

# Testimony

H.A. Ironside (Oct. 14, 1876 Jan. 15, 1951) — My Conversion To God

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From a very early age God began to speak to me through His Word. I doubt if I could go back to the first time when, to my recollection, I felt something of the reality of eternal things.

My father, John, was taken from me before his features were impressed on my infant mind. But I never have heard him spoken of other than as a man of God. He was known in Toronto to many as “The Eternity Man.” His Bible, marked in many places, was a precious legacy to me; and from it I learned to recite my first verse of Scripture, at the age of four. I distinctly recall learning the blessed words of Luke 19:10, “*For the Son of Man is come to seek and to save that which was lost.*” That I was lost, and that Christ Jesus came from heaven to save me, were the first divine truths impressed on my young heart.

My mother, Sophia, widowed at 26, was one of a thousand. I remember yet how she knelt with me as a child, and prayed, “O Father, keep my boy from ever desiring anything greater than to live for Thee. Save him early, and make him a devoted street preacher, as his father was. Make him willing to suffer for Jesus’ sake, to gladly endure persecution and rejection by the world that cast out Thy Son; and keep him from what would dishonour Thee.” The words were not always the same, but I heard the sentiment times without number.

To our home there often came servants of Christ— plain, godly men, who seemed to me to carry with them the atmosphere of eternity. Yet in a very real sense they were the bane of my boyhood. Their searching, “Henry, lad, are you born again yet?” or the equally impressive, “Are you certain that your soul is saved?” often brought me to a standstill.

California became my home before I was a child of God. In Los Angeles I first began to learn the love of the world, and was impatient of restraint. Yet I had almost continual concern as to the great matter of my salvation.

I was only twelve years old when I began a Sunday School to try to help the boys and girls of the neighbourhood to a knowledge of the Book I had read ten times through, but which had still left me without assurance of salvation. To Timothy, Paul wrote, “*From child thou hast known the holy Scriptures, which are able to make thee wise unto salvation, through faith which is in Christ Jesus*” (2 Tim. 3: 15). It was this latter that I lacked. I had, it seemed to me, always believed, yet I dared not say I was saved. I know now that I had always believed about Jesus. I had not really believed in Him as my personal Saviour. Between the two there is all the difference between an eternity in heaven and endless ages in the lake of fire.

As I have said, I was not without considerable anxiety as to my soul; and though I longed to break into the world, and was indeed guilty of much that was vile and wicked, I ever felt a restraining hand on me, keeping me from many things that I would otherwise have gone into; and a certain religiousness became, I suppose, characteristic. But religion is not salvation.

I was nearly fourteen years old when, upon returning one day from school, I learned that Donald Munro, a servant of Christ from Canada, well known to me, had arrived for meetings. I knew, before I saw him, how he would greet me; for I remembered him well, and his searching questions when I was younger. Therefore I was not surprised, but embarrassed nevertheless, when he exclaimed, “Well, Harry, lad, I’m glad to see you. And are you born again yet?” I hung my head, and could find no words to reply. My uncle said, “You know, he preaches himself now a bit, and conducts a Sunday School!” “Indeed!” was the answer. “Will you get your Bible, Harry?” I was glad to get out of the room, and so went at once for my Bible, and returned, after remaining out as long as seemed decent, hoping thereby to recover myself. On my re-entering the room, he said, kindly, but seriously, “Will you turn to Romans 3:19, and read it aloud?”

Slowly I read, “*Now we know that what things soever the law saith, it saith to them who are under the law: that every mouth may be stopped, and all the world may become guilty before God.*” I felt the application, and was at a loss for words. The evangelist went on to tell me that he too had been once a religious sinner, till God stopped his mouth, and then gave him a sight of Christ. He pressed on me the importance of getting to the same place

before I tried to teach others. The words had their effect. From that time till I was sure I was saved, I refrained from talking of these things, and I gave up my Sunday School work.

But now Satan, who was seeking my soul's destruction, suggested to me, "If lost and unfit to speak of religious things to others, why not enjoy all the world has to offer?" I listened only too eagerly to his words, and for the next six months or thereabouts no one was more anxious for folly than I, though always with a smarting conscience.

At last, on a Thursday evening in February, 1890, God spoke to me in tremendous power while out at a party with a lot of other young people, mostly older than myself, intent only on an evening's amusement. Standing alone by a refreshment table, there came home to my soul, in startling clearness, some verses of Scripture I had learned months before, found in Proverbs 1:24-32. Here wisdom is represented as laughing at the calamity of the one who refused to heed instruction, and mocking when his fear comes. Every word seemed to burn its way into my heart. I saw as never before my dreadful guilt in having so long refused to trust Christ for myself, and in having preferred my own wilful way to that of Him who had died for me.

I went back to the parlour, and tried to join with the rest in their empty follies. But all seemed utterly hollow, and the tinsel was gone. The light of eternity was shining into the room, and I wondered how any could laugh with God's judgment hanging over us, like a Damocles' sword suspended by a hair. We seemed like people sporting with closed eyes on the edge of a precipice, and I the most careless of all, till grace had made me see.

That night I hurried home, and crept upstairs to my room. There, after lighting a lamp, I took my Bible, and, with it before me, fell on my knees. I had an undefined feeling that I had better pray. But the thought came, "What shall I pray for?" Clearly and distinctly came back the answer, "For what God has been offering me for years. Why not receive it, and thank Him?" My dear mother had often said, "The place to begin with God is at Romans 3, or John 3." To both these scriptures I turned, and read them carefully. Clearly I saw that I was a helpless sinner, but that for me Christ had died, and that salvation was offered freely to all who trusted in Him. Reading John 3:16 the second time, I said, "That will do. O God, I thank Thee that Thou hast loved me, and given Thy Son for me. I trust Him now as my Saviour, and I rest on Thy Word, which tells me I have everlasting life."

