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Sermon preached at "Ebenezer", Clapham, by Mr. Raven,
on Wednesday evening, March 16th, 1938

Text: "For the Son of Man is come to save that which was lost".
Matthew 18, v.11.

One thing does sparkle throughout the whole of the record that we have of the ministry of the Lord Jesus Christ, and it is this, that He is kind to sinners. A sweet thought that has been to some of us, that the Lord Jesus is kind to sinners. His heart is filled with the tenderest-compassion to poor sinners; with the deepest sympathy toward poor sinners; with the kindest goodwill toward poor sinners; filled with grace for poor sinners; thoughts of peace toward poor sinners. In His teaching again and again He emphasises this blessed truth that He was sent by the Father to undertake the cause of poor lost sinners. "He shall stand at the right hand of the poor to save him from those that condemn his soul." When a man feels, in some measure, by the Spirit's teaching, what a sinner he is, how guilty he is; when he is filled with shame and realises the woefulness of a lost condition, and he gets an inkling of this truth, O, how attractive it is to him that Christ is the Friend of sinners. As Mr. Hart says,

"Christ is the Friend of sinners,
Be that forgotten never."

And as He went about in His ministry, O, the words of grace that came from His lips and dropped into the weary hearts of poor sinners who were round about Him, so that they were attracted with the powerful influence of His grace. O, they felt in hearing Him preach the gospel to the poor that this was what their poor souls needed, that this alone could satisfy their hunger, could quench their thirst, could meet their deep need. That was their conviction, and so, as we read just now, publicans and sinners drew near to Him to hear Him. He laid no harsh impositions upon them, He laded them with no burdens. He said to them, "Come unto Me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take My yoke upon you and learn of Me; for I am meek and lowly in heart, and ye shall find rest unto your souls. For My yoke is easy, and My burden is light." They had never heard such words as these from the lips of their religious teachers. They had heard nothing but the crack of the legal whip in listening to their religious teachers; grievous burdens were laid upon them, impossible tasks, and do what people could they could make no progress in that way; they were in bondage. But the ministry of Christ spoke of liberty, it was the trumpet of Jubilee; He proclaimed "liberty to the captives and the opening of the prison to them that are bound". There was nothing in His Person or teaching to forbid and discourage the approach of poor sinners, however guilty and vile, however sick and polluted. Elihu said, "Behold

I am according to thy wish in God's stead: I also am formed out of the clay. Behold, my terror shall not make thee afraid, neither shall my hand be heavy upon thee." In that word, Elihu was a blessed type of the Lord Jesus Christ. His hand was not heavy upon poor sinners; there are no terrors in Him to frighten poor sinners from His feet, but everything to allure them.

What an attractive Object was Christ as He went about in His ministry, preaching as He was anointed to preach of the Holy Ghost, and He said, "The Spirit of the Lord God is upon Me, He hath anointed Me to preach the gospel to the poor," and so on. So we find this again and again, He speaks to the fears and discouragements that beset poor people who would come to Him, He answered the accusations of their adversary who would keep them back from Him, by saying this, "Him that cometh to Me I will in no wise cast out." He was full of grace and truth. So here in our text He says, "For the Son of Man is come to save that which was lost." Wonderful truth! Wonderful it is for a poor sinner to be enabled to believe it, to feel the truth and reality of it in his own heart, "The Son of Man is come to save that which was lost." The Lord Jesus Christ had just been giving the disciples some instruction in the matter of humility, and He called a little child unto Him, and set Him in the midst of them and said, "Verily I say unto you, Except ye be converted and become as little children, ye shall not enter into the kingdom of heaven." And so He goes on to speak of these little ones; and who are these little ones, who receive the kingdom of heaven as little children? Who are they? Why, they are just poor, sensible sinners; they are people who are given by the Spirit of God such a real and solemn sense of their sinnership that with all humility and sincerity of heart and mind they go before God and set themselves down in the lowest place at His feet. As the hymnwriter expresses it, "To Thee I come a sinner weak, To Thee I come a sinner poor, To Thee I come a sinner great, To Thee I come a sinner vile." They come, and it matters not how low He sets them down in His Word, they fall under it. They say like the Syrophenician woman when the Lord seemed to call her a dog, "Truth, Lord, yet the dogs eat of the crumbs that fall from the Master's table." It is these people, who, being given such a sense of their sinnership, guilt, ruin and helplessness before God, answer to the description the Lord gives here when He says, "The Son of Man is come to save that which was lost."

First of all let us notice briefly this expression "The Son of Man". There is for a poor sinner something so attractive when the Spirit speaks it in the heart, when the Spirit interprets somewhat of its meaning.

