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Sermon preached by Mr J H Gosden
at Blunsdon Hill
on Wednesday 28 October, 1953

1 Timothy 1 v 15

"This is a faithful saying and worthy of all acceptance
that Christ Jesus came into the world
to save sinners; of whom I ^{am} chief"

A very common saying, so common that people pass it by without considering what it means. But it means a great deal to sinners who are such in their painful experience, that is to say, people who are solemnly convinced that they are lost without the truth of the text. Salvation, a work wrought out by the Son of God for the election of grace, comes to be an imperative need in the experience of everyone who is in that secret covenant, in the Lord's own time, and that is a very solemn matter. It may be with some of you that all you can do and say often times, and about all the religion you seem to have, is, "Lord save me!" I would rather have your religion, if that be your condition, than the religion of many who acquire a "working knowledge" of the Bible and never have a sick night for sin before God. The issues are beyond all thought tremendous. We are either saved or lost, and that for eternity. We may have a quantity of religion, and be lost. We may feel to have a very little knowledge of religion, and yet have some little knowledge of Christ and His salvation, and that is worth more than a ton of sentiment.

Paul, writing to his son Timothy, gives him fatherly advice concerning the exercise of the ministry, and expresses in this context the wonder of his own case as having himself obtained mercy through the abounding of divine grace. "The grace of our Lord was exceeding abundant with faith and love which is in Christ Jesus." This gave him liberty and strength and authority thus to write and advise his son, Timothy, concerning the centre of his ministry. The centre of the ministry is the same throughout the whole of the history of the church and of the ministry. It is "Jesus Christ and Him crucified"; and the Lord God has declared it to be His pleasure that,

through the foolishness of preaching, those who are brought to believe in a preached, and uplifted and crucified Redeemer, shall be saved. (1 Corinthians 1 v 21) "Faith cometh by hearing and hearing by the Word of God".

"This is a faithful saying". Who said it? Who issued the saying. On what ground does it stand? It is the truth of God. It is the very manifestation of God's wondrous grace that you were singing of just now (Gadsby's 984). To Titus, the Apostle says, on the same subject, "The grace of God that bringeth salvation hath appeared to all men". That grace of God was in the appearance of incarnate Deity. True, that grace of God was manifested in measure in the first promise in Eden's garden, but what was that a promise of, but the promise of the coming Messiah? God said that the seed of the woman should bruise the serpent's head. That was the first manifestation of grace in a promise from God, a gracious promise to fallen mankind. But the appearance of this grace was in the coming of the Son of God.

"Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners". Many accept the historical fact that there was a Babe born in Bethlehem, that they called Him Jesus, that He was a good Man, and went about doing good, was a humble Man, set a good example, and suffered on the cross. But historical faith will not save our souls. We may have an historical faith in the event of the coming of Jesus Christ without union to Him, without repentance for sin, and without any love to Him. But if we are lost, if the Lord has in some good and adequate measure revealed to ourselves what we are before Him, and shown us our accountability to Him under the law, O that will make salvation, as I have said, imperative.

The Apostle, speaking of the Lord Jesus, said, as is recorded in the Acts - "There is none other name under heaven given among men, whereby we must be saved". And the emphasis is on "must". I believe Whitfield preached from the text and from the other text in John 3 - "Ye must be born again" - two "musts", hundreds of times, and he was asked why. He said - "Because ye must be born again, and because ye must be saved - or lost. No middle way! Whatever we feel or think, we are lost if we are not saved. There is no salvation apart from Jesus Christ, and apart from possessing union to Him and having Him in our

hearts. It is not only believing in Him verbally, as discovered in the Scriptures, though that is good. I would not say a word - God forbid that I should ever say a syllable - against belief in the Word of God. Paul said that the Scriptures were able to save Timothy through faith in Christ Jesus. They are of saving efficacy, not as received merely in our judgment and logically, but as received in the power of the Holy Ghost.

This saying will be to a convicted sinner, in the hands of the Spirit, a wonderful saying. Couched in it is a tremendous truth, the incarnation of God's only begotten Son and, in that incarnation, the manifestation of God's good will toward men.

