

XX.

THE GREAT SALVATION.

(Preached on Sunday Evening, December 28th, 1845.)

And we have seen and do testify that the Father sent the Son to be the Saviour of the world.—1 JOHN iv. 14.

THIS, brethren, is a very plain text, but a very important one, and we may transfer to it the attributes which the Apostle has ascribed to a similar passage, where he says, "It is a faithful saying." What is common report but falsehood? What is a great part of history but fabulous? What are the promises of men but lies? "I said in my heart, all men are liars." But this is a "faithful saying;" it is a true saying, it is truth itself, and it will not deceive you. All that is important must be true, but all that is true may not be important. But here the importance equals the truth; therefore it is not only a "faithful saying, but worthy of all acceptance;" and worthy the acceptance of all, whether rich or poor, or high or low—of prince or peasant. It is worthy of all acceptance, worthy of all your desires, of all your hopes, of all your joys, of all your affections, of all your expectations. It is worthy of all your thanksgivings and praises which can be experienced and called forth in embracing it. "He," therefore, "who hath ears to hear, let him hear," for "we have seen and do testify that the Father sent the Son to be the Saviour of the world." Now we are not going to draw several doctrines from these words, or to treat them textually even, but in a way of inference, and there are six things which naturally and necessarily result from them.

I. The first inference is this: If the "Father sent the Son to be the Saviour of the world," *then was the world in a lost state.* "God made man upright, but he sought out many inventions." "By one man sin came into the world, and

death by sin, so that death passed upon all men, for that all hath sinned." Adam begot a son in his own likeness, and the earth was soon filled with wickedness. We read that "every imagination of the thoughts of their hearts was only evil continually," and the "flood came and took them all away," except the few who were preserved in the ark: from these afterwards the earth was replenished. But David tells us that when God looked down again upon the children of men, He said, "They are all gone out of the way; they are all become filthy; there is none that doeth good, no, not one." This was the testimony of the Apostle in his Epistle to the Romans, in which he proved that both Jews and Gentiles were all under sin, and both guilty before God. Thus, as sinners, all are condemned, for "cursed is everyone that continueth not in all things that are written in the law to do them;" and "the soul that sinneth, it shall die." Thus all were sinners, and all depraved, and as such are strangers to peace, the vassals of corruption, tyrannized over by these passions, "serving divers lusts and pleasures," and ready to perish. And what is that perdition to which they are exposed? It is expressed by various images employed by the sacred writers, anyone of which is so dreadful as to be enough to drive any man out of his senses or out of his sins; compared with which all the sufferings of life, all the horrors of conscience, and all the rage of despair, are only the beginning of sorrows.

Now, can this state of human nature be denied? Let men turn their thoughts inward and examine their own experience. Surely every man is conscious that he has a tendency to evil, to malice, to pride and ingratitude; and when he examines himself, he cannot fix upon a period when he began to feel these evil tendencies; the reason is, they are collateral; they grow with his growth, and strengthen with his strength. Now, if there were a tree which was known to bring forth only bad fruit, in every age, in every climate, and in every soil, and under every kind of cultivation, should we hesitate to consider it a bad tree, for every tree is known by its fruit? And what has man been always, and what has man been everywhere, in all stations, and under all circumstances? What is the testimony of all history? Observe the most polished and cultivated state of society. Regard it according to the declarations of historians and travellers. Take their religion, and oh, how evil and licentious is their worship! Why, among them vices were not only not forbidden, they were encouraged and enjoined; gluttony, drunkenness, and lewdness, were even made parts and acts of their devotion. We are frequently censured

for defaming human nature. But who is it that asks, "Who can bring a clean thing out of an unclean?" Who said, "the heart is deceitful above all things and desperately wicked; who can know it?" Who was it that testified, "For from within, out of the heart, proceed evil thoughts, adulteries, fornications, murders, thefts, covetousness, wickedness, deceit, lasciviousness, an evil eye, blasphemy, pride, foolishness: all these evil things come from within and defile the man." And who is it that says also, "We are of God, and the whole world lieth in wickedness?" Such, then, is the state of human nature. If it were otherwise, if we were not sick and dying, why send for the physician? If we were not in bondage, why need a Redeemer? If we were not lost and undone, what need have we of a Saviour? If therefore it be true that "the Father sent the Son to be the Saviour of the world," it is equally true that the world was in a lost state.

