

Gospel Message Series—Volume 1

# Full of Grace and Truth

WATCHMAN NEE

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## **TRANSLATOR'S PREFACE**

In the early days of his anointed ministry, especially in the late 1920's and early 1930's, Watchman Nee was greatly used by the Lord in preaching the gospel of Jesus Christ, thereby winning many souls to the Lord. Though gradually he began to spend more time in building up the believers, and eventually towards the end of his active ministry in the late 1940's he seemed to be occupied with ministering to those who ministered, he nevertheless remained at all times a herald of the glorious gospel of salvation.

In the present volume, eight of the gospel messages which he gave in his early years have been selected to form a fuller presentation of the gospel of Jesus Christ. They are translated from the Chinese and appear in English for the first time.

May the Spirit of God speak to the hearts of all who read this book and bring them into the glorious freedom which only Christ can give.



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Scripture quotations are from the  
American Standard Version of the Bible  
(1901), unless otherwise indicated.

## There Is a God

# 1

*The fool hath said in his heart, There is no God. (Ps. 14.1)*

*Without faith it is impossible to be well-pleasing unto him; for he that cometh to God must believe that he is, and that he is a rewarder of them that seek after him. (Heb. 11.6)*

*Now we know that what things soever the law saith, it speaketh to them that are under the law; that every mouth may be stopped, and all the world may be brought under the judgment of God: because by the works of the law shall no flesh be justified in his sight; for through the law cometh the knowledge of sin. (Rom. 3.19-20)*

Today I would like to talk about a subject which may not be easy to deal with. I confess that this is only the second time in my life I have delivered such a message. And it is that which is stated in a fragment found in Hebrews 11.6 which declares that “he that cometh to God must believe that he is.” Moreover, I would also like to touch upon the words of Psalm 14.1: “The fool hath said in his heart, There is no God.” Actually the question of whether there is a God need not be answered, since the Bible never argues this point at all. The Bible takes for granted that men must believe in God because they have no reason not to believe so. It treats this matter as something already given. Nevertheless, there is today in this world a class of people who consider themselves atheists. They say there is no God, neither do they acknowledge there is a God who rules over all things. Such a contention seems to be quite popular these days and is warmly welcomed by a large number of people. Those who say these things appear to have minds newer than the rest of mankind and an ability superior to the general public; they therefore dare to assert such things. Before I attempt to burst their “intellectual bubble” let us recognize the several different kinds of atheists there are. For although most atheists would probably not accept such a

classification as will be presented here, we as more objective observers are clearer than they themselves.

### *Atheists for Moral Reasons*

Towards atheists of this kind there is no use saying anything to them nor arguing with them. All that is appropriate is to look at their lives, because their immorality speaks far more loudly than their words. They profess to be atheists not because they have convincing evidences that there is no God, but because their lives are such that it is expedient for them to say there is no God. Their own moral state keeps them from acknowledging that there is a God in the heavens and the earth. A bandit would like to believe there is no law enforcement; a bad student would like to believe there is no teacher; an unfaithful employee would like to be able to say there is no employer; and a wicked person would like to believe there is no law. This does not mean that they really do not believe that these things exist; it is simply that their own lives impel them not to accept these things at their face value. Yet if someone says to you, "I do not believe in God, for there is no such person as God in my mind," you may respond by asking: "Friend, how about your moral life?" Nothing at all need be said but to ask whether that person lives morally or immorally.

People may disbelieve God, but they cannot deny there is morality. Let me tell you frankly, that though I am still young, yet of the people whom I have met in these few years of mine, at least ninety-nine out of a hundred atheists are questionable in respect of their personal morality. I have yet to meet an atheist who lives somewhat morally. There are some in the audience who are older than I. May I ask you if you have ever met an atheist whose morality is even slightly dependable? Whether asking fellow students, business associates, or friends, the atheists whom I have met are all morally corrupt; so that they cannot believe in God. Allow me to

assert a truthful word, that if ever God goes out of a person, immorality takes His place in that one.

There was a well-known experienced preacher in America whose name was R.A. Torrey. Once when he was preaching at a certain place, a college student came up to him and said: "Formerly I believed in God, but lately I do not believe any more." "For what reason do you now not believe?" asked Mr. Torrey. "Well, after I entered college, my knowledge increased; I therefore do not believe any more. I read this book and that book, until I eventually read God away," replied the student. "Do not try to deceive me," Mr. Torrey responded, "for I too was a college student. I have read many books and I have a doctor's degree. But I have not read God away. You must have some hidden reason, otherwise you would not have read Him out of existence." Then Mr. Torrey continued. "Let me ask you a question. Now that you do not believe in God, how about your moral life?" To which the student replied somewhat candidly, "I must confess that my morality now is not as good as before." Whereupon Mr. Torrey concluded with a word that was indeed well-spoken: "I need not argue with you, nor raise up many reasons as proof to you. If you simply stop doing these bad things and begin to live more morally, God will immediately return." How factual that is, for many fail to believe in God not because they have good reasons to do so but simply because their multitude of sins hinder them from believing. They are compelled to be atheists.

### *Stiff-Lipped Atheists*

This group of people proclaims that there is no God, yet without giving any reason. They are so stiff-lipped that no one can reason with them. If you ask them why they do not believe in God, they have no reason to offer but nonetheless insist that they do not believe. How can you deal with such people? Having asserted that there is no God, they will not change their mind. You may talk with

them for days and nights on end and may even convince them with arguments, yet they will still staunchly maintain their position. Whatever reasons they may eventually give are dogmatic and arbitrary. Their responses are quite adamant. What ever can you therefore do with them? The fact of the matter is that their mind is usually quite empty, having no reason to give; but their lips insistently declare there is no God. And hence we call them stiff-lipped atheists.

There is no way to reason with the above two types of atheists. Another group can be found, though, that is not quite as hopeless as these. Unfortunately, however, they are rather small in number. Who are they? We call them—

### *Atheists for Intellectual Reasons*

Who are these intellectual atheists? They are those who are open to reason. If you can prove to them with sufficient arguments then they are willing to accept your premise of God's existence. For such people, there *is* the need of some reasoning, which indeed has value. Yet how few there are of this kind of atheists in the world. Now I have no intention of arguing with them by marshalling many reasons to prove that there is a God in the universe. For one thing, the Bible, as we said earlier, never deals with this question, but rather speaks of the Lord Jesus, the Holy Spirit, and so forth. This alone indicates that the question of whether God exists need not be mentioned in its pages because it is a fact accepted by all concerned. The existence of God is an unshakable fact that has no need to be discussed.

### *How Dare You Say There Is No God?*

Suppose an atheistic friend comes to talk about this matter of God. He will no doubt say there is no Supreme Being. You may ask him why and he may perhaps give you a reason or two. But whenever I

am confronted with such a situation, I will usually not permit him to go on. I will frankly ask him: "Who are you who dare to say there is no God?" He may still want to continue with his argument but I will stop him by reiterating the same question, for in such a conversation I wish to settle at the outset the credentials of the speaker. Yet I need to ask him this: According to your own estimate, do you honestly believe you have the qualifications to decide whether God is? Or may I put it even more bluntly: "Who do you think *you* are that you dare to say there is no God? What makes you so qualified to assert such a statement? Are there not four billion people like you in the world? What then makes you an authority on this question? Why, you do not even know about the things with which you have contact every day! Do you know, for example, how your fingernails grow? Or how your heart beats? Do you know whether there will be rain tomorrow or whether you will eat your meal again the next day? You have no real knowledge of these things. How then dare you say there is no God?"

"Let me further ask you this: Do you know how big the earth is? But perhaps you are one of those who do not consider the earth as of much consequence. Alright, do you know how big our solar system is? Probably you will regard this as not very large either. Then let me ask you this: Have you the ability to bring the sun down that you may examine to see how big it is? Were it possible to excavate the sun and empty it of its contents, how many earths would you be able to stuff into the sun? Actually, hundreds, thousands, even tens of thousands of earths could be put into it and there would still be space left to be filled. For the sun can contain a million and a half planets like our earth with much room left to spare! And yet, as one astronomer has said, there are five billion other stars that are as large as the sun of our solar system. So how big really are you, that you dare to claim there is no God?"

Those who say there is no God ought to consider the following: Astronomers tell us that the speed of light is 186,000 miles per

second! It is rather difficult for us to comprehend such speed. Yet though light travels so fast, astronomers tell us that the light from some stars has traveled for two thousand years and has still not reached the earth. For a person who is only six feet tall and who occupies less than a foot of ground to say there is no God is not only absurd but most ridiculous.

### ***Who Rules the Universe?***

Though the universe is so immense, there are things within it so small that even a microscope cannot detect them. And however microscopic they are, each of them has its definite organization, definite law, and definite order. How wonderful they are! Formerly people considered the atom as the smallest unit. Later the scientist discovered electrons. Now they have found other particles even smaller than electrons. Yet no matter how tiny they are, they all follow definite principles, laws and order. If there is no God, how did their so intricate design come about? How could they have been made so precisely and accurately? There must be a God who designs and rules, otherwise such beautiful phenomena of nature could never have happened. Only two alternative explanations are possible. These things either came about by accident or they came about by design. If not by accident, they must have come into existence through One who designs them. And if not by design, then they must have arisen by accident. Which is the right answer?

### ***Is It by Accident?***

To say that there is no designer to the universe and that all things were accomplished by accident is really asking too much of our imagination! Some people have suggested that things simply happened through their contact with one another, resulting in the universe as we know it. This theory I can hardly accept as plausible. I

have never observed anything in the world that has resulted from such chance.

Let me tell you a true story. Once a certain person went to visit the chief executive officer of a factory which produced a meat-grinding machine. This small machine can be seen in most butcher shops in Shanghai. During their conversation together their talk turned to the subject of the origin of the universe. At one point the chief executive remarked that in the universe there must be a God who was all wise and all mighty to have designed and built all things. But the visitor sharply disagreed, declaring that there was no God in the universe and that everything came about by accident. Instead of arguing, the executive invited his friend to observe how his employees built their meat grinders. "Please note," the factory chief said, "that our small meat grinder is made of eight different pieces. Now since you say that the universe has resulted merely from chance contact, would you please put these eight pieces and the appropriate screws into a wooden box and shake them up to see if by such an event it will result in a meat grinder?" He knew, of course, that no matter how the visitor might shake them, such accidental contact would never produce a machine. The officer continued by saying, "We have hundreds of workers in our factory. The most capable of them can make 200 machines a day. Yet even if we were to go to the countryside to find and hire a dull woman who has never in her life seen such machines, we could teach her to put one together in a very few days. But you may shake and shake this box of parts for a month or for a year and still not be successful. It is simply impossible. Now if a small machine that is worth only a little over three dollars and seventy cents cannot be produced by accident, how could such an immense universe have been made merely by chance contact? Is it at all rational to believe that all the objects found in our universe came about by accident? The chairs which we were sitting on a moment ago were made by a carpenter, who put it together in half an hour. But had this been left to chance contact, there would never have been any chair for us to sit on today!"

I believe this story points up the fact that the universe, with such obvious order, symmetry and law, must have been designed by a Designer. Even the dullest, most ignorant person in the world must acknowledge this. And therefore, a person who is not a fool will believe in God. There is absolutely no valid reason for not believing in God.

### *The Witness of Conscience*

What we have discussed here are merely external approaches to presenting evidence of the fact that God is. We would next like to look at the subject from another angle. Can we, judging from human psychology, say there is a God? Recently, the National Geographical Society of the United States sent people to many countries to study human society and geography, and the results of their investigation were then published. What the study learned was that throughout every society—whether civilized or barbarous, whether progressive or regressive—there was one trait which was common to all: they all believed that God exists. Truly, whoever they may be—even if the most uncivilized tribes people—they know that there is a God. A person can be so dull as not to be able to think or reason, yet his heart will tell him that there is a God. So many others, though, talk in opposition to their conscience.

A remarkable incident occurred in South America in 1925. One day a missionary passed by a forest and suddenly heard a cry for help. He rushed towards the sound of the voice and came to the side of a river. He saw a man in a canoe being swept downstream. The current was swift, and not far away the missionary could see a waterfall. If not rescued, this man would certainly be overwhelmed by the waterfall. At that critical moment, the man in the canoe cried with all his strength, “Oh God, oh God, save me! Save me!” The missionary quickly sized up the situation and was able to rescue the man.

On the very next day, the missionary was again passing through this forest. But this time he saw hundreds of people gathered by the riverside listening to a lecture. He went forward to learn what it was all about. There a man was speaking publicly on the subject of God. In his lecture he marshalled numerous arguments to prove the non-existence of God. After he finished speaking, he challenged the audience by saying: "I have given you many reasons; if anyone believes otherwise and wishes to argue, he may do so." The missionary stepped onto the platform and spoke: "I do not know how to argue, nor am I going to give you reasons; instead, I will tell you all a true story. Yesterday when I passed through the forest I heard a man crying for help, and he was repeatedly heard to cry out: "Oh God, oh God, save me, save me!" I ran toward the sound and found a man sitting in a canoe, drifting rapidly towards the waterfall yonder. His life was in terrible danger! I instantly rescued him and then sent him home. Let me today introduce to you that man. The one who yesterday cried desperately, "Oh God, save me!", is the very person who today has been presenting to you many so-called reasons for proving that there is no God. Whether what I have said is true or not, you may ask him."

Truly, the conscience of many people is such that before it is awakened they can raise many arguments against the existence of God. But when they are dying or are in a very strait situation, they will then contemplate future consequences and thus their conscience will tell them that God is. Today may quickly pass away. Today may seem so unimportant because you are still young. But the day that you find yourself heading for eternity, your conscience will wake up and speak. I often say, conscience may slumber but it never dies. When the time arrives, it will utter its voice. Nevertheless, it may already be too late.

In England there once was a father and a son who were ardent atheists. But the day the father was dying, he turned about on his bed showing intense restlessness. The son noticed the situation. Fearing

lest his father's atheistic faith be shaken, he tried to encourage his father with these words, "Father, hold on!" With tears on his face, his father cried out: "Hold on to what?" Since neither of them had God, what could they possibly hold on to? But we thank God, we do have Someone to hold on to. We know whom we have believed.

Will you who have heard this please listen to your inner voice? How frequently our mind is affected by outside influences and conceives erroneous thoughts, but the innermost voice is trustworthy, for it presents the real self.

I have researched and concluded that there is no born atheist. He is instead created by his environment. Our conscience is therefore exceedingly precious. And hence it is good to follow it closely.

### *The Testimony of Answered Prayer*

We have already seen how the immensity of the universe, the order of the universe, and the conscience of man all point to the fact that God is. Let us look at the same subject from yet another viewpoint—that of the experience of Christians in their relationships toward God. Christians may be regarded as people who know God most. So that their experiences may be offered too as evidence that God exists. From answers to our prayers—whether as manifested in the grace of forgiveness or in the special protection given—we may know that there is a God. Without God, how can there ever be a Christian?

In this connection, then, I wish to relate an experience of mine of answered prayer—one which I have rarely told to people.

It happened in January, 1926. At that time I was in a country place, and some brothers off in Foochow were preparing for an evangelistic crusade. I had been invited to join them, but considering that they already had quite a few people for the crusade, I concluded

that I was really not needed there. And hence I decided to preach in the villages. I invited six brothers to go with me. Two are now helping Mr. Willis of Quausan Garden, Shanghai. One is in Pagoda, Anchorage. Two are in Amoy learning to fly, and the other is in LienKiang. I mention their whereabouts because they were eye-witnesses to what happened and can therefore corroborate what is said here.

We took the steamboat and went to a town called Mayflower Village. It was a fishing community, and fishermen there earned a great deal of money. Now among the six who accompanied me, there was one who was a young brother around 16 or 17 years of age. He had been expelled from school and his mother in desperation had brought him to me. During his first month under my care I had not known how to deal with him. But in the second month, he was saved. And having now been saved, he greatly loved to work for God. So that during the third month this young brother went along with us to preach the gospel in Mayflower Village.

Now we had originally arranged with a school teacher whom we knew to stay in his school. But when we arrived at the village, we were not allowed to stay in his school for he discovered that we had come to preach the gospel. We searched till dark for a place to stay. Fortunately, an herbalist took us in and we settled in his attic.

In the evening, on January 7th, we ventured out to preach for the first time. An unusual atmosphere seemed to pervade the entire village. The people were most courteous, but after listening to us a little while, they stopped us and walked away mumbling something. When we asked them why, nobody would tell us the truth. We were extremely perplexed, for we seven discovered that all of us had had the same experience. So we asked the herbalist, who was more frank with us—but even he would not discuss the matter with us.

On the following days we went out again to preach the gospel and to sell copies of the Bible. While doing so our young brother committed a serious blunder one day. He became so impatient with the continual silent treatment that he took hold of a villager and insisted on knowing what it was all about. “Don’t you know? We have too many gods here already,” blurted the villager, “and so we are not able to accept any more gods.” Moreover, he continued, “We have a god here whose name is Ta-Wang<sup>\*</sup>. And every year in January we have a festival procession in his honor. You have therefore come at the wrong time, since the procession is going to be held on the 11th. We are all so busy in preparation that we cannot listen to you about your Jesus. Ta-Wang is so fabulous that ever since the Ching Dynasty and for over 200 years the day of the festival procession has always been clear. There has never been any rain!” Upon hearing such words, this young brother was so exasperated that he declared there would be rain this year on the day of the festival procession. Immediately thereafter many young people of the village took this remark up and broadcasted everywhere that a group of preachers had just asserted that there would be rain on the day of the Ta-Wang festival procession. Within two hours, the whole village knew about it. People began to talk, saying that if there were rain, then our Jesus is God; but that if there were no rain, then Ta-Wang is.

When we others returned to the herbalist’s house, we learned about this episode. I told this young brother, “How could you have made such a declaration? You have no control over heaven.” “Well, let us go pray,” he answered. “Indeed, we may pray,” I said, “but will God answer our prayer? Is this according to His will?” Nevertheless we all commenced to pray. Though the supper was already prepared, we had no heart to eat it. We prayed until all felt peaceful, void of any worry or anxiety. Every one of us seemed to be quite sure of God’s answer. Only then did we have our supper.

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<sup>\*</sup> Meaning: the great king.—*Translator*

As we ate together, we told the herbalist that we all knew that on the 11th when Ta-Wang would have his procession there would be rain. "In my opinion," responded the herbalist, "it will *not* rain. And I would advise you not to carelessly assert otherwise. For first of all, among over 2,000 families living in Mayflower Village, almost all the men live by the sea. Would they fail to know the weather? Why, they are able to forecast it quite a few days ahead. But secondly, please consider my little shop. I live by keeping this shop. Hence please do not implicate me in this affair." Nevertheless, we all felt peaceful about the situation and were full of assurance that God had indeed answered our prayers.

On the next day, the 10th, we went out again. Not only this young brother again said there would be rain on the 11th, we now *all* declared it. But when we tried to sell the villagers the Gospel booklets and preach to them, we were refused on both counts. They simply said, "Let us wait till the 11th. If it rains on that day, then Jesus is God; but if it does not rain, then Ta-Wang is god."

Surprisingly, on the night of the 9th we had received a promise from 2 Kings 2.14: "Where is Jehovah, the God of Elijah?" For this with which we were today confronted concerned the glory of God similarly to that of Elijah's time. On the night before the 11th, we prayed again. We knew that in the event there was no rain forthcoming, we would never again be able to preach to the ten thousand people of Mayflower Village. The door of the gospel would forever be closed. One or two of our brothers, weaker in faith, cried out: "If only God would send rain tonight!"

We all slept in later than usual the next morning. As I lay by a small window, the light of the sun shone on my eyes. I thought, What should we do?, for the sun was out. So I knelt down and started to pray. Later, as one by one the brothers woke up, all knelt down to pray: "O God, this is the day to show forth Your glory. Please send the rain to prove that You are God." We all prayed most earnestly.

Then we realized our weakness, for why should we be praying in this manner since God had already answered? We all went downstairs to eat our breakfast. Being the leader of the team, I tried to boost their spirits by telling the brother responsible for our food that he did not need to prepare our picnic lunch because it would rain today and we would not be going out. We then gave thanks for our breakfast food. Suddenly, one brother continued to request that God keep His faith in us.

As we finished our first bowl of *congee*<sup>\*</sup>, all at once we heard a few drops on the tiles. Looking at one another, we knew in our hearts what it meant. We went for our second bowl of *congee*. I asked the others whether we ought to pray. One brother answered, “Why not ask God to send a downpour, thus proving He purposely sent the rain and not that it is due to chance?” So we prayed once more. As we finished praying, the sky began to turn pitch dark and the rain came down in torrents.

After we finished our breakfast, we stood at the door of the little shop watching for the procession. The festival procession was originally planned for 9:00 in the morning, but rain poured down without stopping from 9 to 11 o'clock. According to tradition, the procession could not be postponed more than an hour. So the villagers reluctantly carried the Ta-Wang idol outside. The rain was truly heavy, and by this time the water stood two to three feet deep in the streets. And as Ta-Wang was being carried out of the temple, one of the carriers fell into the water after only a few steps. Ta-Wang did too, breaking three fingers and one arm and twisting its head. The people picked up the idol, adjusted its head, and marched on. Even so, many young people now followed behind and began shouting: “Woe is Ta-Wang this year! Woe is Ta-Wang this year!” As they did so, the rain became heavier and heavier. So much so, that the

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\* Watery rice. —Translator

procession had to stop. With the result that Ta-Wang had to be carried to the family shrine of the Chens.

Subsequently, some village elders went to seek divination from Ta-Wang, and quite ingeniously they came up with the conviction that Ta-Wang had not intended to come forth at all today, but that instead it would do so at eight o'clock in the evening of the 14th. While the old people of the village accepted this verdict, the young people protested by asking why Ta-Wang should fall today and break his arm and fingers.

At lunch time, we asked God to clear up the sky so that we might go out and preach in the afternoon. Having faith in God, we also asked Him to send rain on the evening of the 14th. The work that afternoon was so successful that we quickly sold all the Gospels we had carried.

Since we had to return home on the morning of the 15th, we petitioned God to give us good weather on the 12th, 13th, and 14th—so that we might labor for Him—but to rain during the evening of the 14th so that all people still in doubt might unquestionably know that Ta-Wang was in fact no god. As anticipated, the sky was clear on the 12th, 13th, and 14th. Whereupon we decided to hold an evangelistic meeting on the evening of the 14th at the herbalist's shop—for by this time the herbalist had believed in the Lord (and even up to this moment he remains a good brother in the Lord). And as might be expected, during the evening of the 14th it began indeed to rain. We could see many people waiting at the front of the herbalist's shop. Once again we climbed to the attic to pray, asking God to rain even heavier. Praise the Lord, the rain grew heavier and heavier! And when the villagers carried Ta-Wang out, a number of people fell several times. Many young people shouted, "*God* is and *not* Ta-Wang." Needless to say, the work in that village was most successful. And before dawn on the 15th, we left for home. How truly thankful we were to God.

The answers to our prayers are countless. And this in itself is enough to prove that God is. Our spiritual experience is one of the best evidences for the existence of the living God.

### ***How We Can Meet God***

If, then, there is a God, what must we therefore do? For it is not enough merely to believe that there is a God. We need to read Amos 4.14, which commands us all to do this: “Prepare to meet thy God.” Let me ask, Are *you* prepared to meet God? Since you know there is a God, how can you be negligent about Him? Are you currently able to meet God? I hope none among us will be confused by the false assumption of the atheist. The first thing you must do is prepare to meet your God.

Yet how can we meet God? There is but one way—through believing in the Lord Jesus. Why is this so? Because God shows grace in Christ. Outside of Christ, we are all condemned.

“And might reconcile them both in one body unto God through the cross, having slain the enmity thereby: and he [the Lord Jesus] came and preached peace to you that were far off [the gentiles], and peace to them that were nigh [the Jews]: for through him [Christ] we both have our access in one Spirit unto the Father” (Eph. 2.16-18). Please notice also this passage: “In whom [Christ Jesus the Lord] we have boldness and access in confidence through faith in him” (Eph. 3.12). How can we meet God? The Bible tells us that we have boldness to approach God through believing in Christ Jesus.

One very important thing which keeps us from meeting God is our sin. Sin hinders us from seeing God’s face; sin makes it impossible for us to meet Him. But God has prepared for us a way to resolve the problem of sin, and that is, that the Lord Jesus has borne our sins on the cross for us. He died for our sins. He was scourged and judged in our stead. Jesus was crucified because of you and me. On the ground

of the death and resurrection of the Lord Jesus, all who believe in Him can meet God with boldness because “the middle wall of partition” (Eph. 2.14) has already been broken down and the problem of sin has thus been solved. So that we can now meet God without any fear. I must tell you that one day every one of you must meet God. And you may either be accepted as one of God’s people or be rejected as one of His enemies. What you need to do is to accept the Savior. Do not be an atheist but become a Christian. I beseech you to believe in the Lord Jesus and accept Him as your personal Savior.

Remember that one day you shall have to meet God: there is just no way to escape His face other than to hide in the Lord. If you do not hide in Christ today, it will be too late to try to hide when you shall meet God one day. All therefore who are willing to accept the Lord should do so now without delay.

Perhaps some may not quite understand how the blood of Christ can lead us to God. Our own conscience is a good way to explain it. Let us assume that in a judicial case, sin is presented before the court. A witness, even the precious conscience in our heart, steps forward to bear witness to the fact that we have sinned. Now many dare not think of God because of their evil conscience. They are afraid of God, and hence they do not want to have anything to do with Him. Yet we need not be afraid since we have the Lord Jesus as Mediator.

The Lord Jesus left the beautiful and glorious heaven to come down here in order to bring us there. He suffered on earth that we might have peace with heaven. He died that we might have life—and was rejected that we might be accepted. We may now lay down our load of sins because the Lord Jesus has already been judged for us. We may approach God through faith in Him. How terrible a thing it is for anyone not to believe that Christ has already borne all his sins on the cross. May all of us open our hearts to accept the Lord Jesus. For in so believing, God shall be to us no longer a judge but instead a beloved Father.



## How a Good Man Goes to Hell

# 2

*And he spake also this parable unto certain who trusted in themselves that they were righteous, and set all others at nought: Two men went up into the temple to pray; the one a Pharisee, and the other a publican. The Pharisee stood and prayed thus with himself, God, I thank thee that I am not as the rest of men, extortioners, unjust, adulterers, or even as this publican. I fast twice in the week; I give tithes of all that I get. But the publican, standing afar off, would not lift up so much as his eyes unto heaven, but smote his breast, saying, God, be thou merciful to me a sinner. I say unto you, This man went down to his house justified rather than the other: for every one that exalteth himself shall be humbled; but he that humbleth himself shall be exalted. (Luke 18.9-14)*

This passage of Scripture gives us a parable, one which is spoken by the Lord Jesus Christ himself. In the parable, the Lord says that two men go into the temple to pray: one is a Pharisee, the very best of men; the other a publican, the worst of men. Surprisingly, though, the result of their prayers is that the worst (the publican) is justified, whereas the best (the Pharisee) is condemned! What is meant by the term “justified”? It means that as a verdict of the court a man is declared not guilty. *Not* being justified means that he is declared by the court as guilty and thus must be punished. To be justified is what we believers commonly accept as our “being saved.” To put this in even plainer language, being justified signifies a going to heaven, while not being justified denotes a going to hell. Consequently, what the Lord Jesus announces here is that a good man goes to hell but a bad man goes to heaven.

We always reason that a good man goes to heaven and a bad man goes to hell. But the Lord Jesus declares just the opposite! Do not be shocked as though this were a new teaching, however. For let it be clearly understood that if there is anyone in heaven, he must (apart from the Lord Jesus) be a sinner. In heaven you cannot find nor see a

good man. All in heaven are sinners! And in hell? Lots of good men are there! Do not comfort yourselves by thinking you will not go to hell because you are good. Let me tell you, many like yourself are already in hell. And some who are there are even *better* than you are! According to man's logic, a bad person should go to hell as well as a good person. But in trusting in the Lord Jesus, the bad as well as the good may go to heaven.

In the parable before us, however, the Lord Jesus Christ declares that a good fellow goes to hell but a bad fellow goes to heaven. For the way it works out in such a manner is that if you reckon yourself as righteous and better than the average person, then according to the word of the Lord Jesus, a good man may go to hell; but if you humble yourself and acknowledge yourself as sinful, you need not despair of not being worthy to be saved, for according to Jesus, a bad man may go to heaven.

Let us first notice just how good is this man in the parable who perishes, and then proceed to discover why such a good man goes to hell.

### *The Pharisee*

This good man is a Pharisee (v.10). We frequently perceive Pharisees to be very bad and hypocritical. Nevertheless, we must admit that the Pharisees have many good points. They keep the law (see Phil. 3.5). They are unlike the agnostic Sadducees who do not believe in many fundamental truths of God. The Pharisees, on the other hand, believe the word of God and keep His law, doubting nothing. Yet in spite of all these merits, the Lord Jesus declares that this Pharisee is destined for hell.

How often we Christians feel embarrassed to attend a revival meeting carrying any heavy or large Bible. We will either leave the Bible at home or carry a pocket New Testament to avoid being seen.

We are fearful lest people ridicule us and accuse us of being superstitious. But the Pharisees are not so afraid. They unfailingly put Scripture on the very skirts of their garments. They are not in the least afraid to be laughed at. Quite the contrary, they dare to confess before men that they believe in God.

I know many Christians who dare not say grace when they eat with non-believers. Their conscience bothers them, of course, if they do not give thanks; so to resolve their dilemma, they pray in their heart with eyes open. How timid and how shy! They do not have the courage to confess that they are Christians. Not so the Pharisees. They even have the boldness to pray at the public crossroads! Without probing the matter of their virtue, we must at least acknowledge that their outward action far exceeds that of ordinary Christian believers. Nevertheless, the Lord Jesus declares that this Pharisee is perishing and going to hell.