"The Son of Man! The Lord Jesus Christ

Himself manifested great delight in this title of His; He delighted in it before the worlds were made. He looked forward before there were either angels or men formed; He looked forward to that point in time when He should come forth from the Father, sent by the Father, and should be born of a woman. "God sent His own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh." "In the fulness of time God sent forth His Son, made of a woman, made under the law." And the great Son of God said, "Then I was by Him, as one brought up with Him: and I was daily His delight, rejoicing always before Him; rejoicing in the habitable part of His earth; and My delights were with the sons of men." That was before the world was made. He looked forward to that which lay in the purposes of the Three-One God concerning this world and man upon it, and concerning the election of grace, and He looked forward to that body which He was to take into union with Himself. He looked forward with delight to it, looked forward with delight to that time when He should come forth from the Father and be clothed in human nature and should do His Father's Will upon this earth. "I delight to do Thy Will, O My God." "My meat is to do the Will of Him that sent Me".

So this Son of Man is the eternal, the only-begotten Son of the Father in truth and love, and you know, when a soul is in some measure enlightened by the Holy Ghost and enabled to receive the truth, it is made a very precious, a very glorious truth to that soul. O how he loves it. How he exults in it, that Christ is God, that this Son of Man is truly the Son of God, that in this Person of Christ dwelleth all the fulness of the Godhead bodily. "The Son of Man!" But then we have here the Person who is not only truly, properly the eternal Son of the eternal Father, but we have particularly before us that human nature which He took into union with Himself, which He condescended to assume. The hymnwriter speaks of "the loves of our descending God," and I like that expression. O what condescending love is here, that the great Son of God of whom it is said, "From everlasting to everlasting Thou art God," of whom it is true "The heaven of heavens cannot contain Thee, how much less this house that I have builded," should condescend to be born of a woman, laid in a manger, be "a Man of sorrows and acquainted with grief," upon this earth, a Man of poverty, experiencing weariness and pain and temptation, entering into the trials and afflictions of His people in their daily lives, entering into them in a personal experience of daily life here upon earth, and that the humblest and most laborious kind of life.

— "Nothing brought Him from above,
Nothing but redeeming love."

One says,

"On wings of love the Saviour flies....
To take a human birth."

Then there is this to consider, that He came as the Father's Servant. He came to do His Father's Will, to labour and to suffer for His Church, as Jacob willingly laboured and suffered hardship that he might have Rachel for his wife. So the Son of God became incarnate in order that He might labour and suffer for His Church, that He might purchase her for Himself at the great price of His own most precious blood. "The Son of Man!" The Son of Man was under the law; He was responsible as the Surety of the Church to fulfil every jot and tittle of the law; His every thought, word and act was foursquare with that law. The eyes of infinite purity never saw in His Person or in His life on earth the least thing that was contrary to that law, contrary to His Father's Will; He answered to it perfectly. "And this is His Name whereby He shall be called, THE LORD OUR RIGHTEOUSNESS." O the perfect obedience of Christ as the Surety of the Church is very sweet to His believing people when they are led into it; it is food for faith. The believing people of God do love to be enabled to feed upon Christ's eternal righteousness as imputed to them. When a man is favoured to realise this, his filthy rags are gone, and he is dressed in garments white as snow, even the garment woven in everlasting love, such a garment as that the all-seeing eye of Jehovah can detect no flaw in it, and the one arrayed in it is without spot or blemish or any such thing. The Son of Man came to do this and obey the law for righteousness for His people.

Then again as a Surety He bore the curse; the sins of His elect people by imputation were His. "The Lord hath laid on Him the iniquity of us all." "It pleased the Lord to bruise Him; He hath put Him to grief." The Surety answered for His people; He paid the awful debt; He made an end of His people's transgression, and that for ever. All our sins "He bore," says Peter, "in His own body on the tree." Here again that broken body, that shed blood of His, is meat and drink to His believing people. They eat the flesh and they drink the blood of the Son of Man, and they cannot be satisfied unless they do. Some poor soul may say, 'Well I wish, O, I wish I could say I knew what it is, but it seems to be something altogether too high for me, an experience beyond anything I have ever known, to eat the flesh and drink the blood of the Lord Jesus Christ as crucified for me.' My old Pastor used to speak in a very tender way about these matters, and he used to speak to us about feeding on Christ in just a line of a hymn. It may be that some time you have had just a glimpse of Jesus Christ, of His atoning sacrifice, in a line of a hymn that has distilled a

little sweetness into your heart, and drawn your soul in desire towards Him; you have felt the attraction of His Person and His grace. "A bleeding Saviour seen by faith." It may have only lasted a very short while, but there was an eating of His flesh, and a drinking of His blood. Perhaps it has been in that hymn

"There is a fountain filled with blood
Drawn from Emmanuel's veins."

And your heart has been drawn to Christ in it; Christ has been set before you, and you have felt a springing up of hope in your soul.

"The dying thief rejoiced to see
That fountain in his day."

and you have said

"O there may I as vile as he
Wash all my sins away."

As the Son of Man, how very near He did approach to His people. "The Word was made flesh and dwelt among us." I do like that expression "among us"; it does express the very intimate relationship of the Lord Jesus with His people as bone of their bone and flesh of their flesh, and also the very intimate way in which He entered into the very path His people have to tread. "In all their affliction He was afflicted," and that is certainly true of the Lord Jesus. And, you know, when He was upon earth how people with their sorrows, temptations, burdens, wants, sicknesses and sores found in Him a most ready, willing, sympathising help; they found no lack of compassion in the Christ of God. "The Son of Man." There is such a wealth of tenderness in this word. The Lord Jesus Christ appeared in such a sweet view of Him as drawing very near to poor sinners in order to their redemption. "For the Son of Man is come to save that which was lost".

