

"LIFE'S GREATEST BLESSING"

"In Whom we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of sins according to the riches of His grace." Ephesians 1:7.

What is life's greatest blessing? Many would say, "health." Many travel here and there to obtain health or to keep health. The finest specialists are consulted and money is poured out lavishly for the purpose of improving health. Prior to the war, forty dollars per year per capita were spent for health purposes in this country. Some think riches constitute life's greatest blessing. While riches bring many blessings, including fine houses, splendid equipment, travel and friends, yet they are by no means life's greatest blessing. Others consider fame as life's greatest blessing. The greatest blessing of all is the forgiveness of sins. Forgiveness is the most beautiful word spoken in heaven or upon earth. I know of no doctrine that is as highly cherished and prized as the doctrine of forgiveness.

In the Old Testament three Hebrew words are translated "forgive." They mean: to cover, to lift away and to send away. The common word used in the Greek New Testament for our English word "forgive" literally means "to send away." And so the reference is to God's disposition of our sins. He sends them away. They were committed against Him but He does not hold them against us. Forgiveness is the separation of the sinner from his sins. Forgiveness is not a change in our minds about God, but a change in God's mind towards us.

Not far from New York City there is a cemetery in which there is a grave that has inscribed upon its tombstone just one word, "Forgiven." There is no name, no date of birth or no date of death. The stone is unembellished by the sculptor's art. There is no epitaph nor fulsome eulogy; just that one word, "Forgiven." But that is the greatest thing that can be written on any tombstone or be said of any man, "Forgiven."

I. The Need of This Blessing.

Sin has created this need. Sin is universal. "All have sinned and come short of the glory of God." Romans 3:23. While all are sinful, they are not equally so. While all are not sinners in exactly the same way, nor to the same extent, yet all are sinners. While some have come shorter of God's glory than others, still all have come short. Although the word "sin" is going out of style, yet as an act it is gaining in popularity. There are those who prefer to call sin by some less objectionable name and regard it as merely an error, a mistake, a failure or an infirmity. However, sin is not something to be laughed at or to be regarded lightly. It is something to be feared and dreaded and hated and avoided at all cost. Jesus taught that nothing is more dreadful than sin.

In some quarters sin is something to joke about rather than to be sorry for. Sin is the most serious thing in the universe. It is a transgression of the law of God. It is blindness in the eye, hardness in the heart, perversity in the will and selfishness in the life. It is a dagger aimed at the heart of God. The fact that you change its name and call it "a mistake," "an infirmity," or a "misunderstanding," does not alter its terrible nature.

It is still the same evil thing that blights and curses everything that it touches. Sin is the universal shadow - universal as man and eternal as human history. The fact of sin is not just a creation of the Bible for the consciousness of every man attests it. We know that we have wilfully and needlessly done the things that we should not have done and left undone the things that we should have done. All of the world's seething confusion, bitterness, suffering and sadness are the results of sin. Man's greatest need therefore is not more religious teaching or a more perfect example, but the forgiveness of sins.

II. The Provision of This Blessing.

Christianity's greatest blessing is the bestowal of the forgiveness of sins. Sin is the saddest word in human speech, but forgiveness is the most beautiful word because it cancels the effects of sin. It takes away the darkness and the sorrow of sin, as the light of the sun scatters the darkness of the night. Forgiveness kindles the most beautiful light in the face of God and in the countenance of man.

In forgiveness you have love in action, for "Herein is love, not that we loved God, but that He loved us, and sent His Son to be the propitiation for our sins." I John 4:10. The provision of forgiveness is found in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ. Forgiveness comes through the work of Christ. The key thought in forgiveness is the innocent One suffering for the guilty.

