

Martyn Lloyd-Jones

The Gospel in Genesis

Chapter Three

FIG LEAVES



And the eyes of them both were opened, and they knew that they were naked; and they sewed fig leaves together, and made themselves aprons. And they heard the voice of the LORD God walking in the garden in the cool of the day: and Adam and his wife hid themselves from the presence of the LORD God amongst the trees of the garden. And the LORD God called unto Adam, and said unto him, Where art thou?

G E N E S I S 3 : 7 - 9

This third chapter of Genesis, let me remind you, is absolutely vital to a true understanding of the message of the entire Bible. We meet together in a Christian church to consider this message. The church is not a philosophical society, nor a cultural society. Its business is to expound and to proclaim the message of this book. It is not interested, primarily, in anything else. That is why a meeting, a service, at church is unique. All services thus held in the name of Christ are unique in the sense that we start by making the claim that we come from God with a message from him. We do not start with ourselves. We are not involved in an endeavor to arrive at God or at anything else. We come to consider a message from God.

There is a great message in this book, a message for men and women as they are at this moment. It is not far away from or divorced from life but is the most practical message in the world. This book has spoken to generation after generation. It came to them exactly where they were and as they were, and that is precisely

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what it does still. It is not dealing with some theoretical question or interest. There are such books, and they have their place, their importance, but that is not what we have here. The Bible tells us throughout that we only pass through this world once. But it also tells us that we are determining at the same time our eternal and everlasting future and that, therefore, this is the most vital matter that we can ever consider.

All along the Bible presents its truth to us in this way: it reminds us that we must do something about it. It is always impressing upon us the urgency of the position. If you are interested in the technical terms, it always presents its truth in an *existential* manner, and that means that I cannot afford to sit back and consider it casually in a detached way. The Bible says you cannot do that because you are in an uncertain world, and your whole life is uncertain. And, therefore, it always appeals to us to give it great attention.

The Bible is here to deal with the problems that confront each one of us. It is here to talk to us about ourselves. Genesis 3:9 reminds us of that. It tells us, "The LORD God called unto Adam, and said unto him, Where art thou?" This is a direct and personal address. God is speaking to us. He is speaking to us individually. He is speaking to us about where we are, why we are there, how we ever got there, how we can come from there. That is its whole message. In other words, its interest is in us, in our problems, our pains, our perplexities, our troubles, and all the things that tend to make life so difficult.

And I am saying that if we really are to understand the message of the Bible, we must understand the message of this third chapter of Genesis, because it is foundational. This is the chapter in which we are told exactly why things are as they are. This chapter is historical.

"But," you say, "that's an assertion."

I agree. I cannot prove it to you as one can prove a mathematical problem, but the greatest things in life cannot be proved in that sense. I could suggest many things to you that you take for granted and that you know to be true but that you cannot prove in a math-

emational sense. The whole case of this book, the Holy Bible, is that it is historical. It is the explanation of why people are as they are. But in addition to that, as I indicated earlier, in a very remarkable manner Scripture also describes us one by one as we are now. That is the extraordinary thing about human beings and sin. All of us, as it were, in addition to inheriting certain things, repeat what was done at the beginning by Adam and Eve.

In the previous study we were looking at that from the point of view of the intellect. Man has fallen and has gone astray in every respect, and he started with his mind. He accepted the Devil's dogmatic statement, and as he began to look at it and to fondle it, he liked it. And in spite of all that God had done for him, he accepted what Satan told him about God's character and God's power, and he deliberately rebelled against God. He accepted another point of view, and he acted upon it. And then he began to reap the consequences. And we will show that man is still doing that—he is ready to swallow the most dogmatic assertions that lack any vestige of proof whatsoever because they have great names attached to them and because they are made with a great show of certainty.

It is not only Christians who point this out about modern thinking. I think of a radio lecture on the theme of what was called "humbug in science." It was a most interesting address and perfectly true. It showed how people, even scientists, can, and do, mislead themselves in various ways. That is universally true, but it is particularly true in the realm of science. Man still defies God and rebels against him merely on the basis of some theory or some dogmatic statement, and then he repeats the whole sorry process. He displays his doubts of God, his hatred of God. He reveals his ingratitude toward God. He uses his own reason and substitutes it for divine revelation. You remember how we are told that when the woman saw that the tree was good for food and that it was pleasant to the eyes, she started using her own understanding and her own reason. And so she took the fruit and ate it. It is the selfsame process. It happened there at the beginning, and it is still being repeated.

