
GOD'S UNSPEAKABLE GIFT
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METROPOLITAN TABERNACLE

"Thanks be unto God for his unspeakable gift."— 2 Corinthians 9:15

IF you will read, at home, the chapter from which our text is taken, you will find that Paul was stirring up the Corinthians to an act of liberality. He had boasted of what they would do, and he had just a little fear that they might fall behind, and not quite come up to what he had promised on their behalf. He stirred them up to liberal giving, telling them that they that sowed liberally should reap liberally, and they that sowed sparingly would reap sparingly. Once upon that theme of giving, the apostle could not help speaking of another gift. He saw a track just off the main road, and he felt that it led him straight away to his God, and to his Saviour; and so, while the ink was yet flowing in his pen, he began to write about it as though he would say, "I am not thinking now, my brethren, so much of your gifts as I am of another gift; not so much of your gifts to the Lord's poor people as of the Lord's great gift to you, his poor people. Thanks be unto God for his unspeakable gift."

A person, who was collecting for some good object, called upon a friend one day; and, as he wanted him to be very generous, pleaded hard with him. After a while, he seemed to quit the subject altogether, and he said, "I knew your father." "Did you?" "Yes, and I called upon him about a certain business, just as I do upon you, and your father did not want any prompting. He said, 'State the case,' and as soon as the case was stated, he pulled out his purse, and gave me ten times as much as I had expected to obtain from him." You see, our friend was not exactly pleading with the son when he told that story, and yet I do not know how he could have pleaded better; for reverence for his father's name, and the desire not to seem to fall off from his father's standard, were the very best arguments that could have been used with him. So, I admire the wisdom of Paul. When he would bring these Corinthians up to a high standard of liberality

towards their poor brethren in Judaea, he says, as though it were only by the way, "Thanks be unto God, your Father and my Father, for his unspeakable gift. Whatever you give, I can speak about; but what he gave, surpasses all powers of speech. Thanks be unto God for his unspeakable gift."

Now, this text to-night gives me three things to speak of. The first is, that Christ is a gift; and, secondly, that as a gift, Christ is unspeakable; and, thirdly, that as a gift unspeakable, Christ calls forth praise to God from us.

I. First, then, CHRIST IS A GIFT.

How often you hear people speak about Christ and his salvation as though they were the reward of merit, as though we did something by which to win his divine favour! If they do not teach that salvation comes through our own doings; yet, according to them, it is the effect of our feelings and our experiences. Somehow or other, according to this common notion, we must get fit to receive God's gift; and thus, what comes to us is more our due than an alms of heavenly charity. I hesitate not to say that this teaching flies in the teeth of the entire Word of God. Everywhere in the Scriptures, the great word is not merit, but grace; not deserving, but receiving freely of the great mercy of our God.

Our Lord Jesus must be a gift to us if we are ever to possess him. He could only come to us sons of men by way of gift. Consider the dignity of his person for a minute, and then ask how it is conceivable that we could have deserved that such a person as he should come here, and live and die, that we might be saved. I can conceive of a man meriting this or that honour among his fellow men; but when I think of the Prince of life, the Lord of glory, equal with the Father, King of kings and Lord of lords, very God of very God, and when I see him giving himself up to die for men, my very blood boils at the thought that we could ever have deserved that sacrifice. One is indignant that human pride should dare to go the length of even imagining that a life of perfection could have deserved to be rewarded by the gift of Christ. Nay, my brethren, if we had kept God's law without a flaw, if there had been no omission of duty, and no commission of sin, and we could have taken the compound merits of a perfect world, and laid them at the feet of God, they could not have deserved that Christ should become man, that Christ should live in poverty, that Christ should die in shame for

man. There would have been no need of Christ's death if man had not sinned; but had there been a supposable need, Christ's sacrifice could not have been deserved even if we had remained innocent, like our first parents in the Garden of Eden, before the Fall. I am sure that none of you could, for a minute, tolerate the thought that any human merit should deserve the incarnation of God upon this earth, the coming of the Divine Son in our nature into this world, and his shameful death upon the cross of Calvary.

