

A Grateful Retrospect of Undeserved Mercies

~Other Speakers M-R: Thomas Reade:

70. A GRATEFUL RETROSPECT OF UNDESERVED MERCIES

"How precious are your thoughts unto me, O God! They are innumerable! I can't even count them; they outnumber the grains of sand! And when I wake up in the morning, you are still with me!" Psalm 139:17-18

It is delightful to contemplate what the blessed Jesus is to his believing people. He manifests himself to them in the most condescending manner, by using those similitudes which are comprehended to the humblest understanding. Truly, his words are spirit, and they are life. He spoke as never man spoke.

1. "I am the Vine, you are the branches; he that abides in me, and I in him, the same brings forth much fruit; for without me you can do nothing."

Here I learn, that as the branch receives all its sap from the parent stem, by which union, its fruitfulness is produced; so my soul can only bring forth the fruits of righteousness, by being grafted into Christ by faith. A branch cut off, lies withered on the ground; and, severed from Christ, I shall be barren also.

2. "I am the Bread of Life; he who comes to me shall never hunger; and he who believes on me shall never thirst."

David blesses God for the gift of "bread which strengthens man's heart." If bread be called the staff of life, for its nourishing quality, how precious is the bread from heaven, the Lord Jesus Christ! He is indeed the bread of life. He alone, can give life to the world, to all who come unto him by faith; for whoever believes shall be saved.

3. "I am the Door; by me if any man enter in, he shall be saved, and shall go in and out, and find pasture."

As the sheepfolds in Judea were enclosed, to keep out beasts of prey, it was important that they should be well guarded. Within such a protected sheepfold, the flock could repose in safety. Jesus is the only door of admittance into the gospel-fold. By faith in him, I am admitted into his Church, and form one of the sheep of his pasture, to whom he kindly says; "Fear not, little flock; for it is your Father's good pleasure to give you the kingdom." The roaring lion of the wilderness, who is ever going about seeking whom he may devour, cannot invade this sacred enclosure, for He, who is the door, is the Omnipotent Savior.

4. "I am the Good Shepherd; the good Shepherd gives his life for the sheep."

Jesus is not only the door into the sheep-fold, but also the good shepherd of the sheep. He is the "All, and in all" to his people. While the hireling flees, and leaves his flock to the danger of the wolf, Jesus gives his life for the sheep, that they may be saved from every evil, spiritual and eternal. Happy are the sheep of his pasture, who hear his voice and follow him. To such he will give eternal life, for none can pluck them out of his hands.

Oh! how great is the love and care of the good Shepherd. He died, that we might live; and ever lives to make intercession for us. He wills the salvation of his believing people. He seeks them, he saves them, he sanctifies them, he glorifies them. Oh! that we may rise to the full assurance of faith and hope.

5. "I am the Way, and the Truth, and the Life; no man comes unto the Father but by me."

As a pilgrim, traveling through a dreary desert, I need a guide to direct me. I perceive various roads branching out on the right hand and on the left, but into which shall I turn? Which of them will lead me to the city of Zion, the heavenly Jerusalem? I see a guidepost, on which is written; "This is the way, walk in it, when you turn to the right hand, and when you turn to the left." While reading, I hear a voice; "Thus says the Lord, Stand in the ways, and see, and ask for the old paths, where is the good way, and walk therein, and you shall find rest for your souls." I ask for direction, I entreat the Lord himself to guide me into the way wherein I should go; he hears my prayer; "I am the way, and the truth, and the life; no man comes unto the Father but by me." Oh! what a blessing! Jesus is both the way, and the guide to heaven.

6. "I am the Light of the world; he who follows me shall not walk in darkness, but shall have the light of life."

What a glorious revelation is this! Jesus is the Sun of Righteousness. His bright beams illuminate his Church. As it was of old, so it is now. In the land of Goshen, the children of Israel had light in their dwellings, while the Egyptians were wrapped in darkness. The members of Christ's true Church are now enlightened by the Spirit, while the unbelieving members of the visible Church are walking in darkness; for he, and only he that follows Christ, "shall not walk in darkness, but shall have the light of life."

7. "I am the Resurrection and the Life; he who believes in me, though he were dead, yet shall he live; and whoever lives and believes in me, shall never die."

O! how rich are the promises of Christ! While a sojourner upon earth, if a true believer in the Son of God, I am a fruitful branch in the Vine; I am nourished by the Bread of Life; I am admitted by the door into the sheepfold, the true Church; I am protected and saved by the good Shepherd; I am led into the true and living Way to the Father; I am enlightened by Jesus, the Light of the world, to see and avoid the dangers which surround me. All this is vouchsafed to me while traveling Zionward.

But, I must die! My body must return to the dust, and my spirit to him who gave it. Is all then ended? No. Jesus is the Resurrection and the Life; he will re-animate my sleeping dust; he will re-unite my soul to my body made spiritual and incorruptible; and, he will give me eternal life. There is the climax of blessedness, the fullness of glory.

