
ALL OF GRACE
A SERMON
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*For by grace are ye saved through faith;
and that not of yourselves: it is
the gift of God."
-- Ephesians 2:8*

OF the things which I have spoken unto you these many years, this is the sum. Within the circle of these words my theology is contained, so far as it refers to the salvation of men. I rejoice also to remember that those of my family who were ministers of Christ before me preached this doctrine, and none other. My father, who is still able to bear his personal testimony for his Lord, knows no other doctrine, neither did his father before him.

I am led to remember this by the fact that a somewhat singular circumstance, recorded in my memory, connects this text with myself and my grandfather. It is now long years ago. I was announced to preach in a certain country town in the Eastern Counties. It does not often happen to me to be behind time, for I feel that punctuality is one of those little virtues which may prevent great sins. But we have no control over railway delays, and breakdowns; and so it happened that I reached the appointed place considerably behind the time. Like sensible people, they had begun their worship, and had proceeded as far as the sermon. As I neared the chapel, I perceived that someone was in the pulpit preaching, and who should the preacher be but my dear and venerable grandfather! He saw me as I came in at the front door and made my way up the aisle, and at once he said, "Here comes my grandson! He may preach the gospel better than I can, but he cannot preach a better gospel; can you, Charles?" As I made my way through the throng, I answered, "You can preach better than I can. Pray go on." But he would not agree to that. I must take the sermon, and so I did, going on with the subject there and then, just where he left off. "There," said he, "I was preaching of 'For by grace are ye saved.' I

have been setting forth the source and fountain-head of salvation; and I am now showing them the channel of it, through faith. Now you take it up, and go on." I am so much at home with these glorious truths that I could not feel any difficulty in taking from my grandfather the thread of his discourse, and joining my thread to it, so as to continue without a break. Our agreement in the things of God made it easy for us to be joint-preachers of the same discourse. I went on with "through faith," and then I proceeded to the next point, "and that not of yourselves." Upon this I was explaining the weakness and inability of human nature, and the certainty that salvation could not be of ourselves, when I had my coat-tail pulled, and my well-beloved grandsire took his turn again. "When I spoke of our depraved human nature," the good old man said, "I know most about that, dear friends"; and so he took up the parable, and for the next five minutes set forth a solemn and humbling description of our lost estate, the depravity of our nature, and the spiritual death under which we were found. When he had said his say in a very gracious manner, his grandson was allowed to go on again, to the dear old man's great delight; for now and then he would say, in a gentle tone, "Good! Good!" Once he said, "Tell them that again, Charles," and, of course, I did tell them that again. It was a happy exercise to me to take my share in bearing witness to truths of such vital importance, which are so deeply impressed upon my heart. While announcing this text I seem to hear that dear voice, which has been so long lost to earth, saying to me, "TELL THEM THAT AGAIN." I am not contradicting the testimony of forefathers who are now with God. If my grandfather could return to earth, he would find me where he left me, steadfast in the faith, and true to that form of doctrine which was once delivered to the saints.

I shall handle the text briefly, by way of making a few statements. The first statement is clearly contained in the text:--

I. THERE IS PRESENT SALVATION. The apostle says, "Ye are saved." Not "ye shall be," or "ye may be"; but "ye are saved." He says not, "Ye are partly saved," nor "in the way to being saved," nor "hopeful of salvation"; but "by grace are ye saved." Let us be as clear on this point as he was, and let us never rest till we know that we are saved. At this moment we are either saved or unsaved. That is clear. To which class do we belong? I hope that, by the witness of the Holy Ghost, we may be so assured of our safety as to sing, "The Lord is my strength and my song; he also is become my salvation." Upon this I will not linger, but pass on to note the next point.