But, next, this will be very evident from the nature of the work for which Christ was given. It is clear from the Scriptures that he was given for the undeserving. He came into the world to save sinners. He took upon himself, not our righteousness, for there was none for him to take; but, as we read just now, "the Lord hath laid on him the iniquity of us all." The prominent and paramount idea of Christ in the Scripture is that of a Priest offering sacrifice; but the Priest is for men who need atonement for their sins; the expiation, the sacrifice, the sin-offering, is for guilty men. How could Christ die on the cross for deserving men? The idea is absurd! No bruises were required for those who needed not to be healed. There needed to be no chastisement of peace for those who deserved well of God. The very work of Christ in dying, "the Just for the unjust, that he might bring us to God," implies that we were at a distance from God. It also implies our injustice; and, consequently, our total inability to deserve such a gift at God's hand. No, no; a Saviour is for sinners; a dying Saviour must be for those who deserved to die. Christ does not come, therefore, to us as deserving him; but he is God's unspeakable gift.

And let us think of the splendour of his grace, the lavish wealth of blessing which comes to us through him. Know ye not that as many of you as have believed in Christ are made to live with an everlasting life? There pulses in you to-night the life of eternity, the life of heaven. You have begun to live the life that shall last for ever and ever. Do you not know that you have been regenerated by the Holy Ghost, adopted into the family of God? You are the children of the Most High. "Behold, what manner of love the Father hath bestowed upon us, that we should be called the sons of God." Did you deserve this? Could you deserve this? Is it possible? Being adopted into the heavenly family, you have been justified, made just in the sight of God; and now you know that you are loved with an everlasting love, that you are predestinated to glorify God here, by being conformed to the image of his Son, that you are ordained by divine decree to sit upon a

throne which he has prepared for you, and to reign with him for ever and ever. Did you deserve this? Can it be conceived that anything you have ever done could have been rewarded with such extraordinary boons as these? A boy runs an errand for me, and I give him two pence, or, if I am generous, I give him sixpence; but if I were to give him a thousand pounds, he would not believe that it was a payment for his service, he would not think that possible; he would feel that the reward was far above anything that he had earned, that his service was quite unworthy of so great a gift, and he would conclude that if that great sum of money was really his, I must have given it to him out of pure generosity. He would never dream that he had earned it, even supposing that he had done his errand with all the diligence in the world. And no child of God, however much he has served his Lord, ever thinks that he deserves to be a child of God, that he deserves to be an heir of heaven, that he deserves to be a priest and a king, to live for ever at God's right hand in untold blessedness. Oh, no, all this must be a gift; we could not have earned such a blessing as this.

You know that there are two things to make a gift; there cannot be a gift without, first of all, one to give it, and then another to receive it. Have you received Christ? It is essential to make him a gift to you that you should accept him. It is little enough that you should take into your empty hand the priceless treasure that God bestows. It is little enough that, like an empty cup, you should stand under the flowing spring, and let the crystal stream flow in; but it is necessary in order to complete the gift. I will not ask you to thank God for his unspeakable gift unless, God having given, you also have received. You may receive Christ, oh, so freely! If salvation were to be bought, if it were to be earned, woe would be unto you; but being a gift, nothing is freer. The poorest man in the world may accept a gift; a trembling hand may receive a gift; he that is a thief and a robber, ay, a murderer, doomed to die, may accept a gift, if it comes not of merit, or by way of reward, but entirely of the generosity of the bestower. Oh, what a glorious thing it is that you and I and all of us may receive God's unspeakable gift!

Once received and accepted, Christ is ours. If a man has made a gift to me, I would not say anything that would hurt his feelings, but it is not his anymore. If he has given it to me, it is mine. A person once handed over to me a house that was to belong to a certain part of the work that I had to conduct, and if I had taken possession of that house when it was given to me, it would have been mine; but I did not. The person died; and though I held the deeds and writings, yet the gift was invalid by the law. Had I taken

possession when the house was handed to me, it would have been mine; but as the case stood, it was not mine. I must, if I had taken possession, have said to the person giving the house, "You must go out of it, or you must pay me rent, however nominal it may be, to acknowledge that this is really mine, and that you have given it over to me." But I could not have asked such a thing as that, or even dreamed of doing so, therefore the gift was void, and the house was not mine for the Lord's cause. Now, dear friend, if you accept the gift that God gives, remember that it will be yours, Christ will be yours, eternal life will be yours. You will have the title-deeds of your inheritance; you will stand possessed of it. But do not put that off till death, I pray you. No; take possession now of that Christ whom God gives over to you to be his gift to you, and your possession for ever.

