

THE WORD THAT NEVER COMES BACK

"For he saith, I have heard thee in a time accepted, and in the day of salvation have I succoured thee: behold, now is the accepted time; behold, now is the day of salvation." II Corinthians 6:2.

Now is the word that never comes back. It is the one precious, invaluable portion of time that belongs to you and me, because it's the only portion of time about which we can be sure and in which we know we can act. We cannot do anything with the past. For practical purposes, the only time in which we can do something is the present. And the present may be the only time we shall ever have. That is why we ought to perform our duties while we have an opportunity. I like the suggestion of a poet, whose name is unknown to me, as expressed in the lines: ---

"If with pleasure you are viewing
Any work a man is doing;
If you like him or you love him, tell him now.
Don't withhold your approbation
Till the parson makes oration
And he lies with snowy lilies o'er his brow.

For no matter how you shout it,
He won't really care about it;
He won't know how many tear-drops you have shed.
If you think some praise is due him,
Now's the time to slip it to him,
For he cannot read his tombstone when he's dead.

More than fame and more than money
Is a comment kind and sunny,
And the hearty, warm approval of a friend;
For it gives to life a savor,
And it makes you stronger, braver,
And it gives you heart and spirit to the end.

If he earns your praise, bestow it,
If you like him, let him know it.
Let the words of true encouragement be said;
Do not wait till life is over,
And he's underneath the clover,
For he cannot read his tombstone when he's dead."

When we think for a moment we see what an influence a single day may have upon our characters or upon our fortunes. When we recall our own lives, we become aware of the importance of certain particular days. We can trace a whole province of life back to some day distant now, but not forgotten. Our circumstances as they are to-day may be derived from the evidence of one or two days. For example, a boy leaves school and is ready to begin his work in the world. He hears of a vacancy, applies, succeeds, and there one-half of his life was determined on one day. It was not determined how high he would rise, but there and then it was decided by what ladder he would rise. A day was all that was needed to give his whole future its direction. What we are today, so far as employment, social position, etc., are concerned, sprang from one or two great days, just as the course of a river is determined by whether the fountain-head is on one side of a mountain range or on the other.

Life seems to run along with indifferent regularity, and apparently one hour is just the same as another, no more and no less important. But it only appears so, for in those stretches of time there are hours or moments which are charged with the solemnity of choice and decision. What is done in that period of time, what is chosen or rejected, what is allowed or refused, what is said or not said, will give complexion to the life ever after. While this truth is sufficiently interesting and impressive in the ordinary affairs of life, it becomes even more impressive when we consider it in the experience of a human soul. In our text, Paul appeals to the Corinthians to make the right use of the hour of spiritual opportunity, the hour when God draws near to the soul and calls it to absolute obedience unto Himself. Paul understood full well that there was this sad and strange tendency in men, namely, that they are ever disposed to shift into the future the most serious duties of life. In the time of disease they will not send for the doctor until they absolutely must. The majority put off making their wills until their ability to make them is gone. The future always seems to be richer and better than the present; though, when that future is reached, this hope is seldom realized.

A day of salvation for lost sinners! There is something musical and delightful in the very sound of the word, Salvation. What a joy it is to listen to Heaven's declaration of deliverance from the condemnation and the power of sin now, and from the consequences of sin hereafter. The simple announcing of such a salvation from God should turn the sighs and complaints of earth into songs of joy and gratitude. It should banish all murmuring against God and His government, all unbelief and distrust of His love, all clinging of the heart's affections to vile and perishable objects and transform lost sinners into loving and obedient sons and daughters of God.

One might ask what salvation is. Some would say, "Salvation is getting to heaven when we die." Salvation is vastly more than that. It is the obtaining of meetness for heaven while we live. Here is one account of it, "Giving thanks unto the Father, who hath made us meet to be partakers of the inheritance of the saints in light: who hath delivered us from the power of darkness, and hath translated us into the kingdom of His dear son: in whom we have redemption through His blood, even the forgiveness of sins." Salvation, then, is the getting out of sins; the escape from the kingdom of darkness, and the shaking off and clearing out of whatever belongs to it. Salvation is being made a new creature in Christ Jesus. It is being reconciled to God by Jesus Christ, being made the righteousness of God in Him.