II. A PRESENT SALVATION MUST BE THROUGH GRACE. If we can say of any man, or of any set of people, "Ye are saved," we shall have to preface it with the words "by grace." There is no other present salvation except that which begins and ends with grace. As far as I know, I do not think that anyone in the wide world pretends to preach or to possess a present salvation, except those who believe salvation to be all of grace. No one in the Church of Rome claims to be now saved--completely and eternally saved. Such a profession would be heretical. Some few Catholics may hope to enter heaven when they die, but the most of them have the miserable prospect of purgatory before their eyes. We see constant requests for prayers for departed souls, and this would not be if those souls were saved, and glorified with their Saviour. Masses for the repose of the soul indicate the incompleteness of the salvation Rome has to offer. Well may it be so, since Papal salvation is by works, and even if salvation by good works were possible, no man can ever be sure that he has performed enough of them to secure his salvation.

Among those who dwell around us, we find many who are altogether strangers to the doctrine of grace, and these never dream of present salvation. Possibly they trust that they may be saved when they die; they half hope that, after years of watchful holiness, they may, perhaps, be saved at last; but, to be saved now, and to know that they are saved, is quite beyond them, and they think it presumption.

There can be no present salvation unless it be upon this footing-- "By grace are ye saved." It is a very singular thing that no one has risen up to preach a present salvation by works. I suppose it would be too absurd. The works being unfinished, the salvation would be incomplete; or, the salvation being complete, the main motive of the legalist would be gone.

Salvation must be by grace. If man be lost by sin, how can he be saved except through the grace of God? If he has sinned, he is condemned; and how can he, of himself, reverse that condemnation? Suppose that he should keep the law all the rest of his life, he will then only have done what he was always bound to have done, and he will still be an unprofitable servant. What is to become of the past? How can old sins be blotted out? How can the old ruin be retrieved? According to Scripture, and according to common sense, salvation can only be through the free favour of God.

Salvation in the present tense must be by the free favour of God. Persons may contend for salvation by works, but you will not hear anyone support his own argument by saying, "I am myself saved by what I have done." That would be a superfluity of naughtiness to which few men would go. Pride could hardly compass itself about with such extravagant boasting. No, if we are saved, it must be by the free favour of God. No one professes to be an example of the opposite view.

Salvation to be complete must be by free favour. The saints, when they come to die, never conclude their lives by hoping in their good works. Those who have lived the most holy and useful lives invariably look to free grace in their final moments. I never stood by the bedside of a godly man who reposed any confidence whatever in his own prayers, or repentance, or religiousness. I have heard eminently holy men quoting in death the words, "Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners." In fact, the nearer men come to heaven, and the more prepared they are for it, the more simply is their trust in the merit of the Lord Jesus, and the more intensely do they abhor all trust in themselves. If this be the case in our last moments, when the conflict is almost over, much more ought we to feel it to be so while we are in the thick of the fight. If a man be completely saved in this present time of warfare, how can it be except by grace. While he has to mourn over sin that dwelleth in him, while he has to confess innumerable shortcomings and transgressions, while sin is mixed with all he does, how can he believe that he is completely saved except it be by the free favour of God?

Paul speaks of this salvation as belonging to the Ephesians, "By grace are ye saved." The Ephesians had been given to curious arts and works of divination. They had thus made a covenant with the powers of darkness. Now if such as these were saved, it must be by grace alone. So is it with us also: our original condition and character render it certain that, if saved at all, we must owe it to the free favour of God. I know it is so in my own case; and I believe the same rule holds good in the rest of believers. This is clear enough, and so I advance to the next observation:--

III. PRESENT SALVATION BY GRACE MUST BE THROUGH FAITH. A present salvation must be through grace, and salvation by grace must be through faith. You cannot get a hold of salvation by grace by any other means than by faith. This live coal from off the altar needs the golden tongs of faith with which to carry it. I suppose that it might have been

