

1064a  
L. Q. 692

Sermon preached by Mr. F.L.Gosden at Galeed Chapel, Brighton, Sunday evening,  
1st December 1963

"And as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of man be lifted up; that whosoever believeth in Him should not perish, but have eternal life. For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in Him should not perish, but have everlasting life." John 3:14-16

In the first seventeen verses of this chapter is the instruction that Christ gave to Nicodemus that master in Israel. We are not told in this chapter what immediate effect this teaching had upon him, but evidently it was effectual, because Nicodemus was one who went to ask for the body, the sacred body of the Lord Jesus, and he, with others, embalmed that sacred body and buried it. So it is very evident that this teaching was effectual to his salvation; and very important are these first seventeen verses. I know it is a part of the Scripture that is commonly known, perhaps more commonly known than experienced. The three most vital things in salvation, in fact which make up the whole of salvation, are contained in them, but the order is reversed.

First there is the love of God the Father; "For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son. Secondly, there is the love of the Son in redeeming His people. 'As Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of man be lifted up.' Thirdly, there is the necessity of being born again. "Marvel not that I said unto thee, ye must be born again." The necessity is in this: "That which is born of the flesh is flesh, and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit", and nothing can rise above its nature. You can educate flesh, you can soak flesh in religion for forty years, it will make no difference to it; therefore says Christ, seeing that that is so, "Ye must be born again."

So that it is well to consider those three main works in salvation:

First of all there is the blessed source, the sovereign, everlasting, electing love of the Father, and that love in the gift of His dear Son; and secondly, the love of the Son in coming to suffer, bleed and die in order to redeem His church; the third thing is the work of the Holy Ghost in regeneration. So that in the first seventeen verses we have the blessed Trinity; and we may well pause, as we should do from time to time, looking at these three points which were opened up to Nicodemus as to whether we have any evidence that this work has been begun in us. Therefore we should look at these verses, the 16th verse before the 14th, for the purpose in both verses is the same, that 'Whosoever believeth in Him should not perish.' 'For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son.'

The manner of His loving – 'He SO loved.' It was an amazing love, an everlasting love of the Father and when that love reaches a sinner's heart, there is amazement there. "Behold what manner of love the Father hath bestowed upon us, that we should be called the sons of God. It doth not yet appear what we shall be, but we know that when He shall appear, we shall be like Him, for we shall see Him as He is.' What is that to us? a quotation? a mere quotation of Scripture? As we from time to time attempt in our poor way to lift up the Lord Jesus Christ, is it anything to us individually? Is there any connexion between this great salvation and this great Saviour and our own need as great sinners?

‘For God so loved the world.’ The Arminians abuse this Scripture and build upon it that false superstructure of free will. O how true it is! Even this master in Israel could not understand it, "How can these things be?" he said. "The natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God, they are foolishness unto him, neither can he know them because they are spiritually discerned." And this is spiritually discerned ‘For God so loved the world.’ Not every individual in the world. That is very obvious throughout the Scriptures, otherwise none would ever be lost and, therefore, to maintain their false position they make it appear that the responsibility and the sovereignty, is placed upon poor dying sinners, a creature - and the Lord comes to such but they refused to be saved by Him! Poor religion that which puts sovereignty, or attempts to put sovereignty on the will of a poor changeable sinner. But this ‘world’ in the text is the world of His people, for there are two heads and, therefore, there are two worlds. Adam is the federal head of the people; Christ is the federal Head of His people.

‘For God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son.’ There is no necessity in God to save self-destroyed sinners at all. God was not the author of sin. Sin is a mystery; it is called the mystery of iniquity. Sin entered - that mystery can never be explained and it is unprofitable to pry into the purpose of God in permitting sin to enter. That it has entered is solemnly obvious - not only in the sufferings and death, carnage, murders, brutality and every kind of evil. If we only know sin by observing those things we know very little about it. To know sin is by the law. To know that we are sinners ourselves, that we are by nature completely ruined. But there was no necessity in God to save ruined people, they ruined themselves. ‘But God so loved.’

He chose His people before they fell and the fall of man could not alter immutable love - and such was His love that that love made provision against the fall. ‘He so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son.’ This love was the electing love of the Father. There was nothing in His people for Him to love. If you could find anything in yourself that you think God could love, that something would detract from His glory. You may perhaps feel it a strange expression but some of you may understand it, that you are thankful that you cannot find the least vestige in you that God could love. Everything in you, in the completeness of your ruin, He must hate. It is a great thing to come, to be brought before the Lord by the Spirit in the completeness of sinnership and for faith to see in Him the completeness of salvation. But had God let the human race go, He would have been just. But this brings in the covenant of grace. He made provision in the covenant, and that by His covenant love His people should be redeemed. They needed a Redeemer, a Ransom.