The Pharisees were the elite of society in their day. They were cultured, noble, and educated. Yet God is not partial to social status. If you deserve to go to hell, to hell you will be condemned, for God is just and impartial. Do not reflect in your heart by musing: Will there be any like me in hell? Any who is as beautiful as I am? As gentlemanly, as clever as I with a Ph.D. degree, as rich as I am? Let me assure you that many like you are in hell. Some people there are even more clever, more beautiful, more gentlemanly, and far richer than you are! There is none on earth who is too good for hell! The Lord Jesus declares that this Pharisee goes to perdition. Though he is high up in society, he deserves the lower depths of hell. Therefore, do not trust in your social standing.

Now this gentlemanly Pharisee goes to the temple to pray. And as he prays, he says: “God” (v.11). Let us note the implications of his use of this word. This Pharisee is *not* an atheist, neither is he a fool—for he does not say there is no God (Ps. 14.1a). Then too, he is not a wicked person, neither has he done abominable works (cf. Ps. 14.1b).

He believes that God is. He knows there is a God by the things created (see Rom. 1.19-20). He is not irreligious. As a matter of fact, he comes to pray as a devout, religious person—and this is a very good man. Nevertheless, all this does not save him from ending up in hell. For the Lord Jesus categorically announces that this pious and good man is going straight to hell. Now if such a good man as this—a man who believes there is a God—is going to hell, what will be the fate of those who do not believe! ? !

“God,” prays the Pharisee further, “I thank thee, that I am not as the rest of men . . .” (v.11). He then follows this statement up by mentioning a number of gross sins. He tells God that he is not as bad as others, who commit so many sins. In his estimation, he is the best of all men, for how unlike the other people he is! This Pharisee is indeed a rarity in the world! But the Lord Jesus plainly states that such a rare person as this must go to hell and perish eternally.

Perhaps you might say in response: “Quite possibly this Pharisee is instead a hypocrite, and hence he must go to hell. For if he is really as good as you say, he should go to heaven.” But on what basis do you judge him a hypocrite? Let me make clear that this man is truly a rarity in this world: he is in very fact a highly moral person; for note that after he prayed that he was not like other people who had sinned so much—he having instead done so many good things—this Pharisee is not contradicted or refuted in the slightest by the Lord Jesus or called a hypocrite by Him. Accordingly, he *must* be a good man. In addition, verse 9 indicates that the Lord addressed this very parable to “certain [ones] who trusted in themselves that they were righteous.” This is further proof that the Pharisee in question is an ideal, good man. Nonetheless, this good man goes to hell. Good men *must* go to hell.

But there is even further evidence here to warrant my saying this Pharisee is a rare example of goodness. Let us remember that when the Pharisee states that he is not as the rest of men, he is speaking to

*God.* Let me pause here to say that as I am preaching the gospel, I frequently inquire of people in this fashion: “Do you know you are a sinner and need a Savior to atone for your sins?” And many will answer somewhat as follows: “I neither kill nor set fires. Hence what sin do I commit? Whatever I do I do according to my conscience. I am better than my friends and neighbors. I am better than the rest of men.” And if that person is not a believer, he most likely would say: “Many Christians are not as good as I am. I therefore do not need to believe in the Lord Jesus, for I am already better than they are.” Well, no doubt you can say all these words to me. But can you say to God: “God, I thank You that I am not as the rest of men who sin; I am better than all”? You may dare to say these self-righteous words to *me*, but I am afraid you dare not say them to *God*. You may have the courage to boast before men, but you do not have the boldness to boast before God. You may deceive those who are on earth, but you cannot deceive Him who is in heaven. You may brag before me, you may deceive your parents, husband or wife, children or friends, and the world, but you cannot deceive God. What you dare to say to men, you dare not say to God because you know He searches your heart.

In view of what has just been said, therefore, I must conclude that this Pharisee is quite unusual. He truly does do things according to conscience. He dares to say to you, to me, and to all others that he is a righteous and perfect man who does not sin like the rest of men; yea, he even dares to say to God: “God, I thank You that I am not as the rest of men, extortioners, unjust, adulterers.” His conscience does not accuse him, hence he boldly declares before God his goodness. Without question, he is truly better than most people, certainly better than you and me. Yet the Lord Jesus explicitly announces that a rare and good man such as he must go to hell. And if that is the case with this Pharisee, what ever will happen to people who are not as good as he but who sin as do the rest of men? Will they go to hell and suffer even heavier punishment? “For if they do these things in the green tree, what shall be done in the dry?” (Luke 23.31) If such an excellent person as the Pharisee goes to hell, what will sinners such

as we are deserve to have? Consequently, do not be so self-reliant. Though you are good, you may not escape the fire of hell. O self-righteous man, do not be complacent, because your righteousness cannot save you at all.

Let us return to Jesus' parable of the Pharisee. The latter declares first of all that he does not *extort*. To extort is to obtain undeserved money by force or influence. Though this Pharisee has influence, he will not extort. I wonder how many of my hearers have more or less used their influence to make earthly gains. To use influence in harassing people is such a common practice. This Pharisee, however, does not commit this fault. Yet the Lord Jesus asserts that he cannot escape hell. Good men go to hell. And if a person as scrupulous as this Pharisee perishes, what will happen to the extortioners?

Secondly, this Pharisee states that he is not *unjust*. All which is not just is unrighteous. Unrighteousness is today's most prevalent sin. Without even mentioning the many unrighteousnesses that characterize our manner of life, we additionally commit many such offenses in material matters. Is there some thing in your house, your bedroom, your school, your sitting room, or your office which does not belong to you and yet it becomes yours? Search your bedroom, sitting room, trunks, and pockets and see if there are things in them which were obtained unrighteously. Search your heart and ask yourself whether there is anything you have gotten through unjust means. A suit or even a penny thus obtained is reckoned as unjust. To say that we have obtained these things through unrighteous means is in reality a very mild statement. Bluntly speaking, we actually have stolen these things as thieves would have done! In part, therefore, to be unjust is to steal. Have you stolen any money or any other thing? Have you ever borrowed and never returned? All such things constitute unjust actions.

Once I led a meeting in Chuanchow. A young student had stolen five pennies from her teacher. After she heard the message that was

spoken, she knew her action was sin. Under the conviction of the Holy Spirit, she explained this to her mother and asked for five pennies to make restitution. Another girl had stolen two *peepa*\* from the school supervisor. Her supervisor was such a very strict person that students were afraid even to talk to her. Yet after this girl came into grace and knew she must deal with her unrighteousness, she had the courage to confess it to the supervisor.

Two weeks after that meeting in Chuanchow, I visited the Christian Book Room in Kulangsu. The store manager told me that he had recently received from one of the students a letter and a dictionary. The letter indicated that the writer had taken this dictionary from the store without paying for it. Realizing now that this was unrighteousness, she had returned the book. I wonder if there are some unrighteous people here? I would hope that none of you is unjust in your conduct, but I am afraid there must inevitably be some unjust individuals in our midst. This Pharisee had committed no unrighteous act, so he dared to tell God that he was not unjust. Nevertheless, the Lord Jesus pronounced that he was not therefore justified; with the result being that good men must go to hell. Now if a person who is not unjust nonetheless perishes, how about the unrighteous? Can we legitimately protest if we go to hell?

Finally, this Pharisee asserts that he is not an *adulterer*. I do not know how many of you have committed adultery. You know whether or not, and God knows. How unclean is this sin. Yet many have truly defiled their beds with their fleshly lusts. If we were to probe thoroughly into the adulterous thought of the heart, we would probably find that in this regard there exists no perfect person on this earth. "Every one that looketh on a woman to lust after her," declared the Lord, "hath committed adultery with her already in his heart" (Matt. 5.28). How few today there are who keep their bodies clean

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\* A kind of fruit.—*Translator*

and how even fewer are those who keep their minds pure. God will judge and punish all who commit this grievous sin.

Unlike most of us, however, this Pharisee was a most moral person—untainted by the sin of adultery or such other unclean acts. Yet even here the Lord Jesus affirms that this Pharisee who has not committed adultery must perish and go to hell. With the consequence being that a good man goes to hell. And if this happens to a good and moral man, what will befall an evil man? Will not an adulterer certainly go to hell?

This Pharisee not only has not done many bad things on the negative side, he has also performed many commendable things on the positive side. For example, he “fasts twice in the week” (v. 12a). I would suppose that many Christians have not even fasted once. They may not even know what fasting is. How ascetic is this Pharisee. He subdues his body and does not indulge his passions. He is a man with self-control. He serves God with piety and singleness of mind, because though the Hebrew law does not require a man to fast twice a week, he nonetheless observes what the law does not demand! Yet despite such pious conduct, the Lord Jesus informs us that this good and devout man must perish and go to hell. Will not those who are morally far inferior to him suffer a greater punishment? Who then can be saved?

For another thing, this Pharisee also asserts: “I give tithes of all that I get” (v. 12b). He is not a miser; on the contrary, he is quite generous with his wealth. His rule is to give one tenth of all his income. I wonder if today’s Christians give even one hundredth of their incomes? Many when they give, give pennies instead of dimes and dollars. How different this Pharisee is, for he thinks of laying up a treasure in heaven. Yet once again, in spite of this man’s commendable behavior, the Lord Jesus discloses that he must go to hell. If one who gives away money must go to hell, what must be the fate of those who refuse to give anything?

Now from what we have thus far mentioned, we must readily acknowledge what a good and perfect man this Pharisee is. He is not only considered good in the eyes of men, he reckons himself also as without blemish. Although we would not call him a saint, we would at least have to number him among the good people of his generation. Yet the Lord Jesus gives the verdict that he is not thereby justified and saved but rather he will perish. For this reason, let all who think they will be saved by doing good or because they are good people know and recognize this: that if a good man such as this Pharisee cannot be saved, how can anyone else be saved by doing good? Do not be self-conceited good people who imagine that your goodness is sufficient for your salvation. Acknowledge instead that according to the judgment given by the Lord Jesus, you, like the Pharisee, still belong to hell!

Sinner that you are, do not pretend you can gradually do good till you work out your salvation. Let me tell you immediately that that is but the gospel of the devil. It goes without saying that you cannot possibly do good; and even if you are able to do good as did the Pharisee, you still must go to hell! What, then, is the use of doing good? Our Lord Jesus purposely chooses to put before us this highly good and very ideal man so as to give the verdict of perdition that all who trust in their self-righteousness must realize they cannot be saved by their own righteousness. The way of salvation is totally beyond one's self (see Eph. 2.8-9). Hence let those who sincerely desire to be saved not seek such along the path of reforming their self. Instead, let all who seek to be saved realize that they must *believe* in the Lord Jesus (see Acts 16.31).

Let us now try to understand more clearly why it is, if this Pharisee is such a good man, he must surely go to hell! Three main reasons can be offered. *The first reason* is because he is a person who trusts in himself as being a righteous man (v.9)—in short, he is self-righteous. It is quite true that he is indeed above the heads of the other people in the area of morality. But as a result he becomes self-

contented, assuming that if *he* does not attain to heaven, who else will? He thus “trusts” in his own righteous acts by which to be justified. Yet he forgets that “we are all become as one that is unclean, and *all our righteousnesses are as a polluted garment*” (Is. 64.6) which cannot cover our nakedness and save us from condemnation. He does not know that according to God “there is none righteous, no, not one” (Rom. 3.10). He deems himself to be “not as the rest of men”—as a matter of fact, in his own eyes he is the only righteous man in the world! Within himself he muses that he has well kept the law; nay, he has done even more than the law requires; and consequently, he will unquestionably be justified. Like many others, he surmises he can be saved by doing good.

Yet does not the Bible say that “by the works of the law shall *no* flesh be justified in [God’s] sight” (Rom. 3.20)? And does not it further state this: “We reckon therefore that a man is justified by faith apart from the works of the law”(Rom. 3.28)? Moreover, consider these pertinent passages: “[Know] that a man is not justified by the works of the law . . . because by the works of the law shall no flesh be justified” (Gal. 2.16); “That no man is justified by the law before God, is evident” (Gal. 3.11); and “Not by works done in righteousness, which we did ourselves” (Titus 3.5). The works of the law are the doing of good works. Yet by the works of the law, says the Bible, no one is justified. It therefore means that none can be saved by doing good.

Over and over again this thought is reiterated in the Bible. Though this Pharisee does good, his righteous acts cannot save him. He imagines he can go to heaven by trusting in his righteousness, not realizing he will end up in hell because the righteousness of man cannot satisfy God; only when God sees His own righteousness will He save. Trusting in his own righteousness instead, this Pharisee does not seek the righteousness which God has provided in the Lord Jesus Christ, and by this path he falls into perdition. How pitiful this is! “For being ignorant of God’s righteousness, and seeking to

establish their own, they did not submit themselves to the righteousness of God” (Rom. 10.3). Not submitting is being rebellious. Before God, therefore, this Pharisee is a rebel. How then can he expect to be saved?

How many are the descendants today of this Pharisee! Many deem themselves to be good, and thus incorrectly conclude that they will be saved. Many are still trying to be good in order to be saved. Yet they do not heed what the Lord Jesus has said, that good men go to hell. Oh, if you are like this deceived Pharisee, turn back now and believe in the Lord Jesus, because doing good will not at all save you. There is nothing in the world less dependable than your own righteousness. The self-righteous Pharisee has already gone to hell. He serves as the prime example for all who would desire to be saved by doing good. Why not cease following in his tracks and turn to the Lord Jesus?

*The second reason* for his destiny in hell is pride. Not only does this Pharisee trust in his own righteousness, but the Lord Jesus further states that he also “exalteth himself” (v.14). All who exalt themselves will go to hell. I am a preacher of the gospel, and I must say that in all the years of such ministry I have never seen a proud person saved. If anyone desires to be saved, he must acknowledge himself a helpless sinner. He cannot save himself, nor can he rely on himself. He should confess that hell is his deserved portion and prostrate himself at the foot of the cross of Christ—asking for grace, and trusting in Jesus of Nazareth who was crucified in shame for his sake. How humbling this must be! Yet without humility, who will do it? Nothing under heaven requires more humility than believing in the Lord Jesus as Savior. How reluctant people are to say that they cannot do good! Self-exalted ones will never seek salvation by accepting the despised cross, and hence will not be saved. They instead love to say they can do good to remedy their faults. And even if they should fail to do good, they would rather suffer the consequences than kneel at the cross and be saved. How very

difficult for them to acknowledge themselves as sinners and to confess the Lord Jesus as Savior. All who are self-exalting, may you cease to be proud from this day forward. Humble yourselves before God, lest your pride send you to hell!

*One final reason* to explain this Pharisee's ultimate end is the fact that he spurns the grace of God. He not only is self-righteous and proud, he also does not ask God for grace. He esteems himself so qualified for heaven that he fails to ask grace from God. Since he is such a righteous man, he considers he has far more than enough merits for heaven; so why should he ask for God's grace? He has done good; why then should he beg for grace? Though he goes to the temple to pray and therefore presumably to petition and ask, the Lord Jesus indicates that his prayer is only a "[praying] thus with himself" (v.11a). Read verses 11 and 12 and see if he has really prayed and asked for anything. On the contrary, when he comes to the temple of God, he does not say: "God, I have lacked in this and that; please supply my needs"—nor does he say: "O God, I cannot save myself; please save me." Rather, he *tells* God things: "God, I am thankful I am already good without Your help. I have not done all these bad things but I have done much good." He looks upon himself as a perfect man par excellence. He does not come to ask and pray; he comes to report! He comes before God to make a report that God may know his goodness. It is as though he is intent upon informing God as follows: "God, I thank You because I have not committed these gross sins as others have; furthermore, I have done many good things. I fear You might not be aware of this, therefore I have come purposely to report to You the facts." He certainly has not asked God for grace.

According to his own estimate as well as the evaluation of the world, this Pharisee is beyond dispute a very good man. Yet he is a total stranger to the holiness of God. He has never seen God nor known Him; consequently, he dares to brag before Him who is the altogether good and altogether holy God! Who would ever do such a

thing before God unless he were totally blind? Although in the eyes of the world and his own he is a good man, in God's eyes he is *still* a sinner. He is not justified nor is he saved. He is a man worthy of perishing and of going to hell. In God's judgment, a so-called righteous man needs a savior to atone for his sins just as much as the most notorious sinner of the world. This Pharisee, however, is blind to such divine judgment. He has never known God nor known His grace. And thus he does not know that before God he is a sinner and needs a savior. He is too self-sufficient and self-reliant. He counts himself too able! So that upon descending into hell, he must have been surprised that he was heading towards the wrong place—not knowing that this actually was home!

Let us understand here that this Pharisee has already perished and that we ought to regard this as a divine warning. This man erred in his theory of salvation on two counts: first, he thought he needed to do good in order to be saved; and second, he deemed himself already good enough to be saved. How absurd are such thoughts. By reading Ephesians 2.8-9 we will know that we are not saved by good works but are saved by *believing* in the grace of the Lord Jesus! Also, John 3.18a is appropriate here: "He that believeth on him is not judged: he that believeth not hath been judged already." Whether a person is saved or perishes is determined by his believing or not believing, by accepting or rejecting the salvation which the Lord Jesus has accomplished on the cross. It is not determined by his personal good or bad qualities. If a person is not saved by good works, it goes without saying that a good man is not thereby saved.

Oh do let us not deceive ourselves into imagining that by gradually doing good we shall be saved. I know and God knows that you *cannot* do good. And even if you did manage to do good, the all-good God would still consider your good as no good. Our good deeds will never save us, because you and I can never buy God's salvation with such deeds. Let us be careful not to reverse the divine order: we

need to be saved *first*, and *then* do good. Hence come and accept the Lord Jesus as your personal Savior that you may indeed be saved.

### ***The Publican***

Let us now turn to the bad man in the parable—who gets saved—and discover how bad he actually is and why eventually he, and not the Pharisee, goes to heaven.

This man, we learn, is a “publican” (v.10). The Chinese view robbers as the worst of men, and prostitutes as the worst of women. In the eyes of the Jews, the most degraded, dirty and sinful of all professions was to be a publican or tax-gatherer. A man who becomes a publican and a woman who becomes a prostitute are looked upon as the worst of social outcasts. Yet the Lord Jesus declares that despised as this publican is, he is nonetheless justified by God, is saved, and goes to heaven.

In the days of Jesus, the Jews were under the despotic rule of the Roman government. And the Romans adopted the system of bidding for Jewish customs revenue. The government would decide how much tax must be collected in a certain place and then be open for bids. Now the publicans were those people who won the bids. They would deliver the amount of tax money they had bid to the Roman government but would arbitrarily charge the people more than was necessary for their own profit. These publicans thus aided and abetted the foreign government in the oppression of their own countrymen. They extorted money from their own people to profit themselves. And hence they were despised by society as not only outcasts but the basest of all men. If you had asked the Jews of that day who was the worst of men, you would have been told, “the publican!” Yet the Lord Jesus says to us that the publican is the one who goes down to his house justified, that the bad man is the one who goes to heaven. Now it stands to reason, therefore, that if a great

sinner like the publican can be saved, those who sin less will certainly be saved.

This publican, by his own admission, is a “sinner” (v.13). His own conscience accuses him. All that he has done is against the law of God. He has not been able to keep God’s commandments. His thoughts are unclean, his eyes look at what he should not look at, his mouth says what ought not to be said, his hands do evil, and his feet are swift to go the wicked way. Moreover, he is full of lusts and ungodliness. He is a miser. He knows only how to profit himself and hurt others. So long as his pockets are full, he cares not a whit about righteousness or morality. He turns deaf to the cries of orphans and widows. He would rather let them die in ditches if only he can accumulate more wealth. He does not at all worship God. The fact of the matter is, all his actions and motives are at enmity with God. He is, in short, a gross sinner. But the Lord Jesus declares that this publican is justified! A sinner goes to heaven!

Sinners of the world, you *know* you are sinners. You consider yourselves unworthy to be saved and beyond redemption. As you look at yourselves, your conscience condemns you to perdition. But let me tell you, you need not be in despair and need not give up hope—because the Lord Jesus declares that sinners can go to heaven. You who are miserable, do not be discouraged. Here is the gospel presented to you: that though you are a sinner, yet you may have eternal life. In spite of your inability to save yourself, you may yet be saved. For there is salvation in the Lord Jesus. Come and accept His salvation!

The Pharisee spoke to himself on this wise: “I am not as the rest of men, extortioners, unjust, adulterers, or even as this publican” (v.11b). Now we know that this publican must have committed some of these sins. How he used his influence to oppress people and exercised his authority to extort money. All that he did was full of unrighteousness. Many of the things in his home were obtained by

defrauding others, and therefore were not rightly his. What sin has he not committed and with what defilement has he not been defiled? Even so, the Lord Jesus pronounced the good news that such a person can go to heaven.

In the eyes of the world, this sinner deserves more than hell. According to human judgment, a good man should go to heaven and a bad man should go to hell. If we were capable of doing good, we would agree that good men ought to go to heaven while bad men should go to hell. If the verdict is left to us, we will declare that the Pharisee has eternal life but the publican shall perish. Fortunately, this judgment of salvation or perdition is not given to us to pronounce. Our Lord Jesus Christ decides that good men must go to hell while bad men may go to heaven. How very few are so-called good men on this earth; but the world is full of sinners (see Rom. 3). If only good men are saved, how few would indeed be saved! For would not all men perish? Fortunately, the Lord Jesus declares that sinners may go to heaven. Thus, we sinners have the hope of being saved. Praise the Lord!

Once I was on board the steamer “Niu-shen” going from Shanghai to Fukien Province. On the ship I began to talk with a well-known businessman from central Fukien. I told him of the gospel of the atoning death of the Lord Jesus. He replied by quoting the saying of Confucius: “If anyone offends heaven, prayer is of no avail.” So I asked him, “In view of this lofty observation, how many under the sky have *not* offended heaven?” After contemplating it for a while, he answered, “I am afraid there is none!” I continued: “Alright, since all people in the world have offended heaven, they have no way to pray for forgiveness. Then must it not be that we all are merely waiting for impending punishment?” This businessman had nothing to say. How true it is that all *have* sinned, and therefore all must perish. But God has extended grace and has sent us the glad tidings. Though it may be beyond prayer for all who have offended heaven, yet God is so gracious to all that He provides for them a Savior who

died to atone for their sins, that all sinners may have the chance to be saved and go to heaven. For this reason let sinners come quickly to Jesus and accept the salvation of God—that bad men may go to heaven. Such is the gospel.

This publican, as we have seen, is certainly a big sinner, and yet he is saved. Are we to infer from this that a person must sin until he becomes a big sinner before he can be saved? Can people keep on sinning and be saved? Not at all. In saying sinners may be saved it does not mean that a sinner is saved because he sins. So far as the sinner *himself* is concerned, he is destined by God to perish, but he may be saved if he relies on a third party who can save him. Let us now examine how this publican who has sinned so greatly is saved. This will cause those who are fellow-sinners to know how to obtain salvation.

This publican has so sold himself to sin that he dare not boast before God that he is somebody. The Lord Jesus, in describing the proper attitude to have, said: “he that humbleth himself” (v.14c). And elsewhere the Scriptures declare that “God resisteth the proud, but giveth grace to the humble” (James 4.6). This tax-collector knows there is absolutely nothing in him of which he can brag. He realizes his many shortcomings, and he recognizes the justice of being condemned. Accordingly, he humbles himself before God. He comes to God’s temple, “standing afar off, ... not [lifting] so much as his eyes unto heaven” (v.13b). He acknowledges that God is most holy and just, hence a person like him is totally unfit to approach God. Unlike the Pharisee, he has no merit to report to God. He only knows he cannot save himself, and hence he comes to God to ask for mercy.

The Bible tells us that God “giveth grace to the humble” (James 4.6 quoting Prov. 3.34). Are you proud of yourself, believing you have everything and lack nothing? May the Holy Spirit open the eyes of your heart that you may see your need and come to God for grace. And if you have already realized your insufficiency, then do not at

this moment allow pride to enter in to deceive your heart, lest you perish. Pride has hindered many from believing on Christ and being saved. I hope that pride will not evilly affect you.

Notice carefully what the publican prays to God: “God, be thou merciful to *me a sinner*” (v. 13c). Unlike the Pharisee who “sets all others at nought” (v.9b), he confesses that he is a sinner. How difficult it is to say “I am a sinner.” People are willing to acknowledge that “*all* have sinned” (Rom. 3.23), but few are ready to confess “*I* have sinned.” This is considered as losing face! But this publican stands in the place of a sinner. Whoever wishes to go to heaven must take this place.

Let me remind you that if there is a saved person in the world he *must* be a sinner—since none but sinners are chosen for heaven. If we could ask all who are in heaven about their past credentials, all would answer with one voice that they were sinners before. Heaven is inhabited with sinners saved by grace. It is a place especially prepared for sinners. And all who will not confess themselves as such are not qualified to enter heaven! Heaven welcomes the publicans and the prostitutes. All sinners who believe in the Lord Jesus may come!

Recall the words of the Lord Jesus, who said: “I came not to call the righteous, but sinners” (Matt. 9.13), “for the Son of man came to seek and to save that which was lost” (Luke 19.10). If you regard yourself as righteous, then the Lord Jesus has not come to call, to seek, and to save *you*. But if you confess you are a *sinner*, He comes to rescue the lost, and thus you can be saved. Hence let us see that taking the place of a sinner is the first step towards salvation. Though this publican is a sinner destined to perish, he nonetheless is saved because he does not pretend to be sinless but openly confesses he is a sinner.

One night the famous English preacher Charles H. Spurgeon had a dream. He dreamed that he was at the outside of the gate of heaven. He saw a group of saints—bright and glorious—marching through heaven’s gate with banners of victory in their hands, and singing as they went. As soon as they had entered the gate, he immediately heard the joyous sound of welcome. So he asked an angel, “Who are these people? Why are they so warmly welcomed by heaven?” The angel replied: “They are the prophets of old.” Spurgeon sighed and said, “Alas, I am not a prophet, therefore I am not qualified to enter in with them.” After a while, another group like the earlier one entered through heaven’s gate, and they received the same welcome. Inquiring about them, he got this answer from the angel: “These are the saints of old.” Spurgeon knew he was not one of the saints of old, so he was not fit to enter in with them either. A while later a third group approached. Now they were the martyrs of old. Spurgeon once again dared not enter in with them. Finally came a group larger than the combination of the three preceding groups. Among them were two persons whom he recognized: one was the sinful woman who later anointed the Lord with oil and the other was the robber who was crucified with the Lord. He thought certainly there would not be such a warm welcome in heaven for this group. To his surprise, the shout of welcome was seven times greater. He therefore asked: “Who are these people?” The angel replied: “These are people who were dead in sins, but were later saved by the Lord Jesus Christ.” How joyful was Spurgeon after this, and he declared: “May the Lord Jesus be praised forever! For I find my true companions in this group!” At that point, he awoke from his dream. Now though this was but a dream, it conveys a true word for us all. The Lord of heaven welcomes sinners indeed.

The initial work of the Holy Spirit in a human being is to convict him of sin. God’s first step in saving a sinner is sending His Holy Spirit to work in a man’s heart to convict him of sins and transgressions. Once I was preaching in a certain place. Some young girls were deeply convicted by the Holy Spirit of their sins. After the

meeting, they remained behind to talk with me. I noticed that there was not a dry eye among them. They all felt sorry for their sins. They told me that they knew they were sinners, and wondered if they could be saved. I told them that since they acknowledged themselves to be sinners, this was a sure evidence that the Holy Spirit had worked in their hearts. Later on, I read John 3.16, 5.24, and other verses of promise from the Scriptures to assure them that once they knew they were sinners, they would have eternal life and be saved if they were willing to believe and accept the Lord Jesus as their Savior. Their eyes were opened by the Holy Spirit, and they instantly saw the salvation of the cross and experienced the joy of salvation. Now they are still living joyfully before the Lord. If, therefore, at this moment the Holy Spirit is convicting you of sin, please understand that it is not for the purpose to condemn you but rather to save you.

This publican not only took the place of a sinner, he truly was sorry for his sins. Notice that he “smote his breast” (v.13.). He really hated himself. As he recalled how he had sinned, he deeply regretted it and beat his breast. “Godly sorrow,” declares the Bible, “worketh repentance unto salvation, a repentance which bringeth no regret” (2 Cor. 7.10). The word of God also says the following: “Thus saith the high and lofty One that inhabiteth eternity, whose name is Holy: I dwell in the high and holy place, with him also that is of a contrite and humble spirit, to revive the spirit of the humble, and to revive the heart of the contrite” (Is. 57.15); “The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit: a broken and contrite heart, O God, thou wilt not despise” (Ps. 51.17). Therefore, do not be fearful of the greatness of your sins. Only be fearful lest you will not confess them and genuinely have sorrow for them. If you lightly regard your sins and are unwilling to take the place of a sinner, you will never seek for the Savior. You will reject Him even should He be escorted to the door of your heart. Honestly speaking, it is quite true that there is no merit in self-humility or in taking a sinner’s place and being sorrowful for sins; nevertheless, except a man humbles himself, regards himself as a

sinner, and feels genuinely sorry for his sins, he will never accept the Lord Jesus Christ as the sinner's Savior.

The acts of humility, confession and sorrow of this publican can not save him and earn for him eternal life; these are but steps preparing his heart for salvation. The one and sole reason for this sinner to be saved is because he *believes in the salvation of Christ's atoning death*. Though he is really sorry for his sins, his sorrow cannot save him. Though he confesses that he is a sinner, his confession too cannot save him. Although all these prepare him for receiving salvation, they do not save him. Without these motions of the heart, people will perish; yet these in themselves cannot save anyone. A sinner is saved only because of the salvation which the Lord Jesus has accomplished on the cross. Apart from that, there is no other salvation.

