

Articles and Sermons :: Hannah Whitehall Smith's larger hope

Hannah Whitehall Smith's larger hope - posted by enzyme, on: 2004/12/14 14:50

Hannah Whitehall Smith had a larger view of the gospel than many realise. The publishers of her book "the Unselfishnes of God and how I discovered it" have removed three chapters from the original in which she describes how God opened to her the possibility that he will indeed save all people in the end.

Part of the removed material can be found here:

(http://www.tentmaker.org/testimonials/ThirdEpochInMyLife.html) The Third Epoch In My Religious Life

Probably this is a different slant than most suscribers to this forum hold but I would be interested to hear what you think.

Jimmy.

Re: Hannah Whitehall Smith's larger hope - posted by sermonindex (), on: 2004/12/14 14:54

Quote:
-----Probably this is a different slant than most suscribers to this forum hold but I would be interested to hear what you think.
-----

Here is the text from that chapter.. for people to read and comment on:

--

Chapter XXII

The Third Epoch In My Religious Life

As I stated in the last chapter, after a few years of exuberant enjoyment in the good news of salvation through Christ for myself and for those who thought as I did, my heart began to reach out after those who thought differently, and especially after those who, by reason of the providential circumstances of their birth and their surroundings, had had no fair chance in life. I could not but see that ignorance of God, and, as a result, lives of sin, seemed the almost inevitable fate of a vast number of my fellow human beings, and I could not reconcile it with the justice of God, that these unfortunate mortals should be doomed to eternal torment because of those providential circumstances, for which they were not responsible, and from which, in a charge majority of cases, they could not escape. The fact, that, 1, who no more deserved it than they, should have been brought to the knowledge of the truth, while they were left out in the cold, became so burdensome to me, that I often felt as if I would gladly give up my own salvation, if by this means I could bestow it upon those who had been placed in less fortunate circumstances than myself.

I began to feel that the salvation in which I had been rejoicing was, after all a very limited and a very selfish salvation, and, as such, unworthy of the Creator who had declared so emphatically that His "tender mercies are over all His works," and above all unworthy of the Lord Jesus Christ, who came into the world for the sole and single purpose of saving the world. I could not believe that His life and death for us could be meant to fall so far short of remedying the evil that He came on purpose to remedy, and I felt that it must be impossible that there could be any short-coming in the salvation He had provided. I began to be convinced that my difficulties had simply arisen from a misunderstanding of the plans of God, and I set myself to discover the mistakes. As I have said, my first refuge had been in the annihilation of the wicked. But this had soon seemed unworthy of a wise and good Creator, and a very sad confession of failure on His part, and I could not reconcile it with, either His omnipotence or His omniscience. I began to be afraid I was going to be disappointed in God. But one day a revelation came to me that vindicated Him, and that settled the whole question forever. We very often had revivalist preachers staying with us, as we sought every opportunity of helping forward what we called "gospel work". Among the rest there came one who was very full of the idea that it was the privilege and duty of the Christian to share, in a very especial manner, in the sufferings of Christ, as well as in His joys. He seemed to think our doing so would

d in some way help those who knew nothing of the salvation of Christ; and he had adopted the plan of making strong appeals on the subject in his meetings, and of asking Christians, who were willing, for the sake of others, to take a share of these sufferings upon themselves, to "come forward" to a front bench in the meeting to pray that it might be granted them. Somehow it all sounded very grand and heroic, and it fitted in so exactly with my longings to help my less fortunate fellow human beings, that, although I did not go "forward" for prayer at any of his meetings, I did begin to pray privately in a blind sort of way that I might come into the experience, whatever it was. The result was very different from what I had expected, but it was far from tremendous.

I had expected to enter into a feeling of Christ's own personal sufferings in the life and death He bore for our sakes, but instead I seemed to have a revelation, not of His sufferings because of sin, but of ours. I seemed to get a sight of the misery and anguish caused to humanity by the entrance of sin into the world, and of Christ's sorrow, not for His own sufferings because of it, but for the sufferings of the poor human beings who had been cursed by it. I seemed to understand something of what must necessarily be His anguish at the sight of the awful fate which had been permitted to befall the human race, and of His joy that He could do something to alleviate it. I saw that ours was the suffering, and that His was the joy of sacrificing Himself to save us. I felt that if I had been a Divine Creator, and had allowed such an awful fate to befall all the creatures I had made, I would have been filled with anguish, and would have realized that simple justice, even if not love, required that I should find some remedy for it. And I knew I could not be more just than God. I echoed in my heart over and over again the lines found by one of George Macdonald's characters engraved on a tombstone.

