

GOD'S UNSPEAKABLE GIFT

"Thanks be unto God for His unspeakable gift." II Corinthians 9:15.

There is much in our land to arrest the attention, excite the interest and admiration, and to swell with pride the heart of every citizen -- its great extent from ocean to ocean, its vast and varied productions, its diversified scenery, which is beautiful, attractive, grand, picturesque, and sublime as seen in its widespread, waving forests, its boundless flower-decked prairies, its rolling rivers, rushing cataracts, stupendous waterfalls and numerous lakes, its snow-capped, cloud-piercing mountains, its great institutions, and its wonderful progress in all the elements of national greatness.

We are not grateful enough for the blessings and opportunities we have. How keenly we recognize that fact on Thanksgiving Day. Thanksgiving Day brings to our attention the fact that we are so thoughtless and thankless during the other days of the year. The words "think" and "thank" are from the same root. And the connection still remains -- the thankless person is thoughtless, and the thoughtful person is thankful. An unthankful person is an unthinking person. As character is the fruit of gratitude, thoughtfulness is the soil in which gratitude flourishes. Gratitude is one of the most beautiful and fragrant flowers that grows and blooms in the soil of the human soul. It is good mathematics to become efficient in the high and holy art of counting our blessings. You can always judge one's refinement by his sense of gratitude. And then one cannot experience gratitude without expressing it.

I know it is customary on occasions like this for the speaker to dwell upon our national achievements and our material prosperity; but today I want to lift your thoughts, if I can, up to the one supreme reason for thanksgiving -- God's unspeakable gift to us in Christ Jesus. Everything that is good comes from God. And with Him there is no variableness. He was always good and will always be that way. It is an obligation upon us to recognize the good which comes to us from His bountiful hands. Our eyes should be wide open to see these gifts in their multitude, in their magnitude, and in the preciousness of their character. Having recognized this goodness of God, we should be very prompt to express the gratitude of our hearts therefore, as beneficiaries of His bounty, as creatures dependent upon His will, as deriving the preservation of our lives from Him.

I. The Giver.

Who is the Giver? God. He was a God unworshipped, unloved, unserved, grievously sinned against, and defied in the very act of giving. God is a giver; He is not selling to people. All of the great blessings that we enjoy, we get freely from God. We cannot buy them. You cannot buy the fresh air that you breathe; you cannot buy the water from the rippling brook.

II. The Gift.

Paul had just been urging upon his readers the great duty of Christian liberality. While thus employed, he came naturally to think of the insignificant and trivial character of all human giving when contrasted with the marvelous, boundless grace of God in giving the Son of His love to be our Saviour; and thus he exclaimed with all his heart and soul: "Thanks be unto God for His unspeakable gift." When Paul referred to this unspeakable gift there was in his mind that One Who came from heaven to earth in order that the children of earth might find their way to their home in heaven.

1. It was a gift.

- (1) A free gift. Nothing was given in exchange. Men had nothing to give.
- (2) A voluntary gift. Prompted by Divine compassion and love.
- (3) An undeserved gift. Men deserved condemnation, not Christ.
- (4) A continuous gift. Christ is not ours merely for a time. He is ours forever and ever. He is the saint's everlasting inheritance.

2. It was an unspeakable gift.

- (1) Unspeakably great.

Its greatness surpasses all human expression.

- (2) Unspeakably free.

After all, it is the freeness of this gift that makes it so worthy of God to bestow, and so appropriate for us to accept.

- (3) Unspeakably valuable.

God gave His only-begotten and well-beloved Son for us as an atoning sacrifice to eternal justice, and to us, as our personal Saviour and Lord. He gave Him to become united to our humanity, to become burdened with our transgressions, to make expiation for our guilt, and to deliver us from our sins and doom.

The deity and dignity of Christ's personality, the perfection of His humanity, the glory of His character, the power of His atoning and intercessory work, and the riches of His grace and love are of unutterable and inestimable value.