II. The second inference is this: If the "Father sent the Son to be the Saviour of the world" then *their salvation is a matter of importance*. God does not trifle with you, my hearers: His aim and His end always justified, and more than justifies, His actions and His doings. We should not indeed think very highly of this salvation, if we were to judge of it by the lives of men. They are alive to their temporal welfare, to the safety of their property; as to their bodies they show anxiety enough, they are willing to make any sacrifice to escape from floods and flames, from the dagger of the assassin and pestilential distempers; they are grateful when a disorder is removed, and when they are snatched from the borders of the grave; but they do not value the salvation of which our text speaks, because it is a spiritual salvation, and a holy salvation; it regards those evils which they neither feel nor fear. Hence they make light of it. They make sacrifices as to their farm and their merchandize, for their worldly aggrandisement, for their vanishing honours, and for the pleasures of sin which are but for a season; but were we to judge of the salvation of which we are speaking by the endeavours of many of you to obtain it, we should consider it as a thing of nought. Yet how will you view it by-and-by? How will you view it in a dying hour? and when you stand before the judgment-seat of Christ? And how would you view it immediately, if now you were convinced of sin, and if now you perceived the wrath of God ready to fall upon you as the children of disobedience? Would not your cry be then—not, "What shall I eat, or what

shall I drink?" but—"What shall I do to be saved? How shall I come before the Lord? or bow myself before the Most High God?" What did the Apostle think of it? He calls it "so great salvation"—so unspeakably, so inconceivably great. It is a salvation for the soul, a salvation for eternity, a salvation rescuing us from all evil, and conferring upon us all possible good. What do the spirits above think of it, as every moment they are crying, "Unto Him that loved us, and washed us from our sins in His own blood, and hath made us kings and priests unto God His Father, unto Him be glory and dominion for ever and ever. Amen?" What do the angels in glory think of it? Do they not "desire to look into these things," and come to the Church to learn "the manifold wisdom of God"? Do they not rejoice over every sinner that repenteth? What said the angels to the shepherds? "Behold, we bring you good tidings of great joy, which shall be to all peoples, for unto you is born this day in the city of David a Saviour, which is Christ the Lord." And what was the subject of the praises of the multitude of the heavenly host? They came down, saying, "Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, goodwill toward men."

But again we repair to our inference. We behold the worth of salvation from the importance God Himself has attached to it. He cannot err; He could not have been mistaken; He knew the value of souls, and the misery to which we were exposed as sinners; He knew the full meaning of the terms "everlasting punishment" and "life eternal." And it is here you must study the subject, in the manger and upon the cross, while you behold "God manifest in the flesh." "Because the children were partakers of flesh and blood, He also took part of the same, that through death He might destroy him that had the power of death." Follow the Saviour through His history, see Him descending from the throne to the cross, and ascending from the cross to the throne, and "ask now of the days that are past, which were before thee, since the day that God created man upon the earth, and ask from the one side of heaven unto the other, whether there hath been any such thing as this great thing is, or hath been heard like it."

III. The third inference is this: If the "Father sent the Son to be the Saviour of the world," then *this salvation is no easy achievement*. No, my brethren, the scheme involved in it difficulties which He alone could remove. We deduce this from His wisdom and His perfections. Let us explain a little.