And I will say one more thing. When once you receive this gift, you will never lose it, "for the gifts and calling of God are without repentance," which means that God never repents that he has given this unspeakable gift. He will never say, "You must let me have that again." If God has given you Christ, and you have accepted him, he is yours for ever. And this is the glory of this divine gift. A possession that I may lose is a very poor possession after all. A suit at law may be brought against me, and I may lose what I thought was mine. I would not like to have such a possession as that; I could not go to sleep at night through fear that I should lose it; but if God has given me Christ, and I have taken Christ, he is mine. Nor death, nor hell, nor anything else, shall ever be able to separate the soul from Christ, or Christ from the soul that has accepted him. It was well spoken, "Christ and a crust, ay, Christ and no crust, would be better than all the world without him." Oh! give me Christ, and let me die, sooner than let me live without Christ; for that cannot be truly called life which is without him who is "the Way, the Truth, and the Life."

I know that some of you have been straining after doing something or being something in order to obtain God's unspeakable gift. Will you have it? Will you have it for nothing? Do not insult God by bringing your poor wretched merits as the purchase-money for his free gift of Christ. Come just as you are, and freely take what he freely gives, and Christ is yours for ever.

I was surprised, the other day, when I found that a poor soul in deep despair had obtained comfort from a sermon of mine, not upon the universal redemption of men, nor upon the free offer of salvation, but the

man had laid hold of the sharp angular points of a sermon upon the everlasting covenant and upon election. When I heard of it, I saw how God can give a soul comfort simply by the exhibition of his sovereign grace. "It is not of him that willeth, nor of him that runneth, but of God that sheweth mercy." O soul, if you will have Christ as a gift, you may have him to-night! You need not go home; you need not wait a moment. But if you will not have him as a gift, you shall never have him, for in no other way can Christ ever belong to you and me, except as God's gift which we, by his grace, are led freely to accept.

Thus much, and perhaps too much, considering our time, on the first point, that Christ is a gift, the free gift of God's grace.

II. Now, in the second place, let us consider the fact that, AS A GIFT, CHRIST IS UNSPEAKABLE. "Thanks be unto God for his unspeakable gift," said the apostle Paul; and so say we. "Why," says one, "do you speak about him, then?" Well, principally because he is unspeakable. By this time, after nearly nineteen hundred years, if the theme we have to preach about were speakable, we should have exhausted it; but as it is unspeakable, a sea without a shore, an ocean without a bottom, we will keep on preaching for another nineteen hundred years, if the Lord does not come, and we shall never get to the end of this theme, I am quite sure. I heard of a minister who explained to one of his hearers what a trouble it was for him to get a sermon. "Oh!" said he, "it takes me days, and makes my head ache, and I do not know what to do." "Sir," his friend replied, "if it is like that, I should think you must be near the bottom of the tub." And I should think so, too. But when we come to speak about Christ, we have an unspeakable subject. Here is a well springing up that overflows, and we can speak for ever upon this unspeakable theme.

How is it unspeakable? First, he who spoke best of Christ declared that he was unspeakable. Do you know anybody who spoke better of Christ than Paul did, inspired as he was? What majestic sentences, what wonderful paragraphs you come across in Paul's writing, where he piles up his words, mountain upon mountain, in order to glorify Christ! If anybody could have spoken Christ out from Alpha to Omega, and told all about him, Paul was the man; but though he did not give up the blessed task, but lived and died at it, he declared that God's gift was unspeakable, and I am sure it is so.

Next, he who needs a Saviour most will tell you that Christ is God's unspeakable gift. You know that man. He sits down in the deep distress of his soul, with his hand to his heavy head; but he cannot lay his hand on his heavy heart. It would break his arm to try to hold that up. Laden with guilt, and full of fears, he says, "There is no salvation for me but by Christ. Oh, that I could get Christ! Oh, that I could get Christ! It would be an unspeakable blessing if I could but believe in Christ." I know one who talked like this to his mother, the other night. "Why, John," said she, "you look very miserable! You look as if you had the whole world hanging on you." "Mother," he replied, "I could better bear the whole world with Christ than live without him." When a man thus feels his need of Christ, he knows that Christ is God's unspeakable gift.

When you receive Christ, you will find that he who enjoys him most feels him to be an unspeakable gift. When we do not enjoy Christ much, we can talk like parrots about his charms; but when we get our souls full of Christ, generally we cannot talk at all about him. The man who feels that Christ is his, that he is saved, and that Christ has filled him full of heavenly treasures, and made him to possess all things, such a man as that, when he begins to try to talk about Christ, gets choked up. The tears are in his eyes. "Oh!" says he, "let me go home, let me get alone, and sit down, and quietly think this subject out, for it is altogether unspeakable." He who thinks that he could tell all that he knows about Christ, may also conclude that he does not know much, for he who knows most of him feels that he is God's unspeakable gift.