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But now I want to show you that not only is this being done in the realm of the intellect and understanding, it is being repeated in a much more experiential, a much more practical, manner. It is what man in sin is constantly doing, and here we have a perfect description of it. I confess again that I find this difficult at times, and if I did not know that this biblical teaching about sin is true and that the god of this world blinds our minds, I would be altogether at a loss to understand it. I find it difficult to understand how it is possible for anybody really to read this third chapter of Genesis and not at once to recognize that here we have nothing but a perfect description and delineation of what has been true of every one of us. It is astounding to me that anybody could read that book and not say, "That must be true because that is exactly what I've been and what I've done. It's an account of me; it's an account of men and women as I see them in the world today."

But, of course, instead of doing that, we try to explain the facts away in terms of psychology and in various other ways, as I hope to indicate. And so the voice of God falls upon deaf ears, and men and women, immersed in sorrows and problems and trials and tribulations, refuse the one thing that can deliver them and give them salvation. That is the muddle to which sin always leads. That is what happens to us when we refuse to listen to God and go our own way. We have brought ourselves into trouble. We even refuse the help that is offered to bring us out of it. And so we go on and on, turning round and round in circles and never reaching the point at which we would like to arrive.

So let me remind you of these facts. Man, in the way we have seen, rebels against God, and then certain consequences follow. What are they? Well, they are described here as they happened at the beginning to Adam and Eve. And as we consider them, I think you will see that they are an accurate description of what is still happening. "The woman . . . did eat, and gave also unto her husband with her; and he did eat." And then at once "the eyes of them both were opened, and they knew that they were

naked; and they sewed fig leaves together, and made themselves aprons" (Genesis 3:6-7).

What does this mean? Well, the first consequence of this act of rebellion and sin was this: they at once became conscious of a loss. There is a very interesting phrase here: "The eyes of them both were opened, and they knew that they were naked." What does that mean? Nobody knows exactly, but at any rate it does suggest, does it not, that they were conscious at once that they were deprived of something that they'd had before. They knew that they were in some sense naked; before they had not been naked. What is this? I do not know, but I am inclined to agree with those who suggest, as an exposition of this, that man at the beginning, as he was made perfect by God, had a kind of glory about his body even as there was about his soul. Man, when he fell, not only fell in his spirit, but he also fell in his body. The apostle Paul tells us that at the end, when our Lord comes again, "[He] shall change our vile body"—the body of our humiliation—"that it may be fashioned like unto his glorious body"—the body of his glorification (Philippians 3:21).

Man, let us remember, was made in the image of God in every respect. He was not only upright with a righteousness that was spiritual, but there was, I believe, a glory pertaining to the body. And when Adam and Eve sinned, they lost that glory and were left with bodies as we now know them, and they were aware that they had been deprived of something. There was immediately a consciousness of a nakedness, a loss, an incompleteness. Something had gone. A glory had departed.

And that, I suggest to you, has been the simple truth about men and women ever since. There is nothing more obvious than that every one of us has a sense of loss. Do we not all have an idea that somehow or other we are missing something? We all have an idea that there is something better, something higher. We all know something about a longing for what Wordsworth has called "an ampler ether, a diviner air."⁴ You cannot explain it away. You have this sense; everybody has it. Every single person, it does not matter

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how far sunk in sin in an obvious, external manner, somehow has this idea that there is a better possibility. There is something more somewhere. That is why all the modern analyses, which are not based upon the Bible, are so shallow and incomplete.

What is the meaning of this restlessness that is in human nature? What is the meaning of this constant search for something that we do not have and that we do not seem able to find? Upon what is it all based? There is only one adequate answer. We have an innate feeling that we were meant for something bigger and higher. There is in every one of us a recollection, a memory, of what we once were. We were all in Adam. Man was made perfect in the image of God. He was upright; he was righteous. There was glory about his very body. And though we have lost this and though we have never known it, a memory lingers. It is in the whole of human nature. It is in all humanity, a sense of something else.

