

14. ON THE GIFT OF A SAVIOR

~Other Speakers M-R: Thomas Reade:

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Before the earth was formed, or man created upon it, the Almighty foreknew that his moral creatures would apostatize from him. The angels had already sinned, and were cast into the place prepared for them. They were doomed, in righteous judgment, to be the eternal monuments of divine indignation.

A just, yet infinitely gracious sovereign, did not determine to leave man under the same hopeless condemnation. The revelation is truly wonderful. Jesus Christ, the eternal Son of God, "God over all, blessed for evermore," was foreordained in the councils of heaven to be a sacrifice—a propitiation—an atonement for the sins of apostate man. As "all things were made by him," so all things were made "for him." Earth was to be the theater on which should be displayed the mercy and justice of Jehovah.

The glorious plan was gradually unfolded through succeeding ages. The bleeding lamb was instituted as the appointed emblem of the Savior of the world. When offered up in faith, in humble reliance on the divine mercy, and with a contrite heart, the believing suppliant, thus approaching the mercy-seat through the bleeding victim, found pardon and peace.

In this way, the ancient believers obtained rest unto their souls. They trusted in God, and were not confounded. The prophets depicted in glowing colors the glories of Emanuel, while they blended the deepened shades of his amazing humiliation with the resplendent luster of his divine nature. When the "fullness of time" was come, how grand to the eye of saints and angels was the entrance of the Messiah into our world!

The angel Gabriel was commissioned to convey the glad tidings to Zacharias, that he should be the father of him whom Isaiah and Malachi had predicted as "the voice," "the messenger," who should prepare the way of the Lord. He was then sent with joyful news to the humble virgin at Nazareth; announcing to her that she should be the highly favored mother of the Messiah, of whose kingdom there should be no end. The tender fears of Joseph were next dispelled by a dream, in which he was assured that he who should be born of Mary, his espoused wife, was no less than the Son of God, who should save his people from their sins.

The emperor Augustus was made the instrument, though unconsciously, of bringing the virgin mother to Bethlehem; thus fulfilling the prophetic declaration of Micah, and establishing the truth of the descent of Jesus in the line of David, by a public enrollment.

When born in the city of David, the infant Savior was announced by the angel of the Lord to the humble shepherds of Judea, who were keeping watch over their flocks by night; while the angelic host sang, in exulting strains, "Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, good-will towards men." In the temple, during the ceremony of Mary's purification, and the dedication of her Son to the Lord, Simeon took the blessed child in his arms, and declared him to be "a light to enlighten the Gentiles, and the glory of his people Israel;" while Anna, the prophetess, spoke of him to all those who looked for redemption in Jerusalem.

When returned to Bethlehem, the divinely directed Magi of the east came to pay their homage to the infant King, presenting to him gifts—gold, frankincense, and myrrh.

Herod and all Jerusalem were troubled, while saints and angels were rejoicing, at the birth of the long-expected deliverer.

When John entered upon his prophetic office, he bore witness to the dignity of the Messiah; and pointed to Jesus, as the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world.

The Father himself testified of his Son; for Jesus, when he was baptized, went up straightway out of the water: and lo! the heavens were opened unto him, and the Spirit of God, descending like a dove, lighted upon him; and lo! a voice from heaven said, "this is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased."

The blessed Jesus, when he made himself public to the world, astonished the thronging crowds by his stupendous, yet beneficent miracles; by his heavenly wisdom; by his holy example; by his unwearied labors to do good.

The worldly, the proud, and the self-righteous, could not endure the light of his doctrine, and the keenness of his reproof. Hence they conspired against him, however discordant were their peculiar views and practices. Herod and the high priest—Pilate and the Scribes—Sadducees and Pharisees—heathens, and the professed worshipers of Jehovah—all allowed their national antipathies and religious differences to merge into one common cause against the Lord and against his anointed. Herod, from jealousy; the chief priests and Scribes, from envy; Pilate, from slavish fear; and the common people, from popular feeling excited by their rulers, conspired the death of Jesus, whose meekness and innocence, contrasted with the rage of his bloody enemies, shone like the arch of heaven on the angry cloud.

He died praying for his murderers. He died a sacrifice for their sins. He died, a sacrifice for the sins of a lost world. Amazing love! Oh my soul, look to this precious, bleeding Savior; trust in him for your whole salvation; rejoice in his grace, and adore that wisdom that could overrule so much wickedness, to produce so much good!

How awful the period! The sun was darkened; the rocks split apart; the veil of the temple was torn in two; the

graves were opened; and many bodies of the saints who had died, arose, and appeared in the holy city after his resurrection.