And, beloved, he who has used Christ most and used him longest will tell you this. At first, Christ is everything to the new-born soul in one direction. By-and-by, he is everything in another direction; and, in the end, Christ is everything in every direction. Tell me, my grey headed friend, what you think of Christ? If you have known him fifty years, at what is Christ best, man? "Best?" say you, "he is best at everything;" and so, indeed, he is. And to what use do you put Christ, my brother, in the midst of the battle of life? Do you find Christ good as a helmet, breastplate, shoes, or girdle? "Oh!" say you, "he is good as a full armour. All I want I find in Christ, yea, more than all." It would be impossible to tell all the uses to which Christ is put. You who have used him most and longest will say, "He is unspeakably precious to us, for he has been good to us in sickness and in health, in poverty and in wealth, in joy and in depression. He is equally good

everywhere. Oh, that we might still go on to know more of him, for as God's great gift to us he is unspeakable!"

Again, the preacher who has preached him most fully knows that Christ is unspeakable. Ah, dear friends! I do not suppose that you can understand the feeling that comes over me at times. I have sometimes had glorious liberty in preaching; I have felt like Naphtali, a hind let loose; and I have talked away of my Master to my own joy, and I think to yours, too; and then, when I have been on my way home, I have begun asking myself, "Now, how did you preach, after all?" and it has seemed to me a poor, miserable affair. I have said so little in honour of my Master compared with what I ought to have said, that I have felt half inclined to come back here, and begin again, only the thought has often struck me, "You will do it worse if you go back, so that you had better let it alone as it is." I know a man, an eminent painter, and a person sat to him thirteen times for his portrait, and the artist could not catch the sitter's expression. I saw him throw his brush right into the middle of the painting, and he said, "I give it up; I cannot do it." That is how we sometimes feel with regard to our Master. Who can paint HIM as he ought to be painted? We give it up. Go, sir, and look at the sun, and then come back, and paint the sun upon your canvas; and then go, and look at Christ, and express him by your speech. Nature, all nature together,

"To make his beauties known,
Must mingle colours not her own."

He who preaches Christ most fully knows that he is unspeakable. You did well to sing just now the verse that I often repeat to myself concerning my own preaching, —

"Vex'd, I try and try again,
Still my efforts all are vain;
Living tongues are dumb at best,
We must die to speak of Christ."

I have come so far and reached my last point. I wish that we had more time for such a glorious theme.

III. Now, thirdly, AS A GIFT UNSPEAKABLE, CHRIST CALLS FORTH PRAISE TO GOD FROM US. “Thanks be unto God for his unspeakable gift.”

The gift of Christ makes us view God with thankfulness. Never fall into the mistake that is often made by ignorant persons, when they suppose that our Lord Jesus Christ came into the world to make God loving. No, no, no; Jesus Christ came into the world because God was loving, and in love to us gave his Son, Jesus Christ, to die for us.

“’Twas not to make Jehovah’s love
Towards the sinner flame,
That Jesus, from his throne above,
A suffering man became.
’Twas not the death which he endured,
Nor all the pangs he bore,
That God’s eternal love procured,
For God was love before;”

and he so loved the world that he gave his only begotten Son. God’s unspeakable gift is not the cause of his love, but the fruit of his love. Do not say, “Thanks be unto Christ for dying to placate the Father.” No, no! “Thanks be unto God for his unspeakable gift.” God gave his Son, and we adore the Giver, and bless his name. Once we thought of God with dread; but now that he has given us Jesus, we think of him with thankfulness. We are glad that there is a God. It is no question with us whether there is a God or not. If there were no God, it would be eternal ruin to us; but because there is a God, there is heaven for us, nay, our God is our heaven, blessed be his name! Thus, we think of God with thankfulness.

And notice, next, that we ought to express that thankfulness. The apostle says, “Thanks be unto God for his unspeakable gift.” But, Paul, what brought you to that topic? You were talking to these Corinthians about giving, not grudgingly, as of necessity, and so on; what brought you to the subject of God’s unspeakable gift? Paul answers, “It is impossible to say what brought me to this topic, for I am always at it. Whatever I am talking

about, whatever business I have on hand, I am always thanking God for his unspeakable gift.” The apostle broke out into that burst of praise because he could not help it. His soul was swelling with intense gratitude, and he was obliged to cry out, “Thanks be unto God for his unspeakable gift.”