"Oh Thou, who didst the serpent make,  
Our pardon give and pardon take."

I had been used to hearing a great deal about the awfulness of our sins against God, but now I asked myself, what about the awfulness of our fate in having been made sinners? Would I not infinitely rather that a sin should be committed against myself, than that I should commit a sin against any one else? Was it not a far more dreadful thing to be made a sinner than to be merely sinned against? And I began to see that, since God had permitted sin to enter into the world, it must necessarily be that He would be compelled, in common fairness, to provide a remedy that would be equal to the disease. I remembered some mothers I had known, with children suffering from inherited diseases, who were only too thankful to lay down their lives in self-sacrifice for their children, if so be they might, in any way, be able to undo the harm they had done in bringing them into the world under such disastrous conditions and I asked myself, Could God do less? I saw that, when weighed in a balance of wrong done, we, who had been created sinners, had infinitely more to forgive than any one against whom we might have sinned.

^ ^ ^ ^ The vividness with which all this came to me can never be expressed. I did not think it, or imagine it, or suppose it. I saw it. It was a revelation of the real nature of things--not according to the surface conventional ideas, but according to the actual bottom facts--and it could not be gainsaid.

^ ^ ^ ^ In every human face I saw, there seemed to be unveiled before me the story of the misery and anguish caused by the entrance of sin into the world. I knew that God must see this with far clearer eyes than mine, and therefore I felt sure that the sufferings of this sight to Him must be infinitely beyond what it was to me, almost unbearable as that seemed. And I began to understand how it was that the least He could do would be to embrace with untold gladness anything that would help to deliver the being He had created for such awful misery.

It was a never to be forgotten insight into the world's anguish because of sin. How long it lasted I cannot remember, but, while it lasted, it almost crushed me. And as it always came afresh at the sight of a strange face, I found myself obliged to wear a thick veil whenever I went into the streets, in order that I might spare myself the awful realization. One day I was riding on a tram-car along Market Street, Philadelphia, when I saw two men come in and seat themselves opposite to me. I saw them dimly through in veil, but congratulated myself that it was only dimly, as I was thus spared the wave of anguish that had so often swept over me at the full sight of a strange face. The conductor came for his fare, and I was obliged to raise my veil in order to count it out. As I raised it I got a sight of the faces of those two men, and with an overwhelming flood of anguish, I seemed to catch a fresh and clearer revelation of the depth of the misery that had been caused to human beings by sin. It was more than I could bear. I clenched my hands and cried out in my soul, "O, God, how canst thou bear it? Thou mightest have prevented it, but didst not. Thou mightest even now change it, but Thou dost not. I do not see how Thou canst go on living, and endure it." I upbraided God. And I felt I was justified in doing so. Then suddenly God seemed to answer me. An inward voice said, in tones of infinite love and tenderness, "He shall see of the travail of His soul and be satisfied." "Satisfied!" I cried in my heart, "Christ is to be satisfied! He will be able to look at the world's misery, and then at the travail through which He has passed because of it, and will be satisfied with the result; If I were Christ, nothing could satisfy me but that every human being should in the end be saved, and therefore I am sure that not

hing less will satisfy Him." And with this a veil seemed to be withdrawn from before the plans of the universe, and I saw that it was true, as the Bible says, that "as in Adam all die -even so in Christ should all be made alive." As was the first, even so was the second. The "all" in one case could not in fairness mean less than the "all" in the other. I saw therefore that the remedy must necessarily be equal to the disease, the salvation must be as universal as the fall.