Of course, people have tried to interpret this in other ways, and they have gone wrong in doing so. Plato tried to explain it, and Wordsworth borrowed his idea when he said:

*Trailing clouds of glory do we come
From God, who is our home.*

Wordsworth believed that we start in this world with the glory still, but then:

*Shades of the prison-house begin to close
Upon the growing Boy.*

William Wordsworth,
"Ode. Intimations of Immortality"

Man had it at the beginning, but somehow he lost it.

Well, actually he had lost it long before that. He lost it before he came into this world. But the memory remains, and the Platonic idea is simply an attempt somehow to explain this recollection, this sense we have within us that we were meant for something bigger

and higher, that we are being deprived of something. We all have this idea that we were meant for happiness, that we were meant for peace, that we were meant for a life of joy, but that somehow this has been taken from us. And thus men and women are ever restless, ever ill at ease, and find it difficult to live with themselves and with others.

And in Genesis, at the very beginning, we are given this extraordinary description of this loss. It is in a pictorial form, but it is true nevertheless. Shall I put that in a personal form before I pass on to my second question? Are you not aware of this sense of incompleteness? Is there not some kind of urging within your being that is crying out for something bigger, for something greater? We cannot believe, finally, that we were just made to die. We have a sense of destiny, a sense of bigness, a sense of glory. We cannot get rid of it; we cannot get away from it. Some would have us believe that it can be explained in terms of a great evolutionary impulse that is in us all, urging us on to perfection. But that really does not explain it because what we are all conscious of is the sense, a memory, a recollection, of having lost something. We are ever trying to recapture something that we know we once possessed.

Now that is the first point, but let me hurry on to the second, because it follows of necessity and very logically from the first. The second thing we are told about Adam and Eve is that having become aware of this loss, they then tried to deal with it. They sewed fig leaves together and made themselves aprons. They felt that something had to be done, that they could not remain like this. They said in effect, "How can we cover over this thing that we've lost?" So Adam and Eve made an attempt to cover themselves. The latter part of the chapter tells us how utterly inadequate that was and how God made provision for them. But the point at the moment is that they themselves immediately tried to deal with their loss.

What a wonderful chapter Genesis 3 is! Do you not begin to see how essential it is to a true understanding of life? Has it ever occurred to you that in that one phrase you have a complete sum-

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mation of the whole history of civilization? What have men and women been doing in this supposed civilization? They have simply been sewing together fig leaves to hide their own nakedness—that is precisely the meaning of what we call “civilization.”

Consider some of the ways in which people have tried to do this. First, they are always trying along cultural lines. They say, “What we’ve lost, of course, is knowledge. There must be some understanding somewhere. Life is an enigma. Life is a problem. Things seem to be contradictory. Human beings themselves are contradictory. We must get out of this.” So men and women begin to resort to various cultural ideas and especially to knowledge—the thirst for knowledge, the thirst for understanding.

The book of Job describes this search and says that wisdom is more precious than rubies (28:18). So seek wisdom, discover knowledge. You find this in the book of Ecclesiastes too. There we see man “under the sun” (1:3). That is man apart from his relationship to God. And he is seeking understanding in human wisdom. He says in essence, “If only I could understand man, understand myself, the workings of my very being and of my mind, and the cosmos in which I find myself . . .” That is philosophy, and what is philosophy trying to do? It is trying to make up the loss. We feel we ought to know, that if we only tried harder, we would know. We are trying to cover up the nakedness by means of knowledge.

And not only by direct knowledge, not only by pure thought and philosophy. In their study of history, men and women are really trying to do the same thing and to arrive at understanding. In their love of the arts, in their cultivation of music and so on, they have the feeling that somehow they will make themselves complete, that they will become entire again. They have lost something. How can they get it back? Well, these are the things that they hope will bring them covering and lead to their completion. You are familiar with it all. The world is tremendously busy trying to cover up its nakedness, trying to get back again the glory that has been lost.

Another way, of course, has been through politics. Those who

view men and women as being essentially economic units, or just social units, follow that particular line. The human race has always believed, and still believes, that by means of legislation things can somehow or other be put right. People say, "All these deficiencies that we're aware of, all these lacks, well, let's get together and organize something." That is political action; that is the philosophy of politics. It is once more the attempt to put together the fig leaves to cover over a nakedness, to make life whole and complete and rounded and so deal with this sense of being deprived of something. We feel we are entitled to a fullness and to a completeness of life, and so we seek it in this way.