And thus this publican prays this prayer: "God, be thou merciful to me a sinner" (v.13c). This can also be translated as follows: "God, be thou propitiated to me a sinner" (mg.). This speaks of the cross. None can be saved without the cross. It must have been that as this publican stood in the temple and prayed, he was convicted of his sins by the Holy Spirit. He saw far away in the center of the court the priest offering a sacrifice. He doubtless understood how the sacrifice being offered up must die in the place of a sinner. So he asks God: "God, be thou propitiated to me a sinner." Knowing that he is a sinner, he also knows that sin has its wages. And he also knows that no sinner in and of himself can be justified or go to heaven, and that unless there is a savior who can atone for his sin he must perish. His heart therefore looks at the sin-offering, his heart looks at the Savior. And finally he utters his cry to God. With the result that this publican is saved, and heaven is his.

Coming as he did before God, this tax-collector did not ask God to help him that as he returns home he might be changed. No, he knew he could not be changed, neither was he able to improve himself. He

simply and humbly admitted he had sinned, and that unless there was that which would suffer the penalty of sin for him, he must eventually perish. He looked to a savior—to his substitute—and so he was saved.

We all, are we not, sinners and unable to save ourselves? The Lord Jesus therefore comes as our Substitute and Savior to save us. He does not come to be our exemplar or model; He comes to *die*—and to *die* for us. We have sinned; and consequently, because “the wages of sin is death” (Rom. 6.23), we must die. But praise the Lord, Jesus has died for our sins so that we need not die any more: “Who his own self bare our sins in his body upon the tree” (1 Peter 2.24) — “Christ also suffered for sins once, the righteous for the unrighteous” (3.18)—“And he is the propitiation [satisfaction] for our sins” (1 John 2.2).

How vital is this fact: that *with* the atoning death of the Lord Jesus, we need not die but can be saved. But conversely, *without* his atoning death, we must bear our own sins and perish. Truly, the publican is a sinner, but he relies on the Sacrifice who has died for him and atoned for his sins. So that now he has no more sin and does not need to die and go to hell. This publican goes to heaven—yet not on his own merit but on the merit of a third party: that is to say, the redemptive work of the Savior. All who are in heaven depend on the finished work of Christ on the cross and not on their own righteousness.

The publican came to God, asking to be atoned for his sins. This is not unlike a verse from the Book of Romans: “Whosoever shall call upon the name of the Lord shall be saved. How then shall they call on him in whom they have not believed?” (10.13-14a). The publican called upon God because he had first believed in Him. He was saved because he believed that God would in some way atone for his sins. He was justified by faith and by faith he was saved. He understood the truth of salvation which says that “by grace have ye been saved

through faith” (Eph. 2.8). He realized how full of shortcomings he was, and that apart from God, nothing else could remedy the situation. This publican therefore asked God to be merciful to him for he knew that salvation could only be by grace: “Not by works done in righteousness, which we did ourselves, but according to his mercy [God] saved us” (Titus 3.5). He understood that God would somehow be gracious to him through the Sacrifice because he would need a Sacrifice to die in his place and to atone for his sins. Hence he asked God to be merciful and to propitiate his sins. He prayed in faith and believed with his heart. And consequently he received what he had asked for.

The publican goes to heaven not because he is special but because he is shown mercy by God through receiving the redemption of Christ the Savior. A sinner does not need to pay any cost to go to heaven because the Lord Jesus has paid everything on the cross. The Pharisee perishes because he does not have the Savior, whereas the publican is saved because he has the Savior. To be saved or to perish has nothing to do with one’s self and one’s deeds. Good as the Pharisee is, he cannot escape hell; bad as the publican is, he may go to heaven. He who goes to hell does not go because of his evil, and he who goes to heaven does not go because of his good. The difference lies only in whether or not the person believes in the Lord Jesus who has died on the cross: “He that believeth on the Son hath eternal life; but he that believeth not the Son shall not see life, but the wrath of God abideth on him” (John 3.36 mg.). Eternal life or eternal death is decided by whether or not a person believes. I beseech all today who do not know Him to quickly believe in the substitutionary death of the Lord Jesus that they may be saved.

All who desire salvation should know first of all that salvation is not a kind of bargain. Salvation is not in your gradually doing good till you receive it as your recompense. Salvation is the free gift of God, and it is freely given to all sinners who believe. God does not regard how bad you are; He will save you if you are willing to

receive the Lord Jesus as your Savior, believing that His death is for you by His having borne the just penalty for your sins. No sin can then rise up in the day of judgment to accuse you. You are made whole and are fully saved. Yet neither does God regard how good you are, for you will surely perish if you do not accept the Lord Jesus as your Savior and believe in His substitutionary death. It is most certain that your good cannot cover up nor redeem your evil: you will without doubt perish. Hence God has already ruled that whoever believes in the Lord Jesus shall be saved and all who do not believe shall perish. The unbelieving good man will go to hell while the believing sinner will go to heaven.

In summary, you who are good men, do not boast in yourselves, for your good cannot save you. And you who are bad men, do not be discouraged, for your bad may not be your condemnation. Praise and thank God, how wonderful is His salvation! Though we all are like the publican, being hopeless and helpless sinners who deserve eternal punishment, God nevertheless has caused the Lord Jesus to die on the cross for us that we may be saved by believing and accepting Him as our Savior. What amazing grace this is! Let the sinners follow in the steps of the publican. Come to God, confess your sins, and ask Him in faith, saying: "God, be merciful to me a sinner, for the Lord Jesus has indeed died on the cross for me."

God will save you. Thank Him for His so great salvation.

# 3

*Purge out the old leaven, that ye may be a new lump, even as ye are unleavened. For our passover also hath been sacrificed, even Christ: wherefore let us keep the feast, not with old leaven, neither with the leaven of malice and wickedness, but with the unleavened bread of sincerity and truth. (1 Cor. 5.7-8)*

This New Testament passage explains to us fully the real meaning of the story of the passover recorded in Exodus 12 of the Old Testament. This passage enables us to understand three things: (1) that the lamb slain at Passover is a type of Christ; (2) that the leaven is malice and wickedness; and (3) that since Christ our Lamb was slain, we too keep the passover. Let us carefully trace the story of the first passover found in Exodus and discover its true meaning.

## ***I. The Sentence of Death (Ex. 11.4-5)***

*And Moses said, Thus saith Jehovah, About midnight will I go out into the midst of Egypt: and all the first-born in the land of Egypt **shall die**, from the first-born of Pharaoh that sitteth upon his throne, even unto the first-born of the maidservant that is behind the mill; and all the firstborn of cattle.*

The sentence of judgment is that all the first-born *must die*. What is meant by the first-born? “That is not first which is spiritual, but that which is natural” (1 Cor. 15.46). All who belong to Adam, who are born of Adam, are the first-born. And God’s sentence is that they must die!

Two or three verses elsewhere in the Bible come to mind here: “Death passed unto all men” (Rom. 5.12); “Inasmuch as it is appointed unto men once to die” (Heb. 9.27); “In Adam all die” (1 Cor. 15.22). No one may escape this death! It is an appointment which none can circumvent. All who are in Adam, all the first-born, must die.

## ***II. Separated from Death (Ex. 11.7)***

*But against any of the children of Israel shall not a dog move his tongue, against man or beast: that ye may know how that Jehovah doth make a **distinction** between the Egyptians and Israel.*

Here God had his specially chosen people—the Israelites. He had chosen a people who *would not go through death* to be his people. In like manner, God has chosen out of the world a people today who will not pass through death. Just as He separated the children of Israel from the Egyptians, so God “chose us in him [Christ] before the foundation of the world” (Eph. 1.4). This is indeed glad tidings! Out of so many who are destined to die, God has chosen a people who are not to pass through death.

## ***III. The Salvation of God (Ex. 12.1-4)***

*And Jehovah spake unto Moses and Aaron in the land of Egypt, saying, This month shall be unto you the beginning of months: it shall be the first month of the year to you. Speak ye unto all the congregation of Israel, saying, In the tenth day of this month they shall take to them every man a lamb, according to their fathers' houses, a lamb for a household: and if the household be too little for a lamb, then shall he and the neighbor next unto his house take one according to the number of the souls; according to every man's eating ye shall make your count for the lamb.*

In what way does God save His people from death? Formerly, it was by means of a lamb; now, God has given us Jesus Christ. In the whole world, there is but one name, the name of Christ—who is also called the Lamb of God (John 1.29). The name “son of man” is indeed used in Daniel and Ezekiel, but from Genesis to Revelation, only Christ is the Lamb. 1 Peter 1.19 speaks of His “precious blood, as of a lamb without blemish and without spot, even the blood of Christ”; and Revelation 13.8 declares that He is “the Lamb that hath been slain.” Throughout the Bible Christ is reckoned as the Lamb.

Formerly, the children of Israel were saved through a lamb; now we are saved through Christ.

Why did God make that month of Abib the first month of the year? There is a deep meaning involved. Although there are many months in a year, no month but that one is to be designated the first of the year. This shows us that all the years and months and days before we are saved are not to be counted. Whether a person is aged forty or fifty, his years are not counted before God if he is not saved: all his life is all a waste! God takes that particular month as the very first of the year: in other words, the time a person is saved is his first month: it is the day when one receives the life of God, it becomes the first day of the year. In the parable of the vineyard found in Matthew 20, the owner of the vineyard is spoken of as considering all who have not entered into his vineyard and worked there as being “idle”. Are these people really doing nothing? In the eyes of the owner of the vineyard, they are “idle” indeed.

“In the tenth day of this month, they shall take to them every man a lamb according to their fathers’ houses, a lamb for a household”—This commenced the passover in the time of the Exodus. Now interestingly enough, it was on that very day centuries later that the Lord Jesus is seen entering Jerusalem. He had come to Bethany six days before the passover feast (John 12.1), which was the ninth day of the month. On the next day, the tenth, he entered Jerusalem (John 12.12). Thereafter Judas tried to betray the Lord by seeking opportunity to deliver him to men (Matt. 26.16).

#### ***IV. The Qualification of the Lamb (Ex. 12.5, 13.2)***

*Your lamb shall be **without blemish**, a male a year old: ye shall take it from the sheep, or from the goats.—Sanctify unto me all the **first-born**, whatsoever openeth the womb among the children of Israel, both of man and of beast: it is mine.*

The principal qualification of the passover lamb was that it be without blemish, which typifies sinlessness. No one in the world can be a savior because all have sinned. Since he who is my neighbor has sinned as well as I, how can he ever save me? My neighbor needs to die just as much as I do; and therefore, he cannot save me. But praise the Lord, Jesus is truly without blemish! He himself challenges all of us: “Which of you convicteth me of sin?” (John 8.46) In all history the Lord Jesus is the only one who dares to utter such a word. Hebrews 7 says that He is “separated from sinners” (v.26).

The second principal qualification of the passover lamb was for it to be a first-born from among the flock. Those whom God sets out to slay in Egypt are the *first-born*, so He uses a *first-born to save the first-born* of Israel. Now we know that the Lord Jesus is the first-born son of Mary (Luke 2.7), as well as that He is the Savior “without blemish and without spot” (1 Peter 1.19).

### ***V. The Death of the Lamb (Ex. 12.6)***

*And ye shall keep it [the lamb] until the **fourteenth** day of the same month; and the **whole assembly** of the congregation of Israel shall **kill it** at even.*

This that is told us here is a most vital point. We sinners need a savior to save us. But if the Lord as our Savior does not die, we will perish—even if we, like the Twelve, may have seen Him face to face and heard Him in the days of His flesh. Jesus must *die* in order to deliver us from death, for the wages of sin is death.

The passover lamb was kept till “the even” of the fourteenth day of the month before it was killed; even so was our Lord kept to the fourteenth of the first month to die. The time is exact to the very hour: “Now from the sixth hour there was darkness over all the land until the ninth hour” (Matt. 27.45). “At even” is the English text translation of a Jewish expression which in the Hebrew literally means “between the two evenings” (see Ex. 12.6 mg.). The famous

Jewish historian Josephus wrote that the term “at even” pointed to the sixth to the ninth hour of Roman time. To us, it is from noon till three o’clock in the afternoon. The Lord Jesus was crucified within that very time frame. The sky darkened until He breathed His last breath.

Now who killed the passover lamb? The whole assembly of the congregation of Israel, we are told. Here are great types: the priests represent the church; the twelve tribes represent the nations of the world; and the congregation represents all mankind.

During the time immediately after Noah and the flood, the entire world’s humanity was divided into three groups: Shem, Ham, and Japheth (see Gen. 9.18-19, 10.32). On the day when Christ was crucified, all three groups were represented there: the Jews, the descendants of Shem; the Romans, the offspring of Japheth; and Simon of Cyrene, of Ham. Hence all mankind was present. And thus did the Lord give testimony before the whole world that *He died*. When the Emperor Nero sat on the Roman throne, the census he had taken recorded that during that time there were three million people present in Jerusalem. So our Lord died in the presence of such a vast multitude.

“Neither shall ye break a bone thereof” (Ex. 12.46). This was literally fulfilled in the Lord Jesus as our Passover Lamb: “For these things came to pass, that the scripture might be fulfilled, A bone of him shall not be broken” (John 19.36). How could the Lord be a paschal (passover) lamb? A most singular thing happened. According to the record of the Talmud, forty years before the Holy Temple was destroyed (in 70 A.D.), which was one year prior to Jesus’ crucifixion, the Roman Caesar issued a decree forbidding death by stoning. Stoning would obviously break the bones of the condemned. Now the Jews used to stone people to death, whereas the Romans would crucify them. When Pilate told the Jews to judge Jesus by their own law, they replied that they had no authority to put any to

death (John 18.31). The Lord foretold that he would be crucified, not stoned to death. Otherwise he could not be the Paschal Lamb.

### ***VI. Apply the Blood (Ex. 12.7, 22-23)***

*And they shall take of the blood, and put it on the two side-posts and on the lintel, upon the houses wherein they shall eat it. — And ye shall take a **bunch of hyssop**, and **dip it in the blood** that is in the basin, and strike the lintel and the two sideposts with the blood that is in the basin; and **none of you shall go out of the door of his house** until the morning. For Jehovah will pass through to smite the Egyptians; and when he **seeth the blood** upon the lintel, and on the two side-posts, Jehovah **will pass over the door**, and will not suffer the destroyer to come in unto your houses to smite you.*

Applying the blood is of great significance. The Lord has already died; why then is it that many sinners are today still perishing? There is only one reason: they have not applied the Blood.

How was the blood applied? It was to be put on the lintel and the two side-posts of their doors, with the rest left in the basin. So that the top and bottom, right and left were all marked and surrounded by blood. The cross of our Lord Jesus reaches in all directions: top and bottom, right and left.

“Hyssop” is the smallest of plants (see 1 Kings 4.33). The New Testament also mentions a very small thing—the mustard seed. And this mustard seed is used by the Lord to illustrate our faith. Having obtained the blood from the lamb, it then had to be applied with hyssop by the Israelites. In like manner, the Blood which *we* have must be applied with faith. Although our faith is small, we must nevertheless use this small plant of faith to apply the Blood.

What did God say regarding the blood thus applied by the Israelites? He declared: “*When I see the blood, I will pass over you*” (Ex. 12.13). How significant is this word! The “I” is God himself.

Passover therefore means that God passes over when He sees the blood. It is *God who sees the blood*, not the people who put it on. We will never see the full value of the blood of our Passover Lamb because we are *inside* the door, whereas the Blood is applied to the *outside* of the door. So that the Blood is not seen by us, because it is not given to us to see. We must consequently use faith. Though we may not see it or feel it, we simply believe, for the Blood is for God to see. The essential matter for us is: has the Blood been applied? If it has been applied, there is no more need to be worried.

During a conversation which D.L. Moody once held with a friend, he told the latter that he would be saved if he only believed on the Lord Jesus. But the friend was fearful that even if he believed he would still perish. The two talked for a long while. Before they parted, Mr. Moody said to the friend: "Can you imagine the eight persons in the family of Noah trembling with fear lest the ark would sink during the flood?" "They would have been most foolish had they done so," responded the friend. "But you are just such a person," Moody answered back. Instantly the friend understood and left with joy.

It was *God* who *saw* the blood in Egypt, not the first-born who saw it. When God saw the blood, He passed over. So that it is not because of what *you* see as good that God passes over. A being saved or not hinges on whether or not you believe in Christ and His blood. When God today sees the Blood applied, He passes over. However good you may be, you will die if there is no Blood. Because the Lamb has died, you may not die. If the Lamb does not die, you must die. God does not look at how good or how bad you are, He only *looks at the blood of the Lamb*. Apart from the Blood, nothing can save us.

The Blood stands between God and man. We have sinned, therefore we must die. How can we escape death? By trusting in the death of the Lamb as our death. For "it is appointed unto men *once* to

die” (Heb. 9.27)—not twice. Physical death can seek a person only once, it cannot seek him twice. If we have already died, we escape death.

In the Exodus, either the passover lamb died or the first-born died. Today, it is either Christ who has died or else you must die. Your sins have already been brought to death, they having died in Christ. This is salvation! The basis of our salvation lies in *Christ having died for us*. All we need to do is to look at Him.

By trusting in the precious blood of Jesus Christ we are saved. Yet there remains in us a problem: after we become believers, we are like newborn babes who rise and fall—good sometimes, and sometimes bad. Why is this so? Is the salvation incomplete? Not at all. It is because we have merely done the first half—in our applying the Blood, but we have not continued further to fulfill the second part. And thus we are often weak and sick. Let us now look at the second half, that which must follow immediately after the putting on of the Blood.

### ***VII. Eating the Flesh “in that night” (Ex. 12.8a)***

And they shall eat the flesh in that night.

The Scripture passage states, “in that night”—that is to say, in the night when the blood was applied. Soon after the blood was put up, the flesh of the lamb was to be eaten. The blood was applied to the lintel and side-posts of the door; that was outside. On the other hand, the flesh of the lamb was to be eaten within the house. The applying of the Blood is something objective, whereas the eating of the flesh is subjective. The Blood applied is for God to see, but the flesh eaten is to nourish our bodies. The blood of Jesus causes God to pass over; at the same time the Lord Jesus as the Lamb to be eaten is given to us by God to be taken in so as to give us strength. If we should fail to

accept Jesus to be the Lord of our heart, we will have no strength, though we are saved.

So salvation includes on the one hand God's satisfaction and on the other, our transformation. The application of the Blood satisfies God, while the eating of the Lamb's flesh transforms us. The blood of the Lamb may have already been put on, but I would now like to ask if the Lamb's flesh has been eaten? You may ask, What is the use of the flesh of the Lamb in the stomach? Simply, that it will be digested within you and become *you*—it is converted to be your flesh and your bones. If you have put up the Blood on the outside but have not eaten the flesh of the Lamb, there will be little transformation in your life and you will be so weak that you have no strength to be an overcoming believer. You must eat the flesh of the Lamb *in that night* in which you put up His blood.

An error prevails in the preaching of the gospel nowadays in that it is preached only in one aspect of Christ's work. The work which Christ has done has a two-fold effect: He works *outside* of us that God may be pleased, and He works *inside* of us that our life may be fulfilled. How we emphasize the substitutionary aspect of the death of Christ and yet overlook the life aspect of His work! We only persuade people to believe in His blood that has been shed for us, but rarely exhort them to receive Him into our heart to be our Lord within that He may deliver us from the power of sin and from weakness. The result of such preaching produces many believers who are fundamental in faith but weak in life.

The children of Israel had to eat the flesh of the lamb because early the next morning they would have to begin the journey. How far would their journey take them? As far as from Egypt to Canaan! We likewise today must eat till we too are full, and thus shall we have strength to go on our way. Why is it that many find themselves unable to walk through the wilderness? Because they have not eaten well.

The Blood applied is to satisfy God, but the flesh of the Lamb left uneaten will leave you unfulfilled. You have not received Christ as your Kingly life. Since you have believed in Jesus as your Savior, you should also accept Him as your Lord.

### ***VIII. The Way the Lamb Is Eaten (Ex. 12.8-10)***

*And they shall eat the flesh in that night, roast with fire, and unleavened bread; with bitter herbs they shall eat it. Eat not of it raw, nor boiled at all with water, but roast with fire; its head with its legs and with the inwards thereof. And ye shall let nothing of it remain until the morning; but that which remaineth of it until the morning ye shall burn with fire.*

“Roast with fire”—Fire points to the Holy Spirit in the love of God. To eat the flesh of the lamb by roasting symbolizes for us that in receiving Christ as our life we must receive Him in the power of the Holy Spirit and not in man’s way or in his natural strength: “I am the living bread,” said Jesus, “which came down out of heaven: if any man eat of this bread, he shall live forever: yea and the bread which I will give is my flesh, for the life of the world” (John 6.51). Again, this word of the Lord’s: “It is the Spirit which quickens, the flesh profits nothing: the words which I have spoken unto you *are spirit and are life*” (v.63 Darby). Let us notice that John 6.51-59 deals with the Living Bread with respect to the matter of life. Many of the disciples of the Lord did not understand what they heard from His lips, and therefore some were thinking of leaving Him. This is why the Lord said to them that “the flesh profits nothing.”

Eat we must, but how? The disciples thought He meant to eat his flesh raw, so the Lord told them in a figure that they must eat it roasted. The fire spoken of in Exodus prefigures the Spirit that the Lord Jesus mentioned here in John 6. In accepting Jesus as Savior, we receive eternal life; in like manner, by taking Him as Lord, we have eternal victory.

“And unleavened bread; with bitter herbs they shall eat it”—Leaven signifies sin: and hence that which is *unleavened* must mean sin has been eliminated. According to the instruction of the Scriptures, everyone who receives Jesus as Savior ought to eat the flesh “in that night” as well. How abnormal we are if it requires a long time after we are saved to accept Christ as our Lord too! But the Bible explicitly states that on that night long ago when the blood was applied, the *flesh of the lamb must be eaten and sin must be gotten rid of*.

Christ gives us two gifts: one is justification and the other is sanctification. If we desire only one of the gifts, Christ will withhold even that one which we desire. Without the getting rid of sins, we will not receive God’s forgiveness. If we do not hate sin and desire for holiness, Christ will not justify us. We must put on the Blood and also eat the flesh of the Lamb, but at the same time we must have *unleavened bread*—which means we *hate sin*. If anyone should eat the flesh of the Lamb with leavened bread, that person has not applied the Blood and he is not saved. It is granted that a Christian may sin later, but on the day he wants to believe Jesus as his Savior he must *hate* sin, otherwise he is not saved.

“Bitter herbs” signifies a *sorrowful heart*. Unless we hate sin with a sorrowful heart we may not eat the flesh. Take note of what Paul says in this regard: “Godly sorrow worketh repentance unto salvation, a repentance which bringeth no regret. . . . For behold, this selfsame thing, that ye were made sorry after a godly sort, what earnest care it wrought in you, yea what clearing of yourselves, yea what indignation, yea what fear, yea what longing, yea what zeal, yea what avenging! In everything ye approved yourselves to be pure in the matter” (2 Cor. 7.10-11). This is bitter herbs—to blame and to abhor oneself before the Lord. God will not despise a sorrowful and contrite heart.

“Eat not of it raw”—To eat something raw means to take it according to *natural energy*. This phrase thus means that no one can grasp Christ with his natural strength.

“Nor boiled at all with water”—To boil with water denotes *man’s way*, but the opposite is meant to signify that Christ cannot be taken in man’s way.

“And ye shall let nothing of it remain until the morning; but that which remaineth of it until the morning ye shall burn with fire”—This statement implies that even if a person should desire to eat the flesh the next morning he shall not be able to do so. If morning speaks of resurrection, then the time for going out of Egypt speaks of the time of our being raptured. And hence the eating of the flesh of the lamb must be done *before* the morning—that is to say, it must be done in *this* life. For at the time of resurrection it will be too late to eat the flesh of the Lamb—too late to receive Jesus as our Lord and life.

### ***IX. The Manner of Eating the Lamb (Ex. 12.11)***

*And thus shall ye eat it: with your loins girded, your shoes on your feet, and your staff in your hand; and ye shall eat it in haste: it is Jehovah’s passover.*

The preceding section has told us how to eat; this verse shows us what to do while eating.

“Your loins girded”—This action was necessary because the dress the Jews wore was rather loose and without buttons. The girdle was taken off during leisure time but the people girded themselves while working. From the words given in Luke 17.8, 12.35, and Acts 12.8, we can readily understand the meaning of having the loins girded—that one is *ready to work*.

“Your shoes on your feet, and your staff in your hand”—Thus will the people be prepared for the journey. As soon as the stomachs of the children of Israel were full, they were to depart the land of Egypt and become *pilgrims and sojourners*. With the Blood applied and the flesh of the Lamb eaten, you must immediately come out of Egypt as a pilgrim. Our Christian life is that of a pilgrim. We must therefore prepare to leave Egypt. Now as we have applied the blood of the Lamb and eaten His flesh, we must not be allowed to stay any longer in the world.

“Shoes on”—Compare Ephesians 6.15: “Having shod your feet with the preparation of the gospel of peace.” From this we conclude that to have the “shoes on” indicates our being prepared to go on a journey. In Acts 12 we are told that the angel instructed Peter to “bind on [his] sandals” (v.8). This too bespeaks a journey to be taken. A Jew usually wore no shoes at home; he only put on shoes when he was ready to take a journey—no matter if only down the street. In our journeying, we Christians are to be pilgrims.

“Staff”—Compare this with another verse in the Old Testament: “For with my staff I passed over this Jordan” (Gen. 32.10). This gives evidence that the staff too is for traveling. “By faith Jacob, when he was dying. . . . worshipped, leaning upon the top of his staff” (Heb. 11.21). God in His word makes a remark here concerning Jacob’s staff. Throughout his life—whether it were leaving home or returning home or going to Egypt—Jacob never left his staff behind. This indicates that he spent his entire life as a pilgrim. God was therefore pleased with him.

Hereafter, we too are to live a pilgrim’s life, no longer returning to dwell in the world. Soon after the children of Israel applied the blood and ate the flesh of the lamb, they went out of Egypt. Let me ask you: Are you still a dweller on earth? Which book in the Bible mentions the most regarding “they that dwell on the earth”? Is it not the book of the Revelation? Now they that dwell on the earth are

those who live in Egypt. This has a spiritual application as well as a physical one. Do you have a staff in your hand? Which is your expectation—to remain in Egypt or to pass through the wilderness to reach the Promised Land of Canaan? The world in which you live should be but a pathway for you; and when you die it provides for you only a tomb. Apart from these two things—a pathway and a tomb—you have no other relationship with the world.

Were you to dwell in the world, you would no doubt lose the privilege of reigning with Christ and thus have no part in His millennial kingdom. Philippians 3 tells us that “our citizenship is in heaven” (v.20). 1 Peter 2 says we are “sojourners and pilgrims” (v.11). Our home and our inheritance are not here on earth; if we think otherwise, we are greatly mistaken. Why did the children of Israel often think of Egypt while they were journeying in the wilderness? It was because they only remembered “the cucumbers and the melons and the leeks and the onions and the garlic” of Egypt (Num. 11.5) and completely forgot about the harsh treatment received at Pharaoh’s hand! How we too formerly suffered at the hands of Satan, but how surprisingly today we sometimes recall a small favor we received from Satan in the days before our conversion. What if God were to put us back in Egypt; do you think we would enjoy it? The answer is obvious!

### ***X. The Feast of Unleavened Bread (Ex. 12.15,19-20)***

*Seven days shall ye eat unleavened bread; even the first day ye shall put away leaven out of your houses: **for whosoever eateth leavened bread from the first day until the seventh day, that soul shall be cut off from Israel.** . . . Seven days shall there be no leaven found in your houses: for whosoever eateth that which is leavened, that soul shall be cut off from the congregation of Israel, whether he be a sojourner, or one that is born in the land. Ye shall eat nothing leavened; in all your habitations shall ye eat unleavened bread.*

This matter is most serious. A believer must *purge out the leaven* from his life. Leaven is that which ferments the bread. The Bible tells us that from the day the paschal lamb was to be eaten, the old leaven must be thoroughly purged out from house and food. For seven days continuously the children of Israel were to eat unleavened bread.

What does leavened signify? It signifies malice and wickedness. *Unleavened*, on the other hand, means sincerity and truth (1 Cor. 5.8).

Blood applied suggests being justified and saved, being delivered from further oppression by the Egyptians. Leaven purged implies being sanctified, having a part in the people of God. Blood applied is the *work of Christ*, but leaven purged is what *every saved one himself must do*—and this to be done daily from the first coming of the Lord right up to His second coming. Leaven must be put away for seven days, with the number seven in the Bible always signifying completeness and thoroughness.

*Without* the putting on of the Blood, the purging out of leaven will not save and justify anybody. Yet *with* the putting on of the Blood but without the purging of leaven no one will be sanctified. How sad that although all Christians today have the Blood applied, few have the leaven purged!

The story has been told that once at passover time a carpenter in Judah searched carefully everything and everywhere to make his house as clean as possible in preparation for keeping the feast. But in the evening of the first day of the feast, he suddenly discovered that there was molded bread in a bag. Not daring to touch it with his hand, he used two pieces of wood to pick the molded bread out and then he burned it in the fire. How piously he kept this feast! This should impel us to ask ourselves how much time we Christians have spent in dealing with sins.

If leaven is not purged, the person must suffer loss. Whoever did not put away the leaven was to be cut off from the congregation of Israel. Please note that to “be cut off from Israel” is far different from perishing with the Egyptians in Egypt. To be driven out from among the people of God is not to suffer the penalty of perdition with the people of the world. Yet let us still be impressed with this word of being “cut off from Israel”: without applying the blood of the Lamb, there is no salvation; but without the purging of leaven *there can be no fellowship with the people of God*. A person will instead be separated from God’s sanctified people and will not be allowed to enter Canaan with them.

Our not purging out the leaven will not result in perishing with the rest of the world, that is true; nevertheless, it *will* affect our entering the millennial kingdom (as typified by Canaan). With the Blood applied, one has eternal life; with leaven purged, one gains the kingdom. Whoever is saved shall not perish and be lost, yet whoever does not purge out the leaven to be sanctified cannot reign with Christ in the kingdom. What proof is there for such a conclusion?

