

## MAN'S ONLY HOPE

"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. For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus unto good works, which God hath before ordained that we should walk in them. Eph. 2:8-10.

Here is the core of the doctrines of salvation which is the central theme of Christianity. Not only is this statement the gist of the message and preaching of Paul, but it is the very essence of the Christian message for all times. It reminds us of man's great need of God's greatest gift which is salvation. The scriptures will convince the intelligent man that he needs the Saviour. When we think of God and man, and of them in their relation to one another, as revealed in the Bible, we shall see that salvation is needed, is provided and conditioned.

God's Word deals with man as a sinner. "Behold I was shapen in iniquity, and in sin did my mother conceive me." Psa. 51:5. "For there is not a just man upon earth, that doeth good, and sinneth not." Eccl. 7:20. "There is none righteous, no, not one." Romans 3:10. Therefore, there is no difference in the need of salvation because all have sinned. Sin affects all of life—it taints the affections, warps the intelligence and perverts the will. Since salvation from sin is life's greatest concern, it certainly demands our most thorough consideration.

### I. The Provision of Salvation.

It has been said that it took one man fifty years to learn three things: first, that he could not save himself; second, that Christ did not expect him to save himself; and, third, that Christ had already provided for his salvation.

What, then, is salvation? As used in the Bible, the word "salvation" means deliverance. It means deliverance from the guilt, the penalty, the power, the love, the dominion and eventually the presence of sin. It involves the conscious forgiveness of sins and the realization of the power and willingness of God to strengthen and sustain all those who trust Christ. It is the greatest blessing that is offered to man. Salvation has three phases—that which delivers us from sin and its consequences; that which restores us to the favor of God and communion with him; and that which preserves us amid all the dangers and temptations of our present state until we reach our heavenly home.

Salvation originates in the great love and matchless grace of God. God loves every human being. As an expression of His love, He sent His only begotten Son into the world to redeem and save lost sinners. Jesus came and died on Calvary's cross as a propitiation for our sins. "God commendeth His love toward us, in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us." Romans 5:8. Jesus never died for His own sins, for He had none. "For He hath made Him to be sin for us, who knew no sin, that we might be made the righteousness of God in Him." II Cor. 5:21. "Christ died for our sins according to the scriptures." I Cor. 15:3. "Who His own self bare our sins in His own body on the tree, that we being dead in sins, should live unto righteousness." I Peter 2:24.

"The love that Jesus had for me,  
To suffer on the cruel tree,  
That I a ransomed soul might be,  
Is more than tongue can tell.

The bitter sorrow that He bore,  
And, oh! the crown of thorns He wore,  
That I might live for evermore,  
Is more than tongue can tell."

## II. The Plan of Salvation.

### 1. It is by grace.

Salvation was purposed in the mind of God, prompted by the love of God and perfected by the Son of God. The plan of salvation as set forth in the Word of God, is so simple and plain that even a child can understand it.

God wants all men to be saved. "As I live, saith the Lord God, I have no pleasure in the death of the wicked; but that the wicked turn from his way and live." Ezekiel 33:11. "For this is good and acceptable in the sight of God our Saviour; who will have all men to be saved, and to come unto the knowledge of the truth." I Timothy 2:3. "The Lord is not slack concerning His promise, as some men count slackness; but is long-suffering to us-ward, not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance. II Peter 3:9.

Many attempt to achieve salvation through personal efforts and meritorious works in spite of the fact that God's Word repeatedly states that it is an impossibility. No one is ever saved by his own efforts because salvation is "not of yourselves." Neither can one purchase salvation by acts of obedience or service. What could be plainer than this emphatic statement, "not of works, lest any man should boast"? According to the scriptures there is no salvation apart from God's grace. "For the grace of God that bringeth salvation hath appeared to all men." Titus 2:11. "Who hath saved us, and called us with an holy calling, not according to our works, but according to His own purpose and grace." II Timothy 1:9. "By the works of the law shall no flesh be justified." Galatians 2:16. "Not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to His mercy He saved us." Titus 3:5. So, men are not saved by their good works.

No one will be able to present the record of his efforts and works to God and receive eternal life in exchange. We cannot save ourselves and we have nothing of our own with which to purchase salvation. Salvation is entirely God's gift to us. Paul said, "The gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord. Romans 6:23.

