

~Other Speakers M-R: Thomas Reade:

18. ON NEGLECTING THE GOSPEL

This declaration of the apostle, "How shall we escape, if we neglect so great salvation?"—is both a solemn question, and an awful conclusion. Those who hold infidel principles, who live in a total disregard of religious ordinances, and who persecute the followers of Jesus, despise the salvation of God. But there are other marks equally legible to the discerning eye, though often unseen by the people who bear them, on account of the blinding nature of sin, which point out the neglecters of salvation.

The three following should excite alarm, and call forth the important exercise of strict self-examination.

1. If we are living in the allowed indulgence of one known sin, whether that sin be internal or external; whether it be cherished in the secret recesses of the heart; or whether it ripen into overt acts; we are neglecting the salvation of the Gospel. We may have knowledge, and zeal, and gifts of various kinds; we may do much in active exertion to promote the general cause of religion; we may associate with pious characters, and be ourselves esteemed pious; we may be regular at church; maintain family worship; and, like Herod, do "many things;" yet if, after all, we are living in the allowed indulgence of one known sin, we are neglecting this great salvation; and, dying in this state, must inevitably perish. Should we knock and say, "Lord, open unto us," Jesus would profess unto us, "I never knew you; depart from me, you workers of iniquity." How awful is this consideration, and yet how just! We may destroy all of the Amalekites; yet, if we preserve Agag and the rest of the flock alive; if we retain some beloved lust in the heart, we manifest a spirit in direct opposition to the will and command of God.

2. If we are building upon any other foundation, in whole or in part, than Jesus Christ and him crucified, we are neglecting his great salvation. To be saved from the dreadful consequences of sin, we must build simply and entirely on that foundation which God has laid in Zion, without daring to bring any of the materials of corrupt nature to mix with it. On this foundation we must pray for grace to build gold, silver, and precious stones. This must be done by adding to faith virtue, and to virtue knowledge, and to knowledge temperance, and to temperance patience, and to patience godliness, and to godliness brotherly kindness, and to brotherly kindness charity. If these things be in us, and abound; they make us that we shall neither be barren nor unfruitful in the knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ; while an entrance shall be ministered to us abundantly into his heavenly kingdom.

3. If we are preferring any earthly object, of whatever kind, to Jesus Christ; if our affections are placed on any other being in opposition to him; or if we are seeking our delight in any created thing, as distinct from him and independent of him, we are neglecting his great salvation; yes, setting up idols in our hearts. We must love the adorable Savior with a supreme affection; and we must love other objects only for his sake. Our temporal blessings must be enjoyed as flowing from him; our friends and domestic comforts must be received as gifts coming to us through his redeeming grace. All we possess must be held at his disposal, and with a view to that account which we must one day give. Thus, Christ must be the Alpha and the Omega, the beginning and ending of all our desires and affections.

Oh! how strait is the gate, and narrow is the way, that leads unto life; and few there be that find it. May I never forget this unchangeable truth; that Jesus is the only way of escape from hell—and the only way of access to heaven. Lord, let your Holy Spirit guide me into this consecrated way. Hold me up, and I shall be safe.

It is truly awakening to reflect how far a person may go in the circumstantial and externals of religion, and yet be entirely destitute of the life of God in the soul. The holy Scriptures abound with declarations to this effect, which prove the deceitfulness of the human heart, and the danger of resting in mere outward forms and orthodox opinions. Thus, Job describes the character of the hypocrite: "What is the hope of the hypocrite, though he has gained, when God takes away his soul? Will he delight himself in the Almighty? will he always call upon God?" evidently implying, that, not having the root of the matter in him, though he had gained the applause of men for his seeming piety, he would soon grow weary of the service of God.

David also shows, in awful colors, the wickedness of false teachers: "Unto the wicked, God says, what have you to do to declare my statutes, or that you should take my covenant in your mouth; seeing you hate instruction, and cast my words behind you?" Thus, wicked men may enter into the priestly office, preach the Gospel, and talk about that covenant, in the blessings of which they have no personal interest whatever.

The prophet Isaiah, by the Spirit of God, sets forth the extreme hypocrisy of the Jews: "Cry aloud, spare not, lift up your voice like a trumpet, and show my people their transgression, and the house of David their sins. Yet they seek me daily, and delight to know my ways, as a nation that did righteousness, and forsook not the ordinances of their God. They ask of me the ordinances of justice; they take delight in approaching to God." Thus, their conduct was a strange mixture of apparent devotion and decided rebellion.

The prophet Ezekiel was shown the true character of those who waited upon him. "They come unto you as the people come; and they sit before you as my people; and they hear your words, but they will not do them; for with their mouth they show much love, but their heart goes after their covetousness." Our divine Redeemer has

painted the hypocrite in his true colors: "Woe unto you, Scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites; for you pay tithe of mint, anise, and cummin, and have omitted the weightier matters of the law, judgment, mercy, and faith." "Woe unto you, Scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites; for you make clean the outside of the cup and of the platter, but within they are full of extortion and excess." "Woe unto you, Scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites; for you are like unto whited sepulchers, which, indeed, appear beautiful outward, but are within full of dead men's bones, and all uncleanness." "You serpents, you generation of vipers, how can you escape the damnation of hell!"

When we consider that these men were held in the highest esteem and veneration among the Jews for their outward sanctity and devotion, we see how far people may go in the externals of religion, and yet be in the very gall of bitterness and in the bond of iniquity. It was on this account that the apostle Paul so constantly warned the churches to whom he wrote against false profession, and receiving the grace of God in vain. He speaks of those who hold the truth, but who hold it in unrighteousness. The Epistles of Peter, John, and Jude, are full of warnings against false teachers, antichrists, and deceivers. The charges to the seven churches, in the book of Revelation, most awfully show the danger of declension, of leaving our first love, of becoming lukewarm, and, consequently, loathsome to an infinitely holy God.

Many, it is to be feared, have the reputation of being spiritually alive, whose souls, in the sight of God, are dead to all the vital influences of the Holy Spirit.

Oh, my soul, let not these solemn portions of God's sacred word be lost upon you. Pray without ceasing for that grace, which can alone preserve you from falling, and, through the merits of Jesus, present you faultless before the presence of his glory with exceeding joy.

"Almighty Savior! awaken my drowsy senses, and make me alive to my real condition. Allow me not to neglect your blessed Gospel; but draw me to yourself continually, for your grace is sufficient for me. Wash me in the cleansing fountain of your blood. Place me upon that foundation which can never be moved. Arm me for the spiritual combat; and at last make me more than conqueror, through the power of your might and the riches of your grace.

Why should I linger here below,
When Jesus calls my heart above?
Why, Oh, my soul, the bliss forego,
The joy of everlasting love?
I feel the weight of nature's guilt,
Beneath its ponderous load I groan;
Oh! may the blood on Calvary spilt
For all my crimson sins atone!
Blest Jesus! speak the pardoning word;
Salvation to my spirit bring!
Then will your grace those joys afford,
Which from your cross to sinners spring.
Redeemed from guilt and slavish fear,
My soul shall wing its way to you!
While faith beholds her tide clear
To blissful immortality.