Through Christ He delivers us from legal condemnation and from bondage to Satan, the world and the flesh. Through Christ He bestows upon us divine sonship, likeness, heirship, holiness, comfort and love, with all the riches of His grace here and of His glory hereafter.

- (4) Unspeakably necessary.

We were lost, and none but Christ could find us; dead, and none but Christ could raise us; afar off, and none but Christ could bring us in; guilty, and none but Christ could procure for us a pardon. So far as we know, man is the only creature that is dissatisfied with his lot. "Satisfied" is the lost chord in our human music, and because of its absence all our songs are in a minor key. Not only is man everywhere conscious of this lack, but he is also absolutely unable to supply the need. Oh, the depth of human hunger! Hunger for peace, hunger for rest, hunger for satisfaction; but Christ alone can meet that need. I do not mean to say that every question will be answered at once and every need immediately supplied, but I do say that when Christ is received into the life we can be satisfied to have our questions unanswered and our desires unsupplied.

- (5) Unspeakably efficacious.

A gift may be exceedingly valuable in itself -- it may have been bestowed by great kindness, but, somehow or other, it may fail of answering the end intended. But this gift fully meets our needs. How fully we do not know as yet, for now we see through a glass darkly. Our Redeemer not only supplies our known wants, but the vast catalogue of needs as yet unknown to us. Through Him we are pardoned, cleansed, adopted, sanctified, and through Him we shall be brought into the great home above.

"Unspeakable" literally means, "Not yet fully expounded." "Thanks be unto God for His not yet fully expounded gift." The subject before us presents to the gaze of our souls an ocean of divine love and mercy, without bottom and without shore; an ocean, the immensity, the majesty, and the mystery of which infinitely transcends those of all earthly seas, and the contemplation of which should inspire every human soul with adoring gratitude and overpowering awe. "Not yet fully expounded gift" is very suggestive; it tells me that some day I will understand this gift, though as yet I cannot fully do so. And so, as long as you and I are down here, the gift of God will never be fully expounded. It will take all eternity to get to the depth of it.

"There are depths of love that I cannot know

Till I cross the narrow sea;

There are heights of joy that I may not reach,

Till I rest in peace with Thee."

But what is this gift? The Lord Jesus Christ Himself. He, in all His beauty and glory, has never been fully expounded. Millions of sermons have been preached about Him; hundreds of thousands of hymns have been written to celebrate His blessedness and preciousness, but no one has told the story in full. In part the story is somewhat as follows: --

Nineteen centuries ago Mary, a virgin, went down into that mysterious land of motherhood in Bethlehem's barn and came back pale, and faint, holding in her arms the infant Jesus. He was born as nobody else was ever born. No one else was ever heralded, honored or hated at his birth as was Jesus. He lived in poverty and was reared in obscurity. He never travelled extensively. Only once did He cross the boundary of the country in which He lived and that was during His exile in childhood. He worked in a carpenter shop until He was thirty, and then for three years He was an itinerant teacher and preacher.

He lived here a divine life along with the human life. In the Gospels we have a partial record of His earthly life. When we read this charming record, we wish that we could have lived when He was here in the flesh. He possessed neither wealth nor political influence. His relatives were inconspicuous, uninfluential, and had neither training nor education. In infancy He startled a king; in childhood He puzzled the doctors; in manhood He ruled the course of nature, walked upon billows as if pavements, and hushed the sea to sleep.

In His life He became our example. He was not a pattern to be exactly reproduced, but an example to inspire us and draw us up to the very highest that is within us. As a man He surpassed all others that He ever met. As a teacher, it was said of Him that, "Never man spake like this man." Always and everywhere He was talking about big things -- God, man, sin, salvation, righteousness, truth, justice, love, life now, and life hereafter. It would have been wonderful to have listened to the greatest thinker of the ages. He never expressed an opinion, guessed, surmised, halted, hesitated, or submitted anything for consideration with the hope that people would reach the right conclusion. (His teaching was original, revolutionizing, and unarguable. For boldness of conception, grandeur of character, sublimity of purpose, and originality of mind, His teaching claims the sovereignty of the world.) Take any of His words and it will be manifest that He spoke the first and last word upon every subject which He discussed.

