

A Vision: As Given to William Booth

During one of my recent journeys, I was led out into a train of thought respecting the conditions of the multitudes around me living regardless of all that concerned their eternal welfare, and in the most open and shameless rebellion against God. I looked out upon the millions of people around me given up to their drink and their pleasure and their dancing and their music and their business and their anxieties and their politics and their troubles and thousands of other things; ignorant – willfully ignorant, in many cases. In other instances they knew all about it, but all of them were sweeping on and up in their blasphemies and devilries to the Throne of God; and while thus musing I had a vision.

I saw a dark and stormy ocean. Over it the black clouds hung heavily; through them every now and then vivid lightnings flashed and loud thunders rolled, while the winds moaned and the waves rose and foamed and fretted and broke and rose to foam and fret and break again.

In that ocean I thought I saw myriads of poor human beings plunging and floating and shouting and shrieking and cursing and struggling and drowning; and as they cursed and shrieked, they rose and shrieked again and then sank to rise no more.

And out of this dark, angry ocean I saw a mighty rock that rose up with its summit towering high above the black clouds that overhung the stormy sea; and all around the base of this rock I saw a vast platform; and on to this platform I saw with delight a number of the poor, struggling, drowning wretches continually climbing out of the angry ocean; and I saw that a number of those who were already safe on the platform were helping the poor creatures still in the angry waters to reach the same place of safety.

On looking more closely, I found a number of those who had been rescued scheming and contriving by ladders and ropes and boats and other mechanisms to deliver the poor strugglers out of this sea more effectively. Here and there were some who actually jumped into the water, regardless of all consequences, in their eagerness to “rescue the perishing”; and I hardly know which gladdened me more – the sight of the poor people climbing on to the rocks and so reaching the place of safety or the devotion and self-sacrifice of those whose whole being was wrapped up in efforts for their deliverance.

And as I looked, I saw that the occupants of that platform were quite a mixed company. That is, they were divided into different sects or factions, and they occupied themselves with different pleasures and employments; but only a very few of them seemed to make it their business to get the people out of the sea.

But what puzzled me most was the fact that though all had been rescued at one time or another from the ocean, nearly everyone seemed to have forgotten all about it. Anyway, the memory of its darkness and danger no longer troubled them. Then what was equally strange and perplexing to me was that these people did not seem to have any care – that is, any agonizing care – about the poor perishing ones who were struggling and drowning before their eyes, many of whom were their own husbands and wives and mothers and sisters and children.

And this unconcern could not have been the result of ignorance, because they lived right in sight of it all and talked about it sometimes and regularly went to hear lectures in which the awful state of the poor drowning creatures was described.

I have already said that the occupants of this platform were engaged in different pursuits. Some of them were absorbed night and day in trading, in order to make gain, storing up their savings in strong boxes, bank vaults, and the like.

Many spent their time in amusing themselves with growing flowers on the side of the rock; others in painting pieces of cloth, or in playing music, or in dressing themselves up in different styles and walking about to be admired.

Some occupied themselves chiefly in eating and drinking. Others were greatly taken up with arguing about the poor drowning creatures in the sea, and as to what would become of them in the future, while many contented themselves that they did their duty to the perishing creatures by the performance of curious religious ceremonies.

On looking more closely, I found that some of the crowd who had reached the place of safety had discovered a passage up the rock leading to a higher platform still, which was fairly above the black clouds that overhung the ocean, and from which they had a good view of the mainland not very far away, and to which they expected to be taken off at some distant day. Here they passed their time in pleasant thoughts, congratulating themselves and one another on their good fortune in being rescued from the stormy deep and singing songs about the happiness that would be theirs when they should be taken to the mainland, which they imagined they could plainly distinguish just “over there.”

And all this time the struggling, shrieking multitudes were floating about in the dark sea, quite nearby – so near that they could easily have been rescued. Instead they were perishing in full view, not only one by one but sinking down in shoals, every day, in the angry water.

And as I looked, I found that the handful of people on the platform I had observed before were still struggling with their rescue work – O God – how I wished there had been a multitude of them! Indeed, these toilers seemed to do little else but fret and weep and toil and scheme for the perishing people. They gave themselves no rest and sadly bothered everyone they could get at around them by persistently entreating them to come to their assistance.

In fact, they came to be voted a real nuisance by many quite benevolent and kindhearted people and by some who were very religious, too. But still they went on, spending all they had, and all they could get, on boats and rafts and drags and ropes and every other imaginable device they could invent for saving the poor, wretched, drowning people.