"Naught have I gotten but what I received;  
Grace hath bestowed it since I have believed;  
Boasting excluded, pride I abase;  
I'm only a sinner saved by grace."

Salvation is not partly of grace and partly of works; it is all of grace and none of works. Man must accept it as a gift from God; otherwise, he will never receive it. This is illustrated in a statement by Dr. Alexander MacLaren, the great preacher of Edinburgh, Scotland. Not long before his death his associate minister, Mr. Gustart, visited him and inquired, "What are you doing, brother?" Whereupon Dr. MacLaren replied, "I'll tell you what I'm doing brother: I am gathering all my prayers, all my sermons, all my good deeds, all my evil deeds; and I am going to throw them all overboard, and swim to glory on the plank of free grace."

During this life we shall never understand the complete meaning of grace. However, we do know this, that God's grace in His boundless love freely expressed toward those who are entirely undeserving. Grace means the unmerited love, and favor and mercy of God in Christ Jesus. It is His love in action toward lost people, rescuing them from their fallen condition and giving them eternal life. Dr. J. H. Jowett said, "Grace is the energy of the divine affection rolling in plenteousness toward the shores of human need." The Apostle Paul said, "In whom we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of sins, according to the riches of His grace." Ephesians 1:7.

Oh, what a wondrous plan that He pitied us, loved us, suffered for us and died for us in order that we might be saved! Our only hope of salvation is in the marvelous grace of the Lord Jesus Christ.

"In loving kindness Jesus came  
My soul in mercy to reclaim,  
And from the depths of sin and shame  
Thro' grace He lifted me."

## 2. It is through faith.

By grace God has provided salvation and offers it to us as a gift upon our acceptance of Christ as Saviour. Salvation becomes ours only through faith. It is a gift obtained only on this one condition. It is not a question of our worthiness or unworthiness, but it is a question of our absolute trust in Christ.

Our text strongly asserts that it is faith and not works which procures a soul's acceptance with God. Faith is simply the hand that takes the gift which God presents to us. It is the connection by which the divine supply is brought to the human need. Souls are lost because they reject Jesus Christ as Saviour. God has certainly done His part in providing salvation. In fact, He can do nothing more than He has already done. Jesus said, "He that believeth on the Son hath everlasting life; and he that believeth not the Son shall not see life, but the wrath of God abideth on him." John 3:36. The Apostle John said, "And this is the record, that God hath given to us eternal life, and he that hath not the Son of God hath not life." I John 5:11-12. Men receive His salvation directly and immediately upon the exercise of faith in Him.

In the experience of salvation, God's part is "by grace" and man's part is "through faith." Many think that God saves sinners by other means than by grace through faith in Jesus Christ. They believe it is by grace through faith plus baptism, or plus joining the church, or plus something else. But, according to the Bible, it is by grace through faith plus nothing.

## III. The Purpose of Salvation.

Our text plainly declares that we are saved for good works. It states "For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus unto good works, which God hath before ordained that we should walk in them." This is an arresting statement about the purpose of salvation. The Lord has saved us in order that we may do good works. Good works are the very end of our new creation. As we plant trees in order that they may produce fruit, so the Lord expects us to perform good works after we have been saved. The Christian works for God because he is saved; he does not work in order to be saved. The person who fully realizes that within himself there is no merit and that he owes eternal life to the goodness and grace of God will be all the more anxious to live and labor for Him. "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. These things are good and profitable unto men." Titus 3:8. Thus you see that good works are not to be ignored even though they are not meritorious.

God is planning our lives for us and choosing the places in which we shall work. It is comforting to know these facts. But He is also getting us ready for whatever He is preparing for us. He will not allow us to come to any great crisis without preparing us for it, although we may not be aware of it at the time. He is training us in the midst of circumstances. He is preparing tomorrow for us and He is preparing us for tomorrow. We march forward prepared by God for what God has prepared for us.

What ought to be the effect of this view of life upon us? It should be that of grave responsibility. We are responsible for finding the place that God has appointed for us. It should also produce a sense of perfect safety. In the heavenly sense of the word things do not happen. True success is the accomplishment of the divine purpose. God saves us that we may serve Him. Good works are the dividends or fruits that God gets from the salvation which He gives us. He expects us to walk habitually in them.