À À À À I saw all this that day on the tram-car on Market street, Philadelphia--not only thought it, or hoped it, or even believed it--but knew it. It was a Divine fact. And from that moment I have never had one questioning thought as to the final destiny of the human race. God is the Creator of every human being, therefore He is the Father of each one, and they are all His children; and Christ died for every one, and is declared to be "the propitiation not for our sins only, but also for the sins of the whole world" (1 John 2:2). However great the ignorance therefore, or however grievous the sin, the promise of salvation is positive and without limitations. If it is true that "by the offense of one judgment came upon all men to condemnation," it is equally true that "by the righteousness of one the free gift came upon all men unto justification of life." To limit the last "all men" is also to limit the first. The salvation is absolutely equal to the fall. There is to be a final "restitution of all things", when "at the name of Jesus every knee shall bow, of things in heaven, and things on earth, and things under the earth, and every tongue shall confess that Jesus Christ is Lord to the glory of God the Father." Every knee, every tongue-words could not be more embracing. The how and the when I could not see; but the one essential fact was all I needed-somewhere and somehow God was going to make every thing right for all the creatures He had created. My heart was at rest about it forever.

À À À À I hurried home to get hold of my Bible, to see if the magnificent fact I had discovered could possibly have been all this time in the Bible, and I had not have seen it; and the moment I entered the house, I did not wait to take off my bonnet, but rushed at once to the table where I always kept my Bible and Concordance ready for use, and began my search. Immediately the whole Book seemed to be illuminated. On every page the truth concerning the "times of restitution of all things" of which the Apostle Peter says "God Hath spoken by the mouth of all His holy prophets since the world began," shone forth, and no room was left for questioning. I turned greedily from page to page of my Bible, fairly laughing aloud for joy at the blaze of light that illuminated it all. It became a new book. Another skin seemed to have been peeled off every text, and my Bible fairly shone with a new meaning. I do not say with a different meaning, for in no sense did the new meaning contradict the old, but a deeper meaning, the true meaning, hidden behind the outward form of words. The words did not need to be changed, they only needed to be understood; and now at last I began to understand them.

À À À À I remember just about this time, in the course of my daily reading in the Bible, coming to the Psalms, and I was amazed at the new light thrown upon their apparently most severe and blood-thirsty denunciations. I saw that, when rightly interpreted, not by the letter, but by the spirit, they were full of the assured and final triumph of good over evil, and were a magnificent vindication of the goodness and justice of God, who will not, and ought not, and cannot, rest until all His enemies and ours are put under His feet. I saw that the kingdom must be interior before it can be exterior, that it is a kingdom of ideas, and not one of brute force; that His rule is over hearts, not over places; that His victories must be inward before they can be outward; that He seeks to control spirits rather than bodies; that no triumph could satisfy Him but a triumph that gains the heart; that in short, where God really reigns, the surrender must be the interior surrender of the convicted free men, and not merely the outward surrender of the conquered slave. Milton says, "Who overcomes by force hath overcome but half his foe," and I saw that this was true.

À À À À Read in the light of these views, my whole soul thrilled with praise over the very words that had before caused me to thrill with horror. "Let God arise, let His enemies be scattered; let them also that hate Him flee before Him. As smoke is driven away, so drive them away: as wax melted before the fire, so let the wicked perish at the presence of God." God's wrath is against the sin not against the sinner, and when His enemies are scattered, ours are also. His sword is the righteousness that puts to death sin in order to save the sinner. The fire of His anger is the "refiner's fire", and He sits, not as the destroyer of the human soul, but as its purifier, to purge it as gold and silver are purged.

"Implacable is love  
Foes may be bought or teased  
From their malign intent;  
But He goes unappeased  
Who is on kindness bent."

The Psalmist says, "Thou wast a God that forgavest them, though thou takest vengeance of their inventions;" and with this key to interpret it, all the denunciations of God's wrath, which had once seemed so cruel and so unjust, were transformed into declarations of His loving determination to make us good enough to live in Heaven with Himself forever. I might

multiply endlessly similar instances of the new illumination that shone in entrancing beauty on every page of the Bible, but these will suffice. I began at last to understand what the Apostle Paul meant when he said that he had been made the minister of the new testament, not of the letter but of the spirit, for "the letter killeth but the spirit giveth life". Things I had read in the letter, and had shuddered at, now, read in the spirit, filled me with joy.