

# Life

in Christ

**Also by Jeremy Walker**

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# Life in Christ



BECOMING AND BEING  
A DISCIPLE OF THE LORD JESUS

Jeremy Walker



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*Life in Christ*

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## PREFACE

To be a disciple of Jesus Christ is to live in a position of privilege and blessing beyond anything the world might offer. In no part of that life do the children of God ever need to consider themselves apart from the Lord Jesus—nor can they.

My aim in this book is to consider something of the Christian's experience of God's lovingkindness, his sense of God's tender mercies and great goodness, and his relationships with Christ in them and responses to them. Of course it cannot be exhaustive. Who can fully search out unsearchable riches or finally describe an indescribable gift? I hope, though, that it will provide something of a framework for believers, especially those beginning their pilgrimage, enabling them to trace out, understand, enter into, and rejoice over the trajectory of a life in Christ, the ongoing experience of the grace of God toward a sinner.

I hope that this will prove a timely book. Confusion or error with regard to one or a combination of these elements can seriously undermine a Christian's spiritual health, giving him wrong expectations or establishing wrong patterns of conviction and action that ultimately dishonor the God of our salvation, bringing shame on the name of Christ, grieving the Holy Spirit, unsettling and undermining the church, and hamstringing the progress of the gospel.

If we would be healthy, holy, happy saints, then it will do us good to pause and consider the works of God toward us, the blessings bestowed upon us, and our experience of them and responses to them. Salvation is a work in three tenses: we have been saved, we are being saved, and we will be saved. Redemption is a many-sided

jewel which delights the soul, not least when it is turned in the light of revelation so that its faces gleam and sparkle before us. The abounding and unending flood of covenant mercies bestowed upon the people of God calls for our close attention, our delighted observation, our earnest praises, and our heartfelt engagement.

It is my sincere prayer that this volume will not only enlighten but also enliven and will both provide believers with scriptural categories by means of which to understand and appreciate their experience, and draw out their hearts toward God in Christ in thankfulness and love for His many mercies toward us.



## Chapter 1

# LOOKING TO JESUS

We do not begin life as believers in God. No natural heritage or bloodline assures us of a place in the kingdom of God. John tells us that being born of blood, by the will of the flesh, or by the will of man cannot secure our status as children of God (John 1:13). Only by being born of God do we become children of God, and that new birth always manifests itself in receiving the Lord Christ, believing in His name (John 1:12).

That Jeremiah and John the Baptist may have been subject to some degree of saving or sanctifying influence in their mothers' wombs (see Jeremiah 1:5 and Luke 1:41) does not in any way suspend the general principle that "I was brought forth in iniquity, and in sin my mother conceived me" (Ps. 51:5), that my heart and yours are "deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked" (Jer. 17:9), and that "there is none righteous, no, not one" (Rom. 3:10), for "all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God" (Rom. 3:23).

So if we are to have and enjoy life in Christ—not just to understand it in measure but actually to possess it ourselves—we must begin here: "Most assuredly, I say to you, unless one is born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God.... 'You must be born again'" (John 3:3, 7). This is the language of indispensable necessity. No one enters the kingdom without being born from above, without being subject to the enlightening and regenerating influences of the Holy Spirit.

But what is our experience of those influences? What does it feel and look like, and how does it work to be born again?

When the gospel is proclaimed, the commands issued and the invitations given are to believe on the Lord Jesus and to repent of our sins. The Lord Jesus and His disciple John have already made this connection for us. When our Lord says to Nicodemus, and by extension to every one of us, “You must be born again,” He is not issuing a command but rather communicating a fact. Being born again is an experience we undergo, not one we initiate or manage. However, our Lord goes on to explain to Nicodemus that “as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of Man be lifted up, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have eternal life” (John 3:14–15). He makes the connections again when He speaks to the crowds in Capernaum, explaining that He is the bread of God from heaven: “All that the Father gives Me will come to Me, and the one who comes to Me I will by no means cast out. For I have come down from heaven, not to do My own will, but the will of Him who sent Me. This is the will of the Father who sent Me, that of all He has given Me I should lose nothing, but should raise it up at the last day” (John 6:37–40). When John writes his gospel, he records the signs Jesus of Nazareth accomplished in order “that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that believing you may have life in His name” (John 20:30–31).