This is the story of Christ's dying, taking man's place on the cross, bearing man's sins in His own body. "For Christ also hath once suffered for sins, the just for the unjust, that He might bring us to God, being put to death in the flesh." I Peter 3:18. Christ is the Medium through which this blessing of forgiveness is conferred. There is no other way to be forgiven. "Neither is there salvation in any other: for there is none other name under heaven given among men, whereby we must be saved." Acts 4:12. The forgiveness of sins is a mystery hidden away in the love of God and the cross of Christ. We cannot explain it, but we can know it and enjoy it. The words of a simple chorus partially express it.

"I lost it on Calvary's Hill,
It tumbled and tumbled until
It rolled out of sight,
I was happy that night:
I lost it on Calvary's Hill."

III. The Price of This Blessing.

"For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in Him should not perish, but have everlasting life." John 3:16. "He hath made Him to be sin for us, who knew no sin; that we might be made the righteousness of God in Him." 2 Corinthians 5:21. "God commendeth His love toward us, in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us." Romans 5:8.

Two former college mates and chums met at the bar of justice, one as judge and the other as prisoner who had fallen into sin and crime. The faithful judge sentenced his friend to a large fine. But he immediately stepped out of his office as judge, divested himself of his official garb, and wrote out a personal check, thus paying the fine of his former chum. This illustrates beautifully the righteousness and the love of God. As a righteous judge, He must see that the penalty of the violation of law is paid, but as a loving God He has paid that penalty through the gift of His only begotten Son.

God never forgives the penalty of sin unless that penalty has been met in the death of Christ, the sinner's substitute. Surely it is evident that without the cross we could not have any assurance of divine forgiveness. When we see Him dying on the cross for us, in a redeeming love that travelled to the uttermost, God's forgiveness passes into certainty. In the cross of Christ we learn what heaven thinks of sin. There sin is seen in all its awfulness. There we behold the grandeur of the law in the very glance that tells us of forgiveness. By simply believing the good news about what Christ has done for sinners, God says that "we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of sins." Ephesians 1:7. He also says, "Be it known unto you therefore, men and brethren, that through this man is preached unto you the forgiveness of sins." Acts 13:38. The forgiveness of sins is assured only through the perfect sacrifice offered once for all in the death of Jesus Christ. Redemption from the guilt of sin, from the power of sin, from the tyranny of Satan, from the curse of the law and from the wrath of God was made

possible only by the death of the Lord Jesus Christ. It was necessary that our Redeemer should suffer a bloody death to expiate our sins, to conquer Satan and to reconcile us to God.

Not a soul was ever forgiven apart from redemption. God does not forgive men because they are sorry for their sins, nor does He forgive them for their goodness, nor because they turn over a new leaf, nor because they are baptized and join the church. God only forgives on the basis of redemption. "Without the shedding of blood there is no remission." Because we were unable to atone for sin Jesus Christ went to Calvary, suffered, bled and died that we might be forgiven; and now today we have our forgiveness through His death on the cross.

His forgiveness is "according to the riches of His grace." God does not forgive any because of payment made by them in any form. Forgiveness, like love, is unpurchasable by us. His pardon is absolutely free. It is obtained when we repent and believe.

IV. The Products of This Blessing.

Life's greatest blessing, the forgiveness of sins, is promised by Christ, procured at the cross, proclaimed in the gospel, received by faith and known by the believer. There are millions of people for whom divine forgiveness is a great and thrilling fact. It is an experienced reality. There is no relief in this world like the relief which comes to a burdened soul with the forgiveness of sins. What a wonderful thing it is to be forgiven! Forgiveness is the spring of joy, the source of liberty and the starting-point of victorious Christian endeavor. Forgiven, the barriers are gone that raised themselves between the soul and God. Estrangement has given place to sweet communion. The believer is eternally forgiven the moment he comes to God through Jesus Christ. He enjoys peace of conscience, access to God, no fears of hell and the expectation of heaven. The peace and blessedness of this release from guilt are wonderful. The soul is conscious of a divine freedom. It can approach God with a happy trust and with perfect courage, for the past is no longer a source of terror and the future is bright with immortal hope.