But the extraordinary thing is that, having lost this perfect state through disobedience and rebellion against God, men and women even try to make it up by means of religion. All the religions of the world, the so-called great religions, are nothing but repetitions of this ancient action. They are human beings still trying to answer the question and to fill the gap. Let me give you an illustration from contemporary thought, a most interesting illustration.

Take Aldous Huxley, undoubtedly a brilliant man, a brilliant writer and thinker. Many years ago, Huxley was quite convinced that man could solve his problems and could arrive at a state of completion by means of pure thought. He was one of the leaders of the school that taught that man only has to think and to educate himself and to work things out logically. If he only becomes scientific, said Huxley in his various books and novels, if he only lives a scientific kind of life, then all the problems will be banished and solved, and all will be well.

But Aldous Huxley no longer says that. He came to see that was not the answer. What is it now? Well, now he says that the only thing that can save the world is mysticism, and he has become a Buddhist. In other words, he is aware of the fact that man is not just pure intellect—man has a spirit and feelings and emotions, man is a bigger total than he had thought, and man is crying out for the unseen. There is another realm, Huxley says, another dimension,

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and he calls it mysticism. He means there is a spiritual realm that is influencing us. And we can only be truly happy and make up our loss as long as we are in accord with that and as long as we submit to that. So now Huxley follows the mystic route, the mystic way. He has turned to religion.

Men and women have been doing this throughout the centuries. Having turned from the only true and living God, they have had to make gods for themselves. They have made their religions. They have tried everything but the God from whom they have departed. And the whole time they repeat this procedure of stitching together a few fig leaves in order to try to hide their nakedness. But it is all inadequate. It is all even ridiculous. It is amateurish. Is it not foolish? Is it not almost laughable?

And yet, you see, that is the very thing that men and women still refuse to recognize. They still scoff at Christianity, and they give themselves to these other things that so often throughout the centuries have been proved to be fatuous. They are trying to cover their nakedness. They are trying somehow or other, by their own efforts, to make up the deficiency, the sense of something lost, something that they still need and cannot find.

And that brings me to the third point, which comes out so prominently in this record. Man has a sense of guilt and a sense of fear. "Adam and his wife hid themselves from the presence of the LORD God amongst the trees of the garden" (Genesis 3:8). You remember that formerly they had accepted the statement of the Devil, "Ye shall not surely die." "There's no need to be afraid," he had said. "Just use your mind and assert yourself and stand up for yourself and express yourself—there's absolutely nothing to fear at all." But Adam and Eve heard the voice of God, and they ran and hid themselves. Why? Because of a sense of fear, a sense of guilt, a sense of shame.

Again, the Bible tells us that is true of all of us. I know we do not like that statement, but we cannot get away from it. It is the simple truth. We like to say that we are masters of our fate and captains of our souls, that we are no longer going to be governed by these pho-

bias and fears, that we take a thoroughly rational, scientific view of life, and that we do what we want to do and what we believe in doing, and we are not going to be frightened by anything. That is all very well in theory and on paper, but alas, like Adam and Eve before us, we find that it is one thing to say but a very different thing to experience. And the whole tragedy of the human race today is that it is in this contradictory position. We say we are not afraid, and yet we are terrified. We say we do not believe in sin and in God, but we have a sense of condemnation. We have a voice within us that accuses us and condemns us. We are filled with a sense of shame. We are unhappy.

You have perhaps said to yourself about a particular action, "There's nothing wrong in that." A temptation came, and you said, "It's all right. I'm no longer living in the mid-Victorian era. I'm not going to be frightened by the shibboleths of religion. I'm not going to be alarmed. I'm taking a scientific view. I have these qualities and powers within me, and they're meant to be exercised. I will exercise them, and all's well." And you did, but you woke up the next morning feeling ashamed, with a sense of condemnation, and it's been gnawing at your conscience ever since. You may have even gone to church for that very reason. You are unhappy, wretched.