On the third day, the conquering Savior rose triumphant from the dead; appeared to his weeping followers; ascended into heaven in their sight; and soon after his session at the right hand of power, poured out upon his infant church that great promise of the Father—the Holy Spirit.

How wonderful was the effect of this heavenly gift! The apostles, once illiterate, now spoke with new tongues; their former fears were lost in an undaunted courage; timidity gave place to zeal. In the emphatic language of the sacred historian, "they were all filled with the Holy Spirit, and spoke the word of God with boldness." They preached Christ in the face of danger and of death. Thousands, through their labors, were turned from Satan unto God. Churches were planted in all the known countries of the world; and at length they sealed their truth with their blood, counting it all joy to suffer for the sake of their beloved Lord.

Great is the mystery of godliness—God manifest in the flesh.

That the Almighty should become the Savior of his rebellious creatures, by taking upon him their nature: that he, who rules over all worlds, should stoop, not to be a mighty monarch, but a humble carpenter: that he, who cared for and provided the foxes and the birds with holes and nests, should voluntarily leave himself destitute of a place where to lay his head: that he, who is the great proprietor of all things, should condescend to be supported by pious females, who ministered to him of their substance: that the Fountain of felicity should become a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief: that the Lord of glory should be despised and rejected of men: that the Judge of the living and the dead should stand, like a criminal, at an earthly tribunal, charged with crimes which he never committed, and condemned for transgressions of which he was declared innocent: that the Majesty of heaven should be spit upon, scourged, and crucified: that the Lord of life should pour out his soul unto death: this, this is the wonder of wonders—the unsearchable riches of Christ, "Not to be thought of; but with tides of joy;

Not to be mentioned, but with shouts of praise." Well may Christ be styled by the enraptured prophet, "Wonderful!"

Men ate naturally fond of great things, and yet they feel an aversion to the greatest thing in the world—the Redemption of the Soul. This would be inexplicable, had we not the volume of inspiration to unfold to us the hidden reason.

This aversion to so glorious a work arises from—the state of the human heart, and the nature of redemption. The heart is in love with sin; yes, is itself desperately wicked. Sin is its food; its element; its very constitution.

Salvation by Christ is a deliverance from sin; a renovation of the heart to holiness; a surrender of the soul to God. Hence arises the enmity. Darkness is opposed to light; and Satan reigning in the sinner, is opposed to Christ the Savior claiming his usurped possession.

This enmity is universal, and proves the universality of the fall. Wherever redemption by Christ is faithfully preached, and honestly exhibited in the life, there it is powerfully resisted both by the worldly laity and mercenary priests. As the bitterest enemies of our blessed Lord were those who wore the priestly vestments, so multitudes of the faithful have, in all ages, been devoured by wolves in sheep's clothing. Lord! clothe your ministers with righteousness, that your people may sing with joyfulness.

None can receive the Gospel in the love and power of it, but those who are enabled by sovereign grace so to do. All others lie under the just condemnation of willfully rejecting it; and shall be punished for such rejection. Men may cavil at such a statement as this, and call it inconsistent; but God will, before long, vindicate his own cause. If it be true, that "by grace we are saved," it is equally true, that "this is the condemnation, that light as come into the world; and that men love darkness rather than light, because their deeds are evil."

This great redemption is by price. And Oh! what a price! the precious blood of Jesus, the Lamb of God. This blood cleanses from all sin; satisfies offended Justice; clears away the obstacles in the sinner's path to glory, and procures pardon and peace, and the gift of the Holy Spirit. "He made peace for us, by the blood of his cross." "We have redemption through his blood, even the forgiveness of sins"

This redemption is by power. God, the Holy Spirit, descends into the sinner's heart, applies the healing balm to the previously smitten conscience, and, by his almighty influence, produces the new birth, the new creation. He leads the trembling sinner to the bleeding sacrifice; points to the cross; gives saving faith; causes joy to spring up in the heart; and thus enables the soul, delivered from the penalty and pollution of sin, "to sing in the ways of the Lord," and to glorify the rock of his salvation.

None can love this work of grace but the subjects of grace. This sadly wounds the pride of man; but so it is. We must forever stand indebted to unmerited love for this great salvation. All boasting is here excluded. He that glories, must glory in the Lord. The language of the redeemed is: "in the Lord, I have righteousness and strength."

Oh! that I may now put the crown upon the head of Jesus. May all my affections center in him. To him may I devote every power, and be altogether consecrated to his praise.