On the day of Pentecost, when Peter proclaimed that God had made this Jesus, whom the people of Jerusalem had crucified, both Lord and Christ, they were cut to the heart and cried out, “Men and brethren, what shall we do?” Peter urged them, “Repent, and let every one of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins; and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit” (Acts 2:36–38). To Cornelius and his household, Peter testifies that to Jesus “all the prophets witness that, through His name, whoever believes in Him will receive remission of sins” (Acts 10:43).

When Paul is preaching at Pisidian Antioch, he declares Jesus as the Christ and then issues an invitation and a warning:

Therefore let it be known to you, brethren, that through this Man is preached to you the forgiveness of sins; and

by Him everyone who believes is justified from all things from which you could not be justified by the law of Moses. Beware therefore, lest what has been spoken in the prophets come upon you:

*'Behold, you despisers,  
Marvel and perish!  
For I work a work in your days,  
A work which you will by no means believe,  
Though one were to declare it to you.'* (Acts 13:38–41)

When the Gentiles of the city hear this news, “as many as had been appointed to eternal life believed” (Acts 13:48). When Paul is in Athens, he makes the same God known and then makes plain that “these times of ignorance God overlooked, but now commands all men everywhere to repent, because He has appointed a day on which He will judge the world in righteousness by the Man whom He has ordained” (Acts 17:30–31). This he summarizes as declaring “first to those in Damascus and in Jerusalem, and throughout all the region of Judea, and then to the Gentiles, that they should repent, turn to God, and do works befitting repentance” (Acts 26:20).

When the same apostle is explaining the saving effects of and response to the gospel, he says in Romans 10:9–15:

that if you confess with your mouth the Lord Jesus and believe in your heart that God has raised Him from the dead, you will be saved. For with the heart one believes unto righteousness, and with the mouth confession is made unto salvation. For the Scripture says, “Whoever believes on Him will not be put to shame.” For there is no distinction between Jew and Greek, for the same Lord over all is rich to all who call upon Him. For “whoever calls on the name of the LORD shall be saved.”

How then shall they call on Him in whom they have not believed? And how shall they believe in Him of whom they have not heard? And how shall they hear without a preacher? And how shall they preach unless they are sent?

I hope you can see and trace the connections. We must be born of God if we are to enter the kingdom: it is an indispensable necessity. But this new birth always results in faith and repentance, and we are never directly commanded to be born again (for that belongs to God) but rather urged by messengers of the gospel of peace to repent of our sins and to turn to God and His Christ in faith, and so obtain everlasting life. That is our experience of this change of heart. The question with us must not first be, "Am I elect?" or "Will I be born again?" but, as we hear the commands and invitations of the gospel, "Am I repenting of my sins and believing in God's Son, Jesus the Christ?" for this is our known and felt experience of salvation.

In that regard, it is no accident that two of the scriptures that the apostle Paul quotes in Romans 10 are drawn from the prophet Isaiah, for Isaiah is a thoroughly and plainly evangelical prophet, a man compelled by God's glory and his own experience of grace to go as a messenger of grace to others. Through him, the Lord is pleased to issue gracious commands and comforts to all who seek peace with Him.