The purging of the leaven alluded to in 1 Corinthians 5 was the “put[ing] away the wicked man from among yourselves” (v.13). To put away (to excommunicate) the sinful person from the church of God is similar to purging leaven from a lump of flour. What are the sins committed that result in excommunication? “If any man that is named a brother be a fornicator, or covetous, or an idolator, or a reviler, or a drunkard, or an extortioner; with such a one no, not to eat” (1 Cor. 5.11). People who have committed these six sins should be cast out. Such is the spiritual application of Exodus 12 with regard to the cutting off from Israel.

What will be the loss to those who have committed one of these six sins? “Know ye not that the unrighteous shall not inherit the kingdom of God? Be not deceived: neither fornicators, nor idolators, nor adulterers, nor effeminate, nor abusers of themselves with men,

nor thieves, nor covetous, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor extortioners, shall inherit the kingdom of God” (1 Cor. 6.9-10). This indicates that to be excommunicated from the church is to be *cut off from the kingdom of God*. A legitimate excommunication never subsequently lifted constitutes our being cut off from the millennial kingdom. To be cut off from Israel was to be barred from Canaan. Let it be seen that Canaan does not represent heaven, it typifies the kingdom.

Although many came out of Egypt, only four entered Canaan. Two living persons—Joshua and Caleb; and two who were dead—Jacob and Joseph. These four serve as types of those who on the one hand will be raptured alive and on the other will be raised in resurrection. Alas, today many are the believers who have the Blood, but how few have purified themselves of leaven and have thus been made fit to enter the kingdom.

Please understand that the passover feast leads us to the feast of unleavened bread—that once having the Blood applied for justification, we must also purge out the leaven for sanctification. Rely on the blood of the Lamb, rely also on the work of the Holy Spirit. We should not be afraid of being too passive towards the Blood, and neither should we be fearful of being too active towards the leaven; for we are saved by doing absolutely nothing except depending on the Blood, but now we must use diligence to get rid of the leaven of sins and seek for holiness.

### ***XI. Overcome Satan (Ex. 12.12)***

*I will go through the land of Egypt in that night, and will smite all the first-born in the land of Egypt, both man and beast; and against all the gods of Egypt I will execute judgments: I am Jehovah.*

God not only destroyed all sinners but also all the false gods of Egypt. He saves us from all the powers of Satan (see Heb. 2.14, Rev. 12.11) as well as from death.

### ***XII. The First-born Belongs to God (Ex. 13.1-2)***

*And Jehovah spake unto Moses, saying, **Sanctify unto me** all the first-born, whatsoever openeth the womb among the children of Israel, both of man and of beast: **it is mine.***

Here we are told that hereafter all the first-born of Israel belonged to God. Similarly today, *all who have been bought with the precious blood of the Lamb are God's*. We have been purchased, and therefore we have no liberty. Who may say from their hearts, "God, I belong to You, I am Your slave"? "For ye were bought with a price: glorify God therefore in your body" (1 Cor. 6.20). The day a person is saved is the day that he has been purchased. A slave is purchased with money, whereas a servant is hired for money. One who is *bought* has no liberty to himself at all, but one who is *hired* does have liberty. We are God's bondslaves, not God's servants. According to the original language of the Bible, we are God's bought slaves and not God's hired servants.

## The Robber Saved

# 4

*And with him they [those who crucified the Lord Jesus] crucify two robbers; one on his right hand, and one on his left. And they that passed by railed at him, wagging their heads, saying, Ha! thou that destroyest the temple, and buildst it in three days, save thyself, and come down from the cross. In like manner also the chief priests mocking him among themselves with the scribes said, He saved others; himself he cannot save. Let the Christ, the King of Israel, now come down from the cross, that we may see and believe. And they that were crucified with him reproached him. (Mark 15.27-32)*

*And one of the malefactors that were hanged railed on him, saying, Art not thou the Christ? save thyself and us. But the other answered, and rebuking him said, Dost thou not even fear God, seeing thou art in the same condemnation? And we indeed justly; for we receive the due reward of our deeds: but this man hath done nothing amiss. And he said, Jesus, remember me when thou comest in thy kingdom. And he said unto him,*

*Verily I say unto thee, Today shalt thou be with me in Paradise. (Luke 23.39-43)*

These two passages of Scripture tell us the story of a robber who was saved from perdition at the moment of death. What a wonderful story it is! *The robber got saved!* Yet can a robber be saved? The world would conclude that a man who has plundered and killed ought to perish, for such a dangerous prisoner should be consigned to the deepest recesses of hell. He deserves the heaviest punishment, since salvation in the eyes of the world is the portion only of the good people of the earth. But we find that a robber *can* be saved, for right here in the Gospel account we find that a robber *is* saved. In fact, he was saved at the critical moment of death.

How often, though, we surmise that man ought to do good throughout his life, and thus be saved gradually through the accumulation of merits throughout months and years of effort. Who,

then, would imagine that a robber for life—one who had violated the law repeatedly—could be saved instantaneously at the time of death? But it is a fact of history that one who had never done good but had only done evil throughout his life was saved immediately upon believing in the Lord Jesus. People may be saved in the twinkling of a moment because they believe in the Lord Jesus. What an incredible story! What a marvelous salvation!

“Today,” said Jesus to the robber, “thou shalt be with me in Paradise.” Wherever the Lord Jesus is, there will the robber be. He is saved and will perish no more. It would therefore be of interest to inquire for a few moments as to the kind of person this saved one was and how he subsequently came to be saved.

### *I. The Character of This Saved One*

When a person turns into a robber, his personality becomes completely twisted. No baser position can a man fall into than that of a robber. As a thief this man had fallen to the lowest stratum of society. How lawless a robber is, for he does not care about the laws of the country at all. How lazy he must be, since he refuses to work for his living. How greedy he is, with his eyes always on the possessions of others. How cruel he is likely to become, even willing to kill for gain. And how licentious he lives, because he ends up rejecting every social restraint. From a human standpoint, he is beyond any hope of repair.

Having become a robber and having violated nearly every law, this man had been arrested by the Roman government and sentenced to be crucified because of the seriousness of his crimes. Now doubtless the law of God is much more thorough and perfect than the law of men. Oftentimes what human law does not and cannot condemn must be reckoned as sinful according to God’s law. For what man’s law judges touches only human *conduct*; it cannot reach the *motives*. But whatever is fairly condemned by man’s law is

certainly condemned by God's law, it being far more complete. Now this man was a robber, having been caught and then sentenced to death by the Roman law. Could such a person ever receive the grace of God? For here he was, judged by men who looked upon the outward behavior and not at the heart; yet how much more he must have been judged by God, who looks into the heart as well as at the conduct. Must not such a soul perish?

This man was not only called a robber and condemned by the Roman government to die; he was also in his *own* eyes deserving to be killed: "And we indeed *justly*," he said to the other robber crucified with him, "for we receive the *due reward of our deeds*" (Luke 23.41). At this critical moment of death, he forgot how the government had condemned him and how the people had ridiculed him. He recalled his past and could not but confess that he had received the just punishment for his deeds. At this juncture the agony of his conscience far exceeded the suffering of his flesh. Under the enlightenment of God, he knew his sinfulness and could not help but acknowledge it. According to human judgment and judicial procedures, could such a man under self-confession and self-condemnation ever be released and saved? It would appear that even perdition was less than what he deserved.

From the record in Mark's Gospel, three classes of people are indicated as having mocked the Lord Jesus on the cross: (1) the passers-by, (2) the chief priests and the scribes, and (3) the robbers who were crucified with Him (15.29-32). Both of the robbers crucified with Christ reproached Him at the beginning when they saw and heard so many people railing at Him. This shows us that the saved robber was a man like the rest—without any moral backbone. He simply drifted with the current of ridicule as he saw the people mocking Christ, and he joined in with the crowd without knowing the reason for their railing. Personally he had nothing against Christ, but he blindly followed the majority who blasphemed.

Now we would think that all the people who railed at Christ ought to perish. Nevertheless, this robber, who was numbered among those who blasphemed, was saved. Think of it: a robber gets saved! A sinner is saved! One who is condemned is saved! He whose sins are so great that he cannot but confess to his own sinfulness gets saved! Even he who rails at Christ is saved! Then who will not be saved? Who is unworthy to be saved? Let this word be sounded forth to all the sinners of the world, that this is the gospel! This is grace! A person who was deemed beyond the possibility of salvation was saved by God through His amazing grace so that he might receive eternal life and enjoy the blessing of Paradise. Though you are a great sinner and view yourself as unworthy to be saved, yet God has decided to show mercy to you that you may receive salvation.

Never conceive the mistake that salvation is reserved only for those who are *worthy*, and that therefore a man such as you are does not deserve it. You ought to know that as a matter of fact there is no one in the world who is worthy to be saved. Yet, according to the mercy of God, none in the world is unfit for salvation. If God were to show no mercy but to deal with us according to our sins, even the saints and sages of the world would perish, for who is not a sinner before Him? But if God is willing to show mercy (and He is), then who in the world is beyond salvation? The robber was saved, and so you too can be saved. Only humble yourself and be willing to receive God's grace, and He will most certainly be gracious to you. For God gives grace to the humble.

The genius of the gospel lies in the fact that God has sent his Son to save sinners and not the righteous: "Faithful is the saying, and worthy of all acceptance, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners" (1 Tim. 1.15). How totally opposite is this to our human concept. Yet this is the glorious fact. Notwithstanding how low you have fallen, Christ is able to save you. He saves robbers, He saves prostitutes, he saves sinners of all kinds. He will not cast you out because of your sins; quite the contrary, He will save you

because of your sins. Regardless what sort of person you are, He is willing to save you if you will come to Him.

I recall the story of how once a man came to see the well-known preacher, D. L. Moody, and said to him: “You need not persuade me to be a Christian; you need not induce me to believe in the Lord Jesus.” When Moody asked him why, he replied: “You do not know how hard my heart is!” So Moody laughingly observed: “Is that so? Well, this is of no great significance, since Christ does not say let the soft-hearted come but not the hard-hearted. No, He says that any kind of heart may come. So whether your heart is hard or soft, black or white, you may come.” Christ indeed receives sinners, comforts and saves them all who come to Him. And since He was so willing to save this judged and crucified robber, He is willing to save both you and me. In the eyes of the robber himself, he is a sinner. In the estimation of the world, he certainly is reckoned a sinner. In the judgment of the Roman authorities he most certainly is condemned a sinner. Nevertheless, Christ saves sinners. How amazing is this grace! And such is salvation. Christ delights to save sinners by His grace.

## ***II. The Reason for the Robber’s Repentance***

We cannot be absolutely certain why this robber who at the beginning railed at the Lord Jesus should suddenly change and believe in Christ. I think, however, that it probably was due to that precious prayer of Christ as recorded in Luke: “Father, forgive them: for they know not what they do” (23.34). These words must have touched his heart. Such mercy, such love, such gentleness, such fullness of grace must have moved his hardened soul, modified his prejudice, and melted his wicked heart. That prayer caused him to know that the One who was crucified was truly the Christ, the Son of God. The Roman cross caused him to rail at Christ; but the cross of Christ caused him to repent and believe in the Savior. Law and

punishment cannot save souls; but grace and love will produce tears and repentance in hardened sinners and draw them near to God for mercy.

### ***III. The Expressions of Faith***

#### **A. Rebuke His Companion**

It is certain that the robber on the cross had believed in the Lord Jesus. His faith was seen in his words, attitude and prayer. The first indication of his faith is in his rebuking the other robber. That other robber had started to ridicule and rail at Christ again. And he had no doubt that his companion would join him in assaulting Christ once more as they had both done together before. But not knowing of the change in the believing robber, before his railing was ended, he was quickly rebuked by his believing companion: “Dost thou not even fear God, seeing thou art in the same condemnation?” (v.40)

What did this believing robber mean? What he meant was: Since you and I are both condemned to be crucified, why do you not fear God? You are on the cross, your life will soon be ended; how can you not at least fear God? After a few hours, you will die; yet you still do not fear God? Eternity is before you, and hell and heaven are for eternity. How then can you afford not to fear God? Eternal life or eternal death—being saved or perishing—will be settled within these few hours; how dare you not fear God? In a little while you will breathe your last breath and eternal life or eternal death will be forever decided. Do you not fear God? You who have received punishment from men, are you not afraid of God’s punishment? If human punishment is so painful, how much more will be God’s punishment? And yet you still are not afraid of God? If punishment in this age is so unbearable, how much more unbearable will be the punishment in eternity! And still you do not fear God? Human law and human punishment could take our very lives; should we not therefore be fearful of eternal death in the future? After having

received the punishment of the world, do you not expect to receive God's punishment as well? Will not such severe punishment and pain cause you to be afraid of hell? Eternal life or eternal death will be settled in this short time, and I would therefore reckon that this is the time for you to fear God and His punishment. You have no fear in your life, but will you not now fear God in your approaching death?

Minutes tick away—day after day; and the months and years are swiftly passing. Alas, how short is our lifetime. Time will not stop running; very soon eternity will loom before our very eyes. So who knows how much longer we can live? Is not our life like a breath which quickly disappears? And like a wild flower which is in its glory in the morning but withers in the evening? How unstable is life! Why should we still be entrapped in the lusts and sins of this world? Is not the future of our soul much more important than those things? Why do we desire the temporary present and despise the eternal future? Life is quite fragile, and life and death may change places at anytime. Our souls may leave our bodies at any moment. Even though we may have never thought of eternity, why do we not fear God now? For if we do not take care of our soul today, we will have no more chance in eternity. *If not today, then forever lost.*

As long as we have breath, we must come quickly to the Lord Jesus for salvation. For death has already been at work in us: sickness, pain, frustration, weakness, and sorrow are all the harbingers of death. The seed of death has already been sown in our body, and we have no idea when it will finally and fully realize itself. Young people cannot remain young forever. And the old people's time will soon be ended. How long can we wait if we do not receive the Lord now? Do we not fear God, seeing that our end will soon be decided?

Perhaps the governmental hand of God is already upon you. You have suffered, lost some dear ones, incurred defeats, been troubled

by illnesses, or encountered disasters. You have been chastened enough; yet why do you not turn back to God? Why do you not fear Him? All the afflictions which God has sent your way arise out of His love towards you. Heretofore you had drifted far away from Him, not even believing in Him. You today know only the material things of this world, its lusts and its glory. And you have rejected the Lord Jesus whom God has sent as Savior. Indeed, you have gone so far away from Him that He is now forced to chasten you to get you back. You have already been chastened; why do you not begin to fear God?

### ***B. Confess Sins***

We have just seen how this robber expressed his faith by rebuking his companion. Now we will also see how he signified his faith in the Lord Jesus through the word of his confession. “And we indeed justly; for we receive the due reward of our deeds” (v.41). What do these words mean? “We indeed justly” means that we deserve such tragic death because the punishment of the cross matches up well with our deeds. We are robbers; we have murdered; we have sinned terribly in both heart and action. Nothing we have ever thought or done has been good. It is therefore just and reasonable for us to suffer such kind of death. The law has not treated us wrongly. In our own eyes, as well as in the eyes of God and men, we are truly sinners!

So this robber confessed that he deserved the penalty he suffered. The judgment to him was fair, and so he acknowledged himself to be a sinner. In his confession, the robber did not try to use many words to cover up his sins; neither did he offer many reasons to hide the motives behind his sins. For instance, he had not said: “Though I became a robber, I still did all things according to my conscience. For if I had not gone to stealing I would have starved and shivered to death. I have been driven to rob for money because of the need for

food and clothing. Such a life of robbery was but another type of business. Why, then, can't I do it?" No, he did not argue like this at all. Under the conviction of the Holy Spirit, he readily and quite simply confessed that he was a sinner. He confessed it before those people who surrounded him watching his death, as well as before his comrade and the Lord Jesus. He confessed without hesitation that he was a sinner. It is most difficult for a robber to naturally confess his sin, because his conscience has been so cauterized: "Their feet are swift to shed blood; destruction and misery are in their ways" (Rom. 3.15-16). But under the working of the Holy Spirit, this robber acted so out of the ordinary that he openly confessed he was a sinner. And being a sinner, he needed a savior. He believed, he prayed, and he obtained salvation.

Being a preacher of the gospel, what I usually do initially is to lead people to a knowledge of their sins. This is a difficult task. Some will say to me: "What sin do *I* have? I neither kill nor burn!" Others will declare: "I do everything according to my conscience. Where then have I sinned?" And when I do finally prove to them their sins, they nevertheless will make all kinds of excuses. Even if some will acknowledge that they are sinners, they will still generalize that all have sinned and retort with a So what? They are willing to confess that all have sinned, but they will not specifically admit that they themselves are sinners. Do they not know that besides killing and burning there are numerous other sins? Pride and jealousy of the heart, unclean thoughts of the mind, lies of the mouth, uncontrolled anger—all these and more are sins.

Have you ever committed these sins? For you to say that you do everything according to your conscience causes me to wonder exactly what kind of conscience you have. Is it so black and so dead that it offers no noble standard to guide you?

I remember once I was traveling from Shanghai to Tientsin. I met a fellow townsman on the boat whose berth was opposite mine.

Hence very soon after lifting anchor we began to chit-chat. He was doing the work of a dentist in Shanghai and was a strikingly handsome young man. Not knowing that I was a preacher, he began to tell me of his experiences in Shanghai. From what he shared, it was easy to conclude that he had enticed tens of young women. He felt elated while relating his prowess.

After he finished talking, I preached the gospel to him. I too had my story to tell, only mine related to how I had believed in the Lord Jesus and been saved. “You are a sinner,” I pursued; “you have sinned so much that you will no doubt perish.” “Well,” replied the young man, “all my life I have done everything according to my conscience.” How unwilling he was to accept the gospel! Do let us take note of this young man’s answer. He had destroyed the virginity of tens of women, and yet he maintained that he did all things according to conscience. What sort of conscience was this? Could such a conscience be dependable?

The first step in the work of the Holy Spirit in a human heart is to convict him of sin that he may know he is a sinner who needs a savior, and thus be led to trust in the Lord Jesus. If you refuse to let the Holy Spirit by means of the Scriptures prove to you your sins and instead resist God’s evaluation of you by not acknowledging yourself as a sinner, you will have no possibility of receiving the salvation of God. If you were *not* a sinner, why should you have to be saved? Why would you need the Lord Jesus to die for you? Hence confessing yourself to be a sinner is the first and foremost step towards salvation.

I beseech you to be humble and not proud or afraid of losing face. Simply confess you are a sinner! The better a person knows himself, the more he will cry out: “I have no good in me, only sin.” He who knows the holiness of God more will more readily confess that he is the chief of sinners. I exhort you to be honest with yourself at this

moment and allow the Holy Spirit to touch your heart and cause you to know your sins.

### *C. Confess the Lord*

This robber not only rebuked his fellow-robber and confessed himself a sinner but he also acknowledged that the Lord Jesus was without sin. “This man [Jesus] hath done nothing amiss” (v.41b). By this statement he was saying something like this: We three are here suffering punishment together. It is just for us two robbers to die such a death, but this Jesus has not sinned. On the contrary, all He has done is perfect and holy. Why then should He be punished together with us sinners? What is the meaning of it all? We who are robbers are being crucified, but why is He who is no robber also being crucified? We are condemned because of our evil deeds, but why should He be condemned who has always done good things? We sinners deserve to die; but this man certainly does not. It is most logical for the sinful to die; but where is the logic for the sinless to die? It is just for the sinner to perish; but why should He who knows no sin suffer the pain of perdition? What can we say if we die as robbers? Nothing at all. But why must He, the Son of God, be afflicted with the same affliction?

This is truly an astonishing question! The entire world is unable to answer this question. The Bible, however, *can* provide the answer: “While we were yet weak, in due season Christ died for the ungodly” (Rom. 5.6). “While we were yet sinners, Christ died for us” (v.8). “Who his own self bare our sins in his body upon the tree” (1 Peter 2.24). “Because Christ also suffered for sins once, the righteous for the unrighteous” (3.18). These verses tell us why Christ must die. He is to *die for sinners*, to die by bearing your sins and mine. Notice especially the oft-repeated word “for” here. There is hardly any other more crucial than this one. For if there be no substitution, there can be no gospel. Without substitution, no preaching.

If Christ had not died for sinners, I would not have believed in Christ nor would I now be persuading you to trust in Him. If He had not died for us, we would still be bearing our own sins and be destined to perish with no good reason to believe in Him. But praise and thank God, although He is without sin, the Son of God is willing to sacrifice himself for us sinners and to take upon himself all the penalties of sins in our stead by being crucified on the cross so that we who believe in Him may not perish but have eternal life!

Hence what the robber said about the Lord Jesus—that he suffered without sin—is most meaningful. He witnessed the Lord’s death and reckoned that the Lord had no sin. Why, then, should Jesus die? Secretly he acknowledged that Christ’s death was somehow for him; and thus he believed in the salvation of the cross. As he believed in the substitutionary death of the Lord Jesus, he was saved.

There is really but one way to be saved, and that is, to believe in the Christ of the cross. By believing in His substitutionary death on the cross, you will instantly obtain eternal life. Because you have sinned, you must perish. Sinning and penalty of sin are inseparable. If you were totally righteous and holy, who could punish you? But if you have sinned, the penalty of sin will invariably come upon you. Do you want to perish? If you are not willing to perish, here is the salvation of God for you. The Lord Jesus who has no sin died on the cross for you, bearing in His body all the recompense for your sins. Will you not believe in Him now? “He that believeth hath eternal life” (John 6.47).

#### *D. Prayer*

This robber not only believed in the substitutionary death of the Lord Jesus, but he also offered from his believing heart a most sincere prayer: “Jesus, remember me when thou comest in thy kingdom” (v. 42). This prayer agrees with the import of Romans 10.13, which says that “whosoever shall call upon the name of the

Lord shall be saved.” He called upon the Lord and he was saved. Yet let us also read on to the next verse in Romans 10: “How then shall they *call* on him in whom they have not *believed?*” (v.14a) We thus know that faith precedes calling. Without faith, there will not be any prayer. Prayer is but the final expression of faith. Faith is the cause, prayer the effect.

Let us notice, however, that though this robber rebuked his companion, his salvation was not obtained by such a rebuke. Though he confessed he was a sinner, his salvation was still not due to such confession of sins. Again, though he prayed asking the Lord Jesus to save him, his salvation was not based on his prayer. We must all be clear that neither repentance nor confession nor prayer will ever save a sinner. A sinner is saved because of only one reason: he believes in the substitutionary death of the Lord Jesus Christ—that is to say, he believes that the Lord Jesus died on the cross for him. Before he prayed, this robber had already possessed faith; which means that he had already accepted the Lord Jesus as his Savior. His prayer was therefore but the natural calling out of faith. Anyone who believes in the substitutionary death of the Lord Jesus will spontaneously call on the Lord to save him. His salvation is not due to the calling upon but to the *believing in*.

Consequently, do not trust in your works, for your works cannot in the least save you. Even such good works as repentance, confession, and prayer will not save you. If you desire to be saved, receive the Lord Jesus by faith as your personal Savior and believe that He has borne all the penalties of your sins on the cross for you. Believe and be saved. Believe and receive eternal life. Do you believe?

Now the robber thought that salvation was a thing in the future, and hence he asked the Lord Jesus to remember him at His coming (v.42). This is the Old Testament concept of salvation. He knew he had no goodness nor righteousness of his own to lean upon. So he

simply asked the Lord, "Remember me." His thought was: a man so wretched and unworthy as I am has no hope of salvation; still, if Jesus is willing to remember me, I will be alright. He understood that all whom God would remember would receive amazing grace. And thus he prayed. Although his prayer was not perfect, the Lord heard him nonetheless. For what the Lord promised to give the robber far exceeded his expectation and prayer: "Verily, I say unto thee, Today shalt thou be with me in Paradise" (v. 43).

Now the Lord is ready to treat all sinners today the same way. Are you a sinner, and are you willing to let Him do it? There is not much time left; eternal life or eternal death will soon be decided as your fate. Will you not use this very hour to trust in the Savior who died for you? Will you not at this moment call upon His name with a believing heart so that He may save you?

Alas, how very great are men's sins! How deep are their pains! And how long will be the future punishment! How serious this whole matter is! How dangerous is sinful man's present state! If you as a sinner do not call upon the Lord now, how long will you wait? If you do not mourn and weep now before God, seeking for his salvation, when *will* be the time? I long that at this hour you will awaken and return. Use this opportunity to be quiet and to pray to God to save you for the sake of His son the Lord Jesus Christ.

#### ***IV. The Nature of His Faith***

Through his rebuke, confession of sins, acknowledgement of the Lord, and prayer, this robber had expressed his faith. It may be said that he believed in the Lord at the most difficult time for faith. According to the record of historians, there were several million people in Jerusalem. Many of them cried in unison: "Crucify him! Crucify him! Away with him! Away with him!" At that time, the disciples of the Lord Jesus had mostly scattered. There were so many enemies but so few friends. Yet on the hill of Calvary, a man who

was being crucified with the Lord confessed Him as Savior in opposition to the opinions of the multitude. He believed in Him and accepted Him as his personal Savior. What faith was this? It was a faith which ran contrary to the whole world. Whom the world crucified, he believed as Savior. Whom the world condemned, he acknowledged as being without sin. Though the world is against Christ, I will nonetheless believe. Though the world persecutes Jesus and crucifies Him, I will put my trust in Him. Though the world applies great pressures to oppose the Lord Jesus and His disciples, causing them to suffer greatly, I still will believe.

If you have not yet believed in Jesus Christ, I beg you to believe in Him today that you may receive eternal life. Be like this converted robber who in spite of the opposition, persecution, ridicule, and despising of the world put his trust in the Lord Jesus. Do not be afraid of the multitude, do not act like a coward. If it is right to believe in Christ, then you who have a sound mind should not draw back because of the obstacles put up by other people.

To sin is undoubtedly a shameful thing; but to trust in the Savior is a most glorious act. Be like this believing robber who did not lose his personality through the intimidating actions of the crowd around him. He refused to follow the crowd by shouting what they did when they cried "Away with Jesus! Crucify Him!" It is true that he was that kind of man before, but he now was awakened. And although the Savior this robber believed in was crucified along with him and suffered the same death, he nonetheless believed in the Lord. If we reckon that Jesus and the word of the cross are worthy to be trusted, then let us overcome the opposition of men and trust in Christ. Do not assume that trusting in Christ will cause you to lose your personality. On the contrary, in trusting, a man will regain his personality—even as did this converted robber.

### ***V. That Which He Believed***

What the robber believed was that Christ would save him. How different he was from so many other people who only embrace Christ as an example for men to imitate. Neither did he view Christ as only a great teacher who taught people about equality, fraternity, and liberty. Nor did he espouse Christ as a social reformer who had come to improve Jewish society. These were empty faiths which could not help him in the least. For he was dying. How could the Lord Jesus as the best example help him in his present condition? He would soon die. The most serious consideration upon this robber's heart was the central issue of salvation: Where would he go after death? Could Christ as the great teacher teach him at this hour? What help could Jesus as a social reformer render to a dying thief? No, this Jesus whom he now believed in was not One who could only talk but do nothing; He was One who could comfort his heart, forgive his sins, save his soul, and give him eternal life in his dying hour. This Lord Jesus was able to remember him and save him. This Jesus is the Christ who has come to redeem people from their sins, and all who today believe in His substitutionary death shall be saved.

### ***VI. The Lord's Answer—"Today"***

Let us next see how the Lord Jesus answered this robber: "And he said unto him, Verily I say unto thee, Today shalt thou be with me in Paradise" (v. 43). Paradise is the happy place where all who believe in Christ and who later die dwell. In other words, Paradise is heaven (see Rev. 2.7). So what the Lord Jesus promised here was: Today you are saved; you have eternal life, and you have heaven guaranteed to you.

We need to notice that salvation is now and instantaneous, not something that awaits us in the future. "He that believeth *hath* eternal life" (John 6.47). The moment you believe, at that very moment you

have eternal life. If you believe today, you are saved today. You have no need to wait until you die and stand before God.

The word in John 5.24 is most explicit: “Verily, verily, I say unto you, He that heareth my word, and believeth him that sent me, hath eternal life, and cometh not into judgment, but hath passed out of death into life.” We are told here that all who hear the gospel of Jesus Christ and believe in the heavenly Father (1) have eternal life, (2) do not come to judgment, and (3) have passed out of death into life. The Lord Jesus says that he who believes has eternal life. Since we have believed, do we have eternal life? He says that he who believes is not judged; we have believed, will we be judged? He says that he who believes has passed out of death into life; we have believed, have we passed out of death into life? The Lord never lies. Whatever He says is true. His promises never change and they remain in effect even to today.

Do not doubt the word and the promise of God. How damaging is the sin of doubting. Since the Lord Jesus has promised, His promise must be true. We who believe have eternal life *now*. Hence the pressing question for all of us is, Have we believed in Him? How very dangerous for us if we have *not* believed! What have we to fear if we have believed? Absolutely nothing, for God has already given us eternal life, He has already justified us; who then can condemn us? “He that believeth on him is *not* judged” (John 3.18).

Be it understood, therefore, that salvation and eternal life are not to be known and obtained only in the future. We can know and possess now. In this connection, many have told me: “Mr. Nee, I dare not say I am saved, I *hope* I will be saved.” Others have said: “How can I know now? I have to wait till I die and be judged by God.” Let all men hear, however, the word which the Lord Jesus spoke to the believing robber: “*Today* shalt thou be with me in Paradise.” Today, not tomorrow! Salvation is for now, not just for the future. The word of the Lord Jesus to the robber conveys this

message: “There is no need to wait until I come again for Me to remember you, for you shall be saved today.” So that His word to every sinner who believes in Him now is the same: “You do not need to wait till I come back to judge the world for you to have eternal life; you are now this very moment being saved!” Therefore, do not doubt. If Jesus says that you have eternal life, how can you *not* have it?