How precious are these beautiful sayings of Jesus. The more I meditate upon them, the more of richness and beauty I discover in them. When I take a retrospective view of my mercies, I see, that from a child, baptized in his name, these blessings were freely offered to me in the gospel; and, that from the moment I truly believed with the heart unto righteousness, they became my portion, my treasure, my consolation. I cannot sufficiently praise the Giver of all good, the God of my life and of my salvation, for such unspeakable mercy, for such unsearchable riches of his grace. Oh! that my life may be one continued course of loving obedience, and believing reliance on the faithfulness and truth of God. May I, from henceforth, show my faith by my works; and my election in Christ, by being "holy, and without blame before him in love."

O! my soul, praise the Lord with a song, and magnify him with thanksgiving. Tell of his salvation from day to day; for He is good, and his mercy endures forever. Oh! how great is his goodness towards those who fear him; how transcendent his mercy towards the children of men. There is no end of his loving-kindness. It is inexhaustible; it is everlasting! Sing, then, the praises of your God, O my soul, for it well becomes a redeemed sinner to be thankful. Meditate continually on his excellent greatness, for such meditation is sweet. Rejoice in his salvation, for he has commanded his gospel to be preached to every creature, and has declared, that whoever believes in him shall be saved.

When I take a retrospective view of my undeserved mercies, I must bless my God, that I was born in a Christian land, where the light of the glorious gospel shines around me with meridian splendor. I might have been the offspring of some poor Hottentot, or wild Tahitian savage, ignorant of God, of Christ, and of heaven; sunk in all the sensualities of a debased idolatry. How, then, can I sufficiently admire the mercy of God in casting my lot in this favored island. Truly "the lines are fallen unto me in pleasant places; yes, I have a goodly heritage." I hear the sound of the Sabbath bells calling me to hear the sweet sounds of the gospel of Christ. I am blessed with the faithful preaching of Christ crucified, with the precious Bible, released from its fetters, by our martyred Reformers. Millions of my perishing fellow sinners have none of these things. Even in Christian lands, professedly so called, the bells may sound, but they call to the rites of superstition, or to the preaching of a dead morality.

But, Oh! my soul, remember, yes, remember, that as your privileges are great, so is your responsibility. Never forget the doom of Chorazin and Bethsaida. Peter felt all the force of his Lord's words when he wrote, respecting backsliders and apostates; "And when people escape from the wicked ways of the world by learning about our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ and then get tangled up with sin and become its slave again, they are worse off than before. It would be better if they had never known the right way to live than to know it and then reject the holy commandments that were given to them."

The hearts of such people were never renewed, their natures were never changed. This they proved by their return to the propensities of their natural hearts; for thus added Peter; "They make these proverbs come true: "A dog returns to its vomit," and "A pig that is washed goes back to her wallowing in the mud." The pig, though washed, was a pig still. The outward washing could not change the inward propensity of the animal. Is it not so with multitudes of baptized people? Outward reformation must never be confounded with inward regeneration.

Paul alludes to the same awful people in his Epistle to the Hebrews; "Anyone who refused to obey the law of Moses was put to death without mercy on the testimony of two or three witnesses. Think how much more terrible the punishment will be for those who have trampled on the Son of God and have treated the blood of the covenant as if it were common and unholy. Such people have insulted and enraged the Holy Spirit who brings God's mercy to his people." "For it is impossible to restore to repentance those who were once enlightened—those who have experienced the good things of heaven and shared in the Holy Spirit, who have tasted the goodness of the word of God and the power of the age to come—and who then turn away from God. It is impossible to bring such people to repentance again because they are nailing the Son of God to the cross again by rejecting him, holding him up to public shame."

Oh! how we should dread every approach to final apostasy. "If we deliberately continue sinning after we have received a full knowledge of the truth, there is no other sacrifice that will cover these sins. There will be nothing to look forward to but the terrible expectation of God's judgment and the raging fire that will consume his enemies."

When Paul says of the despiser of the blood of the covenant, "with which he was sanctified;" may he not allude to the ordinance of baptism, whereby the individual was sanctified or set apart to sacred uses, like the vessels of the temple? Had such an one been truly renewed by the Spirit of God, he would have been kept by the power of God through faith unto salvation.

"Dear friends, even though we are talking like this, we really don't believe that it applies to you. We are confident that you are meant for better things, things that come with salvation. For God is not unfair. He will not forget how hard you have worked for him and how you have shown your love to him by caring for other Christians, as you still do. Our great desire is that you will keep right on loving others as long as life lasts, in order to make certain that what you hope for will come true. Then you will not become spiritually dull and indifferent. Instead, you will follow the example of those who are going to inherit God's promises because of their faith and patience." Here the Apostle assures his beloved converts, that he was persuaded better things of them, and things that accompanied salvation, though he thus spoke.

I would then ask— Are all those true Christians; who are born in a Christian country? Are all those born again of the Spirit, who have been admitted by baptism unto the visible Church? Are all those the real disciples of Jesus, who attend his preached word? Alas! alas! many a heathen heart dwells in the bosom of a baptized Christian! What then is my state and character? Before men, I may be esteemed religious; but what will this avail, since He that judges me is the Lord. "For the Lord sees not as man sees; for man looks on the outward appearance, but the Lord looks on the heart."

