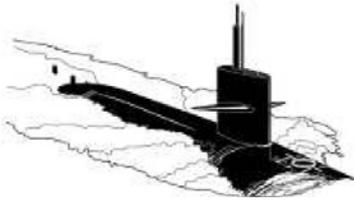




## The Burning Bush—Online article archive

Trapped . . . . and time running out



*A solemn illustration of gospel reality from the sunken Russian submarine. A message preached in Kilskeery Free Presbyterian Church on Lord's Day morning, August 20th 2000.*

*Salvation is of the LORD, Jonah 2:9.*

The sad drama taking place over the last week, in the dark and cold waters of the Barents Sea, cannot have passed without a compassionate thought and prayer for the sailors trapped in the sunken vessel. Irrespective of the views we may have formed of the dark tyranny of Communist Russia and its brooding threat to world peace for many decades, who but those with hearts of stone could think of the plight of those poor sailors without genuine sorrow? When we have watched and considered the politicking of the Russian authorities, all the while the men were trapped below the waves, we were forced to note how coldhearted are those who govern that great land. It seems that national pride, which gave rise to a reluctance to admit to the old enemy, the West, that they were unable to help their compatriots, and perhaps the possibility of some military secrets being observed by any outsiders, involved in a rescue, are more important than the lives of the crew of that vessel who survived the explosions which sank her. These considerations, it would appear, are more important than the lives of the trapped sailors and the grief and heart-break of their poor relatives.

I must say that we are well used to political leaders who temporise with the lives of citizens. We in Ulster have lived too long under the dominance of those who will readily use the deaths and sufferings of the innocent in order to promote their evil policies. Unrepentant murderers are loose on our streets and sit in our government. The innocents of Ulster have been cast overboard in order that the evil men may be placated. This is because it suits the likes of Tony Blair and the promotion of his pro-republican sympathies. We need not look to Russia to see cold-bloodedness and callousness. No! we have both seen it and lived under it here in this Province.

The sad plight of the sailors trapped in the submarine provides us with instructions in the gospel. May we remember in prayer the efforts that are still being made to save those men, even as I again launch the old gospel rescue craft and seek to get you, unsaved sinner, safely aboard. There is a striking parallel between that stricken vessel and each unsaved person here today.

### **I. THE DISASTER ALL BEGAN WITH A FATAL ERROR**

The submarine sank because of an error within. Something happened within that sent her to the bottom.



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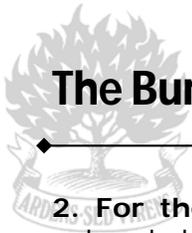
**1. There are many denials about the truth of what happened.** Russian Naval authorities at first tried to say that a collision with another vessel was the cause of the submarine sinking. But as the extent of the damage inflicted on the vessel became clear, it was reluctantly admitted that an explosion on board the submarine had been the true cause of her sinking. Likewise, there has been a denying of the true cause of man's present spiritual and moral plight. The reason for man's present sinful state has ever been denied by those who would hide the truth from mankind. The fall of mankind in Adam is rejected by so many today. But the record in Genesis 3 is absolutely correct and accurate. It is a truth central to the Gospel of Jesus Christ. Man is in the state he is in, because of his fall into sin in Adam. Adam, of his own volition, disobeyed God and brought upon himself and upon his progeny, the curse of a depraved nature and the awful consequences of the broken law of a Holy and Righteous God.

**2. The blame cannot be shifted onto someone else.** Another ship has been blamed but the damage is too great for this to be so. The fault lies within. Likewise, it is vain to blame the social conditions of society for the wickedness that has ever abounded, irrespective of the social conditions. It is not social conditions that make the man but man who makes the social conditions! As the horrendous damage done to the submarine cannot be explained by a collision with another vessel, so the depravity that is rampant presently in society cannot be blamed on unemployment or poor housing or declining educational standards. Such things are but accompanying consequences of man's sinful nature.

**3. As a result of what happened within the vessel, it lies in the depths and darkness of the sea.** How like the spiritual state of fallen mankind! What a picture God's Word paints of poor fallen man! *This I say therefore, and testify in the Lord, that ye henceforth walk not as other Gentiles walk, in the vanity of their mind, having the understanding darkened, being alienated from the life of God through the ignorance that is in them, because of the blindness of their heart: who being past feeling have given themselves over unto lasciviousness, to work all uncleanness with greediness,* Ephesians 4:17-19. What a wretched state you, unsaved sinner, are in today, as you sit under the sound of God's Word! Those poor Russian sailors, lying in despair at the bottom of the Barents Sea, have one advantage over you. They KNOW they are lost!

### II. AS A RESULT OF THE EXPLOSION, A SENTENCE OF DEATH FELL UPON THE SUBMARINE

**1. Within seconds of the blast, all mechanical life ceased in the submarine.** It sank as a lifeless shell. The power failed. The lights went out. All means to provide air to breathe ceased. A slow death began. So it was with Adam. God had said to him: *But of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, thou shalt not eat of it: for in the day that thou eatest thereof thou shalt surely die,* Genesis 2:17. Adam did not at once physically die upon eating the forbidden fruit, but all spiritual life within was extinguished immediately. He became as dark and as doomed as that submarine. He had no hope of escape unless a rescuer came to his aid. Such was the case also with all his offspring. We are born to die. Our life consists, in truth, of waiting for death.