Once a physician visited a young woman who lay upon her sick bed in a hospital. She was very ill and was dying. Not being a resident physician of the hospital, the doctor could not help with her physical need. However, he asked the young woman: “Do you have peace in your heart?” “No,” answered the woman. “Do you believe the Lord Jesus Christ as your Savior?” “Yes.” “Why do you not have peace?” “Because I am afraid of perdition.”

So this doctor read John 6.47 to her. He then asked her, “What does this Scripture verse say the one who believes will have?” “It says that he who believes has eternal life,” she replied. “Have you believed?” “Yes, I have.” “Have you eternal life?” “No, I do not feel it, I probably do not have it.” The doctor therefore asked her again, “What does this Scripture verse say he who believes has?” “He has eternal life,” she answered. “Are you a believer?” “I am.” “Then what does this verse say you have?” “*I say I do not have eternal life, but this Scripture verse says I have eternal life,*” retorted the woman. The doctor pressed her further. “Are you or the Scriptures more trustworthy?” “Of course, the Scriptures,” the woman conceded. “Now do you have eternal life?” The young woman gladly answered, “God says I have eternal life, therefore I do have eternal life.”

Doubtless there are many who are like this young woman. They have believed in the Lord Jesus, but they doubt God’s word—which is to say, that they doubt the promise of God. They think it cannot be fulfilled so quickly. How can one have eternal life as soon as he believes? Please disregard your thought or feeling. Since God’s word

declares that you are saved and the Lord Jesus affirms that you are saved, why do you doubt at all? Instead of doubting the Lord this is the time for us to praise the Lord! Hallelujah, praise God, for He has graciously saved us.

Look at this robber once again. How he believed in the word of the Lord Jesus and doubted not one moment! As he heard Jesus say to him, "Today shalt thou be with me in Paradise" he immediately believed he had received the blessing of his soul. He did not answer Jesus back and say: "Lord, do I get saved just like this?" Neither did he remind Him again by saying, "Lord, please do not forget to save me today." Nor did he even ask Jesus, "What shall I do to be saved?" He simply heard the Lord's word that he would be saved this day and he believed. Hence he *rested* in the word of Jesus and spoke no more. The Lord's word is the surety to our salvation. If He says we are saved, we are saved. If He says we perish, we perish. The Lord declares that he who believes in Him will not be judged (John 3.18), therefore the believer is *not* judged. He says that the one who does not believe has been judged already, so an unbeliever *has* been judged. Hence let me ask you this: "Do you have eternal life? Are you saved?" If you have already believed, you may respond boldly, "Thank God for His grace, I do have eternal life!"

### *VII. Not a Matter of Works*

This robber was saved not because he had done good. Clearly, he *could not* and *had not* done good. His salvation was due wholly to the merit of the substitutionary death of Christ. The robber was worthy to enter Paradise not because of any virtue of his own; on the contrary, he had no virtue whatsoever. He was saved solely because of the merit of Christ. And were the converted robber to have lived on, his spiritual life would have made progress as the natural result of the new life he had received. But the believing robber did not live beyond Calvary and did not accumulate any good works. The

redemption of Christ alone was sufficient for his entering into heaven. Only after a person believes in the Lord will he advance spiritually and have good works, since these are the natural consequences of the new life. Even so, these subsequent good works do not make him more worthy to be saved. Though a person as a believer has many good works which follow, nevertheless, such good works do not help at all with that one's salvation nor do they add anything to make him more fit to be saved. Whether he dies after believing or lives for many years afterwards, the ground of anyone's salvation is *entirely based on the merit of the redeeming blood of Christ*. If he lives, he ought to grow up spiritually, for the life he received cannot help but grow. But his growth does not make him any more fit to receive eternal life. Should he die immediately after he believes in Christ, the work of the Lord is sufficient to bring him to Paradise.

On the hill of Calvary we can see three crosses. In the middle is the cross of the Savior, on the one side is the cross of the saved, and on the other side is the cross of him who perished. The one saved and the one who perished are separated by the Savior's cross! These three crosses thus embrace all the problems related to sin. The Crucified One on the middle cross bore sins without He himself having ever sinned; the crucified one on the cross of the one side had sinned but did not bear his sins; and the crucified one on the cross of the other side had sinned and bore his sins as well. The saved robber was a sinner, therefore he had sin in his heart; but the Lord Jesus has borne his sins and died for him, and thus he need not bear his sins any more. The Lord Jesus Christ had no sin, and thus His death was to bear the sins of the sinners. There was no sin within Him, yet He bore the sins of other people. In this respect, He is unique, the only One in the world like this. The robber who perished had sin in his heart; but since he died without believing in the substitutionary death of Christ, he failed to receive the good of the finished work of Christ and must therefore bear his own sins.

These two robbers represent all the sinners of the world. The difference between being saved and perishing is in believing or not believing in the substitutionary death of the cross of Christ. The saved robber has sin, but since he trusts in the Lord Jesus Christ, he does not need to bear his sins. The perishing robber is as much a sinner as the saved robber; but because he does not believe in the substitutionary death of the Lord Jesus, he must bear his own sins and perish eternally. The cross of the Lord Jesus divides the sinners of the world into the saved and those who perish. Those who believe in the cross of Christ are saved, those who do not believe perish. Which group are you in?

The robber who is saved is not saved because he has any merit; being a robber, he obviously has no merit whatsoever. The perishing robber does not perish because of his evil, for is not his saved companion as bad a robber as he is? It is therefore not the better who gets saved and the worse who perishes, since there is no difference in their conduct; what makes the difference is the matter of faith.

Let it be clear to all that salvation has *nothing* to do with one's good or bad morals. Are not these two men both robbers? Yet one is saved and one is lost. They both have the same profession—thievery; they are united in heart—they both living by robbing. They kill and burn together as though they were as the working of both the right and left hands. They share the same fate—both having been apprehended by the Roman government. They are even judged and condemned together. And they even suffer the same punishment—both being crucified. And finally, on the cross, they both rail at Christ together (Mark 15:32). We can hardly find any two in the whole world more alike than these two. In so many ways they are the same. They walk together in life and they meet the same result in death.

How very different, though, is their state of eternity. Their difference after death is literally the difference between heaven and

hell! One of them enters into Paradise, is called a child of God, and receives everlasting blessing; the other one is cast into Hades to dwell with the devil and to suffer eternal pains. Whence comes the difference? It occurs during the last five minutes of their lives! One believes in the Lord Jesus, entitling him to eternal life; the other does not believe in the Lord Jesus, and is condemned to eternal death. From this we can safely conclude that our being saved or lost is not decided by you or me—whether by our being poor or rich, foolish or wise, short or tall, base or noble. It is purely determined by whether you or I believe in the substitutionary death of the Lord Jesus.

### ***VIII. The Eternal Separation***

Though the two robbers were so intimate as to be nearly inseparable in life, they are now eternally separated! But contemplate your own situation today: You are most intimate with your wife. If she has believed and you have not, you two will also be separated forever! Do you have a saved mother? You love her dearly, but if you do not believe in the Lord Jesus, you will be separated eternally from her. Do you have a deceased father who was saved? If you do not believe in the Lord Jesus, you will never be able to be near him again. Do you have a little child whom you cherish? He is so young and innocent that he is still unable to exercise faith, and therefore he is not held morally responsible but the substitutionary death of the Lord Jesus has already covered him. But you *are* of age, you *are* responsible for yourself; so that if you do not believe in the Lord Jesus, I am afraid you as parent and he as child will be forever separated with no hope of gathering together again. Oh, you who are parents, come quickly to the Lord Jesus! Do you have any dear one on earth? If you expect a happy reunion in eternity, you must believe in the Lord Jesus.

I tremble at the thought that many who are now together will be eternally separated! Many loving couples will be separated forever!

Many bosom friends will be separated forever! Many family members will be separated forever! Alas, what painful and sorrowful separation! Why need this be? For the sake of your own soul, come quickly to trust in the Lord Jesus. Out of concern for the dreadfulness of hell, come quickly to the Lord Jesus. For the sake of the compassions of the heavenly Father and for the sake of the grace of Christ, come quickly to believe in the Lord Jesus.

This matter of salvation should be resolved before we breathe our last breath. This robber was dying, but he still had his last breath, and hence he had the chance to be saved. Once a person dies, there is no more opportunity. The Lord Jesus comes to save sinners. If He has saved the robber, whom can He not save? Do not be fearful concerning the greatness of your sins. As long as you are alive, you may come immediately to believe in Jesus and confess Him before the world as your Lord and Savior. May you make your decision now. May the Holy Spirit help you to make the right decision.

“Lord, at this hour I am willing to accept You as my Savior. Please save me and be gracious to me a sinner that I may have eternal life and may not come into judgment.”



## Five Ways to Hell

# 5

We may wish to travel on any road in the world except that which leads to destruction. I therefore advise you to be careful lest you rush onto this road and end up in eternal perdition.

I am apprehensive that some of you may be heading towards hell. I would therefore like to mention five ways a person may choose to go to hell. And I would plead with you not to fulfill any of these five conditions if you do not want to go there. But if you do desire to end in hell, and wish to know how to arrive there, then perhaps what I mention here will serve as a road map to hell for you. Simply follow the directions which I shall lay out and you will reach your destination without any trouble. Yet how tragic and how painful for anyone to go to hell. My motive and hope in presenting these five paths to perdition is that somehow you will turn back from these ways to destruction. Even if you are determined to go to hell, I shall look to the Holy Spirit to use what is said here to arrest your heart, turn you back from the terrible desire of traveling the road to destruction, and walk no more along this perilous path. May you at this time choose the right road to life.

### *The Desire to Be Rich—The First Way to Hell*

I wish to read a verse in the Bible to prove that the desire to be rich is in fact one way to hell. What I say here I do not say carelessly; it is truly the teaching of the Bible. If I were to say it on my own, my saying would be inaccurate and not factual; if the Bible says it, however, it is God's word and must therefore be most accurate. Let us now read 1 Timothy 6.9: "They that are minded to be rich fall into temptation and a snare and many foolish and hurtful lusts, such as drown men in destruction and perdition." Those who are minded to be rich will end up in destruction and perdition. Why destruction and

perdition? The very desire to be rich is enough to plunge men into such a state. What is destruction and perdition? It is plainly but another name for hell. Hence beware of this, that people who want to get rich will perish and go to hell.

Do we not have a world today that worships money? Have we not frequently heard that money is almighty? Without money, nothing can be done; with money, everything is possible. Is not money truly important? People often believe that “money can influence the gods”—although the gods they think about are actually demons. It is quite true that “money can communicate with demons,” for those who desire to be rich will dwell with the demons forever in hell. Many indeed communicate with demons.

The Bible clearly tells us that they who desire to be rich go to hell. Sometimes people really want to believe in the Lord Jesus, but the desire to be rich impels them to make such excuses as this: “To believe in the Lord Jesus is alright, but I have no time now; I shall wait till a future day.” Yet they shall wait forever without a chance coming to them. And why? Because they shall be waiting in hell.

Many of you are in the business world. I have met countless businessmen, and their excuse is the same: “I cannot be a Christian now because I am a business man. In business, you have to be tricky, otherwise you will starve. Consequently, I cannot believe in Christ.” Oh how cheap is your soul. Are you willing to go to hell for the sake of some bread? Alright, you are today choosing riches rather than Christ. You may have bread right now but afterwards you will go to hell.

There was once a man who kept a small store. He sold incense, candles, and other articles for idol worship. After he heard the gospel, he said to me: “I only earn a few dollars per day. No doubt it is good to believe in the Lord Jesus; but if I believe, will I not have to close my shop right away?” Yes, one who believes in the Lord Jesus

should not keep open a store that sells incense, candles, and paper money for idol worship. But for the sake of riches (actually there was not much wealth involved since he only earned several dollars a day), he would not believe in the Lord. And hence eternal life is worth less than a few dollars a day.

As I pass by many stores, I notice at nearly every one of them the advertisement reading, "Cheap Sale." What is on sale cheap? I would have to say the very soul of the store owner. His soul is up for auction: how much for the soul? One of them has already auctioned his soul for a few dollars per day. How cheap is this soul? You will probably answer me: "That man is really foolish. For the sake of a few dollars a day, he is willing not to believe in Jesus Christ and to go to hell afterwards. As for me, my business comes to tens of thousands of dollars a year." True, your business is much bigger than his, but is your soul worth just tens of thousands of dollars? If so, how cheap your soul is too!

On November 21, 1926, two students with the names of Yang and Liao were cooking their own meals in a school in Peking. To economize, they had purchased a whole can of kerosene oil instead of buying it little by little. Now their practice was that after using the kerosene, they usually sealed the can of kerosene with wax. That day, however, they carelessly dropped the fire into the can of kerosene, causing the whole house to catch fire. They fled from the house, but upon remembering that their money bag was still in the house, they re-entered to retrieve it. Their bodies caught on fire and both were seriously burned. Finally, both of them died.

Learning of the ultimate tragedy, the entire student body wept for them. And when I read the paper that day, I too could not help but shed tears. Why were the two students now dead? Because of the money bag which contained only a few dollars. Money! Money! How many human lives have you not devoured? The fire of hell is burning close, yet you who are slaves to money still have the

opportunity today to be saved. Oh do not lose your soul for the sake of a few coins. How many people risk their lives for it! They think they may pursue after riches without losing their lives. But let me warn you: since you know the high risk, why should you try at all to become rich?

Once, a seafaring ship struck the rocks and was sinking. The captain gave orders to his sailors to let down the lifeboat while he went below to attend to some business. Yet why *did* he go below? Because he had a great deal of money in the safe and was not willing to let his money sink with the ship. So at this perilous hour he risked his life to get it. The ship was sinking inch by inch while he was still engaged in retrieving his money. But the speed with which the ship was sinking exceeded the speed with which he was gathering up his wealth.

When the sailors saw that the captain was not returning topside, they jumped into the lifeboat and fled. The water flooded the ship, reaching the feet of the captain. He thought of hurriedly leaving, but it was too late: he finally drowned. Later, the ship was lifted from the bottom of the sea. What they found was the captain at the bottom of the ship with one hand holding the key to the safe and the other hand holding a bag of gold dollars. The money was in his hand, but his life was snatched away! Drowned! Which is better—money or life? The desire to be rich sent this captain to hell. Therefore, beware lest the love of money also dispatch you to everlasting suffering and loss.

There is another story similar to the one above. At the time when a boat was sinking, people left their things and fled for their lives. A certain sailor, however, could not stand to see all these riches sink to the bottom of the sea, although at the same time he naturally did not want to lose his life either. So he took hold of a good life belt and put it around his chest. He told himself: “Now that life is safe, I will spend a little time to gather riches.” So this sailor ran to the lower deck to collect money both in coins and in paper, collecting a great

deal. He wrapped it all up in a large cloth and tied it to his waist. He then ran up topside, but since the boat was definitely sinking at this point, he immediately jumped into the sea. He expected to float until he was picked up.

Strangely, though, as the sailor leaped into the sea he sank like a rock to the bottom. Had the life belt lost its effectiveness? Why did he sink? It was because the gold coins attached to his waist were too heavy. The strength of the life belt was enough to save *him*, but it did not have sufficient buoyancy to save both him and his *riches*.

Let all who are called Christians, beware! In name you may believe in Christ; but I do not know if you have really believed. Believing in Christ and desiring to be rich are incompatible. Never embrace the idea of both wanting to be rich and wanting to believe in Christ too. Without a doubt Christ is able to save you; but if you do not get rid of your love for money, He will not save you. He is able to save sinners to heaven, but He will not save sinners with their sins to heaven. Unless you leave outside heaven the sin of desiring to be rich, both you and your sin will be left outside heaven's gate.

Who of you is hindered from believing in Christ because of riches? Actually, we all at one time or another have desired to be rich, but Christ has died for all of our sins—including our sin of desiring to be rich. However much you have lusted for riches before, you will be saved if you believe in Christ. There is no sin in this world so big that Christ cannot atone for it. He is well able to deliver us from every one. He has died for our sins and has borne their penalty; whoever therefore believes in Him shall be saved.

Although the sin of desiring to be rich may not cause you to perish *directly*, the greedy heart can cause you to perish *indirectly*. What does this mean? It is true that Christ has already died for us and that God will not condemn us to perdition for any sin if we believe in Christ. Even this sin of desiring to be rich has also been judged in

His body. Yet how the greedy heart can be very forceful. It may in and of itself hinder you from believing in Christ. It may cause you to love riches more than your own soul. It may induce you to seek after worldly things with such single-mindedness that you have no heart to seek after heavenly blessing. It may dampen your interest for spiritual life out of concern for the treasures of this world. And hence you do not believe in Christ because of your greedy heart. So that although the sin of desiring to be rich may not directly cause you to perish since Christ has already borne your sins, this greedy heart can nonetheless hinder you from believing in Christ and being saved. This greedy heart can *indirectly* cause you to perish.

Let every one examine himself. See if you are one who desires to be rich. And discover if it is because of the desire to be rich that you will not believe in Christ. If so, consider carefully as to which is better—to have riches or to have eternal life? Unless you are a fool, you certainly will not choose riches and go to hell. He who desires to be rich will unquestionably go there. Therefore, beware!

### ***Persecuting Christians—the Second Way to Hell***

Let us now read a portion of the Scriptures which are words that were spoken by the Lord Jesus himself: “Woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! for ye build the sepulchres of the prophets, and garnish the tombs of the righteous, and say, If we had been in the days of our fathers, we should not have been partakers with them in the blood of the prophets. Wherefore ye witness to yourselves, that ye are sons of them that slew the prophets. Fill ye up then the measure of your fathers. Ye serpents, ye offspring of vipers, *how shall ye escape the judgment of hell?* Therefore, behold, I send unto you prophets, and wise men, and scribes; some of them shall ye kill and crucify; and some of them shall ye scourge in your synagogues, and persecute from city to city: that upon you may come all the righteous blood shed on the earth, from the blood of Abel the

righteous unto the blood of Zachariah son of Barachiah, whom ye slew between the sanctuary and the altar” (Matt. 23.29-35).

The Lord Jesus tells us explicitly in this passage that those who persecute Christians cannot escape the punishment of hell. Yet you Christians who hear this word should not become overly excited, thinking that all who persecute you will go to hell. For you ought to know what is meant by being persecuted. To be persecuted means to be so by opposition or maltreatment for the sake of one’s faith in the Lord Jesus, for the sake of righteousness, and for the sake of the truth. This alone is accounted as true persecution. If you are opposed or suffer because of your improper conduct, it is *punishment* and not persecution. Be careful not to confuse the two. Punishment is what you receive through your sin; persecution is what you receive because you believe in the Lord Jesus. If you suffer opposition for the sake of your faith in Christ, consider the opposition as your glory. But if you are opposed because of some wrong conduct on your part, do not consider yourself as being persecuted. Rather, acknowledge that you have been fittingly punished.

But a warning needs to be sounded also to those who have not believed the Lord: do not persecute Christians. If they are persecuted by you because of their *wrong* doings, who can say anything? But if their conduct is not below the level of civic standard and you persecute them and even kill them for their faith in the Lord Jesus, you ought to be very concerned. Because the God whom they believe is the Lord of all, and He will surely punish sinners. The Lord Jesus tells us in plain terms in this passage that the consequence for these people is their going to hell.

Just consider for a moment. Do these true believers in the Lord Jesus really deserve to be persecuted? They read the Bible daily in order that their spiritual lives may be nourished by its word. They pray daily for all the people as well as for all who are in authority—to the end that God may save them. They frequently go out to preach

the gospel, persuading men to rid themselves of sins—not only their sins against the law of God but also against the laws of the world. They wish all men to know the true God, to believe in the Lord Jesus as their Savior, and to receive eternal life. Now do such people deserve persecution? Do you have any good reason to persecute them? If you say they are superstitious, then this question needs to be asked: that of the millions in China, are they the only ones who are superstitious? If it is because they preach that all have sinned and must therefore repent and believe in the Lord Jesus, what harm can such preaching do? Or is it perhaps because, you yourself being a sinner, your sins are exposed and you therefore hate them? Yet if you honestly thought it through, you would see how reasonable it is that if you know yourself to be a sinner you would surely repent quickly and believe in the Lord Jesus. How then can you become angry and persecute them?

Frequently Christians see dying those who do not have Christ and who only have a terrible darkness ahead of them and who are totally unprepared to face death. These Christians therefore seek to admonish them according to the word of the Bible to accept the Lord quickly and to depend wholly on the finished work of Christ since He has already borne their sins so that they may have eternal life. And such a promise presented and such a gospel spoken have comforted and saved countless dying sinners. May I therefore ask you, Do these people who give peace to the conscience of the dying sinners deserve to be persecuted?

Now granted that there are many materialistic and physical aspects to Christianity and Christendom to which I am opposed as much as you are; there are nonetheless many true Christians who genuinely love the Lord and the people, who do many things in secret to help the common folk. They do not blow trumpets to tell of their deeds. Do you think these believers who are so self-giving with no thought of seeking favor or gain deserve to be persecuted by you?

Who has set you up as judge? Yet you persecute. You who persecute, you observe that the morality of many Christians is low and that they are hypocrites. You say that the Christian mission schools are a cultural invasion, that the church charity societies are held in suspect as having ulterior motives, and that the preaching and spiritual works of the church are perpetrated to fool people. I will not argue with you if the conduct and intention of these Christians is as bad as you assert. Yet I would wish to ask you but one question: You declare that the morality of others is under par; well how about your own? You say that other people are hypocrites; are you not really wearing a mask by such assertions? Is your conduct and manner of life really any better than that of the Christians? Hence I would say that you who persecute the believers should at least have the qualification of being better, or else you have no right to persecute them.

The persecution of Christians is not something new today; it has happened many times before now. Christianity has one great blessing—it has received much help from its opposers. One of the greatest apostles in Christianity, Paul, was once himself the greatest persecutor of Christians. Today you say you are my enemy; but I hope one day you will go with me to preach the gospel.

As for myself, I was formerly one who hotly opposed Christianity: I am now a Christian through the salvation of the Lord Jesus, for He has forgiven all my sins. I now have unlimited joy and unspeakable peace. I do hope that you and I will some day have the same Savior and serve the same Lord. To believe and to serve Him is highly advantageous in that you know for sure your sins are forgiven, your conscience is at peace, that you are engaged in the work of saving souls now, and that you will receive the blessings of eternal life in the future. So instead of persecuting Christians, why not come and believe in the Lord Jesus and be persecuted yourself!

When the church was being persecuted in the early days, some believers who refused to deny their faith were taken by the soldiers to the top of a high mountain to be exposed to unbearable cold that they might recant. As they were stripped naked in the icy cold, they sang together with a loud voice: “Ten choice soldiers of Christ, willing to suffer for the Lord.” Due to the biting cold, their voices grew lower and lower. Finally, one of them could not stand the cold, left the place of testimony, and went to warm himself at the fire with the soldiers. This was a sign of his apostasy. But just at that moment, one of the soldiers took off his clothes, gave them to the backslider, and ran to join the nine remaining believers! He stood with them, singing together “ten choice soldiers of Christ” until he died, for he too had become a Christian.

Let me say that you never know but what after a few hours or months or years, you too may want to become a Christian. Who can guarantee that he will never be a Christian? Why then do you persecute believers today? Persecuting the followers of Christ is the same as persecuting Him. For Christ and the Christians are joined in one.

In persecuting Christians, you demonstrably show that you do not believe in Christ as your Savior. If you do not believe in Him as your Savior, then you have no savior at all. As a consequence, you must bear your own sins. In other words, having no savior, you must perish in hell. Why go to hell? Receive the Lord Jesus today!

### ***Trodding the Blood Under Foot—The Third Way to Hell***

Blood is mentioned over 400 times in the Bible. Since it is repeated so many times in God’s word, it must be of utmost importance. In the Old Testament, the blood of the bullocks and the lambs is frequently mentioned. The blood was shed during the time of sacrifice. The blood of all these sacrifices pointed to the blood of the only sin-offering of the New Testament era. For what the Bible

emphasizes throughout is the precious blood of the Lord Jesus Christ. For this blood speaks of His death. When we mention the blood of the Lord Jesus, we mean the death of the Lord Jesus. The passport to heaven is this precious Blood. Apart from the blood of the Lord Jesus, no one can rely on anything by which to enter into heaven. The word in Hebrews 9.22 is quite clear: “that apart from shedding of blood, there is no remission” for sins. We acknowledge that we all have sinned. How numerous they are! Each time we touch our heart in the silence of the night, will not our conscience accuse us, telling us that we are indeed sinners?

What anguish is ours as we recall our past failures, stumblings, and sins. How we hope that there would not have to be such dark pages in our personal history. When we think of the future penalty which sins will bring to us, do we not tremble in our hearts? Although at times we reflect that a future hell is but a supposition, nevertheless, when our conscience is awake, does it not inform us that hell is real? How can we not shudder at the thought?

Under such circumstances, we must have a savior, because the wages of our sin is death and God must punish sins for righteousness’ sake. Men have sinned; and the righteousness of God demands punishment. So God sent His Son to the world to be a man that He might bear the penalty of sin for sinful men. This is called substitution. Such substitutionary death on the part of the Lord Jesus is the gospel. The gospel of God does not seek to persuade people to do good in order to balance the bad and thus to enable men to redeem themselves. No, God knows that men have no merit whatever, for they cannot do good. Hence He sends His Son to shed His own blood in atoning for men’s sins. All who trust in the work of His shed blood shall be freely forgiven and justified.

Let us look into the Bible and read what it says about the precious blood of the Lord Jesus. “This is my blood of the covenant,” declared Jesus, “which is poured out for many unto remission of sins” (Matt.

26.28). “The church of the Lord which he purchased with his own blood” (Acts 20.28). “Whom God set forth to be a propitiation, through faith, in his blood . . . of the passing over of the sins done aforetime” (Rom. 3.25). “Much more then, being now justified by his blood, shall we be saved from the wrath of God through him” (5.9). “In whom we have our redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses” (Eph. 1.7). “But now in Christ Jesus ye that once were far off are made nigh in the blood of Christ” (2.13). “And through him to reconcile all things unto himself, having made peace through the blood of his cross” (Col. 1.20). “How much more shall the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered himself without blemish unto God, cleanse your conscience from dead works to serve the living God?” (Heb. 9.14) “Having therefore, brethren, boldness to enter into the holy place by the blood of Jesus, by the way which he dedicated for us, a new and living way, through the veil, that is to say, his flesh” (10.19-20). “Knowing that ye were redeemed . . . with precious blood, as of a lamb without blemish and without spot, even the blood of Christ” (1 Peter 1.18-19). “The blood of Jesus his Son cleanseth us from all sin” (1 John 1.7). “Unto him that loveth us, and loosed us from our sins by his blood” (Rev. 1.5).

Upon reading these many Scripture verses, we may know why the Lord Jesus must shed His blood and what the value of His shed blood is. His blood is to atone for sins. Without any sins, there is no need to redeem; but with sins there must be redemption. To provide redemption, however, a price must be paid. It is for this reason that the Lord Jesus died. He shed His blood, and His blood makes it possible for our sins to be forgiven and for us to go to heaven.

Having said all this, I would turn to the third way in which we may go to hell. That third way is none other than treading under foot the precious Blood. Hear what the Bible says: “A man that hath set at nought Moses’ law dieth without compassion on the word of two or three witnesses: of how much sorer punishment, think ye, shall he be judged worthy, who hath trodden under foot the Son of God, and

hath counted the blood of the covenant wherewith he was sanctified an unholy thing, and hath done despite unto the Spirit of grace? ... It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God” (Heb. 10.28-29,31).

These verses tell us plainly that a certain class of people will fall into the hands of the living God, suffer His wrath, and receive unspeakable punishment. We know without doubt this is speaking of going to hell. We are told here that whoever violates the law of Moses will die without mercy. Many people seem to be more merciful than God! They think God would never punish sinners with hell. But the Bible says plainly that such a person will die without mercy.

Following the same trend of thought, it goes on to say that if anyone should tread under foot the Son of God, despise His redeeming blood, and resist the conviction of the Holy Spirit, he will surely go to hell. What is meant by “hath trodden under foot the Son of God, and hath counted the blood of the covenant wherewith he was sanctified an unholy thing, and hath done despite unto the Spirit of grace”? It means that when the Holy Spirit moves in a person’s heart with grace by showing his sins and the salvation which the Son of God has accomplished, by causing him to know how efficacious is this precious Blood to forgive sins, and by persuading him to immediately accept this Blood for the cleansing of all his sins, that person in response resists the request and conviction of the Holy Spirit, loves his sins and uncleanness, and considers the precious blood of the Lord Jesus as insignificant. He may muse within himself as follows: “To listen is one thing, but to believe is too much. I have sinned, but I will continue to commit these my former sins. What do I care if the Son of God loved me and gave himself for me?” By so doing, he is condemning himself to hell because he has trodden under foot the precious Blood.

There is only one way in the world by which a person can be saved. The Lord Jesus has died for sinners, and His precious blood was shed to cleanse all sins. This Blood is the pledge before God. Whoever believes in Christ and His shed blood shall be eternally saved because this blood of Christ speaks to God in that it says in so many words that though sinners ought to be punished, they have already been punished in Me (Christ), and therefore You (Father) need punish them no more. All the sins a sinner has committed from birth to the grave have all been judged in the Lord Jesus. The precious Blood is the proof that the sins of all the sinners have already been judged and punished. Otherwise, why should there be need for this Blood? Hence the rejection of this Blood will plunge the sinner into eternal perdition. Somehow the sinners' sins must be judged. So the all-important question is whether or not the sinner will want Christ to die for him. If he rejects Christ, he will have to bear his own sins. In thus treading under foot the precious Blood, he denies the substitutionary death of Christ. And without receiving the substitutionary death of Christ, he will die himself and receive the judgment due his sins.