So it is that in Isaiah 45 the Lord God is front and center, revealed as the only living and true God, as the creator and sustainer of all, as the sovereign Lord of heaven and earth, and as the Savior of sinners like us. He is unique. He stands alone, above all idols, He alone being able to deliver:

*They shall be ashamed  
And also disgraced, all of them;  
They shall go in confusion together,  
Who are makers of idols.  
But Israel shall be saved by the LORD  
With an everlasting salvation;  
You shall not be ashamed or disgraced  
Forever and ever. (Isa. 45:16-17)*

There is no one like God, none to whom we owe our existence, and none to whom we can look for a blessing. In verse 18

God again speaks as the creator of all things, declaring His utter exclusivity as God and His merciful righteousness:

*“I am the LORD, and there is no other.  
I have not spoken in secret,  
In a dark place of the earth;  
I did not say to the seed of Jacob,  
‘Seek Me in vain’;  
I, the LORD, speak righteousness,  
I declare things that are right.”* (Isa. 45:18–19)

In verse 21, His exclusivity as Savior now comes to the fore: He says, “There is no other God besides Me, a just God and a Savior; there is none besides Me” (Isa. 45:21). If we know our Bibles, immediately we must hear the voice of God the Son speaking here. Joseph A. Alexander suggests that it is natural for today’s readers, who are privileged to know clearly that it is only through the Son that the Father saves, to suppose that it is the pre-incarnate Christ who is speaking here—although it need not have been presumed by the ancient reader.<sup>1</sup> This is the eternal Word by whom the heavens were made, “and all the host of them by the breath of His mouth” (Ps. 33:6). “All things were made through Him, and without Him nothing was made that was made. In Him was life, and the life was the light of men” (John 1:3–4). This is the one who “in the beginning laid the foundation of the earth, and the heavens are the work of [His] hands” (Heb. 1:10). Isaiah saw the glory of Christ and spoke of Him (John 12:41)—that One in whom the Godhead is preeminently made known for salvation.

And it is this One who speaks in rich language, calling to people with words that ring out and echo down through countless gospel sermons through the Scriptures and in history since: “Look to Me, and be saved, all you ends of the earth! For I am God, and there is no other” (Isa. 45:22). Taking this as a prototypical declaration to sinners of God’s gospel goodness, let us consider this as Christ’s inviting call to believe upon Him and so enter His kingdom and

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1. Joseph A. Alexander, *Isaiah* (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 1992), 2:188.

the experience of every child of God, to some degree, in hearing and responding to such gracious entreaties.

### **The Gracious Command and Invitation**

First, Christ gives a command: “Look.” We have identified this as an inviting call and a gracious entreaty, but we should not overlook the urgency of this word, which comes to us with the force of a divine commandment. There is a wonderful simplicity in this word, and yet it is definite and pointed. The gospel demands engagement. It leaves no neutrals behind. When Paul writes to the Thessalonian Christians about their experience of persecution, he describes their ferocious opponents as those who “do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ” (2 Thess. 1:8). In similar fashion, the apostle John records the commandment of God the Father: “that we should believe on the name of His Son Jesus Christ and love one another, as He gave us commandment” (1 John 3:23).

Do not mistake this: the gospel always carries with it the beauty of an invitation and the weight of a command. When someone hears such words, he either receives or rejects the invitation; he obeys or disobeys the command. Such exhortations and encouragements never leave us in no-man’s-land but either draw us to the side of Christ or disclose our distance from or antipathy to Him.

When an awakened sinner hears such words as these, under the influence of the Spirit he feels at least something of their majesty, their compelling force, and their divine authority and understands something of their consuming demand. For what is commanded here is a distinctive way of looking. Here the living Lord requires us to look *from* something *to* something else. It is a cry to detach our thoughts, concerns, hopes, and desires from whatever distractions and deviations they have been running after and turn our full attention to some other thing. Whatever we might have been pursuing, we are to leave it and pursue something else entirely. The fact that this is a command demonstrates that it is not something to be trifled with. The nature of the demand shows that it calls for

a wholehearted seeking after something, turning our whole attention from all other things into a particular channel.

This is not a command that depends upon our physical capacities, as if the farsighted or nearsighted, or even the altogether blind, are somehow disbarred. Indeed, it is notable in Mark's gospel, for example, that blind Bartimaeus sees far more clearly and looks far more intently than multitudes with 20/20 vision. He will not stop shouting until he has gained the attention of Jesus of Nazareth: "Son of David, have mercy on me!" (Mark 10:46–52).