Dear friends, praising God is never out of season and never out of place. You know that some of us, who profess to be Christians, are the most orderly and proper people in all the world; that is to say, we never intrude our religion upon other people. We can see a man for twenty years, and yet never say a word to him about Christ. We do not have those dreadful people crying out “Hallelujah” in the service, do we? We are so dreadfully proper! Besides that, we are dreadfully cold as well. Perhaps we should speak about Christ very imprudently and do some very rash things if we loved him better; but we love him so little that we become wonderfully prudent, and wonderfully proper, and we and the world jog on together as if there were no difference between us. If a man does roll out an oath now and then, we are very sorry but we never rebuke him. Of course not. Ah! well, I wish that we could be at least as rash as one old man who was employed at a wharf unloading. He was weakly and sickly, and so they gave him less pay than others received, and he was quite content. But there was a stevedore who one morning swore at him, and the old man bowed his head, but said nothing. The blasphemer swore again, and the old man bowed his head again. At last, the swearer said, “You old fool, what are you bowing to me for?” The good man replied, “I was not bowing to you, but you named the name of God, and I thought that I would pay him reverence if you did not.” Well done, old man! Well done, old man! May every Christian here find out some way of thanking God for his unspeakable gift! The more the world curses, the more let us bless. We are to express our thanks as well as to feel grateful.

Our expression of thankfulness for God’s unspeakable gift would make ourselves all the surer that Christ is ours. A man who has received a gift, and never looks at it, and never thanks the giver, will come by degrees to forget that he has it, or to forget the giver, and to forget how he came by it. Cultivate a grateful spirit when you think of what a gift you have in Christ. Praise the Lord for Christ. Then you will want to praise him again; and when you have praised him again, you will want to praise him yet again; and the more you praise him, the more sure you will be that he is really yours. Suppose that a man has a garden, and that he knows it is his; he is quite sure it is his. But suppose that for twenty years he has always

gathered all the fruit of the garden and lived upon it. Then nobody can question his right; he has the right of possession, the right of enjoyment. He received his garden as a gift, and for the last twenty years he has thanked the giver of it. I am sure that his title is clear enough. Oh, how some of you would clear your titles if you praised God more! Your very praising and blessing him would be a re-examination of your title-deeds; and your confidence would grow to full assurance. You would not only know that you had received God's unspeakable gift; but you would also know why you had received it.

Lastly, we are to wish for the spread of such thankfulness. If we are in the right frame of mind, we shall not only ourselves say, "Thanks be unto God for his unspeakable gift," but we shall mean what Paul meant, let everybody else who has received this unspeakable gift praise God for it. Brothers, let us thank God! Sisters, let us praise the Lord! I remember being at a Primitive Methodist meeting, where they sang a hymn beginning,

"Come, soldiers, can't you rise and tell
The wonders of Immanuel?
Yes, bless the Lord, we can rise and tell,
The wonders of Immanuel."

There was a very lively chorus to the hymn, and those Methodists did sing it, too. It ran like this,

"All glory to the Lamb of God,
Who purchased us with atoning blood!
We soon shall pass over Jordan's flood,
And join the saved in glory!"

I learned a lesson in praise, the other morning. I think it was a little after five o'clock, when I was just waking, I heard a blackbird come, and chirp a note or two close by my window. After a minute or two, a thrush also began to sing; and when the two together became fairly awake, they were not satisfied until they had aroused all the chaffinches, and goldfinches, and sparrows. So, they chirped away and sang on until they awoke every bird near my house. What an oratorio of praise the bird musicians gave

forth! They never had to look to their paper to see whether they kept to the score; but each one did keep to the score, and they rose higher and higher and higher in their exultant songs to the God of day, who had chased the night away, and given them light once more in the morning. Now I am the blackbird that would start the praise to-night. There are birds of all sorts here, of different colours, and varying plumages, and able to sing all manner of notes. Let us join together to give the Lord an evening song as those birds gave him a morning song, and let this be the keynote, "Thanks be unto God for his unspeakable gift." Before I dismiss those who are not going to remain for the communion, let us all sing,

"Praise God, from whom all blessings flow,
Praise him, all creatures here below,
Praise him above, ye heavenly host,
Praise Father, Son, and Holy Ghost."