regenerated, here's the extent of your freedom. You can pick whatever behavior, attitude you want that dishonors God. Take your pick. But you can't please Him. You can't. You can pick your sin. And people do it all the time. You can pick your sin, you're free. People talk about, "I want my freedom," you've got it; you can choose your sin. Well, you might be restrained a little bit because you don't want to go to prison for the rest of your life. Or you might be restrained a little bit because you don't want to crash your car, so you limit how much you drink. You might be restrained a little bit 'cause you don't want to lose your wife and your children, so you hide your immorality. But you can choose your sin. You just can't choose anything else. You can't choose not to sin. You can't choose what pleases God.

Jonathan Edwards dug a little deeper on that and Jonathan Edwards, certainly in my mind, the greatest theologian America's ever known and maybe the most brilliant thinker. He wrote this, "What we choose is not really determined by the will. What we choose is not really determined by the will. It is determined by the mind. What the mind thinks is what makes the choice and the mind is not neutral. The mind is not neutral. The mind," and I'm paraphrasing Edwards at this point, "the mind is corrupt, the mind, to borrow Jeremiah's word, the mind of man is deceitful above all things and exceedingly wicked." So the mind isn't neutral. It thinks some things are best and it's free to choose. "When confronted with God," Edwards goes on, "the mind of the sinner never thinks that following or obeying God is a good choice." Never thinks that. His will is free to choose God. Nothing stops him from choosing God but his mind will not allow him to submit to God because that's not desirable to him. "Therefore," says Edwards, "unless God changes the way we think, our minds will always tell us to turn from God, which is precisely what we do."

The sinner is in a position where he can't do anything else. So if he is to will to repent and will to

believe, God has to change his mind. Change how he thinks. Change what he desires, what he loves, what he hates, what he longs for. This is often called irresistible grace, and that's okay. It works with a little tulip acrostic, irresistible grace. But I don't know that I like that because irresistible is negative, and I don't think of this as a negative experience, do you? I mean, if you call this His irresistible grace—I was saved by God's irresistible—it sort of sets up the idea that I got something I necessarily didn't want. Also, to say irresistible grace is redundant, because frankly, sovereign grace is irresistible since it's sovereign. And so to say irresistible grace sort of over-qualifies grace and sort of under-defines grace. Grace is more than something to resist. And it is by nature a gift from God that is irresistible.

We could do better than that. We could call it saving grace, life-giving grace; a sinner can't change his will because his mind is corrupt. He can't move his will toward God, not by logic, not by a persuasion, not by clever preaching, and not by emotional music. God has to go to the grave and say, "Come out," and give him a sovereign, supernatural call that summons the sinner up from the dead, at which point all his faculties are given new life, a new mind, a new will as mighty God works a work of regeneration.

Back in 1996 there was a meeting of some of my friends and some of the noblest and best of those who serve the Lord and think about biblical things, called "The Alliance of Confessing Evangelicals." They met in Boston and they produced what's called "The Cambridge Declaration." One of the paragraphs in that Cambridge Declaration says this: "God's grace in Christ is not merely necessary, but is the sole efficient cause of salvation. We confess that human beings are born spiritually dead and are incapable even of cooperating with regenerating grace." Great statement.

They're incapable even of cooperating with regenerating grace. I say that because I don't want you to think I invented this. I know you don't because I showed it to you in Scripture, and they're just seeing exactly what you saw today.

Salvation is not in any sense a human work. Human methods, human techniques, human strategies can't accomplish regeneration. Faith is not produced in our unregenerated human nature. We receive faith, we receive a new mind. We receive a new will.

One of my favorite little bits of church history is to go back to Charles Wesley. Charles Wesley denied this doctrine essentially. He was an Arminian in theology. That is, to follow an early theologian named Arminius who denied that salvation is all a work of God. He saw it as a synergistic work between God and man. Not only did, of course, does that view have problems with John 3 and everywhere else in the New Testament, and the whole idea of calling, but nonetheless it developed into a full-blown theology which still exists.

Charles Wesley had some issues with the theology, even though he espoused it and affirmed it along with his brother, John. But, you know, when you got to the heart of Charles Wesley, I think he found something different. Listen to what Charles Wesley wrote, and you know these words, listen to this: "Long my imprisoned spirit lay, fast bound in sin and nature's night, Thine eye defused a quickening ray, I woke the dungeon flamed with light. My chains fell off, my heart was free, I rose, went forth to follow Thee." The guy is a closet Calvinist! (Laughter) Are you kidding me!? You can't say it any better than that.



Jim Boice, a good friend, now with the Lord, wrote a little story about John Newton. I'll close with this. Newton was raised in a Christian home in which he was taught verses of the Bible, but his mother died when he was only six years old, and he was sent to live with a relative who hated the Bible and mocked Christianity. So John Newton ran away to sea. He was wild in those years and was known for being able to swear for two hours without repeating himself. He was forced to enlist in the British navy, but he deserted, was captured, and beaten publicly as a punishment. Eventually Newton got into the merchant marine and went to Africa. In his memoirs wrote that he went to Africa for one reason only, quote: "That I might sin my fill."

Newton fell in with a Portuguese slave trader in whose home he was cruelly treated. This man often went away on slaving expeditions, and when he was gone his power passed to his African wife, the chief woman of the harem. She hated all white men and vented her hatred on Newton. He says that for months he was forced to grovel in the dirt, eating his food from the ground like a dog. He was beaten mercilessly if he touched it. In time, thin and emaciated, Newton made his way to the sea where he was picked up by a British ship making its way up the coast to England. When the captain of the ship learned that the young man knew something about navigation as a result of being in the British navy, he made him a ship's mate. But even then Newton fell into trouble. One day when the captain was ashore, Newton broke out the ship's supply of rum and got the crew drunk. He was so drunk himself that when the captain returned and struck him on the head, Newton fell overboard and would have drowned if one of the sailors hadn't quickly hauled him back on board.

Near the end of one voyage, as they were approaching Scotland, the ship ran into bad weather and was blown off course. Water poured in and the ship began to sink. The young profligate was sent down to the hold to pump water. The storm lasted for days. Newton was terrified. He was sure the ship would sink, he would drown. In the hold of the ship as he desperately pumped water, the God of all grace whom he tried to forget but who had never forgotten him, brought to his mind Bible verses he had learned in his home as a child. The way of salvation opened up to him. He was born again, totally transformed.

Later, when he was again in England, he began to study theology, eventually became a preacher in a little town called Olney and later in London. His story is contained in these words: "Amazing Grace, how sweet the sound that saved a wretch like me."

Father, we thank You for the truth, thank You for the work of salvation, the mighty work of salvation that You have done in us. We are unworthy. When we have done all that we ought to have done, we have to say, "I'm an unworthy servant; all glory goes to You, all praise to You. To the praise of Your glory You have chosen us, You have redeemed us, You have justified us, regenerated us, adopted us, sanctified us. You have placed us into the communion of the saints and promised us eternal glory. And this is all Your mighty work for which we praise You. How could we not worship, how could we not love You? How could we not obey You? How could we not find endless joys in what You've provided for us? May that never grow stale in our minds and hearts. We give You thanks; we give You praise.

Father, thank You for the time that we've been able to set aside from the world around us, come into this wonderful place, gather with Your saints, worship You and have You speak to us so powerfully through Your truth. Seal all these things to our hearts and fill us with gratitude, we pray. Do Your work in every life, and we'll give you all the praise and all the glory. Amen.

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