I. Salvation Is Greatly Needed.

It is not necessary for one to be surrounded with friends, to enjoy good health, or to have great riches, but it is absolutely necessary to be saved or one is lost for ever.

II. Salvation Is Graciously Provided.

The salvation which God has so graciously provided for the lost is in Christ. It is obtained through repentance and faith, results in present joy and in useful living, and guarantees an eternal home in heaven. This salvation has certain outstanding characteristics: --

1. It is spiritual.

It saves the soul from sin and raises man to the enjoyment of God.

2. It is great.

It is as great as the requirements of Divine justice. It is also as great as the misery of man. It was the great God who planned it, it had a great Saviour to per-

fect it, it has a great Spirit who applies it, and a great multitude will receive it and enjoy it.

3. It is appropriate.

This salvation is exactly what we need. It required infinite wisdom to contrive it, infinite merit to procure it, and infinite grace applies it to the soul. It is wonderfully adapted to our wants and needs as lost sinners. For our guilt it brings pardon, for our guilty dread of God it brings reconciliation, for our love of sin it brings the regeneration of the Holy Spirit, for our pollution it provides a fountain opened for sin and uncleanness, and for our restless misery it offers the peace of God and a joy unspeakable and full of glory.

4. It is free.

It is without money and without price. It is favor shown freely to the undeserving. It is God's unspeakable gift, which all may receive, but upon which none had any claim; and yet it is a strange feature of our depravity that this very freeness is the chief reason why men reject it. The great controversy with God has been to do something to merit eternal life. The greatest and most prominent feature of all religions, except Christianity, is that they all bring a price in their hands with which to buy salvation. But, salvation is not to be obtained in that way.

5. It is present.

It is not a salvation from a future hell only, but from the power and condemnation of sin now. To the soul that trusts in Jesus its language is, "I have blotted out as a thick cloud thy transgressions." "Thy sins, which are many, are all forgiven." The surse of condemnation is at once lifted from the soul, the dark cloud of wrath rolls away, and the clear sunshine of God's love and favor beams upon the soul. Christ's salvation also delivers from the love of sin, and plants a new principle of life in the soul.

6. It is perfect.

There is no deficiency in it. There is no sin so deep and terrible but what the blood of Jesus Christ can wash it out. Oh, what a glorious passage is this: "Where sin abounded, grace did much more abound!" This is the very salvation that men need, and such as none but a God of infinite love and perfect wisdom could have devised.

7. It is eternal.

"The Lord will give grace and glory." Psalm 84:11. "My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me: And I give unto them eternal life; and they shall never perish, neither shall any man pluck them out of my hand." John 10:27-28. Christ's salvation is everlasting.

III. Salvation Is Frequently Neglected.

1. Excuses for neglecting it.

- (1) Temporal matters must be attended to first.
- (2) There is time enough yet.
- (3) It will be easier to attend to later.

2. Such neglect is sinful.

- (1) What an insult to God!
- (2) What a return for the love and sacrifice of Christ!
- (3) What a pernicious example!
- (4) What an injustice to ourselves.

3. Such neglect is perilous.

- (1) Life may suddenly be cut short.
Death does not send a notice of his approach, but, like a thief in the night, he comes to the young and the old alike.
- (2) Serious illness, just prior to death, may render attention to spiritual matters practically impossible.
Delaying sinners often look forward to a death-bed as a time when they will have opportunity enough to prepare for eternity. This is a delusion of Satan. A death-bed is not a fit place for settling the great concerns of the soul. Sometimes, when death is not sudden, reason is gone, and the victim lies in unconsciousness, or in a muttering delirium. But even where this is not the case there is pain, depression, etc., that unfits the mind for anything requiring concentration and clearness of thought.
- (3) The heart may be fatally hardened.
- (4) The desire for salvation may pass away.
- (5) The Spirit of God may cease to strive with you.
When the day of grace is neglected, the night of doom is certain to follow.