Since you have now learned of the significance of the precious Blood, I beg you not to harden your heart. Do not reject this one and only salvation. It will be too late to indulge in regrets in hell for not accepting the precious blood of the Lord Jesus while still alive. If anyone goes to hell, it is not because of sins but because of his rejecting the Savior of sinners.

### ***Negligence—the Fourth Way to Hell***

We have mentioned a few of the paths to hell. All these paths are easy to travel. Here is another way which is even easier: “How shall we escape, if we neglect so great a salvation?” (Heb. 2.3) Not to escape means to be condemned, which means to be punished—which in turn means to go to hell. Hence this other way to hell is the

neglecting the salvation of God. The preaching of the gospel may so often enter into one ear and go out the other. The gospel is proclaimed in diligence but you may listen quite casually. What are you doing thereby? You are neglecting the salvation of God, you are despising it!

When you hear that you are a sinner, you may say to yourself: "What is that to me? Whether I am a sinner or not makes no difference to me!" Hearing further that sinners will be punished with hell, you will say, "I do not care whether I go to hell or not, whether or not I will be punished. Why should I concern myself about future things?" Moreover, being told that Jesus Christ is the sinner's Savior, that He has died in the sinner's place and has suffered the sinner's judgment, you again say: "I am not a bit interested in what Jesus did. I see no significance to me in whether He died or not, or whether He died for sinners or not. Why should I be concerned? I come here with a peaceful conscience; why should you preachers disturb my peace with many words?" Hence by such response you neglect and you despise God's salvation! You do not care whether you are saved or lost. You just live your days carelessly. You drift day by day. Neither consideration of hell nor heaven stirs you. You are surely a most heartless person. Beware, however, for the Bible warns: How shall you escape if you neglect so great a salvation?

People often ask me, "What must I do to be saved?" I quickly tell them: believe in the Lord Jesus and you shall be saved. But if anyone should ask me, What must I do to perish?, my answer quite simply is: *do nothing!* If anyone wants to perish, he need not do anything: He does not need to commit sin, or to blaspheme Jesus Christ. He has no need to rail at God, or to do any terrible act. He need not commit adultery or be proud. No, he does not even need to reject Jesus Christ as his Savior or to refuse to listen to the gospel.

Let me tell you, you have absolutely no need to do any of these things to qualify. For *just as you are*, you are already qualified to go

to hell: merely neglect and despise God's salvation as you are doing today and you easily meet the full qualification for hell. You have already heard about so great a salvation, having learned that the Lord Jesus has died for your sins, but you do not listen nor pay attention—as though your soul had departed to some other place.

Neither heaven nor hell, neither salvation nor perdition, eternal life nor eternal death, soul and sins, Jesus Christ and His substitutionary death seem to be able to touch your heart. The words of the preacher appear to have fallen on deaf ears or on a heart of wood or stone. You let what you hear fade away as though you have no concern with the problem of life and death. You deem yourself as not necessarily going to hell, yet you are not sure that you are going to heaven either. You live your life as a dreamer. How can you possibly escape if you therefore neglect God's salvation in this manner? Surely you are a person of perdition today.

In North America, there borders between Canada and the United States one of the biggest waterfalls in the world—the Niagara Falls. Upstream from it is a river upon which people often set sail. They must be very careful, however, lest they drift too near the falls. If they are carried over the falls, both people and boat will be smashed to pieces.

One day a young man with a strong physique was canoeing on this river. At a certain point in his trip downstream he rested his paddles in the canoe and let it drift. He took a nap, fully confident that he had the strength to pull the canoe to safety. He considered his strength greater than that of the water. Within an hour those on the shore recognized the danger for this man because he was now fairly close to the falls. They shouted to wake him up, and instantly he saw the danger he was in. So he exerted all his power to row the canoe to safety. Although he had tremendous strength, the strength of the water was greater. His canoe drifted nearer to the falls.

People on the shore tried to rescue him by throwing a long rope to him so that they might pull him safely to shore. He indeed saw the rope, but he acted as though he had not seen it. And thus he allowed his canoe to be swept forward by the current. Twice, three times, people threw the rope to him, but he did not grasp hold. Finally, the canoe and the young man went over the falls and he lost his life.

Why did he lose his life? Because he despised people's efforts to rescue him. He neglected salvation. He was cool and indifferent towards the attempt at rescue. This incident should serve as a warning to you today. Do not allow your days to drift away. For there has been presented to you today God's salvation, which is like a rope of rescue being thrown to your side. And I would ask you not to be sluggish, indifferent and negligent as was that young man in his canoe. For the sake of your soul, quickly receive this salvation. Why should your life be cast into hell eternally? Man is not like a beast that lives just for a time. Why do you despise the things in the future age? And how will you escape if you continually neglect this most important matter?

Especially you who have frequently heard the word need to be particularly careful. You who study in Christian mission schools have had the opportunity of hearing the word of God daily. You also may be a nominal Christian who has heard the same word for months or years. Such people as you need to be even more careful, for it is easier for you than for other people to go to hell. You have heard so much and are so familiar with the gospel story—yet you still have not believed in the Lord Jesus as your Savior. So long have you listened that you are tired of hearing it. You know all about it. Hence you despise the good news God sends to you. To you it is merely an old message; why, you sometimes can even repeat the words from memory of how the Lord Jesus died to save people.

Beware lest you neglect the salvation of God. How can you escape? Yes, you have heard more than enough, but are you saved?

If this important question is unsolved, you are still neglecting the gospel. I beg of you not to so fill your mind with the mere teaching of the gospel that you tragically end up sharing your knowledge with those in hell.

### ***Fear of Man—The Fifth Way to Hell***

This is the last way to hell that I will mention today. It is yet another danger to be avoided. We know we ought to get rid of sins and bad companions. We know we should believe in the substitutionary death of Jesus and confess Him as our Lord and Savior. Yet often there is a big hindrance to our dealing with sin and confessing the Lord Jesus. And what is this hindrance? It is the fear of man.

So often men are on the verge of believing in the Lord: with but one more step they would accept the Lord Jesus as their Savior. But they dare not believe or confess because they are afraid of the ridicule and opposition of man. Are you too plagued by such fear? Two passages from the Bible can help you to resist this fear of man: “The fear of man bringeth a snare” (Prov. 29.25). “But for the fearful. . . their part shall be in the lake that burneth with fire and brimstone; which is the second death” (Rev. 21.8).

All who are afraid of man are cowards. What will be their destiny? They shall fall into the snare of the devil and be bound, for they dare not believe the Lord Jesus nor confess they are Christians. And hence their final destination will be to follow the devil into the lake of fire which is hell. The work of the devil is to instill the fear of man. With this heart of cowardice he keeps his prisoners. He puts such a fear of man in people’s hearts that they dare not leave his territory. Thus he maintains them as his slaves forever.

How very frequently people do indeed know it is to their loss to serve Satan. Deep down within they know there is really no joy in

sins. Even though there seems to be pleasures for the flesh for a fleeting moment, yet their conscience will accuse them for a long time. When they think upon life after death, they sense great darkness. The very thought of future judgment causes them to shiver. No matter how they try not to think of the woes of hell, the fact of the existence of hell seems to have its deep root in their heart. It can neither be washed out or be driven out. Although sometimes they may talk themselves into believing that hell does not exist, their consciences will tell them in the silence of the night or at their dying hour that there *is* a hell.

Do not most people realize, upon hearing the gospel, that if they serve Satan they will go to eternal perdition? Yes, they do. They know that they should accept the Lord Jesus as Savior and confess His name before men after they have heard the gospel and understood that Christ has died for them. They also realize that this will deliver them from the oppression of sin now as well as from the punishment of hell in the future.

Satan too is fully aware of this. And so he knows he cannot reason with people on this point for they will easily see which side of the question is the more reasonable. Being full of deceit, therefore, he uses a different device to keep his prisoners. Though he has been defeated in many other ways, Satan has one very clever way to keep men in his grip which appears to be highly successful. He will whisper to those whose hearts are touched by the gospel, saying: "Yes indeed, it is very good to believe in the Lord Jesus; but are you not afraid of people's opposition? You are a wife, and your husband hates religion. Are you not afraid of his opposition? He often sins; and will he not mock at you if you do not follow him in sin? You will possibly meet great opposition if you merely mention the idea of belief in Jesus. Do you not therefore fear him?"

Or you may be a son. Your parents, grandparents, uncles and aunts are all Confucianist. They are very much against Christ. If they

hear you have believed in Him, they will be most angry and greatly persecute you. Your future will be jeopardized. Perhaps they will ridicule you by saying: "So, a person like you has also taken up religion!" Satan will paint on the canvas of your mind such a dark picture of your family that you are totally frightened and dare not confess the Lord Jesus as your Savior.

Or you may be a student. There are many unbelievers in school. They will mock and despise and harass the Christian. And as you contemplate this, Satan will tell you: "Think twice. If you tell them that you have believed in Christ, they will treat you with the same measure of hostility as they have treated other believers. Are you able to bear such treatment? Don't forget that you were even one of them who despised and ridiculed the other Christians in the past; what shame will be upon you now! You mocked at others; would you today become a Christian too? You who mocked others will now be mocked yourself. How can you stand even the thought of such an event?" Satan causes you to be afraid and thus you dare not accept Christ as your Savior.

Perhaps you have a close friend who dislikes people believing in the Lord Jesus. Or you have a fiancé or fiancée who opposes Christ or is so worldly as to be cool towards Him. If he or she hears that you have believed in the Lord Jesus, that one will no doubt oppose you, thus forfeiting his or her pleasure towards you. In such a circumstance Satan will put these pictures before you to make you fearful of your intimate friend so that you dare not confess the Lord Jesus as your Savior.

Satan might even say to you: "If you really insist on believing in the Lord Jesus as your Savior, I have no way left of dissuading you. But why must you openly confess the Lord Jesus as your Savior before men? Will that not unnecessarily stir up opposition? Would it not be better for you to be a *secret* Christian? You can still believe in the Lord Jesus, but at the same time you may avoid the scorn of men.

Will not this be a most convenient arrangement at both ends?" Yet the Bible tells us most plainly that "with the heart man believeth unto righteousness; and *with the mouth* confession is made unto salvation" (Rom. 10.10). Should we become Christians, we must confess Christ before men. We cannot be His secret disciples.

To sin is indeed a shameful thing; but what shame is there in believing in Christ and getting rid of sins? It is ignominious to be a slave of the devil and to do hidden things of darkness; but is there any disgrace to be a child of the heavenly Father and to wear garments of light? If Christ should be believed then we must believe. If He should be confessed, then we must confess. How can we, for fear of men, disbelieve what we ought to believe and fail to confess what we need to confess? We must not act cowardly in refusing to witness for Christ because of the presence of many unfamiliar faces. If you really love your family, you should be the first to believe in the Lord Jesus so that they may have the opportunity also to believe in Him. Should you hide yourself and dare not openly testify, how long must they wait until somebody else in the family is raised up to lead them to faith?

I recall a very interesting story. A colporteur took many Bibles to the villages to sell. He came to one house and shared something of the Bible story. As a result, the wife of that house bought a New Testament with the money she had accrued as a laborer and thought of reading the book during her leisure time.

Her husband, who was a foreman, came home. In the past he had frequently gotten drunk and his life was rather wicked. He saw this new book in the house and asked where it came from. Upon hearing his wife's answer, he became very angry that she should buy a useless book with useful money. When his wife told him that the money in the house was not all his since she owned at least half of it, he quickly retorted: "Alright, half is half. The half of this book belongs to me." And with that, he tore the New Testament in half,

pocketed the half which belonged to him, and angrily went back to work.

But the husband felt gloomy afterwards. Then, he remembered he had a book in his pocket. So he took it out to read. Now it so happened that his half of the book was the first part of the New Testament. He read from the first chapter of the Gospel according to Matthew onward. Finally he came to Luke 15 and read the story of the prodigal son: which tells about how good the life of the son was in the beginning, but how he eventually left home and sinned and suffered, and how he finally repented and decided to return home. The husband read the story with increasing interest, but the last word on the last page of his half of the book was this: “And he arose, and came to his father” (v.20a). There was no ending! How he would love to know the end of the story. He wondered if the father would receive the prodigal son and what might have happened to the son afterwards. He was most eager to know, but he dared not ask his wife for the second half of the book out of fear lest he be laughed at.

Now during this time, his wife too was reading this story at home. Through her reading of the story she had come to know that there was such a father who lovingly dealt with his wandering son; but as to how the son had left home in the first place, what happened to him while away from home, and why he then returned—none of this did she know about. She thought of asking her husband for the first half of the book that she might read it, but she was afraid of her husband’s opposition. And consequently, they were afraid of each other. They met each day as usual, yet they dared not say what was on their hearts. Until at last one day the husband could stand it no longer. He asked his wife how the story of the prodigal son had ended. And his wife immediately asked her husband how the story had begun.

After they talked with each other, the eyes of both husband and wife were opened by the Holy Spirit to see that each of them was like

the prodigal son. They were people who had spend their all in sins and had suffered greatly as a result. They like the prodigal were convinced that they too should immediately return to the Father's house. So with all mutual fear gone and tears in their eyes, the husband and wife knelt before God, confessed their sins, and accepted the salvation which God had provided in the Lord Jesus Christ.

Are not many fears we harbor completely groundless? As God works in your heart, how would you know that He might not also be working in the hearts of your family members at the very same time? I know of many stories of how both the husband and the wife had decided to believe in the Lord Jesus, and yet they did not have the courage to tell each other of their faith. When finally the news was broken, they realized that each had been waiting for the approval of the other. Even if the other party disapproves, it is still your duty to confess Christ before men since He has died for you and suffered so much for your sins that you may have eternal life.

I suspect some of you have heard the story of the ungrateful daughter. There was a family which was fairly rich over ten years ago. Besides the mother and daughter there was no one else in the family. At that time this daughter was yet a baby. One day the house caught on fire. The mother happened to be outside. She saw the house burning but there was no way to save it. Before her very eyes all her wealth was instantly being reduced to ashes. She suddenly remembered that her daughter had been sleeping upstairs! Having great love for her daughter, she braved the fire, rushed into the house and brought her baby out. Although her daughter suffered no great injury, the mother's hair was scorched and her body was badly burned. As a result, she had to remain in the hospital for several months. She had thus lost her former beauty completely and her property was totally gone.

Now in order to sustain herself and her daughter, she had to work hard by washing people's clothes and doing needlework. Later she sent her daughter to school. Though she was poor, she dressed her daughter well. One day on her way to wash clothes she met her daughter coming down the street with her schoolmates. She called to her daughter and said a few words to her. And as they passed her, the mother still stood there and looked at the back of her daughter with pride.

But then the schoolmates asked the daughter, "Who is the woman who talked with you?" Now this mother was shabbily dressed, her head was bald and face scarred, and she was carrying in her hands many clothes to be washed. Would a respectful student acknowledge such a woman to be her mother? Would she not be laughed at if she did? So out of fear of her friends she answered, "She is the maid in my house." And her mother overheard it. This poor woman could no longer wash clothes. She went home so broken that she grew sick and became bed-ridden for the rest of her life. No matter how the daughter later on tried to comfort her, she could not be comforted, for her heart was greatly broken. Thus she died sorrowfully.

Do you know that the Lord Jesus has died for you? Why should He come to this world and be called illegitimate if it were not for the purpose of saving us? Why should He suffer many unspeakable afflictions, even be scorned as being demon possessed? Why should He sweat drops of blood? Being the Son of God, has He any need to be judged by men, ridiculed, scourged, slapped about, and reproached? If not for the sake of saving sinners such as you and me, would He ever wear a thorny crown and be crucified with iron nails?

Today, what people oppose and deride is none other than the word of the atoning blood of Christ, that is to say, the word of the substitutionary death of Jesus on the cross. Were it not for the sake of saving us, He would have no need to shed His blood on the cross as well as to suffer the despising and the railing of men. Is He not filled

with all wisdom, and is He not able to expound ethics, philosophy, and moral laws beyond any human comprehension? Had he decided to do so, would He not then have been universally acclaimed? Why, then, did He rather suffer shame and death than be popular? Why did He give away His life if it were not absolutely necessary for Him to die to save us sinners? The fact of the matter is, He has humbled himself and suffered beyond imagination for only one reason: to save you and me.

Nowadays, your face shines whenever you declare you believe in any kind of “ism”; but for you to confess the Lord Jesus as Savior, you and I know you will be despised. The name of “Jesus” seems to be inseparable from shame. It is not an easy thing to confess the Lord Jesus; nevertheless, how could we ever save our face temporarily but deny the One who has died for us? For our sakes He has humbled himself to die on the cross; can it then be that we for passing glory refuse to testify to our Benefactor? How can it be? We severely judge the daughter in the story as being very ungrateful, but can we ignore ourselves? Our very nature will tell us it is not right for us not to confess Christ. It is not right for us to fear what man may think or say.

The devil realizes he is already defeated, but in this area of the fear of man he is often successful. Who knows how many souls have perished because they dared not believe and confess the Lord Jesus out of the fear of man! They have already departed this world; and they are destined for hell because of their cowardice. Will you follow in their footsteps and fall into the same trap? The dead are already gone, but let us who are living be very careful. How we look down on people who are not manly and courageous. Let us not be the fearful unto perdition in this critical matter of believing in the Lord Jesus. Is there anyone who is fearless and willing to accept the Lord Jesus as his or her Savior now?



## More Ways to Hell

# 6

From the Bible, we can see even more ways to hell. This is a most solemn subject, concerning as it does the matter of life and death. Now I do not believe that there is anyone in the world who is willing to go to hell. At the very mentioning of this subject, people show fear in their faces. Many are nevertheless unconsciously traveling on the way to hell. Though their hearts are unwilling, their feet are moving towards destruction. What anguish will be theirs when they end up in hell! For this reason, we ought to pay attention to this subject and learn how to avoid going to perdition. We should recognize the various ways there are to hell so as to be warned and thus kept away from such a fate. I hope all of you are seeking for truth. I pray that none is careless about the final destination of his or her soul. Yet if there should be any who are negligent concerning eternal life and eternal death or are lax in their personal conduct, I earnestly pray that they will be awakened after hearing the gospel of God and turn to seek eternal life.

### *The Sixth Way to Hell—Lying*

“. . . All liars, [whose] part shall be in the lake that burneth with fire and brimstone; which is the second death” (Rev. 21.8). The Bible frequently speaks about hell. If there were no hell how would God be able to manifest His righteous nature? If there were no hell there would be no need for the Lord Jesus as Savior since who would need a savior if all go to heaven? If there were no hell there would be no gospel because we would have no need of it. If all are saved, what purpose would a gospel for saving sinners serve? If there were neither hell nor preacher, would there be any preaching? Unfortunately, hell is real, and all who sin are heading that way. Consequently, sinners must listen to the gospel and believe in it. And that is why I must present the gospel to you.

The Bible verse which we have just read tells us that in the future there will be the lake of fire which is the second death. What we human beings fear most is death, but according to the Bible, death occurs not just once, but twice. After the normal death of the flesh there will be a second one. In this second instance of death, our whole being shall suffer the penalty of our sins in the lake of fire forever and ever. Now the hell spoken of in the Bible is this very lake of fire. In frequently mentioning hell, the Bible often tells us as well what kind of people specifically will go to it.

The Scripture verse now before us, for example, informs us that one kind of people who are destined for hell are liars. Many look upon lying as a most common fault. Hence they consider it insignificant. I am a native of Foochow. In our city we have a bridge which is heavily traveled. It is called "the Great Bridge." Countless people pass over it continually from dawn to dusk. So much so that the residents of Foochow have a proverb which says: "If three days pass without lying, no one passes over the Great Bridge!" You see how common a thing lying is! We human beings do not follow the teaching of the Bible, saying yea, yea and nay, nay. We instead speak carelessly and inaccurately. We think such lying to be quite normal and inconsequential. Yet the Bible declares that liars will go to hell. Examine yourselves whether you have lied or not. If you have, then you are a sure candidate for hell.

How very common lying is. In the experience of many, there will be two or three words of lying for every ten words uttered. It seems as though speaking the truth were something impossible. I recall that in my family there was one member who was most honest. He refused to tell a lie. For him it was a case of yea, yea or nay, nay. He was so open and transparent. People did not commend him, however, for his honesty; rather, they criticized him as foolish. How very like the proverb I have heard which says that honesty is thirty percent foolishness! In this wicked world, honesty is truly an unknown virtue. If anyone is honest, that person will automatically be

reckoned a fool. How sad that the world views honesty as foolishness. What more can be said in the face of such a low moral state?

In order to earn the reputation of being clever, how many in this world try to cheat others with tricky words! They may be known as clever, but is this really cleverness? It is nothing but deceit and cunning. Probably a majority of the so-called clever people in the world are in actuality deceitful and cunning. The world recognizes that fact, and yet they still praise these people as being clever. Why? Because they are so accustomed to lying themselves that they will lie on this very point too. And hence they will label “foxy” people as being clever. Truly, the entire world of men are expert liars.

This present world may indeed be called a lying world. People deceive one another. Few are honest. In the family, among the parents and brothers and sisters there is much deceit. Even between husband and wife deception is fairly common. In school, between teachers and students, wiles and ruses are not unknown. Possibly the very height of deceit is observed in the official world: without devious maneuvering, no position can be reached and no office can be obtained.

In the commercial world, cheating is like eating one’s daily food. A number of businessmen tell me that without cheating they cannot make money. If they are honest, they had better close their doors and quit doing business. They consider cheating to be the golden rule of commerce. In this connection, I recall the following story: Once a villager visited a textile store. He looked through many rolls of cloth but was not satisfied. Finally, the store owner took one roll of cloth—which had already been examined by the villager—to the back of the store, wrapped it with excellent colored paper, and emerged with it in his hand, saying to the customer: “This is the best cloth in my store. I just now took it out of the storeroom at the back.” This villager believed it to be true and bought that roll of cloth. No

wonder people say there can be no business without lying! Only a few days ago, in fact, I read in the paper about two Christians in England who were dismissed by their employer because they refused to put false trademarks on goods. Truly, in this world one will lose his job if he will not lie or engage in deceit.

Perhaps some of you will say that you are not merchants and that therefore you have not spoken such lies. I will have to agree that you have not thus lied; but let me ask this of you: When you are talking, have you ever exaggerated beyond the facts? Have you ever made small things in your conversation big or reported more for what was less? This too is lying. Have you ever exalted yourself through the use of lying words for the sake of vainglory? Have you possibly used dishonest words to avoid difficulties or misunderstandings? These too are all lies. Yet how we congratulate ourselves as being sincere and honest, but only because we do not examine ourselves. Now if you do not believe what I have said here, why not prepare a notebook and jot down every lie you may tell during the day? (Keep in mind that all untrue or ambiguous words are lies, and they should therefore be recorded in the notebook.) By so doing, I believe you shall see how skillful you are in lying.

I wish now to point out the biggest lie in the world. Do you know what it is? Read 1 John 1:8: "If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves." This important verse tells us the biggest lie uttered by men. As a matter of fact, we tell lies to deceive others. But who is desirous of lying to deceive himself? It appears alright for us to deceive other people because it is they who are victimized; but who will wish to victimize themselves? That is quite another matter. Nevertheless, untold numbers of people deceive themselves without even knowing it.

Whoever says he has not sinned, the Bible informs us, he deceives himself. This is the biggest lie we mortals ever tell. Whatever lie you have told in the past pales in significance before this lie of 1 John

1.8. If you have told the lie mentioned here, I tremble for you; for we have already mentioned that liars will go to hell, and the word of God never fails. And there is no lie in the world that can be compared with this one. Those who tell other lies may be forgiven and saved through the Lord Jesus, but whoever lies by stating that he has not sinned is destined for hell. For in so lying he rejects the salvation of God and refuses to allow the grace of the Lord Jesus to come upon him. He makes himself unredeemable.

Oh how many there are who insist that they have not sinned! They are inclined to consider themselves a moralist, a religionist, or the number one good man of the world. They reckon that they do all things according to conscience. Because they judge themselves good, they say they have no sin. Yet preachers of the gospel are most unwelcome in their midst because we prove to them that they have unquestionably sinned. And that is where the wound is. The moment this is pointed out, immediately people will commence to feel unbearable pains.

Many of you will retort: What have *I* sinned in? *Where* is my sin? Oh how deceived you are! Please be reminded that it is not I who says you have deceived yourselves, it is the Bible which says so. All who declare that they have no sin have in truth deceived themselves. And what profit is there for you to deceive yourself? But it is very much for your profit and good to be saved from going to hell. Why then should you continue to deceive yourself? Why should you lie by saying you have no sin and thereby put yourself beyond salvation? Has your conscience never once told you that you are a sinner? When you touch your heart in the depth of the night, do you not sense that you have sinned? During a time of great suffering, do you not think at all of this sin problem and its solution? When you have been alone, have you never pondered the future penalty of hell? Throughout your life, have you never inquired where men come from and where they will go afterwards? I do not believe your conscience

has become so cauterized as to be totally insensitive to this crucial concern of human life.

Human conscience ought to gauge the exact condition of a man. But what I fear the problem to be is, that you are deceiving yourself. You lie to yourself in order to deceive yourself. You congratulate yourself as though you have no sin; and you salve your conscience by thinking there can be no judgment of you after death. And anyway, you say to yourself, after I die, I am annihilated, so where will be the punishment? You use these words to comfort yourself. In actuality, though, such musing is not self-comforting but self-deceiving.

Yet must the liar go to hell? Let me tell you the good news that all liars—no matter what lie they might have told in the past—still have the hope of being saved. For the Lord Jesus has died for their sins. Even this serious sin of lying was judged in Christ. They may therefore be saved. But if anyone should continue to lie that he has no sin, that person will most certainly go to hell with no possibility of being saved.

Why is this so? Because when a person lies that he has no sin, he declares by such an attitude that he has no need of a savior: since he has no sin, why should he trust in a savior to save him? In saying he has no sin, he denies there will be any penalty for sin, and that therefore he does not require a savior to suffer for his sins. Despite what he claims, however, the fact remains that he *has* sinned, that he *should* perish, and that he really *needs* a savior. What will be the end for the person who on the one hand considers himself without sin and thus rejects the Savior, while he on the other hand has in fact sinned and needs a savior? None else but perdition, no other fate but hell.

Yet even with all the lies you have told you may nonetheless be saved if you confess your sin and trust in the finished work of the Lord Jesus on the cross. But if you insist on lying to yourself that you

have no sin, there is no other end but hell for you. Hence heed this word very carefully: that all who do not believe in the substitutionary death of the Lord Jesus will perish, but all who do believe in His substitutionary death will be saved. Liars shall doubtless perish, and those who lie that they have no sin shall surely perish; but should they believe in the Lord Jesus they shall be saved. Unless people lay aside their lie of having no sin, they cannot be saved. Only those who acknowledge that they are sinners are willing to believe in the Lord Jesus, and by believing they are saved.

### ***The Seventh Way to Hell—Making Excuses***

Excuses are of two kinds: unwillful and willful. An unwillful one is making excuse due to the apparent insignificance to a person of the matter involved. A willful excuse is made when he knows the importance of a matter yet is unwilling to do it and consequently gives an excuse for not doing it. Unwillful excuses are the result of ignorance, the person not realizing the vital importance of a matter. Such ignorance should be eliminated. If the significance of the matter is explained and he is still careless and cool about it, that person's mind must be abnormal. Willful excuses are made, however, because the heart is unwilling to do what he clearly knows is the consequence of a matter. Such an excuse is really no excuse at all.

Should someone even now be making excuse about believing in Christ, he will either excuse himself unwillfully or willfully. If you do not realize the seriousness of this matter of believing in Christ or not, then please regard attentively what I am going to say. Please keep an open attitude in seeking the truth; do not hold on to preconceived ideas that one's future destiny is inconsequential and therefore make excuse inadvertently. How unreasonable your excuse will be if you know that believing in the Lord Jesus to be saved is of utmost importance and yet out of fear of men you willfully give excuse. Many come to hear the gospel with prejudice; they decide merely to listen but not to believe. So that when they are finally

persuaded to believe, they end up making excuses. Let me tell you that your real difficulty lies in your prejudice and not in your excuse. If you put away your prejudice, you will at once notice how unreasonable is your excuse.

Let us now turn to the Bible and see what it says about this matter of excuse. Luke 14.15-24 records a parable of Jesus'. He says that a certain man made a great supper and invited many guests. At the supper hour he sent his servants out to these invited guests for them to say: "Come; for all things are now ready" (v.17). But "they all with one consent began to make excuse. The first said unto him, I have bought a field, and I must needs go out and see it; I pray thee have me excused. And another said, I have bought five yoke of oxen, and I go to prove them; I pray thee have me excused. And another said, I have married a wife, and therefore I cannot come" (vv. 18-20). All the invited guests made excuses not to come. This parable is spoken by the Lord Jesus concerning the gospel feast which God has prepared for all in the world to enjoy. They do not need to do anything except to believe and come. But all gave excuses.

In Matthew 22.7 the Lord Jesus tells us the end of those who made excuses: "But the king was wroth; and he sent his armies, and destroyed those murderers, and burned their city." The final destiny of all who refuse to accept the grace of God and instead make many lying excuses will be perdition. Just think for a moment what has happened here: God has provided grace for men to be saved; He asks them only to believe and accept this grace; but they refuse to accept God's grace by fabricating many unreasonable excuses. What else do they deserve but perdition!

Many people today are not ignorant of the importance of believing in the Lord Jesus, nor are they unaware of His substitutionary death which can save them. They know they have sinned and their sins will eventually cause them to go to hell, yet somehow they are not willing to accept the Lord Jesus as their Savior. They instead use all kinds of

lying excuses. How foolish they are! If they *should* believe, then they *ought* to believe. How meaningless for them not to believe simply because they are somehow reluctant in their hearts and not because they do not know they should believe. Would it not be accounted foolish were a person to die because he made excuses about not taking the medicine which he knew could cure him?

