

THE SALVATION OF THE UNBELIEVER

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AS GOD is the Saviour of all mankind, especially of those who believe (1 Tim.4:10), we may confidently rest on one grand and glorious foundation truth—that all salvation is of God, and neither believer nor unbeliever has any part in it. On the one hand this assures us of the possibility of saving all men, for God alone is able, and, on the other, it bars out all human schemes for their restoration, whether by works, or suffering, by giving them a second chance, or by any cause whatever which originates in man. Those who believe are saved by His grace (Rom.4:16), those who do not believe are saved through His judgments, but in both it is He alone Who is Saviour. Faith is but the channel of grace; it plays no efficient part in salvation. Judgment is but the means He uses, the process which leads to the salvation of the unbeliever. It does not remove his guilt or cleanse a single sin. That is done wholly and solely by the blood of Christ. Every effort to bring about the ultimate salvation of all through the purgatorial or penitential sufferings of the sinner is a denial of this great truth. Judgments do not save, but the God Who judges is also the Saviour and all His dealings with mankind are governed by the grand goal which He has set before Him—to become All in all His creatures.

In setting forth the process by means of which God brings the unbeliever back to Himself we must remember that few believers are able to analyze the method used in their own salvation. Now, if we are not able to explain our own experience, how shall we understand His method with others? Yet, strange as it may seem, God's dealings with the unbeliever are much more easily apprehended than His way with us. The very simplicity of faith baffles us. Most theological systems seek to base belief on evidence, and speak of "Christian evidences" as the foundation of the believer's salvation. This is, rather, the method He uses in the deliverance of the unbeliever.

When we reflect how few of those who actually heard our Lord and His apostles, who saw Him and perceived the signs and miracles and powers which He performed, and had ample opportunity to test their genuineness, how few of those actually believed, we are tempted to lose confidence in the efficacy of "Christian evidences." Yet they had their place and were

used in the proclamation of the kingdom. They produced a hybrid sort of faith, generated partly by tangible evidence, and partly by confidence in those who wrought them. The case of Thomas is an example of the overpowering force of evidence where faith is wanting. No man can long withstand the testimony of his senses, even when his interests are opposed. But today the doubting Thomases are offered no proof to correct their credulous questions. It is either sheer unfounded faith or fatal unbelief.

The tangible proofs given to support the proclamation of the kingdom affords a rich field for the study of the effect of evidence on the human heart. The unbeliever will be saved by sight. He will yield to the force of facts. He will be convinced by logic. What evidence is most suited for this purpose? In our Lord's ministry we can see both the helps and the hindrances offered by the senses. The consideration of a few cases will reveal what most moves men and what makes them obstinate.

The rich young man was hindered by his possessions. The Samaritans were helped by the Lord's words. The resurrection of Lazarus led many Jews to rely on His acts. These illustrate God's method in the judgment of the unbeliever. He removes hindrances—no earthly acquisitions interfere with the decisions of the heart, for both heaven and earth flee from the face of Him Who sits on the throne. He works the greatest possible miracle, by raising them from the dead. He reads the inmost secret of their hearts. He appears in their very presence in soul-dismaying splendor. They cannot doubt His power or His perfections, and no motive remains to lead them to deceive themselves.

The judgment of unbelievers takes place in the interval between the passing of this present earth and the creation of the new. Every tie which bound them to the earth has been burned up. They are the subjects of the most astounding miracle ever wrought, having been raised from the dead. They are in the presence of the Divine Majesty. Their secrets are bared to His awful gaze. The character of their judgment, being adjusted to their acts, not simply as to severity but so as to correct them, will reveal God's purpose to save and reconcile them to Himself. This, followed by their death in the lake of fire

and subsequent vivification at the consummation, is the basis of their reconciliation.

First, we will consider the hindrances which have held many from becoming followers of Christ. The rich young ruler (Matt.19:16; Luke 18:18) desired eonian life but was kept from it by his acquisitions. Will this hinder him in the judgment? No. For then all his riches will have vanished; not only through his own death, but by the fires which have engulfed the world.