As a miracle worker He far excelled them all. Wherever He went, He had only to speak and the waves obeyed Him, the storms were quieted at His command, demons fled from the afflicted people, loaves and fishes were multiplied to feed the hungry thousands, and even death fled like a frightened spaniel when it heard the command of Jesus. To take Him out of history is like taking the matter out of physics, the heat out of fire, the fragrance out of flowers, and the numbers out of mathematics. The searchlight of criticism has been focused upon Him, both by His friends and His foes through these nineteen centuries, and yet it has failed to find in Him one suggestion of sin, one ill-advised word, or one selfish deed. He is the Universal Man. He was born in the first century, yet He belongs to all the centuries. He was born a Jew, yet He belongs to all races. He was born in Bethlehem, yet He belongs to all countries. Let any man from any country come penitently to Him and put his trust in Him, and he will go his way thrilled with the consciousness that Christ has forgiven his sins, and is helping him to bear the burdens of life.

"Forever God, forever man,
My Jesus shall endure;
And fixed on Him my hope remains,
Eternally secure."

While still a young man, the tide of popular opinion turned against Him. His friends ran away. One of them denied Him. He was turned over to His enemies. He went through the mockery of a trial. At nine o'clock one morning He was nailed to a cross. There and then the history of human guilt culminated, the purposes of divine love became intelligible, the mysteries of prophecy were unravelled, the majesty of the law was vindicated, and the great problem of human redemption was solved. There Satan's armour was removed, the fire of the law extinguished, the penal claims of God against us exhausted, every righteous judgment of God perfectly met, our condemnation lifted, our death sentence revoked, the door of heaven opened, the fountain of salvation unsealed, and the darkness of eternity irradiated. "Christ died for our sins."

Blessed Joseph and Nicodemus removed His body from the cross and prepared it for burial and laid it in the tomb. All night long Friday night, all day long Saturday, and till early on Sunday morning, His body was in the tomb. Early Sunday morning, angel of Lord came down, soldiers guarding tomb fell like dead men, seal was broken, stone rolled away, and Jesus arose, laid grave clothes aside, walked out of tomb a living Christ, Lord and King. He resumed His power, recovered His challenged rights, regained His waning influence, and reasserted His sacred grandeur. For forty days He was here among men. Then He went back to the Father where He is now making intercession for us. He has promised that He will come back to this earth. While looking and waiting for His return should live pure, clean, faithful and righteous lives.

It is encouraging to recall that He never marshalled an army, nor drafted a soldier, nor fired a gun, and yet no leader ever had more volunteers who have, under His orders, made more rebels stack arms and surrender without a shot being fired. The names of the past proud statesmen of Greece and Rome have come and gone; but the name of this Man abounds more and more. Though time has spread nineteen hundred years between the people of this generation and the scene of His crucifixion yet He still lives. Herod could not kill Him, Satan could not seduce Him, death could not destroy Him, and the grave could not hold Him. Nineteen wide centuries have come and gone, and today He is the centerpiece of the human race and the Leader of the column of progress. I am far within the mark when I say that all the armies that ever marched, and all the navies that ever were built, and all the parliaments that ever sat, and all the kings that ever reigned, put together, have not affected the life of man upon this earth as powerfully as has that One Solitary Life. He stands forth upon the highest pinnacle of heavenly glory, proclaimed of God, acknowledged by angels, adored by saints, and feared by demons, as the living, personal Christ, our Lord and Saviour. Let us, therefore, thank Him with the gratitude of our hearts, with the praises of our lips, and by the obedience of our lives. May we say with Isaac Watts, "WHEN I SURVEY THE WONDEROUS CROSS."