

THE GRAMMAR OF THE GOSPEL

"Verily, verily, I say unto you, 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).

As we consider "the grammar of the gospel," it is not our purpose to deal in a technical treatment of the meaning of "grammar." For the moment a simple working definition of grammar would be that it is the manner in which words are written or spoken so as to convey clearly the meaning involved. And as unglamorous as the subject may be to you, you must employ its principles if you are to read with understanding a letter, a newspaper, or the Bible. After all, words are but vehicles by which we transmit thoughts from one mind to another. Even Jesus Himself did this. So, for the next few minutes let us look at "the grammar of the gospel" as Jesus Christ transmits from His mind and heart to yours one of His greatest gospel truths.

In so doing let us examine His words in John 5:24: "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." The meaning of this well known passage of Scripture lies on the surface, and I merely want to call your attention to it. This is the word of supreme authority, for Christ is the only One Who can speak with authority on the subject of salvation. He is the One Who really knows about the conditions of residence in the Father's house. Having come down from heaven, He has perfect knowledge about the place. He prefaces His declaration with the solemn words, "Verily, verily"; "Truly, truly, I am just now declaring to you the truth with respect to this important matter of salvation."

Let me ask you some questions. Are you a Christian? Do you know that you have been saved from your sins? Are you simply hoping that you will be saved in heaven at last? Or do you look with dread upon the prospect that some day you must stand unprepared before the judgment seat? Do you live in daily fear that through some sin you will lose your salvation?

Regardless of how you answer these questions, this message is for you. Here in the text the Lord Jesus tells you how you may be saved, when you may be saved, and the eternal consequences once you have been saved. All of these are involved in the tenses of the verbs used here by Christ. And let me say at the outset that not one of these verbs dealing with salvation is in the future tense. All except one are present tenses. And that one exception makes the grandest statement of all. So, let us look at these three declarations of Christ Jesus.

I. Christ Tells You How You May Be Saved.

Let us listen to it from the lips of the Son of God Himself. "He that heareth my word." "Faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the word of God." "How shall they believe in him of whom they have not heard?" The Lord Jesus said, "You must begin by hearing my word." The Bible is the very Word of God, written by men, but inspired by the Holy Spirit. Its words are the very words of God Himself. Hearing what the Bible says, we hear the Word of God to our own souls.

There are people who will not listen to the Word of God. They are like some who return letters unopened, refusing to read their contents. Their ears are stopped with prejudice, or something else, and they will not hear. Unless you hear the Word of God you will never know what it is to be saved, or how to be saved. The reason that some are not saved is because they have refused to hear the Word of God. He Who came as heaven's Ambassador to earth says: "If you would be saved, you must begin by hearing my word, for in no other way can anyone become possessed of faith."

Many are willing to listen to other voices, but they will not listen when Christ speaks. They are willing to listen to the newspaper correspondent or the magazine writer or to some teacher who attempts to tear the Bible to pieces. How many there are who are willing to listen to voices which guess at the truth, and every voice but the One Who said,

"Verily, verily, I say unto you, he that heareth my word." There is only one Voice that can speak with authority of the souls' relation to God, and point the way unerringly from this life to the next. You must put the Word of Christ above the word of all others, if you are going to be saved.

Of course, it must be a spiritual hearing. Many may read the Bible and hear the gospel without either heart or conscience being reached. Not everyone who looks upon a sunset sees its glory. Not everyone who walks through an art gallery enjoys its wonders and its beauties. Not everyone who hears music really appreciates it. By "hearing" Christ means more than merely hearing the sound of His voice. He means to hear with understanding what He is saying. "Hearing" means understanding. Many people sit in church services Sunday after Sunday where the gospel is preached. But they do not hear the gospel. Some of you listening to me now do not hear, for you do not listen with your minds and hearts. Before God I am responsible for every sermon which I preach. But you are responsible also for how you hear them. The Bible says, "He that hath ears to hear, let him hear" (Matthew 11:15). Furthermore, by "hearing" Christ means to hear and to heed. In Matthew 13:13 He spoke of those who "hearing, they hear not." They heard, but they did nothing about what they heard.

If you are really to hear the Word of Christ, you must do something about it. And that something is to believe on the One Who sent Him. God sent His Son to be your Saviour. In Christ, God has acted for your redemption from sin. Do you believe this? You say that in your mind you accept it as true. But do you accept it to the point of trusting your soul to Christ and committing your life to Him? For a saving faith must reach beyond your mind into your will. You believe that Christ can save you, but will you let Him do so?

Before a group of excited spectators a man rode a bicycle across Niagara Falls on a steel cable. He repeated this, carrying on his back a weight equal to that of a man. Each time the people applauded. Then the man asked, "How many of you believe that I can carry a man across the Falls?" Every one raised his hand in agreement. But when the rider pointed to one man, saying, "Let me carry you across," the man drew back, saying, "Oh no! Not me!" He believed about the rider, but he did not believe on him.

And so it is with some of you. You believe about Jesus Christ. You believe that He is the Saviour of sinners. But you do not believe on Him as your personal Saviour. Until you do, you have not really heard His Word or believed on God Who sent Him.