This commands the looking that saves—a willing for, wishing for, desiring after, trusting in, taking hold of, hanging on to, and hoping in Jesus Christ, the Son of God, the Savior of sinners. This is language that would have chimed with Simeon, that "just and devout" man who was "waiting for the Consolation of Israel." He was waiting to see the Lord's Christ. He had given this his full attention, and when he saw the infant Christ he declared that now he had set eyes upon that for which he had long been looking:

*For my eyes have seen Your salvation  
Which You have prepared before the face of all peoples,  
A light to bring revelation to the Gentiles,  
And the glory of Your people Israel. (Luke 2:25–32)*

When ancient Anna arrived, "in that instant she gave thanks to the Lord, and spoke of Him to all those who *looked for* redemption in Jerusalem" (Luke 2:38, emphasis added). These faithful people did not hang around in the vague hope of seeing something. They saw that for which—that One for whom—they had long been looking and waiting: the Lord's Christ. They were obeying this command.

How sweet and simple this is, but how much it humbles us, bringing down all our high ideas of self, pointing us away from ourselves and our own notions of capacity and worthiness. So often this leaves us like Naaman, told by Elisha's servant to go and wash seven times in the Jordan in order to be restored from his leprosy and made clean.

But Naaman became furious, and went away and said, “Indeed, I said to myself, ‘He will surely come out to me, and stand and call on the name of the LORD his God, and wave his hand over the place, and heal the leprosy.’ Are not the Abanah and the Pharpar, the rivers of Damascus, better than all the waters of Israel? Could I not wash in them and be clean?” So he turned and went away in a rage. (2 Kings 5:11–12)

Naaman had big ideas of his own importance and firm notions of the worthiness of his own resources. He needed to be humbled by those faithful servants of his who asked if—given that he would have done something great, if required, in order to be healed—he would not now do this simple thing: “Wash, and be clean” (2 Kings 5:13).

In similar fashion, such a command as this turns us out and away from ourselves and from our own notions of helping ourselves and sends us to another. It is a call to faith, and saving faith, in its essence, sends us out of and away from ourselves. But it would be a counsel of despair if the Lord did not also identify an object for our looking: “Look to Me.”

Faith does not operate in a vacuum. Faith always has an object, and the Lord does not leave us wondering where or to whom we must look in matters of such importance. To do so would leave us as lost, bewildered, and confused as ever we were. Christ says, “Look to Me—turn from all else and all others beside, and, in this matter of your salvation, look always and only to Me.”

Do not look to any other creature, to men or to angels, as if there were merit enough in any or all of them to move you one inch closer to God. Do not look to idols, to the vain imaginations of human fantasy or the pointless creations of human ingenuity, so often proposed and received as things worthy of trust. Do not look to your own works; do not look to your own tears and repenting; do not look to your own heart and emotions; do not look to your graces and gifts in their exercise and operation. Do not look to your religious rites, ceremonies, and observances. Do not look to your

would-be holy feasts and festivals. Do not look to your own righteousness, your own efforts, to make you acceptable with the Holy One of Israel, for that will not qualify you. Indeed, in one sense sin is the only qualification we need, and it is one which we have in a horrible abundance.

The command comes to us as sinners and tells us to turn away from all these things and look to the Christ of God; the Son of God; the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world; the one Mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus; the only Savior of sinners; the sole Redeemer of the lost.

We look to Him at Calvary. There hangs the suffering, bleeding, dying Lamb. Look to Him, with the crown of thorns piercing His noble brow. Look to Him, with the blood pouring from His hands and feet, cruelly pierced with Roman nails. Look to Him as the gore drips from His wounded flesh, torn from His back by a vicious scourge. Look to Him as He bows His head in agony under the weight of His holy Father's just anger against sin. Look to Him as He cries out from the midst of an impenetrable darkness, "My God, My God, why have you forsaken Me?" Look to Him as He shouts with a loud voice, "It is finished!" Look to Him as He yields up His Spirit.