Oh! my soul, forever bless your beloved Lord, for thus becoming your Redeemer. He is always near his people to support and comfort them. He dwells in their hearts by faith. He abides in them by his Spirit, to enlighten their minds, to purify their hearts, to regulate their wills, to direct their walk, to lead them in the paths of

righteousness, for his name's sake.

Thus they are safe and happy under the Shepherd's care.

Their union with their divine Lord is sweet and constant. They "lean upon their beloved," and are supported through the wilderness. They are made strong by his strength; wise by his wisdom; righteous in his righteousness; holy by his grace. They daily receive out of his fullness, who of God is made unto them, "wisdom, righteousness, sanctification, and redemption."

Jesus is the head over all things to his church. All power is given unto him in heaven and in earth. As he rules over all, so he overrules all for the good of his people. Hence the apostle could confidently declare, "all things shall work together for good, to those who love God, to them who are the called according to his purpose." All this is cheering to the humble followers of the Lamb. Are they in trouble? Jesus appoints it for their good. Are they joyful? The joy of the Lord is their strength. Well may the believer triumphantly exclaim: "Who shall separate us from the love of Christ?" "We are more than conquerors through him that loved us."

Jesus is the universal Lord: to him every knee shall bow, of things in heaven, and things in earth, and things under the earth. Jesus will be the Almighty Judge; all nations shall be assembled before his throne; he will render unto every man according to his works.

When, through faith, the sinner is admitted into the family of God, and changes both his state and nature, through the blood and spirit of Jesus, then his desire is to maintain the peace which he has happily obtained through believing. This he learns to do from the prophet Isaiah: "you will keep him in perfect peace, whose mind is stayed on you, because he trusts in you." A wandering, backsliding, double heart, can never enjoy peace. To possess the blessing of peace, the mind must be stayed upon God. This is the same as "abiding in Christ:" being "steadfast in the faith," "rooted and grounded in love."

It implies stability, constancy, perseverance. The mind must be stayed upon the covenant of grace as an unchangeable, everlasting covenant; ordered in all things and sure. In this covenant, every thing is treasured up which can furnish the believer with grace here, and glory hereafter. Staying his mind, therefore, upon this covenant of life and peace, he finds rest unto his soul.

The mind must bow with humble reverence to the authority of God. Pride and rebellion destroy peace. Humility and submission promote it. The believer must wait the Lord's time for deliverance: "Oh! tarry you the Lord's leisure; be strong, and he shall comfort your heart," is the affectionate advice of David, the sweet Psalmist of Israel. This childlike reliance on the divine goodness tranquilizes the mind in seasons of darkness, perplexity, trial, and temptation. That soul is the most happy, which can the most cheerfully acquiesce in the appointments of infinite wisdom. Murmuring and repining grieve the Holy Spirit. Resignation and contentment produce serenity and sweetness of mind.

While cultivating these important duties, which are brought into daily exercise by the very nature of Christian experience, the mind is kept in peace, holiness is promoted, and God, the author of all good, is equally glorified. Who, then, dare say, that the doctrine of grace, abounding to the chief of sinners, through a crucified Redeemer; is a doctrine which tends to licentiousness? As a sick stomach may corrupt the most wholesome food, so a wicked heart can turn the grace of God into lasciviousness, and, under a most dreadful delusion of Satan, sin that grace may abound. But let not this evil be charged upon the holy Gospel of Jesus, any more than the disordered frame upon the wholesome food. The natural and spiritual consequences in both cases are similar. The one, arising from a bad stomach—the other, from a bad heart.

"Blessed Jesus! bestow upon me, your unworthy servant, that realizing faith, that tranquilizing hope, that operative love, which will enable me to know and serve you more and more, until my soul shall be made fit for that happy world, where all sin and sorrow shall flee away, and where perpetual peace and purity shall gladden the redeemed forever and ever!"

What soul can reach the lofty height,
From where the Savior came to die?
What soul can trace the Lord of might
In his profound humility?

Angels, who stand before the throne,
Here feel the weakness of their powers;
In wonder, they, adoring, own
The Lord of life, both theirs and ours.

Oh for a heart of faith and love,
To taste the Savior's richest grace,
To emulate the choirs above,
Who ever see his blissful face.

Blest Spirit! beautify my soul
With humble joy and holy fear;
Your power can make the wounded whole
And bring each Gospel blessing near.
Descend and dwell within my heart;

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**The Savior's image let me bear;
Then bid me hence with joy depart,
And angels' bliss forever share.**