Men often degrade themselves by the means they employ to accomplish their purposes. Sometimes they employ unsuitable means, and thus become laughing stocks ; and sometimes they employ inadequate men and thus fail in their enterprise ; and sometimes they employ more means than is necessary, and then they shew their ignorance. What would you think of a man who would put himself to great expense in constructing a machine to crush a fly? or who would employ a thousand hands when one was enough? But if you were to see a skilful builder, and one in whose judgment you could confide, bringing together a vast number of workmen, and an immensity of materials, you would infer that an extensive work was to be going on, and one that was neither trifling nor easy. My brethren, we have defective notions of sin, and defective notions of the holiness and the righteousness of God, and therefore are not aware of the difficulties found in the way of our recovery ; but God was perfectly acquainted with them, and He does nothing in vain. What he does, He Himself deems necessary, and His judgment is always "according to truth." What then has He done whose understanding is infinite, and who is liable to no error? He delivered the Jews from the land of Egypt, "with a strong hand, and a stretched-out arm." He often saved them from their enemies ; He brought them back from the Babylonish captivity, and restored them to their religious privileges. But behold a new thing in the earth and something surpassing every previous dispensation. "Behold the Word was made flesh and dwelt among us." "A body was prepared for Him, and He suffered, He died, and He rose again, and He now sitteth on the right hand of God, as a Prince and a Saviour, to give repentance to Israel and remission of sins." For 4,000 years prophets predicted Him, sacrifices prefigured Him, and saints expected Him. And, brethren, what do we again infer from this? We are never so liable to err as when we come forward and determine what God should do, or what He should not do, in particular cases. But if God Himself comes forward, shewing us that He was under a kind of necessity—we use His own language—to do so and so, surely it becomes us to acquiesce ; and has He not told us that "it *became* Him, by whom are all things, to make the Captain of their salvation perfect through suffering." Has He not told us that Christ ought to suffer these things, and to enter into His glory? That "it behoved Him in all things to be made like unto His brethren, that He might be a merciful and faithful high priest in things pertaining to God, to make reconciliation for

the sins of the people?" And we may well suppose that if the mercies of God could have been exercised to the human race without this, and in harmony with His truth and justice, and righteousness, that the world would never have witnessed the incarnation and sufferings of His own Son.

IV. The fourth inference is this: If the "Father sent the Son to be the Saviour of the world," then *what compassion must have filled the bosom of Him who sent Him!* Ah, my brethren, the Apostle is beforehand with us here. It is from hence he says, "In this was manifested the love of God towards men, because that God sent His only begotten Son into the world, that we might live through Him." And "herein," says he, as if it appeared in nothing else, "herein is love, not that we loved God, but that He loved us, and sent His Son to be the propitiation for our sins." This is, indeed, the most transcendent instance of it, for observe the motive that influenced Him in doing so. He was not compelled to do this; He was not actuated by our desert; His love was not drawn forth by our desire; for, says He, "I was found of them that sought Me not; I was made manifest to them that asked not after Me." Then consider the messenger He sent. It was not a man; it was not an angel, but the Lord of angels; it was not a servant, but a Son—the Son of His love, and His only begotten Son. "For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth on Him should not perish, but have everlasting life." Then consider the condition to which this errand of love and mercy reduced Him, so that He appeared in the deepest abasement, and became "a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief." Then you may consider the purpose He had in view. The Son of God might have come down with a rod in His hand to destroy men's lives, for the human race deserved His displeasure; but though He could righteously have "sent His Son into the world to condemn the world," He did not do so, "but that the world through Him might be saved." Then reflect also on the multitude of the partakers of the benefit. "Are there few that shall be saved?" Why, the Saviour "shall see of the travail of His soul and shall be satisfied." And would a few satisfy the benevolence of His heart, and lead Him to say to the Father, "Stop Thine hand! there are enough; I am perfectly satisfied; save no more?" But the Apostle tells us, in the second chapter of Hebrews, "We see Jesus, who was made a little lower than the angels for the suffering of death, crowned

with glory and honour ; that He, by the grace of God, should taste death for every man." The Apostle tells us, that "He is the propitiation for our sins, and not for ours only, but also for the sins of the whole world."

