

SALVATION IN THREE TENSES

"Who delivered us from so great a death, and doth deliver: in whom we trust that he will yet deliver us." II Corinthians 1:10.

II Corinthians opens with a most gracious salutation. It bears the message of comfort in a most impressive manner. After his salutation Paul begins with a glowing doxology to God, praising Him for all His deliverances and comfort, and showing how God's comfort comes to His children in order that they may pass it on to others.

As though the Corinthians would not comprehend the meaning of his sudden outburst, Paul descended to explanation. He said, "We would not, brethren, have you ignorant of our trouble which came to us in Asia." What trouble he was alluding to is by no means certain, but it was one in which human strength was tried to its limit, yes, and beyond. Death seemed certain. If they had been asked whether life or death was expected, they would have answered, "Death." Paul, the faithful minister, was assailed by trouble. Why? That he might learn to look away from self; that he might lose all confidence in the flesh and place all his confidence in God. To Paul, God was a being of infinite power, controlling wide areas and governing past, present and future. Without hesitation, he called upon the Corinthians to abandon themselves to complete trust in God.

You will recall that Paul was writing to a company who were suffering for their faith, in whose midst were difficulty, opposition and tribulation. So, he wrote to them, not only as an apostle, heartening, exhorting and encouraging them, but as a fellow-struggler, as one who himself was in the arena of conflict, and a fellow-sufferer, as one who by no means was immune from any of the experiences which were devastating their lives and making faith unspeakably difficult.

In writing to the Corinthians the Apostle Paul suggested a three-fold deliverance which is all-inclusive and complete. "Who delivered us from so great a death, and doth deliver: in whom we trust that he will yet deliver us." The context reveals that the Apostle was writing about a physical deliverance from the hands of his persecutors who constantly sought his life.

Paul mentioned how grateful he was for the prayers of the saints and recognized fully that he was delivered because they prayed. "Ye also helping together by prayers for us, that for the gift (of deliverance) bestowed upon us by the means of many persons thanks may be given by man on our behalf." II Corinthians 1:11. This deliverance is a beautiful type of the three-fold liberation which the Scriptures reveal as belonging to all of the children of God.

Man has three preeminent needs--deliverance from the wrath of God, deliverance from the bondage of indwelling sin and deliverance from a death-burdened body. Those who are Christians have found the first need fully met in the death and resurrection of Christ. The second phase of deliverance belongs to all who will meet the simple conditions laid down in the Bible. The third will come about upon the return of our Lord at which time we shall experience the redemption of the body. Every misery and woe of the human race springs from these three roots--a condemned soul, a sin-blighted life and a death-doomed body. In God's infinite wisdom and grace full deliverance has been provided. This is the gospel which we are privileged to preach.

When we speak of deliverance in the Biblical sense, we have reference to salvation which God has provided for us in Christ. The word "salvation" is used in the Bible to express all that God has done, is doing and will yet do in man's behalf. Salvation is an all-inclusive term, embracing redemption, regeneration, reconciliation, justification, sanctification and glorification. It represents the whole work of God by which He rescues man from eternal ruin and bestows upon him the riches of His infinite and abounding grace. As the Bible says, "Salvation is of the Lord." Jonah 2:9. In no case is it a work of man in behalf of God.

We can never fully appreciate the blessedness of His work in our behalf until we see how extensive is the deliverance He has provided. The issues involved project themselves into the realms of time and also into eternity.

An analysis of this subject "Salvation In Three Tenses," in the light of our text, logically falls into three divisions:

I. The Past--Deliverance From The Penalty Of Sin.

"Who delivered us from so great a death." Paul opens for us here the book of his own history, enabling us to see the basis for some of his beliefs. Paul had historic evidence for his faith. It was built upon a definite and certain spiritual experience. The Lord had definitely and certainly delivered him, so all questions and explaining away could not alter that fact. The truth that lifts religion from the pages of a book to a level of personal possession is the historic evidence of a personal experience. He delivered me. You cannot erase that.

In this case the historic evidence was especially strong, for the experience was not a solitary one. In one sense, every experience must be solitary, but in another sense, it need not be. Paul and Timothy were both delivered, but it was a separate experience. Paul's deliverance was not Timothy's and Timothy's was not Paul's, but the same thing happened to both. In the same way my experience of God's deliverance is backed up by the like testimony of others. No one passed through the experience with me, but many have passed through an experience like I did. Therefore, when I read Paul's words, "Who delivered us from so great a death," I can claim a share in that deliverance. I am not merely reading here the autobiography of another, but the biography of myself, and this historic evidence is not to be disproved.

Every believer has been delivered from the great death which was the result of his sins. Ezekiel wrote, "The soul that sinneth, it shall die." 18:20. The death referred to is that which comes as a result of the transgression and means separation from the life which is in God. Because of this we read that we "were dead in trespasses and sins," and were "without Christ,....having no hope, and without God in the world." Ephesians 2:1, 12. God will never overlook sin and excuse it as though it were not wrong. There is but one thing for Him to do with it and that is to mete out judgment upon it.

