

HOW CHRIST SAVES

Titus 3:3-8

All New Testament writers were supremely concerned about one matter, the relationship of the soul to God. They recognized the principle of the teaching of Christ, that the first and great commandment concerned our relationship to God. He said, "Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy strength, and with all thy mind: and thy neighbor as thyself."

In our text, Paul states in simple language how Christ saves. Over and over again throughout the New Testament that theme is discussed, and we are told how the sinner may come into right relationship to God.

Speaking through Paul, the human author, the Holy Spirit sets before us the need of salvation. There would not be any use of speaking of salvation or of urging people to be saved if they did not need it. Paul began by pointing out how there was a time in their unregenerate state when he and Titus were foolish, disobedient and deceived, and were living after the flesh so that they hated one another: Paul, the Jew, hated the Gentiles, and Titus, the Gentile, hated the Jews. What was true of these two remarkable Christian characters before their conversion is true of multitudes out of Christ. "For we ourselves also were sometimes foolish, disobedient, deceived, serving divers lusts and pleasures, living in malice and envy, hateful, and hating one another" (Titus 3:3).

We were foolish. We thought we knew better than God, for our foolish hearts were darkened, and we imagined ourselves to be better judges of what was good for us than did the Lord. We refused heavenly warnings because we thought that sin was pleasant and profitable. We proved our foolishness by our thoughts, desires, words, and deeds. We were deceived in our ideas of happiness, hoping to find it where it did not exist. We were once the slaves of desires, longings, ambitions, and pleasures which were wrong. We harbored anger against those who had done us evil, and we lived in envy of those who appeared to have more good than we had ourselves.

The Holy Spirit declared the depraved condition of all men out of Christ. It is not a pleasant picture of human nature, but it is a true one. It leaves no room for the "divine spark" theory which is the basis of so much false teaching extant at this hour. There are those in and of the world who declare that we are born with God in us, but the Holy Spirit points out that we are born with the devil in us. Total depravity is the verdict of the Word relative to human nature. This was true of human nature in Paul's time and in our day. Human nature has not changed. With all of our boasted civilization and culture, corruption abounds in the heart of man and he stands in need of salvation. Because man is a sinner, he needs a Saviour and the salvation which He provides. He may need food, clothes, home, money and friends, but he has no need comparable to that of a Saviour from sin. Salvation is the most glorious fact and reality in the world.

We are grateful for the divine interposition which made salvation available. This salvation had its origin in God. It arose in His goodness. This is the meaning of the term which is translated "kindness" in the English version. It was an expression of the divine philanthropy. The word "love" in this passage is quite literally "philanthropy." It gives us a beautiful picture of the divine heart in its attitude toward mankind. Jonah cried, "Salvation is of the Lord" (Jonah 2:9). This truth seems to be hard for people to grasp. They imagine that salvation is at least partly of man, and that, if he lives up to the golden rule or to some commendable principles, he will be saved in the end. But, salvation is not of man; it is of the Lord. Our text says emphatically, "He saved us." Into this simple statement is crowded the whole scheme of divine redemption. We need to let the emphasis fall where it belongs,

upon the pronoun "He." "He" it was who saved us and not we ourselves. Such teaching as this is utterly contrary to the thinking of the natural man. It is his natural bent to imagine that there is something he can do which will merit God's salvation. No matter what man thinks or how he feels about it, the entire Bible backs up the statement of the prophet that "salvation is of the Lord."

How does Christ save? This text tells us plainly: "Not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to his mercy he saved us." Mercy is pity to the needy, and here again we have a revelation of God's attitude to man. He knows our need, and in mercy pities us with a divine compassion and stoops to our aid.

Salvation is based, not upon human merit, but upon divine mercy. We are not saved because we deserve to be saved, but because there is forgiveness with Him, because of the truth,

"Plenteous grace with Thee is found,
Grace to cover all my sins."

The mercy of God is limitless and boundless. Its greatness is beyond the powers of human utterance. If God did not show mercy toward us, what hope would there be for any of us? No man can be saved apart from the mercy of God. In His terrible sinfulness and rebellion against God man deserves to be stricken down and cast into hell, "but according to his mercy he saved us."