This is the cry to which faith wholeheartedly responds, and to which faith, so looking, is able to say:

*See there the meek, expiring Lamb!  
'Tis finished! He expires for me.<sup>2</sup>*

The great theologian John Owen makes this point in a rich passage on the nature of faith, relentlessly seeking to communicate the nature of this forceful invitation and the right response to it.<sup>3</sup> He says, first, that the faith by which a sinner is justified is most frequently expressed in the New Testament as *receiving*. It is, says

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2. Charles Wesley, "'Tis Finished! The Messiah Dies."

3. What follows is essentially a recasting of *The Doctrine of Justification by Faith*, by John Owen, in *The Works of John Owen* (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth, 1965), 5:291–94.

Owen, Christ Himself that we receive: “But as many as received Him, to them He gave the right to become children of God, to those who believe in His name” (John 1:12). Unbelief is, therefore, not receiving Christ (John 1:11; 3:11; 12:48; 14:17). Faith receives Christ as the One who is made by God to be “THE LORD OUR RIGHTEOUSNESS” (Jer. 23:6; 33:16). In looking to and receiving Christ for salvation, neither grace nor duty cooperates with faith; only faith so grasps the Lord Jesus, and nothing else is involved. In addition, this receiving Christ as our saving righteousness utterly excludes any other righteousness but His from our justification; we are “justified by faith.” Faith alone receives Christ, and Christ, as received by faith, is the cause and basis of our justification. It is only in this way that we become the sons of God. So we receive the reconciliation made by the blood of Christ (Rom. 5:11), whom God set forth as a propitiation by His blood, through faith (Rom. 3:25). In receiving this reconciling atonement, the believing and repenting sinner thoroughly and willingly approves of and assents to Christ’s bloody death as the only way of salvation and appropriates that sacrifice to himself. In doing so, we receive the forgiveness of sins: “that they may receive forgiveness of sins and an inheritance among those who are sanctified by faith in Me” (Acts 26:18). In receiving Christ we receive the atonement, and in the atonement we receive the forgiveness of sins.

Even the “abundance of grace” and “the gift of righteousness” (Rom. 5:17) (righteousness considered as the efficient and material cause of our justification) are received in this way. Faith, operating like this, receives everything that lies behind and gives rise to God’s declaration that we are righteous in His sight.

Having emphasized that faith involves receiving the merits of another and in itself merits nothing, Owen then explores other language, turning to Isaiah 45:22 to explain that faith is also expressed by *looking*: “Look to Me, and be saved” (he also points to Isaiah 17:7; Zechariah 12:10; and Psalm 123:2). We see the nature of this looking, according to Owen, in John 3: “And as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of Man be

lifted up, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have eternal life” (vv. 14–15). These verses refer to Christ being lifted up to die on the cross (John 8:28; 12:32). The fiery creatures and the death that followed their attack are clearly, for Owen, representative of the guilt of sin and the lawful punishment that follows (1 Cor. 10:11). He explores the parallels: when someone was bitten and sought any remedies apart from the one that God had provided, he perished. Only those who looked to the bronze serpent that was lifted up were healed and lived. This was what God had ordained, the one appointed way in which those people could be healed. And here we have pictured the pardon of sin and the grant of everlasting life.

In this way of looking we have portrayed the nature of faith, as our Savior makes clear: “Even so must the Son of Man be lifted up, that whoever believes in Him”—that is, whoever looks to Him in the same way that the Israelites in the wilderness looked to the bronze serpent—“should not perish but have eternal life” (John 3:14–15).