Salvation could not be at the expense of the glory, the holiness, the justice of God, and you will see and feel the beauty of it. O if this love ever reaches your heart by the Spirit and the rod of His strength is sent out of Zion into your heart, you will be thankful that the forgiveness of sins is just; salvation is just. Therefore, there is no room for excuses and you will make none. You will not look at your case as a sin-bitten sinner and try and find some extenuations, neither will you look round and see if you can find a sinner bigger than yourself. No, but by faith to behold the love of God in Christ Jesus. It was such a comfort and strength to Paul that he felt persuaded that nothing could ever separate him from this love of God, through which He gave His only begotten Son.

‘For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son’ and with Him He gave everything and gave everything in Him. The person of Emmanuel, the infinite God who cannot be contained, who is omnipotent in His power, that He should take into union with His divine and infinite Person, human nature, and that for the love of His people, is the very

mystery of godliness. Salvation could never have been accomplished in any other way. Had it been possible for the holy character of God and His justice to have been vindicated and sinners saved in any other way but for His Son to suffer, bleed and die, God would have used that method, but there was none; and there is a beauty in it; a solemnity in it. Here we see sin in its right view, and we can estimate its guilt. Not those types of the beasts and the sacrifices. They were just shadows and figures, they could never take away sin; and I have felt one of the sweetest words of love from the Lord Jesus was, "Lo, I come." He knew what He was coming to. He knew that those Levitical sacrifices could never take away sin. "Then said I, Lo, I come." After consideration of all the futility of all the ceremonial law, the Lord Jesus declared - and that for the encouragement of His people, "Lo, I come, in the volume of the book it is written of Me, I delight to do Thy will O My God."

‘God so loved the world.’ But it will be of no use to us unless the Holy Ghost makes it ours. For us to be able upon the authority of the Spirit to say ‘God so loved me, that He gave His only begotten Son for me’ - and your case will be made so universal in your being, eternity will be made so real to you that you will feel that you need the whole of the gospel for yourself. You will feel to need the whole of the Lord Jesus and go and tell Him so, but you will do it in sincerity and when you do that you will feel to be the chiefest of sinners. Feel to be saturated and impregnated with that malignant disease of sin from your head to your feet. Go to Him and say, ‘Lord Jesus, I need all that Thou art, I need all that Thou hast accomplished, I need the whole of the merits of Thy precious blood. I need to be clothed and covered in Thy righteousness. I need the whole of Thy saving sanctifying grace.’

‘God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son’ - and gave everything in Him. Everything without exception is to be found in Him. I remember on a Thursday night preceding a Good Friday and having services before me on the Friday, that it was as though the Holy Spirit took me by the hand to Calvary and gave me a little glimpse of the Lord Jesus, with this word, "In Him dwelleth all the fullness of the Godhead bodily and ye are complete in Him." Ah, if the love of God comes into your heart my friends, you will know then what that love did through the Son of God - for it is the love of God in Christ. ‘For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son’ - He could not give anything more. The love of God to His dear Son is inexpressible, unspeakable. I cannot speak of it. You could almost understand if He gave His Son for obedient good people, if He gave His dear Son for Adam if he had never fallen, although then there would be no need for it. That is the amazing mystery. What brought the glory and majesty of God into exercise with respect to men was sin. So that the glorious attributes of Jehovah and all the glory of God we manifested in the exact opposite.

When all this is concentrated and focussed upon your own soul and your own individual salvation it will make salvation great. ‘For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son.’ Did not spare Him - not only did not spare Him but delivered Him up; delivered Him up into the hands of wicked men to be crucified and slain. It was not Herod or Pilate really that slew the Lord Jesus; it was not Herod or Pilate, that said "Awake, O sword against My Shepherd." "It pleased the Lord to bruise Him." Although it was by wicked hands that took Him and crucified and slew Him, yet it was according to the determinate counsel and will of God, flowing from this love that, rather than lose His people in their sins, He found a Ransom. This was love. I wonder what it means to us? I wonder how you are hearing? You are either hearing prayerfully to receive the gospel in the power of it, or you are merely hearing a lecture. Therefore, the point is, what connexion have these truths with your

experience? Do they unite us unto Christ? join us unto Him so as to have that token for good and the witness of the Spirit in our experience of our union to Christ, O how blessed that is.

