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Let me share one of my favorite true stories with you, about an RAF gunner in World War II. Flight Sergeant Nicholas Alkemade was rear gunner in a Lancaster II, a bomber of the 115th Squadron operating from Witchford, Cambridgeshire. On the night of 23/24 March, 1944, the squadron attacked Berlin. On the return trip Alkemade's plane was attacked by a Ju88 night fighter which did fatal damage to the Lancaster and set it on fire; the bomber pilot ordered his crew to bail out.

In most RAF bombers the only man who had room to actually wear his parachute was the pilot, whose parachute pack was slung like a bustle and formed a cushion, fitting into a recess in his seat. All others carried a separate pack which was normally stowed in a small carrier fixed to the side of the aircraft near the various crew positions. In order to bail out, each man who wore a parachute harness had to retrieve the parachute itself and snap it into place onto his harness with the harness's two carabiner-like clips.

In the Lancaster the rear gunner's parachute pack is stowed just inside the fuselage between the rear turret and the tail spar since there is no room for it in the turret itself. To grab his parachute, Alkemade opened the turret doors that had formed his backrest, but in the few seconds he had the doors open he was badly burned about the hands and upper body. The Lancaster's fuselage had become a blowtorch, funneling all the fire's fury toward the rear gunner's turret. Alkemade's parachute was already a blazing ruin.

Alkemade knew he faced either the horror of incineration or jumping without his chute. With instant decision he turned his turret sideways, disconnected his oxygen and intercom and pushed out backwards into the night sky.

Nicholas Alkemade parted company with his plane at the altitude of 18,000 feet which meant he had 100 seconds to contemplate his fateful decision. God knows what prayers he may have prayed as he rocketed toward the earth at 120 miles per hour with the wind of his descent screaming in his ears. What we do know is that as he neared the ground, he fell through the interlaced branches of a thick pine forest. The layers of slapping branches successively broke his fall and finally bounced him into a drift of deep snow.

A few minutes later, Alkemade came to and found that he had suffered some cuts, bruises and a twisted leg. Blowing the whistle attached to his battledress, he attracted help and was taken prisoner. At first the Germans took him for a spy, but later his aircraft was found, burned out but with his parachute pack still in its stowage. Before sending Alkemade to Stalag Luft III in Zagan, Poland, a German doctor gave him a signed certificate documenting his miraculous survival.

A amazing story, isn't it? Now think of this fall without a parachute as an allegory of our lives. We didn't jump from a plane, but since we emerged from our mothers' wombs, we are irrevocably, unrestrainedly falling *through time* toward our return to the dust. As we fall, we possess only limited control over our circumstances. We can reach in a pocket for a stick of gum, we can wave at our friends who are falling with us, we can do some acrobatics in the air, and we can even decide our landing spot within a certain radius. What we cannot do is alter the essential direction of our fall (down) or its inevitable conclusion (meeting the ground).

If this were the whole story it would be pretty depressing; in the contest of life the odds would be 100% against our winning. However, as believers in the God of the Bible, we have been promised a miraculously soft landing at the end of our fall through time: the ground will open up and become our doorway into a glorious eternity. This gives us hope. However, the question arises of whether the one having made the promise is truly able to keep it. The answer to that question will make the difference for us between hope and joy. As we study the biblical teaching of God's sovereignty, we discover that He is indeed able to keep His promise for there is nothing—from the ants crawling on the ground to the swirling atoms of the stars, from the denizens of hell to the souls under the altar of heaven—that is outside of His control. What God decrees will inevitably come to pass, indeed is already a reality from His eternal perspective, for He is the infallible, omniscient and omnipresent Director of all things. If we are in His hands, we *will* land softly, we *will* win the contest of life against all odds, and we can fall through time *joyfully* because we know the outcome in advance.