So faith, justification, and salvation are made clear to us through this scriptural, historical illustration. If the faith that justifies, in principle and practice, involves the lost and guilty sinner looking to Christ alone for everything he needs by way of help—for deliverance, righteousness, and life—then it is clear that nothing else is involved in our being justified. And this is just what happens when a sinner is converted: faith is the act of the soul by which those who are hopeless, helpless, and lost in themselves expectantly and believingly seek after all the help and relief they need in Christ alone.

By now, of course, Owen is hitting his stride, and so he begins to explore this grace of faith, turning it this way and that, letting the light reflect off it as it is described in the Scriptures. So we find that it is often called a *coming to Christ*: “Come to Me, all you who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest” (Matt. 11:28; cf. John 6:35, 37, 45, 65; 7:37). To come to Christ for life and salvation is to believe on Him with an eye to the justification

of life (no other grace or duty, but faith only, is coming to Christ like this, and therefore everything but faith is excluded from this matter of justification). Ask someone who has been convinced of sin and weary of its burden, who has determined to flee from the wrath to come and has heard the voice of Christ in the gospel inviting him to come unto Him for help and relief. That person, by the Spirit's illumination, will tell you that coming to Christ in this way involves going out of and turning away from yourself, completely renouncing all your own duties and righteousness, and applying yourself with all your trust and confidence to Christ alone, resorting only to His righteousness to be pardoned for sin, accepted with God, and granted a right to the heavenly inheritance.

Faith is sometimes expressed in the language of *fleeing* for refuge: Christians "have fled for refuge to lay hold of the hope set before us" (Heb. 6:18; cf. Prov. 18:10). Faith might be defined, then, as the flight of the soul to Christ to be delivered from sin and misery. Again, this assumes that someone is already convinced of his lost condition, and, if nothing changes, there is only damnation to come. Such a person is convinced that he cannot deliver himself from this doom and must look elsewhere for deliverance. He therefore considers Christ as set before him and offered to him in the promise of the gospel. Persuaded that this is the only holy and safe way—a way characterized by divine excellence in every part—to be delivered from death and find acceptance with God, the sinner flees immediately and sincerely to Christ for refuge in order not to perish in his present condition. He trusts in God's provision entirely and alone.

Elsewhere in the Old Testament we find faith expressed in terms of *leaning on God* (Mic. 3:11) or *Christ* (Song 8:5); *rolling or casting ourselves and our burden on the Lord* (Pss. 22:8; 37:5); *resting on or in God* (2 Chron. 14:11; Ps. 37:7); *clinging, holding fast to, or continuing with the Lord* (Deut. 4:4; Acts 11:23); or, in countless places, *trusting, hoping, and waiting*.<sup>4</sup>

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4. The eighteenth-century Dutch Further Reformation divine Alexander

Here, then, is a rich biblical vocabulary of turning away from ourselves in dependence on another: receiving, looking, coming, fleeing, leaning, rolling, or casting ourselves and our burden on another, resting, cleaving or clinging, trusting, hoping, and waiting. And so, concludes Owen,

It may be observed, that those who acted in faith as it is thus expressed, do everywhere declare themselves to be lost, hopeless, helpless, desolate, poor, orphans; whereon they place all their hope and expectation on God alone.

All that I would infer from these things is, that the faith whereby we believe unto the justification of life, or which is required of us in a way of duty that we may be justified, is such an act of the whole soul whereby convinced sinners do wholly go out of themselves to rest upon God in Christ for mercy, pardon, life, righteousness, and salvation, with an acquiescence of heart therein; which is the whole of the truth pleaded for.<sup>5</sup>

This, then, is what we are commanded to do when the Lord calls to us, “Look!” Despairing of ourselves, we look to Christ alone in dependent faith and developing adoration as He suffered and died in the place of sinners, and in doing so we are saved.

### **The Glorious Purpose and Promise**

This is the glorious purpose intended and a glorious promise held out. Why are we directed so to look to Jesus Christ? To what end are we so commanded? It is in order that we might be saved. “Look to Me,” says the Lord of glory, “and you will be saved.”