Many people, upon hearing the gospel, excuse themselves by saying that they are too busy and therefore have no time to believe in the Lord Jesus. Yet how absurd is such excuse: for (1) though believing in the Lord Jesus does take some time, it takes very little; and (2) if this matter is important, one must lay aside secondary things to make time for this primary matter. If you acknowledge that your salvation is supremely important, you must make time for it. Hence such excuse is without any reason.

Some will propound the idea that if they are not successful in their spiritual pursuit after believing, they will become laughing stocks. Such theorizing is really sad. Why not stand on the promise of God? Has He not said, "Being confident of this very thing, that he who began a good work in you will perfect it until the day of Jesus Christ" (Phil. 1.6)? If God helps you to believe, then He has already begun His good work in you and will no doubt perfect it in you. So what have you to fear?

Here is another excuse some give for not receiving the gospel: that they do not quite understand this doctrine. But the Bible tells us *first to believe* and then to understand. You who make such excuse may have been in Christianity for some time now, but because there are still many doctrines you do not fully comprehend, you say you cannot believe in the Lord Jesus as your personal Savior. Such an excuse is preposterous. For you need only ask yourself this—Do you know you are a sinner? Do you know your sins will be punished? Do you know that the Lord Jesus has suffered for you? If you know these things, you should believe in the Lord Jesus without further

delay, for you have absolutely no excuse to make. Although you do not comprehend other doctrines, you know at least *these* truths. If you are not willing to enter the door, how can you expect to see the condition of the inside of the house?

I readily confess that in the Bible there are many mysteries which are hard to explain, yet once you believe in the Lord you will be privileged to experience these mysteries so as to remove any doubt. Let me use an illustration here. If a child about to enter grade school tells his parents, "I have not read any of the lessons of the school, therefore I dare not enter it," his wise parents will answer: "You are sent to school because you have *not* learned the lessons; if you knew already, we would not send you there." In like manner, it is because you do not fully comprehend that you must believe in the Lord Jesus. If you knew everything in advance there would be no need to believe. A person who never reads a book will never know it; and by the same token, a person who does not believe in the Lord Jesus will never know the mysteries in the Bible.

Still others make this excuse, that because there are many people in the church whose conduct is no better than theirs, they ask why they should believe? I would easily agree that in the so-called churches there *are* people whose conduct is far from ideal, but would we give up eating because of others' hiccups? Some people in the church attend out of a sense of tradition; others do so out of a variety of other ulterior motives. But these people cannot be regarded as true believers. They only "join the church." We cannot blame the copybook because a student has copied badly. So how can we say that the Lord Jesus is not worthy to be trusted because those who have learned of Christ have many failures? On this very point, may I give a word of advice? If anyone intends to believe in the Lord Jesus, then let him not be the kind of Christian who will be a stumbling-block to others.

We could mention many other excuses, but the fact of the matter is that all of them are *without proper reason*. This is because the mere fact of its being an excuse makes it short on reason: to offer an excuse means knowing something ought to be done and yet trying to push it away. No matter how well you may word your excuse, it is still an excuse. It is false and not true, and involves mixed motives. Hence stop making excuses.

We preachers frequently persuade people to believe in the cross of the Lord Jesus that they may be saved. Unfortunately, many refuse to believe. There have been some people with whom I spoke and who made excuses who have already died and have entered eternity. They are now suffering in Hades, and most likely regret greatly that they made excuses and refused to accept the Lord Jesus as Savior. They have now begun to reap the punishment for their excuses. Yet some of the people I have spoken to are still living. But what are they doing now? Sad to say, they have not only failed to achieve the standard of conduct of the believers and the glory of God, they also have failed to arrive at the ordinary level of human morality. They have fallen deeply; their personality is bankrupt. Would they have fallen so terribly had they been willing to accept the Lord Jesus in their early days? He who continually excuses will go to hell, because the Lord Jesus cannot save the person who makes excuse.

May I speak a word of truth to you? If you continue to give excuse and refuse to accept Christ, you may not regret in ten years, for as long as you live, or even on the deathbed, but there is no doubt you will regret after death when you enter eternity. Why wait till that late hour to regret? Would it not be much better were you to believe in the Lord Jesus today?

### ***The Eighth Way to Hell—Nominal Christianity***

If I am speaking to so-called Christians—even to pastors and preachers—then you must be careful lest you assume that all who go

to hell are outside the church. I fear there are too many in the church who will go to hell. The people in the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah were indeed burned to death, but even the wife of Lot also lost her life. How pitiable that many who join the church are nominal believers who in their hearts have not really believed in the substitutionary death of the Lord Jesus. They are not saved, nor do they have eternal life. They merely bear the name of being church members. They are not Christians.

Let us read a Scripture passage here: “Not every one that saith unto me, Lord, Lord, shall enter into the kingdom of heaven; but he that doeth the will of my Father who is in heaven. Many will say to me in that day, Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy by thy name, and by thy name cast out demons, and by thy name do many mighty works? And then will I profess unto them, I never knew you: depart from me, ye that work iniquity” (Matt. 7.21-23). These are words spoken by the Lord Jesus himself, in which He reveals the situation at the time of future judgment. Many so-called Christians—even preachers and miracle workers—shall be driven away by the Lord. They will wonder why people like themselves cannot enter the kingdom of heaven. The Lord Jesus tells them explicitly the reason for this: “I never knew you.” Do be careful, therefore. Do not think because you bear the name of Christian that your future will necessarily be different from that of the heathen.

Many so-called Christians sing along with the others, “O Lord, O Lord.” They conclude that the problem of their salvation has been solved by such singing. Yet the Lord says that “not every one that saith unto me, Lord, Lord, shall enter into the kingdom of heaven.”

Many consider themselves as knowing how to pray. They also know, after the congregation has finished praying, how to say Amen. They themselves will pray, “O Lord, O Lord.” Consequently they surmise they must be saved. But the Lord declares: “Not everyone

that saith unto me, Lord, Lord, shall enter into the kingdom of heaven.”

Many can preach and call themselves servants of the Lord. They speak from the pulpit on the first day of the week and are busily engaged in many works. When they sermonize, they mention “O Lord, O Lord.” Surely they account themselves more advanced than the laity and thus conclude that they will be saved. Yet the Lord makes clear that “not every one that saith unto me, Lord, Lord, shall enter into the kingdom of heaven.”

Many are not only church members, they sometimes even have supernatural power to cast out demons and perform wonders. Naturally they esteem themselves worthy of the kingdom of heaven. Who knows but that the Lord may have to say: “Many will say to me in that day, Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy by thy name, and by thy name cast out demons, and by thy name do many mighty works? And then will I profess unto them, I never knew you: depart from me, ye that work iniquity.”

For this reason, you must be careful. Never infer that you must surely be saved because you are a church member, because you know how to pray and sing, because you frequently attend church services, or that you often contribute money, or that sometimes you try your best to persuade others to join the church. Do not be so absolutely certain! He who is a Christian outwardly *may not* be saved. In fact, many church goers will instead be gathered with unrepentant prostitutes and pleasure-seekers in the same hell.

Who does the Lord Jesus assert can be the one to enter the kingdom of heaven?—“he that doeth the will of my Father who is in heaven” (v.21b). What is the will of God? Do listen carefully to this Bible verse: “[God] would have all men to be saved, and come to the knowledge of the truth” (1 Tim. 2.4). Hence the fundamental will of God is that men be saved. Yet how are they saved? Not by singing

hymns, nor by praying, preaching, or giving. (Please note that I am not saying to you that you should not sing hymns, pray, preach, or give. Every Christian will at least do these things. Nevertheless, these things will not save you.) For salvation does not come by singing hymns, praying, preaching, or giving. How, then, will people be saved? “Believe on the Lord Jesus,” says God’s word, “and thou shalt be saved” (Acts 16.31). There is only one way to be saved—by believing in the Lord Jesus. Believe in His substitutionary death and you shall be saved. There is no other way. If you do not follow God’s will of salvation, you will go to hell. If you do not trust the Lord Jesus as your Savior and be saved according to the will of God, your knowledge of many religious rituals plus the rules of your denomination will never save you.

Take note of the fact that there is a great principle hidden in the Bible passage before us. As the people mentioned there come before the Lord in the day of judgment, they all speak of themselves in this fashion: “Did not we . . .” They do not come and say, “*Did not Christ . . .*” They do not claim salvation by saying the Lord Jesus has died for them and that they trust in the finished work of His precious blood. They speak instead as follows: “Did we not prophesy by thy name, and by thy name cast out demons, and by thy name do many mighty works?” In this world there is really nothing better than preaching, casting out demons, and doing mighty works; nonetheless, these things cannot save people. “I never knew you,” the Lord clearly tells them; “depart from me, ye that work iniquity.” What! Did Jesus indeed say, “ye that work iniquity”? But did they not prophesy, cast out demons, and do mighty works? These things were not evil, were they? Yet in spite of all their excellent works, the Lord Jesus asserts that their works will not save them. For salvation is not based on how many good works you have done by yourself; it is based on what the Lord Jesus has accomplished for you before God. Salvation is not according to your working for the Lord Jesus; it is according to what the Lord Jesus has worked and done for you. Salvation is not the wages of your works; it is the gift of the finished work of Christ.

These in this passage erred in trying to exchange their own works for the salvation works of God. They viewed salvation as though they could purchase eternal life with their works. Do realize that God will only accept us in the Lord Jesus; He will not accept our works for our own sake. If we have not been accepted by God on His terms, all our works are as nothing to Him. Only as we first are saved can our works have the possibility of being accepted by God. Otherwise, however good our works are—and despite the fact we are called by the name of the children of God—such efforts will not be accepted by God. Will you therefore accept the Lord Jesus as your Savior? Will you not flee from eternal death out of fear of future wrath? I pray so; for what is there left for you to do if you still prefer to go to hell? You can only continue being a nominal Christian. Yet never fancy that all who descend to hell will be hideous sinners. That is a terrible misconception of the truth. If you keep on doing good, being zealous, attending church service, praying and singing, giving, and even preaching, but without first believing the Lord Jesus as your Savior according to the will of God, you will most certainly end up in hell.

### ***The Ninth Way to Hell—Not Believing in the Lord Jesus***

“He that believeth on him is not judged: he that believeth not hath been judged already, because he hath not believed on the name of the only begotten Son of God” (John 3.18)—“He that believeth on the Son hath eternal life; but he that obeyeth not the Son shall not see life, but the wrath of God abideth on him” (3.36). To be judged is to perish; to perish is to go to hell. Not having eternal life but receiving the wrath of God is also perdition, since the penalty administered by God is hell. Hence these two Bible verses confirm what kind of people are in hell.

Who goes to hell? The unbeliever. What does he disbelieve? He does not believe on the name of the only begotten Son of God. Many

assume they must commit some hideous sins to go to hell; but the Bible does not teach that way. Regardless whether you are a moralist, a religionist, or a philosopher, despite how good, courteous, righteous, kind and loving you are, the death and judgment which await you will be no different from that of the unrepentant tax-collectors and prostitutes if you do not believe in the Son of God. To go to hell does not require you to commit one more sin, speak one more lie, blaspheme Christ one more time, persecute more saints, or violate one more law of God. You may do your very best to improve, reform, serve, sacrifice, love and give, but if you fail to believe in the Lord Jesus, that alone is more than sufficient grounds to destine you to hell. In these two Scripture passages we can plainly see that anyone who does not believe is already judged, does not have eternal life, and God's wrath is constantly upon him. And the only reason for this is his unbelief.

What does an unbeliever receive? An unbeliever is already condemned. How ironic that many people appear to make God more compassionate than He really is, for they often maintain that God will not condemn men. Yet in these two verses the Lord Jesus himself tells us that God *does* condemn men for their sins and He *does* use His wrath to punish sinners. Do not fancy God to be so indulgent that He does not act righteously. Many imagine God as so kind and merciful that He refuses to punish sinners. Though our God is merciful, He is also *righteous*. He treats the sinners of the world with love, yet He also dispenses just punishment to sinners who reject His love. Hence we are told here that he who does not believe in the Son does not have eternal life and the wrath of God is constantly upon him. He does have His wrath, and His wrath abides upon the unbelievers. There *is* hell, for both the righteousness of God and the sins of men demand it.

What does a person disbelieve? He does not believe in the name of the only begotten Son of God. What is the name of God's only begotten Son? That name is Jesus. Why is He called Jesus? The

Bible clearly states that His name shall “be called Jesus; for it is he that shall save his people from their sins” (Matt. 1.21). The name “Jesus” means “Jehovah Savior,” so to not believe in the name of God’s only begotten Son is to not believe in Jesus—which signifies not believing Jesus to be an individual’s personal Savior who can save him from his sins. Thus all who do not believe in Jesus as Savior will go to hell. This is what the word of God tells us.

How does the Lord Jesus become the Savior of the world? The Bible speaks clearly on this point. He is not a casual Savior, nor a social Savior. The Bible says He is the Savior from our sins. Do not therefore be deceived into conceiving the Lord Jesus as a great teacher—that perfect model of a man who teaches fraternity, peace, and equality. The Bible does not state this; rather, it plainly tells us that the purpose of His work is to “save his people from their sins.”

How does He become the Savior from our sins? Listen to what He himself has declared: “This is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many unto remission of sins” (Matt. 26.28). He tells us here of the way He saves sinners. It is not by improving and reforming sinners, but by dying for them—shedding His blood for sinners that their sins may be forgiven. The way He saves is by shedding His blood. And such is His cross. By His blood shed on the cross He saves sinners. He does not persuade man to do good, nor does He educate sinners and gradually bring out the good in their hearts. He does not come to save sinners’ flesh, or to reform the current society to make sinners live more comfortably. No, He saves sinners through His shed blood. All that He did while living could not save a single sinner; only His death is the basis for the sinner’s salvation.

Why must the Lord Jesus die to save sinners? Why does He say, This is My blood poured out for many for the remission of sins? Is there not any other way to forgive men’s sins than the shedding of His blood? Truly, truly, there is *no* other way. For sinners have

sinned, and sins must be punished. The Bible tells us that “the wages of sin is death” (Rom. 6.23). Since the wages of sin is death, and sinners have sinned, there is no other way than by death (which includes both physical as well as eternal death in hell). In order to save sinners, the Lord Jesus must die and pour out His blood for them. “For while we were yet weak, in due season Christ died for the ungodly. . . . While we were yet sinners, Christ died for us” (Rom. 5.6,8).

Do please understand that the death of Christ was not a martyr’s death, nor was it an exemplary death. His death was a dying for sinners. In other words, He died in our stead. The sinners have sinned and ought to die and perish, but the Lord Jesus has died for them and suffered the penalty which originally belonged to them. The punishment due to sinners has now fallen upon the Lord Jesus, since He stood in our place and accepted from the hand of the righteous God the punishment reserved for sinners. Since *He* has died, sinners *need not die again*. This is the gospel, and this is salvation!

In offering himself once as the sin-bearer on the cross, Jesus the Son of God has accomplished eternal salvation. Apart from this way there is no other way of salvation in the entire world. If there were another way of salvation for men it would have to be that from the day of birth to the day of death man would have never sinned in thought, in word, in action, and in attitude during any minute or second of their lifetime. If there be less than this kind of perfect life—and however good and moral and pious and religious they may be—men are condemned to hell if they commit sin but once in their thought, word, action, or attitude. Such being the case, could anyone be saved? No, not one. And that is why the Lord Jesus must come to bear the sins of the world. He poured out His blood for sinners that they might be saved *through Him*.

Accordingly, not believing in the name of the only begotten Son of God is not believing in Jesus, which is to say, not accepting the

salvation which Jesus has accomplished on the cross through the shedding of His blood. And in disbelieving this fact, sin is already judged. If there is a person in the world who is perfect and has never sinned throughout his life, possessing conduct as good as that of the Lord Jesus, he has no need to believe in the Lord Jesus. But if there is no such person (and there is not), then whoever has sinned must receive the penalty of his sin. Unless he accepts the Lord Jesus as Savior and believes in His substitutionary death, he must bear his own sins and perish eternally.

Ask yourself if you have never sinned. If you *have* sinned, you need to believe in the Lord Jesus. Otherwise, you must bear your own sins and go to hell. And if you do go to perdition, it will not be because there is no salvation given to you, but because you have refused it!

### ***The Tenth Way to Hell—Procrastination***

The Holy Spirit is now working in us, convincing us that we should believe in the Lord Jesus and be saved. But just here lies a danger, for many desire to wait. They know it is right to believe in the Lord Jesus and by believing they will be saved, yet they muse within themselves that it is a little inconvenient at the present moment, and therefore they will wait a while. Yes, in the near future, whenever they have opportunity they will believe in the Lord Jesus. Oh, I urge you to be careful, think deeply, so as not to be cheated by the devil. Since believing in the Lord Jesus is the most important matter in the world, how can you wait and delay?

Heed the following Bible verses: “Whatsoever thy hand findeth to do, do it with thy might; for there is no work, nor device, nor knowledge, nor wisdom, in Sheol, whither thou goest” (Eccl. 9.10)—“He that being often reproveth hardeneth his neck shall suddenly be destroyed, and that without remedy” (Prov. 29.1).

Who can say he will live to a certain time? Who knows his own life span? You say you will wait for the future, but do you realize how much future you have? I trust no one thinks he can guarantee his life to last a definite period of years. If so, if you cannot guarantee your life, why are you willing to endanger your soul? If you do not believe today, the opportunity may never be again. Let us therefore be careful.

I recall the story of the young Scottish lady who came to see Dr. Chalmer. After being asked to accept Christ as her Savior, she immediately said, "Dr. Chalmer, I wish to wait a while, for I am not ready to accept Christ now." "How long will you wait," he answered. "Will you wait a year? Is it that you will not accept Christ within the year, whatever the circumstance or opportunity may come your way?" "No, I cannot say that, for I may die within the year," responded the lady. "Is that so?" commented Dr. Chalmer; "alright, then, will you wait for a month? And whatever happens during this month, you will not accept Christ till the month is over?" She hesitated and then replied, "Dr. Chalmer, I cannot wait a month before I accept Christ, since I may die during the month." "That is quite true," he agreed. "Will you then delay a week? And no matter what occurs during that week, you will not accept Jesus Christ?" She once again faltered and said, "No, I cannot say that. I cannot say I must wait for a week before I accept Jesus Christ for I may die during the week." "You are right," pursued Dr. Chalmer. "Will you wait a day—for another twenty-four hours? And no matter what happens in that twenty-four hours you will not accept Jesus Christ?" She replied, "Dr. Chalmer, I cannot even say that. For who knows but what I may die within the twenty-four hours." "Do you not see, then," pressed Dr. Chalmer, "that it is far better for you to receive Christ as your Savior now?" She could no longer resist, and finally she answered, "I am willing."

Today I present the same question to you. What are you waiting for? Will you wait a year, a month, or a week? Who can say today

that nothing will happen within that period and that you will definitely live through it to then be able to believe in Christ afterward? If you dare not say you will still be alive after another year, month or week, why postpone till the following period?

I have a friend whose cousin always made excuses for delaying in believing in the Lord Jesus. Once my friend spoke to him and asked him again to believe in the Lord. His answer as before was, "Wait a few days." So my friend said to him, "Well, then, I will come after a few days and speak to you again." But within the next two days, as the cousin took his wife to visit his parents-in-law, he was killed by bandits. Who can therefore say he will not die within a few days?

Is there anyone who can say with certainty that he will not die within the next twenty-four hours? If you cannot say that, why do you wait and wait, realizing full well that you should believe Christ as your Savior now? In view of the fact that you cannot guarantee your life for even twenty-four hours, how can you still insist on waiting till some later time? Hence let us heed the word of God: "Whatsoever thy hand findeth to do, do it with thy might." And why be in such a hurry in this life? Because "in Sheol whither thou goest" (that is to say, man will die and will go to Sheol) "there is no work, nor device, nor knowledge, nor wisdom" (that is, you cannot have opportunity to believe in Christ after death). If you do not believe today, there may not be opportunity tomorrow. Why do you not decide now? Why must you wait till the coming day? We do not know what will confront us in the coming days. We do not know who will even be left alive in the days to come. Who dares to say he will not die? The lesson to be learned here is that we should believe in Christ immediately.

Once a seven-story building in Philadelphia caught fire. This building was leased to a number of big corporations. On the sixth floor was an office for a newspaper. There were telegraph devices which could send news to all parts of the world. Now the fire had

gotten started on the first floor. The tenants on all seven floors tried to move things out and then fled for their lives. But a correspondent on the sixth floor refused to leave the burning building immediately because he liked to do spectacular things. He sat before the telegraph machine and commenced to send messages to the entire nation, saying, "Our newspaper building is now on fire; the fire is on the first floor, but I am on the sixth."

After a while, he sent another message: "The fire is now on the second floor, but I am on the sixth." After fifteen minutes, he sent a third message: "The fire has now reached the third floor, and I am still on the sixth." After an hour, he sent another message: "The fire is now on the fourth floor, but I am still on the sixth." Finally he sent what became his last message: "The fire is now on the fifth floor, but I am still on the sixth." He next thought he could electrify the world if he could say the fire was on the sixth floor and he was still on the sixth! How dramatic that would be!

But his life was also important to him. So he went out to see exactly where the fire had reached. As he looked, though, he found to his horror that the fire was not then on the fifth floor but on the sixth! He had been wrong when he dispatched the previous message concerning the fifth floor! To be accurate he should have said: "The fire is on the sixth floor, and I am also on the sixth floor." Now the fire was coming toward him. He thought of fleeing. As he opened the door, smoke and fire began to pour in. He quickly shut the door; the stairway was also burned. The entire building was engulfed in flames. How could he now escape?

At the last moment he opened the window and saw an electric wire hanging across the street. He now thought he had found a way of escape. He leapt from the window and caught the wire with both hands and began to move slowly across. But streets in America are fairly wide. Upon reaching the middle of the street he stopped. Many observers were below; their eyes were fastened upward on him.

Everyone wondered in his heart if this man could be saved, if he had sufficient strength to reach the other side. But after a while, they saw one of the hands of the correspondent let go. And a short while later, they saw him fall to his death. He was crushed almost beyond recognition.

If you truly know the preciousness of your life, the importance of your soul to God, and the power of Christ to save sinners, why wait any longer? The fire of hell is already burning; why then do you not flee for your life? Hell fire is well-nigh burning at your very faces; hence what are you waiting for? Oh heed the lesson of the burning building. Do not think the fire is only on the fifth floor while you are safe and secure on the sixth. The fire which burns from hell is already burning in your place. For what reason are you therefore still waiting?

Now is the time to accept Christ as Savior. If this opportunity is missed, who knows if there will be another provided you in the future? Satan knows he has no way of binding you from believing in Christ, for he is fully aware that all men fear the penalty of sin which is hell and that to receive forgiveness through believing in Christ is the most reasonable thing. But he has a clever way of causing you to wait and to delay till the time is far spent and the opportunity is lost. You may know you ought to be saved, and yet you are eternally lost. What are you waiting for? Do you desire to wait until you are sick and then believe? To wait until you are in some danger and then believe? To wait until you are dying and then believe?

Please do not delay, but come to the Lord Jesus at this very hour and accept Him as your Savior by faith. Why not even now pray: "O Lord, I am a sinner deserving to go to hell. But I am asking You now to save me." The Lord will hear your prayer.



# 7

## The Sufferings of the Cross

Each time as I am moved by the Holy Spirit to contemplate how the Lord Jesus has died for me that I may escape the penalty of sin and receive eternal life, I cannot help but be tearfully thankful for His grace.

What sufferings my Lord has experienced on the cross!

“My Lord, how deeply touching that You died for my sins on lonely Calvary.” The Lord Jesus was the glorious God in heaven. He is most holy, and hence He does not need to die, nor can He as God ever die. Yet because of His compassion towards the sinners of the world, He came down to this sinful earth, took upon himself the likeness of men, stood in the place of sinners, and received the penalty due to them. He died that you and I may live. What love this is! Sins are committed by sinners such as you and me; evils are done by evil persons like you and me. But the punishment of sins—the sufferings of hell—fell upon the Lord Jesus Christ. What is this? This is substitution. This is love. This is grace. Sinner, do you know that your sins have crucified the lovely Lord Jesus? I hope you understand this. I hope you will be moved by the love of the Lord Jesus to believe in the merciful Savior.

When the Lord Jesus was born, He was born in a manger because there was no room in the inn. How appalling that was! Even today there are many in whose heart there is no vacancy for Christ. The Bible tells us that as soon as He was born, He was wrapped in swaddling clothes and laid in a manger. How lowly are the swaddling clothes and how hard is the manger. Was this indeed the portion which this Heavenly Visitor received from the hands of men? The Most High had no need to condescend to such a state, yet for the sake of loving you and me, He has suffered this affliction at birth. Truly my sins have done Him harm.

Moreover, during the thirty-odd years He spent on earth, there was not a day in which He did not live under the shadow of the cross. He had no permanent place to dwell in and no set time to eat. How He labored from dawn to dusk, trying to lead people to believe in His impending death for their eternal blessing.

In the days of His flesh, nothing on earth really satisfied His heart. Though His disciples sometimes gave Him a ray of joy, their doubts and dullness plus the unbelief and opposition of the people often caused Him to sigh with a broken heart. Finally confronted with the irretrievable hardness of human hearts, He wept for Jerusalem. Did He only cry for *that* sinful city in His time? Nay, He weeps over all the rebellious hearts today. O Lord, it is for all our sins that You descended to such a lowly state. Had it not been for Your loving me, You would not have needed to have suffered so much antagonism from sinners. The foxes have holes and the birds have nests; yet only the Son of man who so loves us has nowhere to lay His head.

Why did He sink to such a state? Because He loves you and me so very much. It was for our sins that He suffered so tremendously. In order to save us, He suffered hunger and cold, He endured despising and shame. For our sake He hungered and He thirsted. He traveled incessantly and ended up crucified. Oh, this is grace! Tenderest Savior, how wicked are my sins. You are truly my Savior, and I am willing to trust in You.

Though the afflictions of Christ while living are almost unbearable to recount, yet in comparison with His sufferings at death they are of no great account. How he suffered for us by bearing our sins on the cross. The distress in His life is but a little introduction to Calvary. He came to die, not to live. He came to die for us that we might live. Sinner, you ought to realize that if it had not been for your sins, the Lord Jesus would not have died nor would have needed to die. Because you and I are pitiful sinners, He comes to die for us.

Will you not therefore accept Him as your Savior? Do you not care that He died for you?

Recall the scene in the Garden of Gethsemane. It must have been a chilly night, for many were warming themselves in the light of the fire (see Mark 14.54). Yet during that cold night, your Savior was praying earnestly in the open garden. He prayed till “his sweat became as it were great drops of blood falling down upon the ground” (Luke 22.44). What a sight! Can you dare be lighthearted, can you dare be careless, can you be unconcerned, can you be so stubborn? Christ entered into such agony because of your sins and mine.

It is as though God had begun to lay our sins on Him in Gethsemane. The outline of the cross had by this time completely overshadowed Him. So that He was exceedingly sorrowful, agonizing greatly until His sweat became drops of blood. How I wish we would appreciate His bloody sweat. It appears that at this juncture He was glimpsing already the thundering wrath of God as well as the manifold sin of man; and He was in the midst of it all. He bore on the one hand men’s sins, and endured on the other hand God’s wrath. Yet all these in the Garden are but the shadow, O Lord; Your sufferings are already great! And Calvary still awaits You!

Next people came to arrest Him. In spite of the fact that He could ask His Father for twelve legions of angels to come to His rescue, He would rather be bound by men because He wanted to loose us from our sins. Recall from the Old Testament how one angel slayed over a hundred thousand Assyrians (Is. 37.36). A legion is more than six thousand strong. So twelve legions would be a staggering number of angels. How exceedingly powerful must these twelve legions of angels have been! Most likely the inhabitants of the entire city of Jerusalem would not have been enough for them to slay. But in order to be our Savior He suffered shame and bonds. Was God taken by men? Yes indeed, He allowed this to happen because He wanted to

save us. The God of heaven was arrested by men as a robber (Luke 22.52) for the sake of saving men. All this was due to your sins and mine.

See next how the Son of God was led away by men. First He was brought to the house of Annas the high priest. There our Savior was slapped by an unknown officer. Why did He suffer such antagonism from sinners? Solely for saving you and me from perdition. It is your sins and mine which hurt Him.

From Annas' house, Christ was brought to Caiaphas' place. The Bible recounts how "Annas therefore sent him bound unto Caiaphas" (John 18.24) as though He were an ordinary criminal. Truly He was standing in the place of sinners and was suffering the sinners' due in order that sinners might be saved. There He was spat upon, then buffeted and beaten with hands (Mark 14.65). What sin had He committed? None whatever! No one could testify that He had ever sinned. All these things befell Him for no other reason than because of your sins and mine.

Later they brought our beloved Lord Jesus to the council to be judged. Once more He suffered much evil and opposition at the hands of men. How unbearable were these affronts. Yet He endured them that He might save sinners such as you and me. We actually insulted Him.

People were not satisfied with merely ill-treating Him—and that without cause. They intended not to withdraw their hands until they put Him to death. So He was brought to Pilate the Roman governor and was unjustly accused of the serious sin of rebellion. But through Pilate God proved the innocence of His Son. Three times Pilate testified that Christ was innocent. Then why was He crucified? Without being guilty of sin, why should He receive any penalty for sin? For no other reason than for the sin of the world. "[Christ] who knew no sin [God] made to be sin on our behalf; that we might

become the righteousness of God in him” (2 Cor. 5.21). The sinless Jesus Christ was crucified for your sins and mine. Will you still harden your heart not to accept Him as your Savior? O Lord, have mercy on us!