Surely I have cause to bless God if he has brought me to the saving knowledge of Christ as my Savior, my Intercessor, my Righteousness, My Hope, my Refuge, and my Trust. The Rock on which I can securely build. The Friend in whom I can safely confide. The Fountain of supply for all my needs. I never can sufficiently admire this boundless grace, granted to one so worthless, when justice might have consigned me to the burning wrath of an offended God.

Lord, why is this? I search, but cannot find the cause in myself. I contemplate your own Eternal Love, and there I reach the Fountain of all my mercies. "I have loved you, my people, with an everlasting love. With unfailing love I have drawn you to myself." Surely mercy and truth have followed me all the days of my pilgrimage, like the waters in the wilderness, which cheered and refreshed the Israelites of old. As they drank of that spiritual Rock which followed them, (and that rock was Christ,) so have I been blessed with the living water from my crucified Lord, smitten for me.

As mountains rise above mountains, so do my mercies. On every side, I see blessings rise. To have Agur's wish fulfilled, is a favor of no ordinary kind. He well knew the danger of extremes, when he asked a gracious Providence to lead him in the middle path. "O God, I beg two favors from you before I die. First, help me never to tell a lie. Second, give me neither poverty nor riches! Give me just enough to satisfy my needs. For if I grow rich, I may deny you and say, "Who is the Lord?" And if I am too poor, I may steal and thus insult God's holy name."

If a believer in Jesus, my happiness will be increased by living near to him, by living to his glory. May humility and love ever dwell in my heart; then I shall be happy in all the changing scenes of life. If called to ascend the hill of prosperity, or to traverse the valley of adversity; if blessed with health, or depressed with sickness; if carried to old age, or cut off by early death; all will be well, if Jesus is my Savior, and my Friend.

It is profitable to consider what I deserve, and what I enjoy, to awaken self-abasement, and gratitude. If the righteous Lord were to deal with me according to my deservings, I should at this moment be under the rack of excruciating pain; or, under the pressure of most abject poverty; or, under the destitution of every friend to comfort me; or, under the sting of an awakened, guilty conscience; thus feeling the foretaste of eternal woe.

If thus dealt with in strictest justice, Death would receive his commission to hurl my affrighted soul into the gulf of endless misery, there to remain an everlasting monument of the vengeance of a holy God. All short of this is mercy! Do I enjoy a portion of health? It is all mercy. Am I undergoing a sanctified affliction? It is all mercy. Do I partake of the bounties of Providence? It is all mercy. Do I possess dear, affectionate friends? It is all mercy. Do

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I experience the love of God in Christ, pardoning my sins, and purifying my heart? Oh! this is mercy, beyond the power of language to praise or to express. Rejoice, O my soul, in such a heavenly Father, who thus spares and blesses his rebellious child. Rejoice in such a Savior, whose intercession for you is incessant and prevailing. Rejoice in such a Comforter, whose gracious work it is to snatch you as a brand out of the burning.

Oh! that I could be more and more grateful for those mercies which I enjoy. Let every murmuring thought be gone. Lord make me all praise, all gratitude, all love. May sin increase in hatefulness, as I increase in the knowledge of your goodness. Enlighten my mind to know both myself and yourself. Increase this salutary knowledge, that, from a deep abiding sense of my own depravity of nature, I may be led with greater earnestness to flee into the ark of safety— Jesus Christ, the righteous.

"My heart is fixed, O God, my heart is fixed; I will sing and give you praise." "I will extol you, my God, O King; and I will bless your name forever and ever." "You are my God, and I will praise you; you are my God, I will exalt you." "The Lord is my strength and song, and has become my salvation." "Great is the Lord, and greatly to be praised; his greatness is unsearchable." Thus sang the sweet Psalmist of Israel. O that I could seize his harp and strike a chord in unison with his!

Glory be to you, O Father, Son, and Spirit. To You be ascribed, by angels and men, all blessing, and honor, and glory, and power. Your name alone is excellent, and your glory above the earth and heaven. "Blessed be the Lord God of Israel from everlasting to everlasting; and let all the people say, Amen. Hallelujah."

Soon shall I bid this world adieu!
And enter soon the world above;
The eternal day bursts on my view,
The radiance of eternal love.
Weep not, O friends, nor mourn my loss,
My purest joys are all to come;
When far removed from every cross,
I reach my sweet, my heavenly home.
The shadows fly, the glorious light
Bespeaks the Holy City nigh;
Behold the day excludes the night,
My soul, is this Eternity?
The first-born form a sacred train
Around the Lamb, whom they adore;
While, safe beneath his gentle reign,
They chant his praises evermore.
I fly to join the victor's cry;
To taste their transports, all divine!
I fly to share the bliss on high,
And in my Savior's glory shine.
Release me now, you heavy chains;
Burden of flesh, drop down, and die
You piercing griefs, you earthly pains,
From you forever do I fly.

Come, then, quickly, Jesus! Come!