Note the certainty. Only look, only rest in Christ, turning to Him with faith, and you will be saved. Do you doubt that it will be so? “Look to Me and be saved...for I am God and there is no

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Comrie devoted an entire book, *The ABC of Faith* (Grand Rapids: Netherlands Reformed Book and Publishing, 2011), to expounding twenty-eight synonyms that Scripture uses for faith’s coming to Christ.

5. Owen, *Justification by Faith*, 5:294.

other.” This is not only a declaration of the Redeemer’s inherent ability to be true to His word but also a statement of His divine obligation to act upon His promise. Think of it: if the Lord turns away the penitent, trusting sinner, He undoes Himself! He ceases to be the God of mercy and truth. He will not deny the one who comes to Him; the repenting, returning, believing sinner will by no means be cast out (John 6:37).

Note also the immediacy. It almost takes less time to do than to say it! The effect is instant. It may be that for a long time, a sinner has wrestled with his felt unworthiness to come to Christ. It may be that he has long doubted whether Christ is willing to save him. But he has been irresistibly drawn and effectually called, and so he comes, and he looks, and in that moment he is saved. What a marvel of grace this is, that we might be sitting one moment a wretched, lost man or woman, dead in trespasses and sins, altogether filthy. But the Spirit has been at work in us, and our eyes are now open to behold the glory of God shining in the face of Jesus Christ, and in that moment of true seeing we are truly saved. From out of the dominion of darkness we are carried, translated in that moment into the kingdom of the Son of God’s love. That is the moment in which we experience salvation, however clearly we are able to discern it and whether our sense of it is more like that of a tipping point in the entrance of light (like Lydia, for example) or more like the flashing of lightning (like the Philippian jailer, perhaps).

And consider, too, the fullness of it, the completeness of it. This is no halfway house. There is no probationary period. If we have looked, we are saved, and our lives are hidden with Christ in God. You cannot be a little bit saved. This is salvation complete in degree and extent. I am not suggesting that you cannot enjoy a fuller experience of what it means to be saved, but I am adamant that you cannot be more saved than you are in the moment at which you look to Jesus, and you cannot become saved and then cease to be saved. Remember Isaiah 45:17—when God saves, He saves with an everlasting salvation, in which there is not and never can be the least degree of shame or disgrace.

Again, this is the decree of the sovereign, saving God: “Who has declared this from ancient time? Who has told it from that time? Have not I, the LORD?” (Isa. 45:21). One moment, the sinner was teetering on the brink of an eternity in hell, the next he is snatched by grace to a life of joy unspeakable and full of glory, thankful praise, and mercies temporal and eternal that all the tribulations in this fallen and hostile world cannot sweep away, to a taste of glory here and an eternal heaven with God hereafter.

There is no other salvation, certainly no better, for there is no other God. All sinners, if they are to be saved, must be saved by this God in this way. The richest people in the world and the poorest beggars on the street must all alike be saved by turning from their sins to trust in this Jesus. The most brilliant philosophers and scholars and the slowest learners are leveled here. The greatest wits and artists and the untaught child who cannot read or write a word come in the same rank. The most respectable and outwardly upright pillars of society and the lowest, vilest, most degraded outcasts must all be saved by looking to Jesus to save them from their sins.

Truly these things crush all high thoughts of self:

*Perish each thought of human pride,  
Let God alone be magnified.<sup>6</sup>*

If you will not look to Christ, then you cannot be saved. If you have not looked to Christ, then you are not saved. But if you will look to Christ, you must be saved. If you have looked to Christ, you are saved.

But there is something else worth seeing here, for there are many who doubt this offer. Some torture themselves with fears that perhaps, after all, they were not included in this grand invitation or encompassed by this gracious command. It is one of those declarations that is almost beyond belief, and yet there is a richness here that we have not yet touched upon.