Trying to shift his responsibility, though, Pilate now sent the Lord Jesus on to King Herod. There He was mocked by Herod and his soldiers and arrayed “in gorgeous apparel” (Luke 23.11). Were they honoring Him? Not at all. The Bible says that they did this to mock Him. Jesus my Savior, it is my sins that hurt You. Because You love me, You endured such reproach and shame. Now I am willing to believe You and love You.

Finally, the Lord was sent back to the Roman governor’s house. Oh do be aware that He had not gotten a wink of sleep the entire night. He was bound and sent from here to there: He was dragged from place to place for over seven miles throughout the night. What afflictions Jesus must have suffered. Even so, He took them all because He loves you and me. Though Pilate acknowledged the innocence of Christ, he nonetheless had Him crucified against the law.

“And Pilate delivered Jesus, when he had *scourged* him, to be crucified” (Mark 15.15). This word sounds quite casual, yet it implies great sufferings. A Roman scourge or whip was made of a wooden handle with many strips of leather attached to the end, and on these leather strips were affixed heavy pieces of metal. The one to be *scourged* was to be tied bareback to wood, and the scourger would then whip him with these leather strips. With just three or four stripes alone, flesh would break and blood would flow from the victim. For the sake of our sins, the glorious Christ was scourged for us. Would the cruel Roman soldiers spare our Savior? Not in the least, for like all other sinners “their feet are swift to shed blood” (Rom. 3.15). How pitiful the Lord Jesus was in their hands. But thank God, “by [his] stripes ye were healed” (1 Peter 2.24). All who are sick in soul,

do come and receive healing, for Christ has received our stripes for us.

“And they clothe him with purple, and plating a crown of thorns, they put it on him; and began to salute him, Hail, King of the Jews!” (Mark 15.17-18) What insult! How unbearable! What the world offered to Jesus Christ was not the crown of glory that he so rightly deserved, but a crown of thorns. He bore our curse and His head wore a crown of thorns, thus speaking of the curse which came to sinful men. How sharp and cutting must have been those thorns! Should a brow such as His was—and without any blemish—be so pierced? Yes, He willingly suffered and shed His blood because He knew that unless He suffered we would all be forever damned.

“And they smote his head with a reed” (v.19). Wearing as He did the crown of thorns, would not the smiting of a reed cause the thorns to penetrate deeper into Christ’s head? As God He had naturally never experienced such biting pains. Yet for the sake of loving men, He accepted such unspeakable pains and was willing to die on the cross that He might rescue men from the lake of fire which is eternal death. These soldiers—who were instruments of sin—not only inflicted bodily torture on Jesus but also heaped upon His soul untold distress. They “spat upon him, and bowing their knees worshipped him” (v.19). And after this ordeal, they led Him out to crucify Him.

“They offered him wine mingled with myrrh” (Mark 15.23). We are told that this was to anesthetize whatever pains occur during crucifixion. But our Savior received it not. He refused to avoid any such pains. Before he had come into this world, He had already sat down and counted the cost (see Luke 14.28); He loved the sinners of the world so much that He was willing to submit to all their afflictions. He would rather taste death for sinners once for all and *completely*, so that they might receive eternal life. He would take to himself *all* the bitterness that belonged to sinners in order that they might have the joy of His righteousness.

Having now arrived at the hill of Calvary, He was crucified. Did the Roman soldiers alone crucify Jesus Christ? Did the Jewish council alone crucify Him? The fact of the matter is that your sins and mine crucified Him! The cross was made of one horizontal and one vertical piece of wood. The soldiers made the Lord Jesus lie on it. They then nailed His hands to the wood with big iron nails. The flesh was broken, the blood flowed, and the pain reached to the heart. Both hands and feet were thus nailed to the wood. Next they raised up the cross. The weight of the entire body of the Lord Jesus hung on those few nails. Was not the Lord Jesus being punished too severely? But let us see that the sin of the entire world is exceedingly heavy. How manifold are your sins and mine. The wages of sin is the eternal sufferings of hell. Consequently, what the Lord Jesus suffered on the cross is what all we sinners of the world ought to have suffered. God had not judged Him extremely harshly, since this is what all sinners must suffer.

Here we see how the Lord is accomplishing the work of dying for sinners. And therefore, “he that believeth on him is not judged: he that believeth not hath been judged already, because he hath not believed on the name of the only begotten Son of God” (John 3.18). Our sins are like the iron nails which crucified Jesus Christ. Being crucified, His blood drenched those iron nails. On the one hand our sins crucified Him, but on the other His blood covers our sins. This is truly salvation! And what a salvation is His! “The blood of Jesus his Son cleanseth us from all sin” (1 John 1.7).

Now the Lord Jesus has been lifted up. Sinner, do witness His bloody sweat, behold the blood oozing from His thorn-pierced brow, see the blood streaking down His scourged back, and observe closely the blood dripping from His nailed hands and feet. Behold the Man of blood! Behold most of all the blood that flowed from His broken heart! “Apart from shedding of blood there is no remission” (Heb. 9.22). Certainly this bleeding Savior is able to forgive your sins. Why then do you linger and hold back from receiving His

forgiveness? Do not deceive yourself into thinking that He suffered so much—even to the shedding of His blood—just to set forth an example to mankind. He himself declared: “This is my blood . . . which is poured out for many unto *remission of sins*” (Matt. 26.28).

Make no mistake here. *He* poured out His blood instead of *you*; *He* was crucified for *your* sake; and *He* suffered to bear *your* sins: “Christ also suffered for sins once, the righteous *for* the unrighteous, that he might bring us to God ... Who his own self *bare* our sins in his body upon the tree” (1 Peter 3.18, 2.24). You who are oppressed by sins, where now are your sins? Are *you* still carrying them or have you given them to *Christ*? Never forget that Christ died for you. He loves you. Hence do not harden your heart. You should think much of His sufferings, that you may know on the one hand His love and on the other the painful penalty for sin that awaits you if you do not believe in Him.

We have already touched upon Christ’s bodily sufferings. Yet His sufferings in soul and spirit are not any less severe. Recall that His disciples fled: some hid themselves, one betrayed Him, and some even denied Him. How lonely He was on the cross! He truly trod the winepress alone. Who would sympathize with Him?

The scene of darkness was awesome in its terribleness! Here is God, who is most holy. And how He hates sin intensely; yet now He must bear the sins of the entire world and be made sin for us. Who can comprehend in the slightest such agony? On the one hand there were the gibes of Satan and his evil spirits: “Son of God, today is Your day, why do You not come down from the cross?” (see Matt. 27.39-42) On the other hand God the Father forsook Him: “My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?” (Matt. 27.46 quoting Ps. 22.1) What a tragic scene here! God hates sin so much that He hates the sins which His own Son bore in His body on behalf of men. Do see that God cannot live with sin, He cannot even tolerate the sight of sin. And hence if He must forsake His Son who bore others’ sins,

will He not most assuredly forsake you eternally, oh sinner, if you do not receive Christ as your Savior? “O Lord Jesus, Your sufferings on the cross are beyond my knowledge. Lord, how You suffered! I am willing to take You as my Savior today.”

Psalm 22 depicts the sufferings of Christ on the cross. This is David prophesying through his own experience the sufferings of the Lord. “Trouble is near; for there is none to help” (v.11)—This predicts the scattering of the disciples. “Many bulls have compassed me; strong bulls of Bashan have beset me round. They gape upon me with their mouth, as a ravening and a roaring lion” (vv. 12-13)—This speaks of the coming rage of Satan and his forces against the Lord, probably expressed through men at the foot of the cross. “I am poured out like water” (v.14)—This well agrees with the Messianic passage found in Isaiah 53.12 which states that “he poured out his soul unto death.” How painful is such pouring out of life! “All my bones are out of joint: my heart is like wax; it is melted within me” (v.14)—This describes the sufferings one would endure in hanging on a cross. His heart was literally broken at Calvary! “My strength is dried up like a potsherd; and my tongue cleaveth to my jaws; and thou hast brought me into the dust of death” (v.15)—This indicates how on the tree He experienced the fiery judgment of God’s wrath in tasting the torment of the lake of fire for men.

This was the time when He said: “I thirst” (John 19.28). By comparing the excruciating thirst of the rich man in Hades described in Luke 16, we can faintly comprehend the agony of the Lord Jesus at Golgotha. “Dogs have compassed me; a company of evil-doers have inclosed me” (v.16)—This discloses the scene under the cross. “They pierced my hands and my feet” (v.16)—This points to His hands and feet being nailed to the cross, a prediction of how the Son of God was crucified! “I may count all my bones” (v.17)—This again denotes the affliction of crucifixion. “They look and stare upon me. They part my garments among them, and upon my vesture do

they cast lots” (vv.17b-18)—These actions were completely fulfilled at Calvary.

You who read this portion of the Bible, I hope you will meditate on these verses and let Christ crucified be livingly portrayed before your eyes. Alas, His death is the most tragic of all deaths! None have ever died like Him. With a heart full of loving desire to redeem sinners, He came specifically to die in such a manner. Oh, if the penalty of the lake of fire does not frighten you, you should at least be touched by the love of His cross to accept Christ.

Now redemption is totally accomplished! You need not do anything, since the Lord Jesus has completed salvation for you. He has paid all the price that you may be saved freely without any cost. He descended from heaven that you might ascend to heaven. He suffered the antagonism of sinners so that you might receive the acceptance of God. He was temporarily forsaken by the Father that you might be eternally welcomed by the Father. He became poor that you might be rich. He died on the cross that you might live in heaven. Is there any love greater than this? Oh sinner, do not harden your heart any more. Wait no longer, but come immediately. The Lord still extends hope to you.

“Surely he hath borne our griefs, and carried our sorrows; yet we did esteem him stricken, smitten of God, and afflicted. But he was wounded for our transgressions, he was bruised for our iniquities; the chastisement of our peace was upon him; and with his stripes we are healed. All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned every one to his own way; and Jehovah hath laid on him the iniquity of us all”(Is. 53.4-6).

“What must I do to be saved? . . . Believe on the Lord Jesus, and thou shalt be saved” (Acts 16.30,31).

## The Assurance of Salvation

# 8

Each time I go to a place to proclaim the gospel of God's grace, I always use a question to test the Christians of that locality. I believe all who can answer me honestly and affirmatively experience the grace of God with great joy. The question is: Are you saved? In other words, do you know if you are saved or not? When I make such inquiry, I discover that out of a thousand people only two or three actually know they are saved. Sometimes I cannot find anyone in the entire congregation who knows he is saved. I would ask them: "Have you not believed in the Lord Jesus and taken Him to be your personal Savior, and trusted in the cleansing of your sins by His precious blood? Why are you still ignorant, then, as to whether you are saved?"

If a person falls into the water and is rescued by a passer-by, he certainly knows after he regains his consciousness whether he is in the water or safely on the shore. Likewise, you ought to know whether you are to perish or you have already been saved through grace. Yet many will answer: "I do not know if I am saved. How can I declare I am saved while I still live on earth?"

I suppose there must be many who hear this who will answer in the same way. But this is a wrong answer! For believing in the Lord Jesus is not a kind of gamble which is ruled by luck: with good luck you win, with bad luck you lose. Our trust in the salvation of the cross of Christ is fully guaranteed. We need not wait till we die to find out whether or not we are saved. We can know it now. This is the explicit teaching of the Scriptures. Let us read some Bible verses.

"Be it *known* unto you therefore, brethren, that through this man [the Lord Jesus] is proclaimed unto you remission of sins: and by

him *every one* that believeth is justified from all things, from which ye could not be justified by the law of Moses” (Acts 13.38-39).

We cannot be justified by our own works. We have committed so many sins that the very memory of them causes us great sorrow in our hearts. Hence we say to ourselves, How dare I consider myself saved! Nevertheless, in spite of all our failures, the Lord Jesus is still trustworthy. By believing in Him, our sins are forgiven; by trusting in Him, we are justified. How great is the salvation of the Lord! The word of God here says: “Be it known.” What is known? Know that the moment you believe in the Lord Jesus, your sins are forgiven and you are justified—you are already saved! God says “Be it known,” which means we *may know* whether or not we are saved. Make no excuses. Quickly hand over your sins to the Savior, and trust in the salvation which He has accomplished for you. And you will be saved.

“If we receive the witness of men, the witness of God is greater: for the witness of God is this, that he hath borne witness concerning his Son. He that believeth on the Son of God hath the witness in him: he that believeth not God hath made him a liar; because he hath not believed in the witness that God hath borne concerning his Son. *And the witness is this, that God gave unto us eternal life*, and this life is in his Son. He that hath the Son hath the life; he that hath not the Son of God hath not the life. These things have I written unto you, that ye may *know* that ye *have* eternal life, even unto you that believe on the name of the Son of God” (1 John 5.9-13).

This passage from God’s word tells us that whoever has the Lord Jesus has life; whoever does not have Him does not have life. Have you accepted the Lord Jesus as your Savior? If you have, then you already have life, that is, you are saved. The Lord Jesus himself declares: “He that believeth hath eternal life” (John 6.47). God bears witness to His Son by giving us eternal life. If we do not believe this witness (that we have eternal life) as given in the passage just quoted,

we make God a liar. For has He not said that we who believe in the Lord Jesus have eternal life? Would God lie? Never. Accordingly, let us believe that we who have been washed by the precious Blood have eternal life and are now saved. God uses the apostle John to write these words that we may *know* we are saved.

The testimony of the Bible is that we may *know* if we are saved. This is not a matter which waits to be known after death. As we today live on earth, we should know whether or not we are saved. If anyone is still *unsaved*, he needs to believe immediately in Jesus Christ and trust in the redemption He has accomplished for us. But if we *are* saved, we should be grateful to God's grace and live on earth like saved people. "Behold, *now* is the acceptable time; behold, *now* is the day of salvation" (2 Cor. 6.2). Now does God accept us, now does He save us. And not for us to wait until after death!

Occasionally when I ask people about this matter of salvation, they will say: "I try my best to do good and to serve God, hoping that later I will be saved." This too is a mistake. Such behavior is due to your not knowing the way of salvation accurately. Do you really think you can be saved if you do your best to serve God? Please underscore this fact again and again that nothing of our works and deeds is acceptable to God. For "all our righteousnesses are as a polluted garment" (Is. 64.6). Do you think you can be saved that way? No, a thousand times no. Has not the Bible clearly stated that "by grace have ye been saved through faith; and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God; not of works, that no man should glory" (Eph. 2.8-9)?

Salvation lies in trusting the Lord Jesus, "who his own self bare our sins in his body upon the tree"—"the righteous for the unrighteous, that he might bring us to God" (1 Peter 2.24, 3.18). He has already accomplished redemption; hence all we need to do is to trust Him: "Believe on the Lord Jesus, and thou shalt be saved" (Acts 16.31). Do not ever imagine that you can be saved by your works.

No matter how good they are, such works cannot save you because salvation is “not of works.”

If you are willing to trust in the substitutionary work of the Lord Jesus on the cross, you *are* saved. If you do not accept Him as Savior, you have no other hope to be saved since you cannot save yourself. But if you have already accepted the Lord Jesus, then you have no need to *hope* for salvation. We only hope for a thing we have not obtained. Having obtained it, we no longer hope. When a father is out, his child hopes to see him. But when the father has returned, the child is quite happy. Should the mother ask the child, “Are you still hoping to see your father?”, the child’s answer will be: “I have already seen my father; why, then, would I hope any more?” Once salvation is obtained, we no longer hope for it. Either you have believed in Jesus and received eternal life or else you are still unsaved and perishing. There is no middle ground between the two. “He that believeth on him is not judged: he that believeth not hath been judged already” (John 3.18).

The Bible divides people into two categories: the saved and the perishing. There is not that third category of *hoping* to be saved. If you really trust Jesus Christ as your Savior and believe in His substitutionary death on the cross, you are saved. You no longer need to hope of being saved.

Suppose a man is rescued from the water and he is asked what he wants; would it make any sense for him to say “I hope to be saved to the shore”? If you have believed in the Lord Jesus why do you doubt any further? You have already obtained eternal life, so why do you yet hope? Why not praise the Lord instead!

There are yet others who when confronted with the question of salvation will answer: “I now live on earth, truly trusting in the redemptive work of the Lord Jesus; but I dare not say I am saved. Such certainty must wait until after I die and behold the face of the

heavenly Father. Then He will judge me to see if I am a sheep or a goat. If He says I am a sheep and am therefore saved, I will be overjoyed; but if He says I am a goat and must perish, I can only go to hell sorrowfully.”

Is not such a concept on the future pitiable? Let me tell you frankly that if I did not know I was saved, I probably could neither eat nor sleep today. Thanks be to the heavenly Father! for He has already accepted me and given me eternal life. Do you really trust in the redemptive work of Christ? If you do, why must you wait till after death before you know whether you are saved or will perish? This is not right in the light of what the Lord himself has declared: “For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth on him should not perish, but have eternal life”(John 3.16).

Is not this trustworthy Bible verse clear? “For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son”—this is what God has done. He loved and He gave. He gave the Lord Jesus to the world to die for the world by accomplishing salvation on the cross. “That whosoever believeth on him [Jesus] should not perish, but have eternal life”—by believing in the Lord Jesus, you shall not perish but have eternal life. How much plainer could it be stated that we who believe in the Lord Jesus shall not perish, but have eternal life? Yet sadly, many believers change the words of John 3.16. They trust the Lord as their Savior, yet they feel and say they are not saved. They seem to change John 3.16 without even being conscious of it, as follows: “For God so loved the world, that He gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth on him, *after a month, two months, a year, ten years, several decades, after death, will perhaps* not perish, but have eternal life.”

Thank God that the Bible does not put it that way. It has no place for these extras! It joins “whosoever believeth” with “should not perish, but have eternal life.” *Whenever* you and I believe in the Lord

Jesus, having our sins washed in His precious blood, *then and there* you and I shall not perish but have eternal life. “He that believeth on the Son hath eternal life”(John 3.36). You need not wait for it until after death.

Concerning the reference to the parable of the sheep and goats, it is an error to apply this to the judgment of the believers. For the parable is clearly concerned with “the nations” (Matt. 25.32). God divides the world into “Jews, Greeks [that is, the gentile nations], and the church of God” (see 1 Cor. 10.32). We who are in the church of God are no longer related to the nations. The judgment of the sheep and the goats points to that meted out upon the nations after the Lord Jesus shall return to the earth with His saints. We believers are not included in this judgment.

Let it be understood that we believers will not go through the judgment of whether saved or perishing. For the Lord Jesus was judged for our sins on the cross. He has already solved the problem of sin for us. We who believe in Him take Him as our substitute. And because He was judged and died in our stead, therefore we will not be judged and die for our sins any more. “There is therefore now no condemnation [judgment] to them that are in Christ Jesus” (Rom. 8.1). John 5.24 is also pertinent here: “Verily, verily, I say unto you, He that heareth my word, and believeth him that sent me, *hath* eternal life, and *cometh not* into judgment, but *hath* passed out of death into life.”

How sweet are these words of our Lord Jesus! No one has ever spoken like Him. These unambiguous words fall upon the ears of the sinners like beautiful music. Since it is couched in Jesus’ well-known “Verily, verily” (that is to say, Truly, truly), can it be *unreal* or *untrue*? Of course not! What the Lord Jesus says about “hath eternal life” *is* true; what He says about “cometh not into judgment” is likewise true. And what He says about “hath passed out of death into life” is equally true. When He says “hath” it actually means “hath.”

“Hath” signifies that the thing is already come. Since the Lord says that anyone who believes in Him “hath passed out of death into life,” why should we say we have to wait till after death to know if we are saved?

Let it be strongly proclaimed that we who trust in Him have already passed out of death into life during our very lifetime. Such is truly the glad tidings. Any one who believes “hath passed out of death into life” and anyone who does not believe “hath been judged already.” The “hath” here in both John 5.24 and 3.18 shows it “hath” been decided *now*.

Perhaps, though, you will be like many believers who deem it as smacking of arrogance to say that they are already saved and know they are saved. Let me quickly say that I have no hesitation in declaring that we who have received the Lord Jesus know that we are saved. This is no boasting in ourselves, however. The very phrase “are saved” in its grammatical construction indicates that we are passive in the matter of salvation. Where, then, is there any boasting? When we say we *are saved*, this implies that, whereas we were once sinners deserving to perish, we now are saved by trusting in the Lord Jesus. *He* has saved us, *He* has done something to us and for us. This shows how deep is the grace of the Lord, how wide is His redemption, and how great is His power. This is by no means an exalting of ourselves. In knowing that we are saved by grace, we will naturally sing praises to the Lord with thanksgiving. And this is an exalting of the Lord and not ourselves. The deeper we know our sins, the greater will we see the forgiveness of the Lord and the more we will love Him. Let us join Paul in proclaiming that “*by the grace of God I am what I am*” (1 Cor. 15.10)!

God is the One who says we have eternal life and are saved, and therefore we also can say we are saved. Such a declaration is not a bragging but a reflection of our believing—that is to say, of our acknowledging that what God says is true. We believe in God’s

word, and this pleases Him greatly. Concerning our salvation, we ought to believe in the word of God.

If we have no desire or need to be saved, then in that instance we really are bragging—for in reality we are esteeming ourselves stronger than the rest of mankind. Yet how dare anyone take that stance since their conduct is no better than that of others. No one's conduct is any better than anybody else's; nevertheless, salvation is not based on man's good works. The Lord Jesus does not come to save the righteous but to save sinners: "The Son of man came to seek and to save that which was lost" (Luke 19.10). "Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners," said Paul, "of whom I am chief: howbeit for this cause I obtained mercy" (1 Tim. 1.15-16).

If salvation depends on ourselves, not only do *we* dare not say we are saved, but also no one else in the whole world can say it, nor will anyone be saved either. How can anyone be saved if salvation rests on his merits? All who lean on their own works are unstable. At times they are good, so they expect to be saved. At other times they are bad, and hence they esteem themselves lost. This shows they do not wholly trust in Christ. It can never be our good works which save us, it is only Christ who saves us. How great is His grace!

Countless people will say, "I know I am saved by trusting in the merit of the cross of the Lord Jesus. Nevertheless, I do not *feel* anything. Is this being saved?" Please understand that the Bible does not say: "These *joyful feelings* have I given unto you, that ye may *know* that ye have eternal life, even unto you that believe on the name of the Son of God." If this had been the wording, then whoever is void of these joyful feelings is not saved. But what does the Bible actually declare? "*These things* have I written unto you," states John the apostle, "that ye may know that ye have eternal life, even unto you that believe on the name of the Son of God" (1 John 5.13). The phrase "these things" refers to the word of the Bible, the words of

God the Father. We know we have eternal life and are saved not because of how we feel but because of what God's word says.

Since the Bible states that we who believe in the Lord are saved, we therefore are saved people. Regardless whether we feel saved or not, we are saved if God says so. You have already trusted in the Lord Jesus and your sins are already washed by His precious blood; consequently, you are already saved. And why? Because this is what the word of God makes clear.

Suppose, for example, there is a poor family which is suffering great privation through financial difficulties. The head of the family writes to his well-to-do friend asking for help. Several days pass and no reply comes. He begins to think that his friend probably despises him and refuses to help. He feels depressed in his heart. The more he ponders the situation, the more he feels his friend will not help him. He then begins to share his thought with his neighbors. Some neighbors say that true friendship includes sharing the wealth, and that therefore his friend has no reason to refuse help. Some neighbors then say that the world is so harsh and cold that his friends would probably not help. When this head of the household hears hopeful words, he feels happy; but when he hears disappointing words, he is dejected. Yet one day later, a letter arrives at his home from his friend. His heart beats quickly, not knowing whether or not there would be a promise of help. Upon opening the letter, he shouts to his family members: "Now at last everything is settled. He wrote me with his own hand that hereafter he will be responsible for all our needs. I do not care what people say, whether expressing hopefulness or hopelessness, for *he himself* says he will take the responsibility. We can now live our days in peace."

Are not many believers like this poor man before the letter arrived? They vacillate from one feeling to another as they listen to people's opinions. But just as this poor man finally came to rest in the word of his friend, so our hearts should be firmly established in

the word of God. God declares that if we believe in Jesus Christ, we have obtained salvation. And His having said it should settle everything. Hence can there be any room for doubting? Does it matter how we feel? Or how other people think? God says we are saved and that should be enough. *His* word is the final judgment. Since God has generously declared His truth, let us accept His word in faith without doubting.

Yet some will still insist on saying this: “What has been mentioned already is indeed true, but I am afraid my faith is not perfect, and therefore—I am not saved.”

The Bible only knows the difference between “believe” and “not believe”—it knows nothing about so-called imperfect faith. We ought to be very clear in our understanding that there is no *merit* in our believing in the Lord Jesus. God does not save us because we have the merit of faith. Believing is receiving (John 1.12). John 3.16 says God “gave” the Lord Jesus to us and John 1.12 says we “receive” Him. That is all. One giving and one receiving. There is no merit accrued to the sinner on any count. For salvation is all accomplished by the Lord Jesus.

Who among us is not a sinner? We were all dead in trespasses and sins. How truly pitiful! But the Holy Spirit comes to convict us of sin. How terrible is the penalty of sin! Who will not tremble at the thought of the future? What is even more tragic is that we have no way to save ourselves. Sinking in sin’s mire and being unable to extricate ourselves is really a frightening experience. Yet thanks and praise be to the Lamb who was slain! He came and died on the cross for us. He stood in the place of sinners. He loved us and gave himself up for us. He became our salvation. When He died, He cried: “It is finished” (John 19.30). How lovely He is! O Lord, we are eternally grateful to You for Your immense grace! To believe in the Lord Jesus means nothing else than that we as hopeless and helpless sinners are *willing* to be saved by Him. He comes to save, and we

want to be saved. That is all. Here there is not even the slightest consideration of perfect or imperfect faith.

Has not the Lord Jesus himself said that he “that cometh to me I will in no wise cast out” (John 6.37)? Praise God, Christ is truthful and trustworthy here. With Him there is no guise or guile in His word. When He declares He will never cast out those who come to Him He means it. He will save all who know their sins and are willing to accept Him as Savior. “Come unto me, all ye that labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest” (Matt. 11.28); “If any man thirst, let him come unto me and drink” (John 7.37). This is the Lord’s standing invitation.

It is not really faith that saves us. It is His grace and faithfulness. God loves to save us and He is gracious to us. Why do we not believe? Is there any good reason to doubt? The compassions of Christ ought to fill our hearts and displace all wondering, uncertain thoughts.

After having understood this truth, some people still harbor an uncertainty in their mind. They think as follows: “If a man really knows he is saved, has eternal life, and is guaranteed a place in heaven, will he not then be casual about sin? He is now saved; so will he not give in to lusts and freely sin? Because he knows he is saved, sinning does not seem to be of any consequence to him.”

This, however, is merely a supposition. People may speculate that now that they know themselves saved, they can freely sin. But they do not know how opposite their supposition is from fact. If any knows he is truly saved, his thought and conduct will instantly begin to manifest heavenly qualities—though this is not to say that he no longer has a desire to sin any more.

Let me use an illustration. Many Chinese go abroad to study, especially to the United States. Suppose a son is being sent by his

father to America. How will he dress in the new country? Will he consider what kind of Chinese gown and jacket is most fashionable? What will be his table manners? Will he study Chinese etiquette and so forth? Not at all. He is going to *America* soon. What is in his mind is not knowing *China* more but learning the customs of the country he will be visiting. He wants to learn how to eat with knife and fork and how to shake hands. He likes to know in detail the tastes and habits of the Americans. He will inquire into their temperament, and national traits. When he speaks English, he will be careful to try to speak with an American accent. To sum up, whoever is going to America will have the natural tendency to learn to be like an American.

In a similar manner, if a believer knows he has eternal life and is now a citizen of heaven, he will doubtless learn the heavenly manners in speech and walk. Only the one who does not know that he is saved will still imitate the world and be assimilated. Whoever knows he is saved has no danger of freely sinning; on the contrary, he will daily think of the things above. This is fully proven in the spiritual experience of a believer. Whoever wants to go to America will learn to be American-like; and whoever is going to heaven will naturally learn to be heavenly. You have now believed in the Lord Jesus Christ. This is the most important thing in your life. It pertains to the greatest blessing in eternity. The Lord has saved you; this you ought to know. How comforting to realize that I have eternal life. What joy this will give! "Rejoice that your names are written in heaven" (Luke 10.20). How precious is this message! This is truly the glad tidings, that I may know in this world that I am saved. Formerly I was a sinner, but now I have received grace. How joyous I am! How thankful I am, knowing that the Lord has saved me from perdition and has given me eternal life.

Such knowledge causes all believers to offer more praises to God. We know we cannot save ourselves, we therefore give all the

authority, riches, wisdom, power, honor, glory and praise to the Lamb who was slain—forever and ever!

See how God has loved us! In the presence of such love and salvation, should we not, out of gratitude, love Him and live on earth like a saved person? God who has begun a good work in us will certainly perfect it until the day of Jesus Christ (Phil. 1.6). We ourselves cannot please Him because “they that are in the flesh cannot please God” (Rom. 8.8). We can only allow His Spirit to work in us that we may live a holy life. Yet in spite of occasional failures, we will not perish. For that which the Lord Jesus has given us is *eternal* life. So do not despair if defeated. Rise up and ask the Lord for forgiveness. He will lead us on.

Once I was preaching the gospel in a certain place. A brother after he had understood this truth said to me: “Formerly I did not know I was a saved person, so I lived carelessly in the world. I was afraid of being cast out by the Lord in this life and of then being condemned by Him at the time of judgment. Thus would I be deprived of the blessing of heaven as well as the pleasures on earth. Now I know the truth of salvation and understand I am guaranteed a place in heaven. Being a citizen of heaven, I will not live unwisely on earth any more.”

Oh, if we know that our life is hid with Christ in God, we will naturally seek the things that are above. Is not this marvelous? We have a wonderful Savior, and we receive a wonderful salvation. How can we refrain from joyfully singing, Hallelujah!