possible, if God had so willed it, that salvation might have been through works, and yet by grace; for if Adam had perfectly obeyed the law of God, still he would only have done what he was bound to do; and so, if God should have rewarded him, the reward itself must have been according to grace, since the Creator owes nothing to the creature. This would have been a very difficult system to work, while the object of it was perfect; but in our case it would not work at all. Salvation in our case means deliverance from guilt and ruin, and this could not have been laid hold of by a measure of good works, since we are not in a condition to perform any. Suppose I had to preach that you as sinners must do certain works, and then you would be saved; and suppose that you could perform them; such a salvation would not then have been seen to be altogether of grace; it would have soon appeared to be of debt. Apprehended in such a fashion, it would have come to you in some measure as the reward of work done, and its whole aspect would have been changed. Salvation by grace can only be gripped by the hand of faith: the attempt to lay hold upon it by the doing of certain acts of law would cause the grace to evaporate. "Therefore, it is of faith that it might be by grace." "If by grace, then it is no more of works: otherwise grace is no more grace. But if it be of works, then it is no more grace: otherwise work is no more work."

Some try to lay hold upon salvation by grace through the use of ceremonies; but it will not do. You are christened, confirmed, and caused to receive "the holy sacrament" from priestly hands, or you are baptized, join the church, sit at the Lord's table: does this bring you salvation? I ask you, "have you salvation?" "You dare not say." If you did claim salvation of a sort, yet I am sure it would not be in your minds salvation by grace. Again, you cannot lay hold upon salvation by grace through your feelings. The hand of faith is constructed for the grasping of a present salvation by grace. But feeling is not adapted for that end. If you go about to say, "I must feel that I am saved. I must feel so much sorrow and so much joy or else I will not admit that I am saved," you will find that this method will not answer. As well might you hope to see with your ear, or taste with your eye, or hear with your nose, as to believe by feeling: it is the wrong organ. After you have believed, you can enjoy salvation by feeling its heavenly influences; but to dream of getting a grasp of it by your own feelings is as foolish as to attempt to bear away the sunlight in the palm of your hand, or the breath of heaven between the lashes of your eyes. There is an essential absurdity in the whole affair.

Moreover, the evidence yielded by feeling is singularly fickle. When your feelings are peaceful and delightful, they are soon broken in upon, and become restless and melancholy. The most fickle of elements, the most feeble of creatures, the most contemptible circumstances, may sink or raise your spirits: experienced men come to think less and less of their present emotions as they reflect upon the little reliance which can be safely placed upon them. Faith receives the statement of God concerning His way of gracious pardon, and thus it brings salvation to the man believing; but feeling, warming under passionate appeals, yielding itself deliriously to a hope which it dares not examine, whirling round and round in a sort of dervish dance of excitement which has become necessary for its own sustaining, is all on a stir, like the troubled sea which cannot rest. From its boilings and ragings, feeling is apt to drop to lukewarmness, despondency, despair and all the kindred evils. Feelings are a set of cloudy, windy phenomena which cannot be trusted in reference to the eternal verities of God. We now go a step further:--

IV. SALVATION BY GRACE, THROUGH FAITH, IS NOT OF OURSELVES. The salvation, and the faith, and the whole gracious work together, are not of ourselves.

First, they are not of our former deservings: they are not the reward of former good endeavours. No unregenerate person has lived so well that God is bound to give him further grace, and to bestow on him eternal life; else it were no longer of grace, but of debt. Salvation is given to us, not earned by us. Our first life is always a wandering away from God, and our new life of return to God is always a work of undeserved mercy, wrought upon those who greatly need, but never deserve it.

It is not of ourselves, in the further sense, that it is not out of our original excellence. Salvation comes from above; it is never evolved from within. Can eternal life be evolved from the bare ribs of death? Some dare to tell us that faith in Christ, and the new birth, are only the development of good things that lay hidden in us by nature; but in this, like their father, they speak of their own. Sirs, if an heir of wrath is left to be developed, he will become more and more fit for the place prepared for the devil and his angels! You may take the unregenerate man, and educate him to the highest; but he remains, and must forever remain, dead in sin, unless a higher power shall come in and save him from himself. Grace brings into the heart an entirely foreign element. It does not improve and perpetuate; it

kills and makes alive. There is no continuity between the state of nature and the state of grace: the one is darkness and the other is light; the one is death and the other is life. Grace, when it comes to us, is like a firebrand dropped into the sea, where it would certainly be quenched were it not of such a miraculous quality that it baffles the water-floods, and sets up its reign of fire and light even in the depths.