The Fifth inference is this : If "the Father sent the Son to be the Saviour of the world," then *there is full encouragement for every desponding sinner*. What a difference is made in the mind of a man by a little clear and sound conviction ! Before, it was hardly possible to induce him to fear ; now, it is equally difficult to induce him to hope when he thinks of the guilt of his transgressions, of the pollution of them, and of their number, and when he thinks of their heinousness in the sight of God, he finds it hard to believe that God can be pacified towards him ; and it is difficult to satisfy him that if he returns to God, God will come forth and "receive him graciously, and love him freely." What, then, is the consolation he meets with while in such a condition ? Is all the encouragement he can obtain a mere venture, that the Lord "may turn, and repent, and leave a blessing behind Him, that he perish not ?" Is this all the encouragement he can derive from Him who hath declared that he has "no pleasure in the death of the wicked ;" from Him who "waits to be grievous ;" who never refused any who applied to Him for mercy ? "He who spared not His own Son, but delivered Him up for us all, how shall He not freely give us all things ?" Will He be displeased if you approach Him through this Saviour, when you apply to Him for the very purpose for which He sent His Son ? while you beseech Him that you may be made partakers of His salvation ? *No*, it is the pleasure of the Lord prospering in the Redeemer's hands. *No*, "He will rejoice over you with joy."

VI. The Sixth inference is : If "the Father sent His Son to be the Saviour of the world," *what are we to think of those who will not come to Him that they may have life ?* Let us reflect upon their condition, and view it on two grounds. First, the helplessness of their condition : for "there is salvation in no other" but through Him who "was despised and rejected of men." No man can come unto the Father but by Him. What is the consequence ? They need no decree, no threatening of God to cause them to perish ; it results from the nature of the thing ; for if there be only one remedy for the sick and disordered, and they refuse this, why they must perish. There was only one ark of old, therefore all who refused this were

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destroyed by the flood. There was only one sacrifice for sin, and if this be renounced "there remaineth no more sacrifice for sins but a certain fearful looking for of judgment and fiery indignation, which shall devour the adversaries."

Then look at it in the greatness of their guilt. Their ruin lies principally in their contempt of this salvation—their contempt of such an infinite Benefactor, and of the infinite provisions of mercy which He has made. O, how do they disobey the greatest of all His commands, for "this is His commandment, that we believe on the name of the only begotten Son of God." How do they rob Him of His rightful glory, the glory of His grace! How do they frustrate the grace of God, and make Christ to have died in vain! They cannot, therefore, come off with impunity. *Impossible*. How shall we escape if we "neglect so great salvation?" "He that despised Moses' law died without mercy under two or three witnesses. "Of how much sorer punishment"—what of dying without mercy? Yes, "Of how much sorer punishment, suppose ye, shall he be thought worthy who hath trodden under foot the Son of God, and hath counted the blood of the covenant wherewith he was sanctified an unholy thing, and hath done despite unto the Spirit of grace." So that if any of you should perish under the gospel, you will have double destruction. The law will deal with you first, then the gospel. You will have one destruction from the law you have transgressed, and another from the gospel you have rejected. Your misery, therefore, will be a *death unto death*. I am often ready to ask, What must angels think of the human race when they look down upon us? when they view us despising this salvation? Surely there is nothing like this in other cases amongst men. Who ever heard of a condemned criminal in prison, who was expecting execution, yet refused pardon sent by the King, by his prime minister, sent by his own son? And yet this is the case with many. "God hath committed unto us the ministry of reconciliation." "Yes, we are ambassadors for Christ; as though God did beseech you, we pray you in Christ's stead, be ye reconciled to God."

Yes, "we are workers together with God, and beseech you that ye receive not His grace in vain." But arise, "the Father hath sent His Son to be the Saviour of the world." *Go and embrace Him*, with the language of the Church, "Lo, this is our God: we have waited for Him, and He will save us; this is the Lord, we have waited for Him, we will be glad and rejoice in His salvation."