When the Babe was at Bethlehem, the angels celebrated His birth with that wonderful ascription of praise, "Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, good will toward men". Good will is grace, favour, and that, consistent with the glory of God in the highest. That is the point. That will be the point in your conscience as convicted by the Holy Ghost. "Against Thee, Thee only have I sinned, and done this evil in Thy sight". Sin must be condemned, and sinners must be condemned, apart from Christ and His salvation, His sacrifice, His intercession and advocacy in heaven. He is essential to us.

"This is a faithful saying". Nothing can infringe it, overthrow it. It is a declaration of mighty truth and, first of all, it expresses God's intention and divine purpose in sending His only begotten Son into the world; no other purpose but the purpose of grace, to manifest His favour toward His elect people, and to discover His character as a just God and a Saviour. He "sent not His Son into the world to condemn the world", (John 3 17). He needed not to do that. Christ, the Son of God eternal, needed never to have taken ^{our} human nature to condemn the world". That could have been done from His holy throne in heaven. But it was for this one blessed, holy purpose of grace, to save sinners.

"Worthy of all acceptation", all approval. Do you approve of this saying, this truth? What is it to you? "What think ye of Christ?" If that simple question were pressed home on your heart and

conscience not merely as a passing thought, but as the regular direction of your mind, what would you have to say with sincerity? Is Christ anything? If He is anything really to you, He will be everything. He will be everything or nothing.

"Worthy of all acceptation, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners." The manner of His saving sinners was, first of all, to obtain for them eternal redemption, to pay their debts, to suffer the penalty due to their sins, to weave out a righteousness of perfect obedience, as Man, to the law of God. To do what no man could do, even for himself, as a son of Adam. The Son of God came and took our nature to do that. O, it is worthy of all acceptation! It is acceptable to a lost sinner. And when a glimpse of the truth that is in this text, in the incarnation of the Son of God, and His work is given to a poor sinner, that sinner will say "There is all my hope. I have no hope apart from that truth". But he will say more than that: He will say, "Lord tell me, and make me feel it, that Thou art my salvation, that in Thy incarnation, in Thy obedience, in Thy substitutionary sacrifice and suffering death, my sins were included, my unworthy name was on Thy heart." That will be the point.

"Worthy of all acceptation, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners." Now some of you may be so solemnly convinced of your sin that it may be a constant and daily trouble, a weakness, and sometimes almost a terror to you, because you are guilty, and therefore feel liable to condemnation. And in the midst of that conviction you may have rising up in your mind some thought like this "Well, but Christ died for the election of grace, and I am not at all sure - I have no present feeling knowledge of being one of the election of grace", and you may be held there. Many a child of God has been held there. Some have said - You should take notice of election. Christ died for the sheep; and you have a great trouble in your mind, and may be greatly tempted to conclude that Christ did not die for you and, concluding, despair. But this word of Paul's just says this "Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners", and he adds "of whom I am chief".

Do some of you really feel in secret before God a kind of

gathering despair because your sins are unusual, and so many, and so black, that you cannot entertain a comfortable hope in the mercy of God? I can sympathise with such a person. When the Lord deals with people He makes them in some measure feel that they are great sinners, and they could not entertain a hope, were not the blood of Christ infinite in its merit. But then this point of election may be before your mind. Well, if you are enabled by the Holy Spirit to plead with the Lord and to put your case before Him, and tell Him you have no hope of obtaining mercy, of escaping hell, of reaching heaven, no hope of ever being pure and holy and fit for heaven, apart from the merit and virtue of Jesus Christ and His blood, I believe that if you really are brought there in secret before the Lord, it will prove sooner or later that you are amongst those who are chosen to obtain salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ. You cannot say, if so exercised, that God has ever revealed to you that you are not elect, and it is obvious, according to Peter, that most of the Lord's people, at least in the beginning of their experience, are very doubtful about their election, else he would not enjoin them to give diligence to make their calling and election sure. And what can make calling and election sure so much as obtaining an experience in the conscience of blood-bought pardon and divine mercy?

"Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners". And He did save them. He laid down His life, and obtained eternal redemption for them. There was nothing left unexpiated when He died, no sins left in God's account against the church of God. O, if we did but believe that, if the Holy Spirit led us into that sacred mystery of the incarnation of His dear Son, and that precious sacrifice which He offered of Himself, it would strengthen our faith. We should cast ourselves upon the merit of His death and plead that Name before the Father until we obtained an experience of this salvation in our souls!

"Of whom I am chief". Paul never forgave himself. He remembered how injurious he had been, and what a blasphemer he was. He says he was not worthy to be called an apostle because he persecuted the church of God, and that he was "less than the least of all saints". It was the grace and mercy of God that brought him to feel that. When people receive the atonement and realise what it cost Christ to make

that atonement for them, they never have had a word of excuse, they never open their mouth again when the Lord is pacified toward them for all that they have done. (Ezekiel 14 v 63) And this is the point that you, if convicted of sin, would be at.

"Christ came into the world to save sinners". Now, He did save them, virtually, when He died. In that day the sins of the whole church, the nation of the elect, were blotted out and put away. But though that was sufficient in the sight of God, that sufficiency must be conveyed as an experience, and this is in the resurrection and intercession and advocacy of Him who died on Calvary's cross and now fills the mercy seat. O, how thankful I have been hundreds of times for the doctrine of the resurrection and the blessed truth that we believe in, trust in, and come to, a living Christ. He who died, rose again, and liveth "after the power of an endless life". And He is there. He who came into the world to save sinners rose again and ascended on high in the interests of those same sinners whose salvation is secured by His death, and is in heaven to dispense the experience of that salvation, the fruit of His precious work, to the objects of His love. My friends, do you find sometimes a compulsion upon your heart?

Jesus my soul's compelled to flee
From all its wrath and curse to Thee

Just as you are, without a plea, without an extenuation, but with confession, you must flee to Him who died upon the cross and fills the mercy seat. O, there is no refuge anywhere else! You will sink in gloom if your eyes, the eye of faith, is taken off Jesus Christ. Peter began to sink when he went to walk on the water to go to Jesus. His eyes were off Him, and he saw the waves and felt the wind boisterous. "And beginning to sink, he cried, saying Lord save me". How many of you today have walked about and prayed those three words out of a feeling heart? If I might say so, that word expresses a healthier state of soul than a stagnant, widespread, notional religion, painful though it is to be lost. But we read concerning Peter, that the Lord immediately stretched out His hand and saved him. It is not always immediately in the experience of a poor, sinking, sinful worm, but it will be sooner or later. No man ever

pleaded in faith the Person and blood and righteousness of Jesus Christ, and was lost. What a mercy there is something to plead! And what a mercy that there is an ear inclined toward confessing sinners! But this could not be but for the truth of Christ's incarnation and saving work upon earth. The work of divine salvation is a whole work from beginning to end, God's work, and what Christ wrought on earth must be conveyed in the blessed fruit of it from heaven in answer to the cries of those who are taught of the Holy Ghost.

Paul was made a praying man. He prayed all his days. He knew the Lord by divine revelation, he obtained mercy from Him, and he was made a great apostle and minister. But he needed, to his latest days, still that mercy; he still declared he had not apprehended that for which God had apprehended him. If the Lord has laid hold of us by the mighty arm of His power, and laid us low, and taught us a little of what we are as sinners, and our helplessness in respect to that sinnership, and our guilt, and then revealed to us a little of who Jesus Christ is, then Christ will be everything to us, and we shall be more or less constantly feeling after Him, to obtain virtue from Him.