IV. Salvation Should Be Accepted Promptly.

1. Nothing worthwhile is to be gained by delay.

- (1) God's terms of salvation will never change.
- (2) Your sins will become more numerous. If you delay, you will not have fewer sins to repent of and obtain pardon for, but more.
- (3) Delay will increase your difficulties.
It will never be easier for you to turn to God. Some of you have been delaying this matter for years already, in fact, all too many. But, you will never be more able to come to Christ by delay. You have all the powers now that you ever will have -- an understanding to hear God speak, a conscience to feel His mighty claims upon you, the Holy Spirit to convict you of sin, and the Bible to present you with the simple plan of salvation. Delay can never make you more willing to come to Christ. You may delude yourself with the idea that the circumstances with which you are now surrounded are unfavorable, and that by delay you may obtain improvement in this respect; but this is a deception of the devil. Satan's great object is to persuade you that the time has never quite come -- that you are not yet quite ready to attend to the affairs of your soul; and, if you thus listen to his counsel, you never will be ready. He will always have a tomorrow with which to beguile you on to eternal death.

There can never be more powerful motives urged upon you than you have now. You are now urged by the most powerful motives to come to Christ -- motives drawn from heaven, earth, and hell. These motives will not become stronger by delay. Heaven is a glorious, hell as awful, death and eternity as solemn, the promises of God as precious, and the love of the Lord Jesus Christ as tender and melting as they ever will be. If these great realities do not affect you now,

what reason have you to expect that they ever will affect you? While you have been delaying, thousands have been saved under the very means you have been rejecting. You, too, might have been saved, but "ye would not."

(4) Hardness of heart is very undesirable.

You are less inclined to attend to spiritual things now than previously. The matter of attending to the salvation of your soul appears to you at this moment encompassed with more difficulties than it ever did before. You have delayed coming to Christ until your conscience is seared, and your heart is hardened. You can now sit calm and indifferent under sermons that at one time would have made you tremble. This hardening process is continually going on, and every day's delay increases the probability that you will never be saved at all. "He, that being often reprov'd hardeneth his neck, shall suddenly be destroyed, and that without remedy." Proverbs 29:1.

2. You will lose much by delay.

(1) True happiness in the present.

By delay you are losing the present enjoyments which the Gospel of Christ imparts. The sinner has the conception that the service of Christ is one of gloom, and that to become a Christian is to lose all the pleasures in the present in the hope of enjoying the blessedness of the future. But where has he obtained this idea? Not from the Bible, for it speaks of "the peace of God which passeth all understanding," "the joy unspeakable and full of glory," of the hallowed joys of fellowship with Him, of the calm delight of freedom from the fear of death, and of the gladness of the hope of everlasting life. Neither has he obtained this idea from true Christians, for they all bear emphatic testimony to the blessedness of the hope in Christ. The idea has been propagated by those who know nothing personally or experimentally about Christianity, and whose statements concerning it are not worthy of any more attention than would be the remarks of a blind man on the subject of colors, or of a deaf man on the harmony of sounds. By delay you have lost years of true happiness.

(2) Genuine usefulness in the future.

It is wonderful what an amount of good one truly saved person, filled and fired with the love of Christ, can do in a few years. Let him be truly dedicated to the Lord, filled with a holy zeal, and directed by a single aim to glorify God, and though possessed of the most moderate talents and common advantages he cannot fail to be very useful. In the conversion of souls, in the comforting of saints, and in the promotion of all the best interest of humanity, he will be honored in performing works of imperishable glory.

Our souls have an aching void -- a restless, unsatisfied longing, which this salvation only can fill and satisfy. Accept it now as freely offered, and it will be the joy of your life, your boast in time, your blessing through eternity! It will prove the charm of your youth, the strength of your vigorous years, the glory of your old age, your health in sickness, and your life in death. If you are still in your sins, there is no reason why you should go on for one more day, for one more hour, not even for one more minute, refusing the salvation the Lord is offering, or fearing to appropriate it lest it might not yet be God's time to save. This is God's moment. "Now is the accepted time; behold, now is the day of salvation." The moment you are ready to turn to God as a poor, lost, needy sinner, that moment He is ready to receive and to save you, and to grant you His forgiveness and to make you His child.