Then I expected to feel a thrill of joy. It did not come. I wondered if I could be mistaken. I expected a sudden rush of love for Christ. It did not come either. I feared I could not be really saved with so little emotion. I read the words again. There could be no mistake. God loved the world, of which I formed a part. God gave His Son to save all believers. I believed in Him as my Saviour. Therefore I must have everlasting life. Again I thanked Him, and rose from my knees to begin the walk of faith. God could not lie. I knew I must be saved.

### **A JEW'S SEARCH FOR BLOOD**

In the spring of 1898, I was holding some gospel meetings in San Francisco, and several times addressed the Jews attending a "Mission to Israel." On one occasion, having concluded my discourse, the meeting was thrown open for discussion with any who desired to ask questions or state difficulties, as also for any who had been brought to Christ to relate their conversions. The experience of one old Jew interested me greatly, and, as nearly as I can, I give his remarks in his own words:

"This is Passover week among you, my Jewish brethren, and as I sat here, I was thinking how you will be observing it. You will have put away all leaven from your houses, you will eat the motsah (unleavened wafers) and the roasted lamb. You will attend the synagogue services, and carry out the ritual and directions of the Talmud; but you forget, my brethren, that you have everything but that which Jehovah required first of all. He did not say, 'When I see the leaven put away, or when I see you eat the motsah or go to the synagogue;' but His word was, '*When I see the blood I will pass over you.*' Ah, my brethren, you can substitute nothing for this. You must have blood, blood, BLOOD!" As he reiterated this word with ever-increasing emphasis, his black eyes flashed warningly.

After a moment's pause, the old man went on. "I was born in Palestine more than seventy years ago. As a child I was taught to read the Law, the Psalms, and the Prophets. I early attended the synagogue and learned Hebrew from the rabbis. At first I believed what I was told, that ours was the true and only religion, but as I grew older

and studied the Law more intently, I was struck by the place the blood had in all the ceremonies there, and equally struck by its utter absence in the ritual to which I was brought up.

“Again and again I read Exodus 12 and Leviticus 16 and 17, and those chapters made me tremble as I thought of the great Day of Atonement and the place the blood had there. Day and night one verse would ring in my ears. *‘It is the blood that maketh an atonement for the soul!’* I knew I had broken the law. I needed atonement. Year after year, on that day, I beat my breast as I confessed my need of it; but it was to be made by blood, and there was no blood!

“In my distress, at last, I opened my heart to a learned and venerable rabbi. He told me that God was angry with His people. Jerusalem was in the hands of the Gentiles, the temple was destroyed, and a Muslim mosque was in its place. The only spot on earth where we dare shed the blood of sacrifice, according to Deuteronomy 12, was desecrated, and our nation scattered. That was why there was no blood. God had Himself closed the way to carry out the solemn service of the great Day of Atonement. Now, we must turn to the Talmud, and rest on its instruction, and trust in the mercy of God and the merits of the fathers.

“I tried to be satisfied, but could not. Something seemed to say that the law was unaltered, even though our temple was destroyed. Nothing else but blood could atone for the soul. We dared not shed blood for atonement elsewhere than in the place the Lord had chosen. Then were we left without an atonement at all? “This thought filled me with horror. In my distress I consulted many other rabbis. I had but one question— Where can I find the blood of atonement?

“I was over thirty years of age when I left Palestine and came to Constantinople [Istanbul], with my still unanswered question, and my soul troubled about my sins.

“One night I was walking down one of the narrow streets of that city, when I saw a sign telling of a meeting for Jews. Curiosity led me to go in. Just as I took a seat I heard a man say, *‘The blood of Jesus Christ, His Son, cleanseth us from all sin.’* I listened breathlessly as the speaker told how God had declared that ‘without shedding of blood is no remission;’ but that He had given His only Son, the Lamb of God, to die, and all who trusted in His blood were forgiven all their iniquities. This was the Messiah of Isaiah 53: this was the Sufferer of Psalm 22.

“Ah, my brethren, I had found the blood of atonement at last. I trusted it, and now I love to read the New Testament and see how the shadows of the law are fulfilled in Jesus. His blood has been shed for sinners, has satisfied God, and is the only means of salvation for all.”

### **BLACKNESS OF DARKNESS**

I think the most awful picture the Bible gives us of the doom of the lost is in the Epistle of Jude. He speaks of those who make light of God’s salvation and who follow after unrighteousness, as “*wandering stars, to whom is reserved the blackness of darkness for ever.*”

When I was a boy in Canada, I remember how, night after night, a blazing comet appeared in the skies; and I heard older people say that this particular “night wonder” had not been seen for some 300 years. I asked in amazement where it had been, and for the first time in my young life I came up against the wonder of infinite space. I was told that that comet had been driving at tremendous velocity billions of miles away for 150 years, and then it gradually began to come back toward the sun. In a few weeks it passed out of sight, not to appear to us for another 300 years. I can recall pondering what would happen if that comet never came back!

My friends, this is the appalling picture that Jude presents. Those who despise the boundless mercy God has bestowed on them in His blessed Son, and persist in refusing His goodness, continuing in their sins, will be driven away from the Sun of Righteousness into the outer darkness, nevermore to find their way back into the presence of God. He is giving a little space now for repentance, but the day of His grace will be over when He rises to shake terribly the earth. How are you treating His offer of mercy?