There is always a reaction. The stolen fruit is not as pleasant as we had thought. A kind of spiritual indigestion follows the eating of it. Somehow we cannot get away with it. If we could, of course, we would not need any psychologists. But they are doing a thriving business because, though we think we are so bold and so wonderful, something within us tells us that we are cads, that we are cowards, that we are fools, that we are foul, that we are vile, that we are beasts and worse. And we cannot get rid of such a conviction. We cannot sleep because of it. We cannot silence this voice that is within us. If we could we would, but we cannot, and we are wretched, and we have complexes—we will call them that, but we will not call them sin. We will not admit the fear, the shame, the strain, the pressure. Is that not the simple truth? We would like to explain it all away psychologically, but we cannot. We are up against the facts,

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the facts within ourselves and with respect to ourselves. Though we want to get rid of God and all that belongs to him, we cannot, for the fact is that every man and woman born into this world has a sense of God and a sense of judgment.

Say, if you like, that you do not believe in God, you nevertheless have a sense of God, and you have to argue with yourself. And all your intellectual arguments are really brought forward to boost your own assertion. While you are asserting that you do not believe and that you can prove scientifically that there is no God, something within you is pronouncing against your disbelief and assuring you that there is a God. You are speaking with eloquence in order to drown the voice within you that speaks for God. This is in us all. There is a universal sense of God. Even the most primitive tribes and races have a sense of God and a sense of judgment.

Yes, and coupled with that—I am being brutally frank, am I not?—there is our fear of death.

“Ah,” you say, “but modern people aren’t afraid of death.”

Are they not? Then why do they take so much trouble to avoid speaking about it? Why do they regard it as morbid to be reminded of it? The fact of the matter is that this present age has a horror of death. It is controlled, in a sense, by the fear of death. The Scripture says we are those “who through fear of death were all their lifetime subject to bondage” (Hebrews 2:15).

Let me give you the great statement of that very fact by William Shakespeare. He put the dilemma once and forever in the words of Hamlet:

*To be, or not to be: that is the question:
Whether 'tis nobler in the mind to suffer
The slings and arrows of outrageous fortune,
Or to take up arms against a sea of troubles.*

Here is the problem confronting us all. Is it worth going on with life with all its contradictions and problems, its pains and difficulties, its disappointments and sorrows? Why go on?

A brilliant young Parliament member not many years ago faced up to all this, and he wrote an account of it before he committed suicide. He had a brilliant future before him, and he knew that he had very good prospects of perhaps even becoming Prime Minister. But he worked it out like this: "I know perfectly well that if I go on living and keep my eye on that I shall make many enemies. I do not want to make enemies of them. But because I succeed they will be jealous of me and they will dislike me and they will become my enemies and there will be disappointments, all sorts of things." He asked, "Is it worth it?" And he decided that it was not.

And yet that man was an exceptional person. The average person, as Shakespeare reminds us, does not do that. In the end of Hamlet's soliloquy, he says that he could end it all with a "bare bodkin." He could do it in a second. Well, why not, then? Because, he says:

*... who would these fardels [burdens] bear,
To grunt and sweat under a weary life,
But that the dread of something after death,
The undiscover'd country from whose bourn
No traveler returns, puzzles the will,
And makes us rather bear those ills we have
Than fly to others that we know not of?
Thus conscience doth make cowards of us all,
And thus the native hue of resolution
Is sicklied o'er with the pale cast of thought.*

Hamlet, Act 3, Scene 1

Is that not absolutely true? However intellectual we are, however rational, however calm and cool and collected, we cannot avoid this sense of God, this sense of guilt, this sense of shame, this sense of judgment, this sense of death and what lies beyond it.

*Dust thou art, to dust returnest,
Was not spoken of the soul.*

Henry Wadsworth Longfellow, "A Psalm of Life"

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If these words had been spoken of the soul, very well, I will take up the dagger and end it. But they were not. The soul goes on. And that, as Shakespeare reminds us, cripples the will, as it were. So we decide to go on with life, but the fear remains, and we cannot get away from it. And the guilt and the shame and all the agony and all the remorse and all the kicking of ourselves metaphorically go on and on and on. It started at the beginning, and it has been continuing ever since.

But, lastly, it is here that we see the unutterable folly of man in sin. In his trouble and in his misery and wretchedness, he runs away and hides from God: "Adam and his wife hid themselves from the presence of the LORD God amongst the trees of the garden."

And this is the saddest and most tragic thing of all about man. He runs away from God. In his shame and misery and wretchedness he runs away from the call of God, from the voice of God who comes to him in the garden in the cool of the day.