Our Lord Jesus Christ is not a merchant who sells salvation for a price. People are busy trying to accumulate a store of merit wherewith to purchase the favor of God. That is the philosophy of nearly every heathen religion, man trying to make himself worthy in God's sight, hoping to obtain salvation by works of righteousness which he may do. And yet, this text declares that such is beyond the realm of possibility. Nobody can obtain salvation on the ground of human merit.

What if, from this hour, we were able to refrain from all manner of wrongdoing, not only in word and deed, but in thought? What if it were possible, on the other side, to do that which the moral law requires, and to fail in no particular in the discharge of our whole duty? What if it were possible for us from this hour to write the record of a perfect day in God's book for every day that we shall live from now until He shall call us hence? What of the deficit of the past? What of the wrongdoing of yesterday? It can never balance the books of the past. We can never accumulate a surplus of merit over and above the obligations of today to pay on the deficits of our yesterdays.

A woman entered a little grocery and held a whispered conversation with the grocer, and in a few minutes went out, evidently very much displeased. A bystander remarked, "Apparently you did not please your visitor." "No," he said, "she was an old customer, too; and I am sorry to have to deny her request. But she came to me asking for credit, and I asked her, 'Is your husband out of work?' and she said, 'No.'" He knew that she worked also, and he said, "Are you out of work?" and she said, "No." "Then the two of you together are working full time and are producing the maximum of your earning power?" She said, "Yes." Then he said, "My good woman, if you cannot pay your way day by day when you are earning all that you have any hope of earning, what possibility would there be of your overtaking your old scores?" And he added, "I advised her to endeavor to live within her income."

Now, my friends, if you and I were able from this moment to discharge our utmost obligation to God; never to fail in a single particular from now until the day of our death, our yesterdays are a record of debts unpaid, duties undone, sins innumerable committed, all written down in God's book. How is it possible that any one of us should ever be able to purchase salvation by works of righteousness which we may do? Christ is not a merchant

who sells, but He is an infinitely wealthy King who gives.

A little girl was passing a beautiful garden one day. She was poor, but she was very fond of flowers, and through the railing she saw a young lady moving among the flowers. She conceived the idea that she would like to have some of those beautiful flowers, but she only had a few pennies. She entered the garden and made her way to the young lady among the roses. Holding out her few pennies, she asked, "Would you sell me some flowers?" The young lady said, "These are my father's flowers and he grows them for his own delight, and for the satisfaction of his family, but he will not sell any." The little girl's countenance fell. She said, "I am so sorry." The lady said, "He does not sell his flowers, but I know that he would be glad to give you some"; and she cut the finest roses she could find and filled the hands of that longing girl.

So, we come to the Lord of all the universe, Whose treasures are inexhaustible; and we bring our little pennies, or the filthy rags of our own righteousness, the poor effort of our hands; and we say, "Please give me salvation. I have prayed, and I have repented; I have read my Bible; I have tried to reform my life; I have corrected as many habits as I could; I have tried to cleanse my heart within and my life without; and now I come with these works of righteousness. Please give me salvation." And the Lord says, "My Father never sells, but He gives away." "Not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to His mercy He saved us.

That is to say, salvation is provided for the impotent, for those who cannot work; it is provided for the bankrupt, for those who have nothing to pay; it is provided for those who are absolutely friendless, for those who have no one to recommend their cause. The divine scheme of redemption is based upon pity, mercy and grace. The means of salvation is the grace of God as manifested by His mercy. The mercy of God is limitless. The thought of its greatness and boundlessness well-nigh paralyzes my powers of utterance. If God did not show mercy toward us, what hope would there be for any of us? Nobody can be saved apart from the mercy of God.

There is nothing more difficult than to get people to accept mercy. How strange it is that human pride is too often a stumbling block. Various religious systems are based upon the desire to obtain salvation without any acknowledgment of moral and spiritual bankruptcy. It is not difficult to get a man to adopt a religion that promises salvation without the surrender of his pride, without the surrender of his will, without an acknowledgment that he is utterly, hopelessly bankrupt before God. But, the salvation that is in Christ is based upon the assumption that men have nothing to pay. It is for paupers, it is for sinners; no one else has any chance. If you think that you have enough money to pay your way, you will discover by and by that "they that trust in their wealth, and boast themselves in the multitude of their riches; none of them can by any means redeem his brother, nor give to God a ransom for him." That is the basis of salvation, divine mercy and not human merit.