Salvation by grace, through faith is not of ourselves in the sense of being the result of our own power. We are bound to view salvation as being as surely a divine act as creation, or providence, or resurrection. At every point of the process of salvation this word is appropriate--"not of yourselves." From the first desire after it to the full reception of it by faith, it is evermore of the Lord alone, and not of ourselves. The man believes, but that belief is only one result among many of the implantation of divine life within the man's soul by God Himself.

Even the very will thus to be saved by grace is not of ourselves, but it is the gift of God. There lies the stress of the question. A man ought to believe in Jesus: it is his duty to receive him whom God has set forth to be a propitiation for sins. But man will not believe in Jesus; he prefers anything to faith in his redeemer. Unless the Spirit of God convinces the judgment, and constrains the will, man has no heart to believe in Jesus unto eternal life. I ask any saved man to look back upon his own conversion, and explain how it came about. You turned to Christ, and believed in his name: these were your own acts and deeds. But what caused you thus to turn? What sacred force was that which turned you from sin to righteousness? Do you attribute this singular renewal to the existence of a something better in you than has been yet discovered in your unconverted neighbour? No, you confess that you might have been what he now is if it had not been that there was a potent something which touched the spring of your will, enlightened your understanding, and guided you to the foot of the cross. Gratefully we confess the fact; it must be so. Salvation by grace, through faith, is not of ourselves, and none of us would dream of taking any honour to ourselves from our conversion, or from any gracious effect which has flowed from the first divine cause. Last of all:--

V. "BY GRACE ARE YE SAVED THROUGH FAITH; AND THAT NOT OF YOURSELVES: IT IS THE GIFT OF GOD." Salvation may be called Theodora, or God's gift: and each saved soul may be surnamed Dorothea, which is another form of the same expression. Multiply your phrases, and

expand your expositions; but salvation truly traced to its well-head is all contained in the gift unspeakable, the free, unmeasured benison of love. Salvation is the gift of God, in opposition to a wage. When a man pays another his wage, he does what is right; and no one dreams of belauding him for it. But we praise God for salvation because it is not the payment of debt, but the gift of grace. No man enters eternal life on earth, or in heaven, as his due: it is the gift of God. We say, "nothing is freer than a gift". Salvation is so purely, so absolutely a gift of God, that nothing can be more free. God gives it because he chooses to give it, according to that grand text which has made many a man bite his lip in wrath, "I will have mercy on whom I will have mercy, I will have compassion on whom I will have compassion." You are all guilty and condemned, and the great King pardons whom he wills from among you. This is his royal prerogative. He saves in infinite sovereignty of grace.

Salvation is the gift of God: that is to say completely so, in opposition to the notion of growth. Salvation is not a natural production from within: it is brought from a foreign zone, and planted within the heart by heavenly hands. Salvation is in its entirety a gift from God. If thou wilt have it, there it is, complete. Wilt thou have it as a perfect gift? "No; I will produce it in my own workshop." Thou canst not forge a work so rare and costly, upon which even Jesus spent his life's blood. Here is a garment without seam, woven from the top throughout. It will cover thee and make thee glorious. Wilt thou have it? "No; I will sit at the loom, and I will weave a raiment of my own!" Proud fool that thou art! Thou spinnest cobwebs. Thou weavest a dream. Oh! that thou wouldst freely take what Christ upon the cross declared to be finished.

It is the gift of God: that is, it is eternally secure in opposition to the gifts of men, which soon pass away. "Not as the world giveth, give I unto you," says our Lord Jesus. If my Lord Jesus gives you salvation at this moment, you have it, and you have it forever. He will never take it back again; and if he does not take it from you, who can? If he saves you now through faith, you are saved--so saved that you shall never perish, neither shall any pluck you out of his hand. May it be so with every one of us! Amen.