Why? Well, because he does not know God, because he has believed a lie about him, because he is altogether wrong with respect to him, because he does not realize that the very God against whom he has rebelled and into whose face he has spat is the only one who can save him and that he is prepared to do so. That is the tragedy. There man is, in shame and in failure and in utter hopelessness. And God comes, but man runs and hides. He runs away from God, his only benefactor, his only Savior.

That is the tragedy of the world. Men and women in their misery, in their sin, try everything except what God says to them. I have been making the same point from the very beginning, have I not? We start with the voice from God, the word from God. Man was made in God's image, and he spoke to God, and God spoke to him. But then man listened to the other voice, and he ceased to listen to God, and all his troubles followed. But God speaks again, and again man does not listen. He runs away in fear. And that is precisely what is happening today.

What am I doing as a preacher? I am nothing, and what a privi-

lege is mine. I am just a mouthpiece for God. My dear friend, you who are in sin are being addressed by the voice of God. It is coming to you in the cool of the evening. Are you afraid? Are you resisting him? Are you in some shape or form running away from him? Do you feel that he is against you? Are you rebelling against his message? Are you trying to argue against it and to push it off? Are you afraid of the consequences of listening? If so, you are just repeating what Adam and Eve did. For God came into the garden to tell them that in spite of everything they had done, though he had to punish them for their rebellion, he was also providing a way of salvation and of deliverance. That was exactly why he came. Not merely to denounce them and to pass judgment upon them, but to bring the promise of the seed of the woman and the conquest over the enemy who had misled and defeated them.

That is the message of the gospel, and that is my simple message to you. There is nothing and no one under heaven today able to meet your need except Jesus Christ and him crucified. You are aware of the restlessness, the thirst, the hunger, the searching for something you cannot find. What are you searching for? What do you really need? Let Augustine answer in his great words: "Thou hast made us for thyself, and our souls are restless until they find their rest in thee."

My dear friend, you are made on that scale. Nobody else can satisfy you, no one less than the almighty, eternal God himself. And he does so in Jesus Christ. He brings you back to himself. He will deal with all these subsidiary problems that I have been mentioning. Give up trying to solve them. Give up trying to deliver yourself. Give up trying to get rid of your sense of guilt, for you never will. Your conscience will follow you. As long as you are alive, it will go with you, even beyond the grave, and it will torment you in hell through all eternity. You will never silence it. You will never get rid of a sense of failure, you will never get rid of a sense of guilt and of shame, until you come to Jesus Christ and believe what he tells you—that he has taken your guilt upon himself, that he died for your sins, that

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God has punished them on the cross and offers you free pardon. Jesus Christ was crucified on Calvary's hill for that reason and for that reason alone.

And because of that, if you believe in him, the wrath of God no longer abides on you. God assures you that he has pardoned you freely, that he has washed away your sin. He will take away the sense of guilt and of shame. You will know that you are forgiven. You will know that you are a child of God. He will give you new strength and power. He will give you a new understanding. He will give you a new insight. You will see things differently. You will reason differently. You will have a new view of life altogether, a new view of death, a new view of judgment, a new view of eternity, a new view of God himself. Instead of running away from him and whimpering and hiding yourself and feeling that he is against you, you will long, believe me, beyond anything else in this life, to hear the voice of God. You will begin to say:

*Speak, I pray thee, gentle Jesus,
Oh, how passing sweet thy words,
Breathing o'er my troubled spirit
Peace which never earth affords.*

*All the world's distracting voices,
All its enticing tones of ill,
At thine accents, mild, melodious,
Are subdued, and all is still.*

William Williams,
"Speak, I Pray Thee, Gentle Jesus"; Edward Griffiths, translator

My beloved friend, have you heard the voice of God speaking to you? He *has* been speaking to you, showing you your failure, your misery, your unhappiness, your wretchedness, the cause of it, how nothing else can ever deliver you out of it, but that he has provided a way in his only begotten Son who gave his life for you because he

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loved you. Come out of your hiding place. Come to him. Rush to him. Cast yourself at his feet. Say, "I believe."

Just as I am. . . .

With many a conflict, many a doubt.

I don't understand, but nothing else can save me, so—

O Lamb of God, I come, I come.

Charlotte Elliott, "Just as I Am"

And if you do, he will smile upon you and let you know that he has received you. And he will bless you throughout the remainder of your earthly life and in death, and then he will receive you unto himself in glory.