Salvation is entirely unmerited. All through the ages mankind has shown in various ways its need of and longing for salvation and its earnest desire to be right with God, and yet it is a curious and striking fact that side by side with these intense desires, man has ever sought to accomplish this end by his own unaided efforts. The impossibility of salvation by works is evident to intelligent people when they remember what sin has done for man in affecting every part of his moral being and preventing him from doing that which is right in the sight of God. If man is to be saved, it must be entirely outside his own merits or deservings and quite apart from any works of his own. Religiously, mankind is divided into two classes. One class endeavors to win God's favor by work or merit, saying "Something in my hand I bring." The other class, utterly distrustful of self and human merit, says in penitent trust,

"Nothing in my hand I bring,
Simply to Thy cross I cling."

Salvation consists, not in reformation, but in regeneration. The Holy Spirit is the divine agent in our salvation. "He saved us by the washing of regeneration and renewing of the Holy Ghost." After we are regenerated, He continues to renew our thoughts, feelings, desires and acts. Regeneration can never come twice to any person, but the renewal of the Holy Spirit is repeated many times.

God's salvation is poured out upon us in great abundance, meeting every conceivable need and all possible circumstances in every part of the world. There is salvation from the ignorance of sin through the Divine knowledge, salvation from the guilt of sin through the Divine righteousness, salvation from the bondage of sin through the Divine redemption, salvation from the defilement of sin through the Divine holiness, salvation from the weakness of sin through the Divine power, salvation from the degradation of sin through the Divine glory, salvation from the enmity of sin through the Divine fellowship, and, in the life to come, salvation from the very presence of sin as the crown and culmination of God's marvelous provision.

When we become the possessors of this great salvation of the Lord, what does it do for us in personal experience?

1. It gives us a new position.

"Being justified by His grace." How wonderful to be restored to that position which was lost through sin! It implies the removal of the guilt of sin, of the condemnation of sin and of the separation caused by sin.

2. It gives us a new privilege.

"That being justified by His grace, we should be made heirs." What a glorious privilege is this, to be heirs already enjoying in part the wealth of God's grace and the heritage of His mercy and favor!

3. It gives us a new possession.

"Eternal life." This eternal life is even now the possession of all the children of God. "He that heareth my word, and believeth on him that sent me, hath everlasting life, and shall not come into condemnation; but is passed from death unto life" (John 5:24).

What glorious riches belong to every saved soul! He is made an heir of God and a joint-heir with Christ. He possesses eternal life.

It would be impossible for anyone to come into possession of such riches through efforts of his own. They are a gift from God and may be claimed by faith. God will not force them upon anyone, but offers them to such as see their need and their poverty-stricken condition, and receives them as a gift from Himself, fully paid for by the redemptive work of Christ upon the cross. Salvation is conditioned upon faith. We are to believe on the Lord Jesus Christ and receive eternal life. Believing on Christ means leaning wholly, only and always on Him. Depend on the precious blood of Christ for the cleansing of sin; depend on the power of the Holy Spirit to renew your mind, to enlighten your understanding, to kindle your affections, to cleanse your imagination, to purge your memory, to enfranchise your will -- in short, to make you a new creature in Christ Jesus; and depend upon the eternal faithfulness of God the Father to give you eternal life and to preserve you.

The purpose of salvation is expressed in verse eight, "This is a faithful saying, and these things I will that thou affirm constantly, that they which have believed in God might be careful to maintain good works." God has not saved and called any of us to a life of idleness, but to a life of usefulness. Before He bids us serve Him, He saves us and puts us in the place where we can do so, and then He bids us to maintain good works.

Every Christian is "to be careful" about this business of serving God. We are to serve Him according to His will and in the power of His Spirit.

The story is summarized in the words: "These things are good and profitable unto men." Knowing this, every Christian should be faithful in the declaration of this message as to how Christ saves. Every unsaved person should "believe on the Lord Jesus Christ" and be saved.