‘For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son; and as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must this Son be lifted up.’ Not only gave Him; not only did He bring immortal blessings down; not only did He bring life and immortality to light through the gospel, but He must be lifted up. We have the figure here; ‘As Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so.’ You know that history, that for murmuring in the wilderness the Lord sent fiery serpents which bit the Israelites; and the only remedy that God prescribed was for Moses to lift up a brazen serpent, an emblem of that which had bitten them. Then they were exhorted to look at that serpent. This is a lively and sacred type of the lifting up of the Lord Jesus Christ upon Calvary’s cross, which involves the whole of His sufferings, His life and His ignominious death. ‘As Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness.’ This brings before us the doctrine of substitution. According to reason, if we had seen those bitten Israelites and we were asked to advise and prescribe some remedy, I think that we should never have suggested that the very thing that had bitten them should be raised up for them to look at. It looked altogether the wrong thing to do. But O how suitable it is, not to a nominal sinner but to one that is stung to death. It sets before us the imputation of sin to the Lord Jesus. He became sin. Indeed, His Father made Him to be sin for us and that was one of the greatest ingredients of His sufferings. The imputation of sin into His holy soul - He had a human soul, as well as a human body. Sensitive it was, and the more sensitive because it was completely holy. O the sufferings of intrinsic holiness, not only to come into the midst of sin and sinners, but the imputation of sin to His holy sinless Soul! That was suffering, and that is why Moses was instructed to lift up a serpent. Doubtless in all sincerity, though mistaken, if we had to lift up an emblem to those bitten Israelites, we would have lifted up the emblem of an unfallen Adam as much as to say here is innocency and sinlessness; now you look at sinlessness and you will live; but that would have been death. That is where error comes in my friends.

*Serpents are the beasts that bite them,  
Make of brass a serpent like them,  
That's the way I choose to save.*

*(Gadsby's 876)*

What a hopeless thing for a sin-bitten sinner to look at an emblem of innocent Adam, and what a hopeless thing for a sinner to look at the emblem of an unfallen angel!

"He hath made Him to be sin for us, who knew no sin." Holy, harmless, undefiled and separate from sinners He was, otherwise there would have been no validity, no salvation in Him. O see this infinite One, infinite in holiness, yet in human nature, void of sin yet emptying Himself, becoming poor, and the whole of the sins of His people poured into His sacred soul; and He carried them away! "He hath borne our sins in His own body on the tree." O, this is the Man at God's right hand, the Son of man whom He hath made strong for Himself! - Made Him strong for weak sinners. This is how He laid help upon one that is mighty. What a terrible thing sin must be to need such a work; to need such a gift as the unspeakable gift of God's eternal Son - and nothing else could be a ransom.

‘As Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness’ and so He is lifted up by the Holy Spirit in the ministry. We feel our insufficiency to lift Him up, but we try to do it. It is a blessed object of faith. It may be some of you who know how deep the wounds of sin are, you know what it

is to be stung to death, how the good news of the gospel has so entered into your soul that He has been, as was said to the Galatians, "Christ hath been evidently set forth, crucified among you." Paul so preached Him to the Galatians that it was as though He was evidently crucified among them.

Have you ever beheld His glory, the glory of the dear Son of God, lifted up upon Calvary's cross, there a Substitute, there a Great High Priest, offering one sacrifice for ever, before He sat down on the right hand of God? He must be lifted up and lifted up in the preaching of the gospel; but He is lifted up in the souls of His dear people. The Holy Ghost lifts Him up there. Well, what do you think of Him? Have you need of this Great High Priest? Because when He was lifted up He was offering Himself without spot to God. You look at the two things - the sins of the whole election of grace were made to meet upon His sacred head and imputed to His holy soul - and yet, with all that aggregate of the sins of the Church upon Him and the curse of His divine Father in His soul, He was offering Himself without spot, without spot, - and yet the burden of the guilt of the whole Church. As one sings:

*My faith would lay her hand,  
On that dear Head of Thine,  
While like a penitent I stand  
And there confess my sins.*

*(Gadsby's 125)*

But the purpose of it is this – 'That whosoever believeth in Him should not perish /but have eternal life.' O, it is this believing in Him! "The Jews came to Him and said, what shall we do to work the works of God? Jesus said unto them, this is the work of God that ye believe on Him that He has sent." To believe is the work of God; and this believing is unto salvation. It is not merely an assent to the truth but a receiving of it by faith and a reception of it as revealed by the Holy Spirit. Have you thus received the Lord Jesus? "To as many as received Him, to them gave lie power to become the sons of God, even to them that believe on His name." Receiving Him, coming to Him, believing in Him are all the same thing. Dost thou believe on the Son of God? Do you believe that He came, that His Father sent Him? Do you believe that His sacrifice was all-sufficient and prevalent, that because He is eternal God, therefore, eternal virtue is in all that He condescends to become and to accomplish? Do you believe it?

Do you believe it in this way, you desperately need it? Has it been made so attractive to your heart so that you can in the simplicity of those lines say, to yourself, "Give me Christ or else I die"? Well, if so, then you are inside of this text, that 'Whosoever believeth in Him should not perish.' But if you are only nominal in your believing, if you have no interest in Christ and He has no interest in you, if you are not united unto Him in the new birth, but severed from Him, you must eternally perish. If you possessed the world and attained to the greatest honour in it, yet when you come to die you leave everything behind. But if you believe that He is yours then all your treasure, all the treasures of grace, of salvation, of righteousness and holiness will take with you into heaven?

'Should not perish but have everlasting life.' and may the Lord give you diligence "to make your calling" for the calling is to be born again - "and election sure."

Amen