It lies in the promise extended to “all you ends of the earth” (Isa. 45:22). At this point, many of the Jews of Isaiah’s day—those who

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6. Philip Doddridge, “God of Salvation, We Adore.”

drew near to God with their mouths but not their hearts—would have been dumbfounded and offended: “Surely we shall be saved, but not any Gentile scum!” In Christ’s day, the Pharisees would, perhaps, have had all but themselves consigned to hell. Even after Christ’s death and resurrection and that Great Commission, which sent the disciples to make disciples of all the nations, we find Peter balking at the breadth of the invitation. Are we any less prone than Peter to err in this regard?

Do we sometimes say these words, or words like them, and mean, “Look to Christ and be saved...all you pleasant people, all you people of a certain educational or social standard, all you people who look like you might fit neatly into our congregation, all you people of a certain race or color, all you people of a certain background, all you people of a certain status and standing, all you people of a certain appearance, all you people who have attained a certain level of respectability”?

If we say it, suggest it, or hint it, we are blasphemously misquoting the God of salvation, who says, “Look to Me and be saved, *all you ends of the earth.*” God has no qualms in issuing this invitation. There is a geographical and spiritual universalism here that excludes none: “Go into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature.” Christ has purchased a people for Himself, paying for them with His own precious blood, but they are now scattered through every culture and society and throughout all their parts and levels. The church and her ministers—“those who preach the gospel of peace, who bring glad tidings of good things” (Rom. 10:9–15)—are sent to

*Publish abroad  
Again and again  
The Son’s glorious merit,  
The Father’s free grace,  
The gift of the Spirit,  
To Adam’s lost race.<sup>7</sup>*

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7. Joseph Hart, “Give Glory to God, Ye Children of Men.”

The church is to believe this promise, both for ourselves—we are to trust Him exclusively—and for others—we are to offer Him universally. We are to put no human limitation on divine redemption. Christ makes no exceptions: He says to any sinner, man or woman, boy or girl, “Look to Me and be saved.” We are not to refuse Christ because of our sin when Christ has not refused us on account of it. It is sinners whom Christ has come to save.

It may be that you do not yet have life in Christ. It may be you have tried a thousand different ways to obtain peace with God. You might have a mind full of the foulness of your soul, the lightness of your sense of sin, the horrors that you have spoken, thought, or done, but Christ does not hold you at arm’s length. He Himself bids you come. He Himself offers you everlasting salvation, saying, “Look to Me and be saved.” All who have looked to Christ have been and are being saved and have never been shamed or disappointed. If we say we cannot look, we must cry to the God who gives grace to the humble, who grants grace for looking. We are to look—and leave the saving to a sovereign and merciful God.

And if we have looked, then we live. This is our passage from death to life, from darkness to light, when we believe on the Son of God. This is our first breath of new life. This is the proof that God is at work in our hearts, when, with newly opened eyes, we gaze with repenting faith upon the Son of God in all His saving glory, and—believing—enter into the family of God. This is life in Christ.



**For Further Reflection**

1. Have you now or in the past assumed that being born into a family with Christian parents, being baptized or sprinkled or christened, or having always attended a church where the gospel is proclaimed automatically makes you a Christian? Why is this a dangerous and even deadly assumption?
2. Describe, using biblical language, what is necessary for a sinner to enter God's kingdom. What is a Christian's experience of this? What does someone do when this happens to him or her?
3. Have you reckoned with the fact that God's gospel is both invitation and command? What does this mean for you and others?
4. What or who is the object of saving faith? What else are we tempted to look to? What, specifically, have you been or are you tempted to look to?
5. Briefly describe faith—the “looking” of Isaiah 45:22—by some of its parallel biblical expressions. Which of these do you find sweetest, most helpful, most comforting?
6. The salvation that God promises is certain, immediate, and complete. What effect should that have on you if you want to be or are a Christian?
7. Does the broadness and freeness of God's offer of salvation unsettle you or trouble you in any way? Why might that be? Should it be so?
8. What advice would you give to someone who wanted to be converted and become a Christian?