"To save sinners; of whom I am chief". There is only one sin spoken of in the Scripture that shall never be forgiven and that is the sin against the Holy Ghost, the blasphemy against the Holy Ghost. No child of God ever commits that. If you are exercised before God concerning pardon, if you seek to know whether you have an interest in the Lord Jesus, then you have not committed that sin, for I believe it fixes a person in hardness and impenitence. But you may have some sins that you remember, some sins that you can never forgive yourself for, and some sins that you feel make your conscience very sore. You cannot undo those sins, and there you are. What can you do? Can you go upon the general notion of divine forgiveness? No! You will want this blessed truth and this blessed salvation in your heart. Writing to the Ephesians and the Colossians, the apostle speaks of Christ dwelling in their hearts, the hope of glory, (Ephesians 3 v 17; Colossians 1 v 27) and that is what you will want. That is what you will seek. "Lord, bring in that salvation, come into my heart, and bring the blessings of salvation, pardon, justification, sanctification, peace with God, into my poor heart! I want Thee there

Lord!" And you will have Him there one day. O His love will not be withholden always from those whom, in love and pity, He redeemed with His precious blood. Can you rise high enough in desire and in hope to ask Him, to tell Him you have no other ground, no other name, no other door of entrance into God's presence, but Himself? Listen to what John says in his first epistle, speaking of the gospel - "These things have I spoken unto you that ye sin not. And if any man sin we have an Advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous". Did Christ, as an Advocate, and did His advocacy in heaven, ever appeal to you and draw you up to Him and give you courage to lay your case into His hand? An advocate is one who takes a person's case entirely up. You put your case into His hand. Ah, if you put your case into His hand who reigns in heaven as Mediator and Intercessor, and who once agonised under the weight of imputed guilt on the cross, I believe you will prove that that blessed One is your Friend and your Saviour, and that the love which He bore to you in suffering for your sins is still the same love. When He lets it down into your heart and tells you, and makes you feel it, that you are His because you were given to Him in eternity, that you are His because He died for your sins on the cross and thereby redeemed you to God, and that you shall be His for ever by union to Him in the Spirit, that will enrich your soul, that will give you a prospect for eternity, that will strengthen you to oppose Satan, and that will give you victories over sin in your own nature, and over the world and the sin that is about you.

Salvation! O, we need it, need it daily really. We shall need it down to the very end. And there is no deficiency. Plenteous redemption is with the Lord, and we need it. We do not need more, but less will not suffice, than the infinitude of the merit of Christ's atoning blood. It is a worthy saying "Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners" and He came down by divine authority. His Father sent Him. That is a point in experience. You will find these things wrought out in the secrets of your little soul, insignificant though you feel yourself to be before God sometimes. The Father sent Him. And when you plead in the Father's ear the merit and sacrifice, blood and righteousness of the Lord Jesus you plead in that way the Lord has appointed.

And so John continues: "And He is the propitiation for our

sins". Propitiation is reconciliation. It means that there is no rejection for those who come through Him to the Father. Expiation, pardon, blessing! The Lord Himself pledged this when upon earth: "Whatever ye shall ask the Father in My Name, He will give it you". The Father who sent the Son to be the Saviour of the world, that same Father is approached through Jesus Christ by the power and teaching of the Holy Spirit, by poor sinners. Do you ever get access? In these days of my life, I esteem a few moments of real feeling nearness to God in Christ more than the whole world. I got it the other day for a few moments in my study, and it was sacred! It is needful. We can never do anything but sink in gloom and depression and darkness unless we get some contact. It is like touching the hem of His garment. It is like going into the inner court. O, but it is solemn, it is solemn to be a sinner, yet blessed to know something of Jesus Christ and His great salvation and to feel rising up in your heart a deep sense of gratitude for His infinite condescension in coming, and to the Father for His great love in not sparing, but sending His own only begotten Son into the world that we might live through Him. This is grace! Nothing caused Him to do it but His own grace and love and goodness.

You were singing at the outset "If free grace, why not for me?" Well, put that question, not to yourselves, nor to your friends, but to the Lord, and ask Him to settle it. If He says in effect in your heart "I have redeemed thee, thou art Mine" and with that declaration impresses your heart with a sense of His redeeming love, and melts your heart thereby into godly sorrow and contrition for your sin, you will be a happy person for the time, and Christ will be everything to you. He will be your King, Lord, Friend, Counsellor. You will say then in some feeling of what you say - "Whom have I in heaven but Thee and there is none upon earth that I desire beside Thee". "What think ye of Christ?" The Lord give us right thoughts and give us warm hearts and living faith to cleave to Him!

AMEN.