II. Christ Tells You When You May Be Saved.

"He that heareth my word, and believeth on him that sent me, hath everlasting life." He says that the one hearing and believing "hath everlasting life." Note the present tense -- "has everlasting life." In other words, the very moment you believe upon God in Christ you have a spiritual life which is eternal.

Two common mistakes are made with regard to our concept of eternal life. One error is to think of it in terms of length rather than of quality. This is true even of what man calls natural life.

Some people live more in thirty years than others do in a century. Gamaliel Bailey reminds us that "we live in deeds; not years; in thoughts, not breaths; in feelings, not in figures on the dial; we should count time by heart-throbs. He most lives who thinks most, feels the noblest, acts the best."

In an even greater sense is this true of spiritual life. While it does extend into eternity, it is a life that is also related to time or to the existence which now is. The primary element in eternal life is its quality. "Eternal life" means "age-abiding life." It is that quality of life which abides through the ages.

The second error is to think that eternal life begins after death. How often we hear someone pray, "And save us in heaven at last." But if you are not saved here and now, you will not be saved then and there.

Christ says that you can have this quality of life right now. Christ is life. In I John 5:11-12 we read, "God hath given to us eternal life, and this life is in his Son. He that hath the Son hath life; and he that hath not the Son of God hath not life." So in order to have this life you must believe on Christ as your Saviour. So many people are trying to acquire this life by their good deeds, but men do not achieve it. They receive it by receiving Christ into their hearts. "But as many as received him, to them gave he power to become the sons of God, even to them that believe on his name" (John 1:12) At this very moment Christ stands at the door of your life, waiting to be received. The very moment you receive Him, you have eternal or everlasting life. You do not need to wait in order to be saved in heaven at last. You can be saved right now. If you will hear the Word and believe on Christ, you will receive salvation, and there will not be any doubt about it.

III. Christ Tells You About The Eternal Consequences Of Being Saved.

"And shall not come into condemnation; but is passed from death unto life." If you trust Christ as your Saviour, you will have many temptations, but you shall never come into condemnation. Actually "shall not come" may be translated "does not come." It is a present tense with a future effect. Literally, it reads "keeps on not coming into judgment." Christ repeatedly made it clear that those believing on Him already have eternal life, and are not going to come into condemnation at the judgment. This is because your judgment as to salvation is already in the past. For Christ has been judged for you. On the cross God poured out on Christ His wrath concerning sin. And if you are in Christ you have already been judged in Him.

When a fire sweeps across the prairie the safest place for you is not to flee before the fire, but to stand where the fire has already been. And instead of fleeing from God's wrath to come, you should flee to Calvary. There through faith in Christ stand where the fire of God's wrath has already burned. There you are forever safe in Him.

The God of all grace poured out wrath upon the sinless Christ. Forsaken was He that our sins might be forgiven and forgotten. He received the wages of sin which He never earned that we might have eternal life which we never deserved. Sold was He that we might be ransomed. Bound was He that He might bestow upon us the freedom of sons. Scourged was He that by His stripes we might be healed. Crucified was He that through His grace we might crucify the flesh. For a time He was separated from God that we might be with God through all eternity.

For all who wish to, and will, receive the Saviour, He stands ready to bring you from death to life, from shameful failure and loss into the gain of His cross. On His side there is no reluctance, but only highest willingness. What will you do with the Christ Who receiveth sinful men? You can pass from death unto life through Him. For the weariest day, He will be your stay. For the darkest night, He will be your light. For the weakest hour, He will be your power. For each moment's call, He will be your all. What will you do with Him Who was assaulted that we might be shielded, smitten that we might be healed, lacerated that we might be liberated, slain that we might be secured, and Who will change the whole world by the brightness of His coming?

Without Jesus Christ -- in sin there is no grace; in temptation there is no strength; in trouble there is no courage; in disaster there is no refuge; in perplexity there is no prompting; in darkness there is no light; in storms there is no calm; in sorrow there is no comfort; and in death there is no assurance. But with Christ you have assurance of victory over sin, Satan, the world, and eternal punishment.

Do you have everlasting life? Is it a present possession? The Lord Jesus Christ does not give life to last ten, twenty, or forty years. There is only one kind of life that Christ gives, and that is life that lasts forever. Lay hold of that simple truth once more, that believing on Jesus Christ, you will never perish. He says so. You may have many temptations, countless difficulties, lots of trouble, and life may be a terrific conflict for you. But no matter what may come, you have the Word of God for it, the believer shall not perish because he has everlasting life.

See "the grammar of the gospel." It is not my grammar. It is the grammar of the Son of God Himself. Not that there are three verbs, or actually participles; the one hearing, the one believing, the One sending. Christ simply stated the historical fact that God sent Him to be the Saviour, and tells you how you may be saved -- by hearing and believing. Do you believe it? Do you believe it enough to rest your soul's salvation upon it? If you do, then here and now you may have this blessed assurance: "Verily, verily, I say unto you, 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." The whole thing is settled forever.