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**2. For the sailors within there is a waiting for death.** That is their inevitable end, unless help arrives from above. They were sentenced to die there in the submarine as a result of the accident. How like your state today, sinner! *Wherefore, as by one man sin entered into the world, and death by sin; and so death passed upon all men, for that all have sinned*, Romans 5:12. Eternal death draws near to all here who are not saved.

**3. There is nothing they can do to save themselves.** Such was the conclusion that Jonah, in similar circumstances, reached. He knew in the belly of the whale that if he was to be saved, it would be the Lord alone Who could accomplish it. *Salvation is of the LORD*, he cried out. What a day it is when sinners learn that truth! Sinners are without strength. They cannot help themselves escape from hell and damnation. *For when we were yet without strength, in due time Christ died for the ungodly*, Romans 5:6. They are *dead in trespasses and sins*, Ephesians 2:1. Utter helplessness describes the poor sailors in that submarine and also mankind.

### III. ESCAPE CAN ONLY COME FROM OUTSIDE HELP

**1. Pride has already stood in the way of that help.** *Pride goeth before destruction*, saith the Word of God. (Proverbs 16:18.) How many pride has damned! The pride of Russia's leaders hindered the use of the help that was available to rescue the trapped men. Likewise, it keeps men back from seeking mercy from the Saviour. It was He Who said: *Except ye be converted, and become as little children, ye shall not enter into the kingdom of heaven. Whosoever therefore shall humble himself as this little child, the same is greatest in the kingdom of heaven*, Matthew 18:3-4. Humility is required if men are to be saved.

**2. The help the sinner needs comes from above.** I can imagine the straining ears of those poor men as they listen for a sound from above that signals help. The sinner's only help is likewise from above. From the brightness of heaven down to the dark murkiness of this world came the blessed Son of God on the greatest rescue mission ever. *This is a faithful saying, and worthy of all acceptance, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners; of whom I am chief*, 1 Timothy 1:15. *For God sent not his Son into the world to condemn the world; but that the world through him might be saved*, John 3:17. *Herein is love, not that we loved God, but that he loved us, and sent his Son to be the propitiation for our sins*, 1 John 4:10.

**3. Help demanded the hazarding the lives of the rescuers.** In the case of Christ, it cost His life. *The Son of God, who loved me, and gave himself for me*, Galatians 2:20. *Christ also loved the church, and gave himself for it*, Ephesians 5:25. Christ said of His first advent: *Even as the Son of man came not to be ministered unto, but to minister, and to give his life a ransom for many* (Matthew 20:28). His taking upon Himself the likeness of human flesh was in order that He might enter the place of condemnation on behalf of those He came to save. We could not save ourselves for we are unable to keep the law of God. So Christ came to release us by taking our sins and guilt upon Himself and dying beneath our penalty. *For what the law could not do, in that it was weak through the flesh, God sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh, and for sin, condemned sin in the flesh*, Romans 8:3. Here is the heart of the gospel. *But he was wounded for our transgressions, he was bruised for our iniquities: the chastisement of our peace was upon him; and*



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*with his stripes we are healed. All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned every one to his own way; and the LORD hath laid on him the iniquity of us all, Isaiah 53:5-6. The rescuers risk their lives and we hope that it will be no more than that, but Christ GAVE His life for the salvation of sinners. May your heart melt as you consider the grace of the Lord Jesus as He gave Himself up unto death in order to save sinners. He took their place and died in their stead. For he hath made him to be sin for us, who knew no sin; that we might be made the righteousness of God in him, 2 Corinthians 5:21.*

**4. Escape was by one route only.** Should the escape hatch be opened, what would you make of a trapped sailor who turned his back upon it and sought the darkness of the submarine? You would say he was demented, would you not? If you are to escape from the certain damnation that awaits you it will be by Christ alone. What do we say of those who repeatedly have turned their back upon His mercy and love? Hasten to Him today while you have yet the opportunity.

Come, sinner, behold what Jesus hath done, Behold how He suffered for thee! They crucified Him, God's innocent Son, Forsaken, He died on the tree!

*They crucified Him, they crucified Him, They nailed Him to the tree; And so there He died, a King crucified To save a poor sinner like me.*

From heaven He came, He loved you—He died; Such love as His never was known; Behold, on the cross your King crucified, To make you an heir to His throne!

No pitying eye, a saving arm none, He saw us and pitied us then; Alone in the fight, the victory He won O praise Him, ye children of men!

They crucified Him, and yet He forgave, 'My Father forgive them,' He cried. What must He have borne, the sinner to save, When under the burden He died!

So what will you do with Jesus your King? Say, how will you meet Him at last? What plea in the day of wrath will you bring, When offers of mercy are past?

**Sadly, since this message was preached it has been reported that all the crew had died in the submarine. Dear sinner be in time!**