"He is come." The Lord Jesus states the blessed fact, "He is come." The Church in the Old Testament, right from the beginning when the promise was first made, had been looking forward with longing expectation, with earnest desire to the promise of that coming One. The Psalmist and the Prophets sung of Him. That tabernacle which Moses was commanded to rear was significant of Him and His union with His Church and people, what He was to do for them, and what He was to be to them. Then you find again and again expressed the longing of individual believers in the Old Testament for His coming. For instance, Job: how he looked forward to the day of Christ. He longed for a Daysman, and he had such a view at one time that he said, "I know that my Redeemer liveth and that He shall stand at the latter day on the earth." Isaiah spake of Him, and so we might go on and name others, but time will not permit. The Church was looking for Him and in the Song of Solomon you find her desiring His coming; there was the cry, "Let my

Beloved come into His garden, and eat His pleasant fruits. In the next chapter you have the response, "I am come into My garden, My sister, My spouse." "For the Son of Man is come." Then you remember what joy there was expressed by that company of believers when the Infant was brought into the temple, Simeon and Anna and others to whom the Spirit had revealed these things. How they rejoiced. Mary sang too, in the prospect of His birth. "My soul doth magnify the Lord, and my spirit hath rejoiced in God my Saviour." "The Son of Man is come." O if the Spirit of God repeats this in our hearts, it will be a fragrant word, "The Son of Man is come." This is the burden of the gospel ministry that the Son of Man is come. He is come, and the things written concerning Him were fulfilled in Him, the work His Father sent Him to do was accomplished perfectly.

" 'Tis finished!" said His dying breath
And shook the gates of hell."

"The Son of Man is come." What to do? "To save that which was lost." Here again this word "to save", what a great word it is. "To save." But who is able at all to appreciate the greatness of it? To the majority of people, these words "to save" mean nothing at all; they are but empty words to the majority of people. And to some people who profess something of christianity these words mean very little. O salvation is a very trivial thing, for the simple reason that sin is a trivial thing to them. More than that, their thoughts of God are trivial and unworthy thoughts, and if our thoughts of God are trivial and unworthy our thoughts of sin will be superficial; we shall think lightly of sin; and if we think lightly of sin certainly we shall think very little of salvation, we shall set little store by a Saviour. These words are great words, first of all because God is great. God is great! And then to be the sinner, to have sinned against that great God is a tremendously solemn and awful thing. The sinfulness of sin lies in the fact that it is against Him Who is infinitely holy. O, then, what a hideous monster, what a vile, black thing sin is made to appear when a sinner is given some discovery of what God is. Then when these points are well fixed in the conscience what a great matter salvation becomes! There are some poor people to whom salvation has been made a tremendously great matter; to be saved from sin, from its guilt, its pollution, its consequences, to be saved from the ruin that is by sin, saved from the wrath to come, from the just condemnation and curse of a holy God in a righteous law is a great matter to a sensible sinner, and therefore, that word Saviour is a great word. The Person who bears, and who loves His name (for the Lord Jesus does love His Name of Saviour) becomes a very great Person in the estimation of a sensible sinner.

"To save!" O, what a salvation, how deep it reaches, to what sinners it comes, and how high it raises them! He that is their Saviour "raiseth up the poor out of the dust, and lifteth up the beggar from the dunghill, to set them among princes, and to make them inherit the throne of glory." "The Son of Man is come to save that which was lost." Not the good sort of people, not the people who can do so much for themselves, but "that which was lost", "that which was lost." And that means guilty, filthy, ruined, helpless, incapable of one single act, of the least contribution toward their own salvation. 'O' says such a sinner, 'if my soul is to be saved, God must do it without my help; I can make no contribution whatever towards it.' What a wonderful mercy it is, what a precious truth it is, that this divine, almighty Saviour is able. He is able, and why? Because of His eternal Deity, because of the humanity He assumed, because of what He did in our nature, and because He is exalted high and ever lives to make intercession at the right hand of the Father. "Because He continueth ever He hath an unchanging Priesthood. Wherefore He is able to save them to the uttermost that come unto God by Him." "The Son of Man is come to save that which was lost." O, His grace, His love, His salvation is as

"Deep as our helpless miseries are
And boundless as our crimes."

"The Son of Man is come to save that which was lost." And, you know, all that He does for poor sinners, He does so graciously; His work bears looking at. It will be matter for eternal praise in those who are raised to sit with Him upon His throne. Eternity will be required to be admiring His grace and all that He has done in saving poor sinners from their sins, redeeming His people, and possessing them for Himself. Eternity will be required to admire it, to sing the praises of it. "For the Son of Man is come to save that which was lost."

The Lord command His blessing.

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