And then I saw something more wonderful still. The miseries and agonies and perils and blasphemies of these poor struggling people in this dark sea moved the pity of the great God in heaven; moved it so much that He sent a Great Being to deliver them. And I thought that this Great Being whom The Almighty sent came straight from His palace, right through the black clouds, and leaped right into the raging sea among the drowning, sinking people; and there I saw Him toiling to rescue them, with tears and cries, until the sweat of His great anguish ran down in blood. And as He toiled and embraced the poor wretches and tried to lift them on to the rock, He was continually crying to those already rescued – to those He had helped up with His own bleeding hands – to come and help Him in the painful and laborious task of saving their fellows.

And what seemed to me most passing strange was that those on the platform to whom He called, who heard His voice and felt they ought to obey it – at least, they said they did – those who loved Him much and were in full sympathy with Him in the task He had undertaken – who worshipped Him, or who professed to do so – were so taken up with their trades and professions, and money-saving and pleasures, and families and circles, and religions and arguments about it, and preparations for going to the mainland that they did not attend to the cry that came to them from this wonderful being who had Himself gone down into the sea. Anyway, if they heard it they did not heed it – they did not care – and so the multitude went on struggling and shrieking and drowning in the darkness.

And then I understood it all. It was plain enough. That sea was the ocean of life – the sea of real, actual, human existence. That lightning was the gleaming of piercing truth coming from the throne of The Almighty. That thunder was the distant echoing of the wrath of God. Those multitudes of people shrieking, struggling, agonizing in the stormy sea were the thousands and thousands of poor harlots and harlot-makers, drunkards and drunkard makers, thieves and liars, and blasphemers and ungodly people of every kindred and tongue and nation.

Oh, what a black sea it was! And oh, what multitudes of rich and poor, ignorant and educated were there, and all so unlike in their outward circumstances and conditions, yet all alike in one thing – all sinners before God; all held by, and holding on to, some iniquity, fascinated by some idol, the slaves of some devilish lust and ruled by some foul fiend from the bottomless pit!

“All alike in one thing?” Nay, in two things – not only the same in their wickedness, but unless rescued, alike in their sinking, sinking, sinking, down, down, down to the same terrible doom.

That great sheltering rock represented Calvary, and the people on it were those who had been rescued; and the way they employed their energies and gifts and time represented the occupations and amusements of those who profess to be rescued from sin and hell and to be the followers of Jesus Christ. The handful of fierce, determined saviors were salvation soldiers, together with a few others who shared the same spirit. That mighty Being was the Son of God, “the same yesterday and today and forever,” who is still struggling to save the dying multitudes about us from this terrible doom of damnation and whose voice can be heard, above the music and the machinery and the hub-bub of life, calling on the rescued to come and help Him to save the world.

My comrades, you are rescued from the waters; you are on the rock. He is in the dark sea, calling on you to come to Him and help Him. ***Will you go? Look for yourselves. The surging sea of life crowded with perishing souls rolls up to the very spot on which you stand.***

Look! Don't be deluded by appearances; men and things are not what they seem. All who are not on the rock are in the sea. Look at them from the standpoint of the Great White Throne, and what a sight you have! Jesus Christ, the son of God, is in the midst of this dying multitude, struggling to save them. And He is calling on you to jump into the sea – to go right away to His side and help Him in the holy strife. Will you jump? That is, will you go to His feet and place yourself absolutely at His disposal?

Does the surging sea look dark and dangerous? Unquestionably it is so. There is no doubt that the leap for you, as for everyone who takes it, means difficulty and scorn and suffering. For you it may mean more than this. It may mean death. He who calls to you from the sea, however, knows what it will mean; and knowing, He still beckons you and bids you to come.

You must do it. You cannot hold back. You have enjoyed yourself in religion long enough. You have had pleasant feelings, pleasant songs, pleasant meetings, and pleasant prospects. There has been much of human happiness, clapping of hands, and firing of volleys – very much of heaven on earth.

Now then, go to God, and tell Him you are prepared as far as necessary to turn your back upon it all and that you are willing to spend the rest of your days grappling with these perishing multitudes, cost you what it may.

You must do it. With the light that has now broken in upon your mind and the call that is now sounding in your ears and the beckoning finger that is now before your eyes, you have no alternative. To go down among the perishing crowds is your duty. Your happiness henceforth will consist in sharing their misery; your ease in sharing their pain; your crown in bearing their cross; and your haven in going to the very jaws of hell to rescue them. What will you do??