For the child of God deliverance from the penalty of sin is an accomplished fact. His sins, having been judged once, will never be called into judgment again. Our Lord made this quite clear when He said, "...and shall not come into condemnation; but is passed from death unto life." John 5:24. Paul wrote, "There is therefore now no condemnation to them which are in Christ Jesus." Romans 8:1. In writing to Timothy Paul must have given him singular comfort, "Who hath saved (delivered) us and called us with an holy calling, not according to our works, but according to his own purpose and grace, which was given us in Christ Jesus before the world began." II Timothy 1:9.

The moment the soul looks to Christ upon the cross and rests entirely upon His great redemptive work, that moment deliverance from the penalty of sins may be claimed. I could not be delivered in this respect any more than I am at this moment, even if I lived to be a thousand years of age. Deliverance from the penalty of sin is not a question of growth, but it is a matter of acceptance with an immediate outcome.

This deliverance of which we speak is available to all who believe. It is based upon a simple and definite act of faith on our part. The Scriptures are clear on this subject even though many people are confused. Thirty-five times in the New Testament faith is declared to be the means of deliverance from the penalty of sin. The word "believe" is used one hundred and fifty times by the Holy Spirit as the sole

condition of deliverance or salvation. "Believe on the Lord Jesus, and thou shalt be saved." Acts 16:31. "For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God: not of works, lest any man should boast." Ephesians 2:8-9.

If a person had to do so much as wiggle his little finger in order to obtain salvation, he would have opportunity to boast about what he did. God will not have any boasting save in the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ and His finished work. It is not believe and make restitution; it is not believe and get baptized; it is not believe and do better; it is not believe and hold out faithful to the end. Rather, it is by faith. Salvation is by grace through faith plus nothing. There is no work which man can do which will be acceptable to the Saviour in payment for His salvation. God does not hesitate to insult man by rejecting human works. If man were to live a million years and do his best for God during all of that time, he could not serve well enough to merit one moment in heaven.

Deliverance from the guilt and penalty of our sins belongs to every soul through a simple act of faith. Dr. A. T. Pierson said, "He who knows enough to throw away a worthless bauble and reach out and take instead a priceless treasure, knows enough to give up his own hopeless efforts and accept the finished work of Christ." Saving faith sees deliverance in the Lord's hand and says, "I will receive it."

II. The Present--Deliverance From The Power Of Sin.

"And doth deliver." Here Paul implies something like this: "Don't think that I put my trust in a past experience. It has its place, but I can bring that experience up to the present." The same power was at work. Paul was confident that the difficulty confronting him would be overcome as certainly as his past trouble.

In school we were taught that the perfect tense expressed an event completed in the past yet coming up to the present. That is not a bad definition of a genuine Christian experience. What real value would past deliverance be to me if that were all? It is the present that means so much. His power is ever present, undiminished, unabated, always at our command.

Though saved from the penalty of his sins and safe within the fold, the Christian still has a disposition to sin and to do those things which are contrary to the will of God. Christians sin by yielding to the lusts of the flesh which is the old carnal nature they have possessed since birth. There has never been a Christian who has gone through an experience by which he has lost his carnal nature. There is no experience through which he can pass in this life by which his Adamic nature is eradicated. Many have imagined this, but as John wrote, "We deceive ourselves, but no one else."

God's Word teaches how the soul may enjoy daily deliverance from the dominating, down-dragging power of indwelling sin. If we have not experienced this victory, it is because we have failed to appropriate the provision which God has made for us.

Our salvation is not merely a matter of memory. It is a present experience. He does deliver us. Today never seems as wonderful as yesterday, nor so luring and full of hope as does yesterday. There is a strange tendency in all of us to look beyond or ahead for real inspiration. Today lacks romance in the rigid reality of life. But, God doth deliver us. That is exactly up to the last minute--religion's immediate help. God is still with His people.

III. The Future--Deliverance From The Presence Of Sin.

"In whom we trust that he will yet deliver us." Thus Paul faced the future unafraid. That is not always easy to do. In youth, of course, the future is a land of golden

dreams. It beckons; it haunts; it is beyond the horizon yonder that the best lies. By and by, the future is more apt by far to take than to give. We must expect the fading of the summer glories, dwindling powers, narrowing circles, the inexorable dulling of life into a sober thing, and to face death within a few more years at the most.

If God is pleased to give us a little forecast of this deliverance by healing the body of its ailment, we can but praise His Name, but He has promised that the hour is coming when the body is to be fully redeemed and delivered from every ailment including physical death. All through the Scriptures God promises to meet death with a hope of resurrection and we look forward to the moment when this will become a glorious reality.

When Jesus comes, the power of the grave will be broken, and the bodies of all believers will be raised to incorruptibility. For those Christians who have not tasted physical death, mortality will give way to immortality and together all of us will be changed into His glorious image. This is what is meant by a future deliverance.

"Delivered," "doth deliver," "will yet deliver." What God was, and is, He will be. Why should He change? Has God ever failed you in the past? No! Is He overlooking you today? No! The same God Who has been and Who is sufficient will be with you all the way. Memory, experience and hope confirm our salvation.

As a child of God you do not need to be afraid of life. Whether you look behind you, or before you, there is a God Who never fails, who does exceeding abundantly above all we can think or ask. In this three-fold plan of God we see the glorious truth of full deliverance.

May the Lord help us to be faithful in proclaiming His blessed work of atonement-- "Who hath delivered;" His blessed work of advocacy-- "Who doth deliver," and His blessed work at the advent-- "Who will yet deliver." He hath saved us, He is saving us, and He will save us.