Examples abound. The excuses offered by those who were bidden to the great supper (Luke 14:18) are all removed before the great white throne. No fields or oxen or wives will intrude between the spirit and the great Judge.

In the judgment day God will judge the hidden things of humanity (Rom.2:16). We are prone to consider this a mere exhibition of His omniscience, to facilitate the trial of the sinner and to insure his condemnation. But more than this, it cannot but have a most powerful effect on the unbeliever's attitude toward Christ. What was it that impressed the woman of Samaria? It was His knowledge of her hidden secrets. When she left her water and went into the city she bore witness: "Come hither! Lo there is a Man Who told me all that I do. Is not this the Christ" (John 4:29)? As a result we read that many of the Samaritans of that city believe in Him because of the woman's word that He told her all that she did (John 4:39).

But more believe on Him through His own word. The Lord bared only a few facts in the woman's life. In the judgment all of men's secrets will be exposed. If men could be moved to believe through the word of a dissolute woman, how much more readily will they bow when all their own secrets are brought to view! And not only so, but when the lives of all their fellow creatures are subjected to the same superhuman scrutiny, the overwhelming evidence will banish all doubt of the identity of the One before Whom they stand.

The blessed results achieved by His exposure of the woman at Sychar's spring will be multiplied by many millions at the great white throne. There is nothing hidden that shall not be manifested (Matt.10:26). As in Corinth, the hidden things of the unbeliever's heart become apparent, and falling on his face, he will worship God (1 Cor.14:25).

Perhaps no miracle wrought by our Lord and His apostles created a stronger conviction than that of raising the dead. When Lazarus was raised many of the rulers believed, and the chief priests were concerned lest all should believe on Him because of this sign (John 11:45,48). When Peter raised Dorcas it also was used to convince many who believed on the Lord. Can we imagine what conviction it must have brought to Lazarus and to Dorcas themselves, if they should have had the slightest tendency to doubt? Could there have been any stronger proof of divine power than that their very life had come back to them at the bidding of One Who is stronger than death? In the process of winning the unbeliever we judge their resurrection and final vivification to be ample to account for their salvation and reconciliation.

The salvation of the unbeliever will be by sight, not by faith. Otherwise it is effected in the same way as that of the believer, by the word and power and presence of God. The means which proved most effective in the past are repeated, but accompanied with unparalleled power and under circumstances infinitely more impressive.

The apostle Paul's case is of surpassing significance in its bearing on the salvation of unbelievers. He was the foremost of sinners, and it cannot be denied that, among men, there was no case quite as desperate as his. All question as to God's ability to save vanishes in the light of his call on the Damascus road. The miraculous means employed in his case surely would suffice for every one of God's enemies. And who will deny, on sober reflection, that the appalling power and glory of the august judgment session into which the unbeliever is ushered by his resurrection will be unutterably more impressive?

The apostle's vision passed. He came back to a scene where all was as before. He alone had changed. But the unbeliever sees the power and presence of God not only in his own deliverance from death, but in all around him. The vision does not vanish. The divine presence abides.

One of the leading lights on eternal torment crystallizes the prevailing insensibility to the mighty dealings of God with the unbeliever in the following question and answer. "Is there going to be any tremendous power in the moral sense in eternity to change a character that it could not

change here?" "There is no hint in the Bible of a change of character beyond this world."

These very leaders would shudder if we should suggest that salvation is based on character. Yet they do not hesitate to damn mankind for lack of it! But we will let that pass. Unbelief in the saint is just as irrational as in the infidel.

The appalling nature of the blindness which lies on Christendom with reference to God's great ultimate can hardly find a better illustration than in the question and answer we have quoted. So far as they read their Bible, the unbeliever is *not* raised from the dead at the judgment, nor vivified at the consummation. They contend for the genuineness of miracles, yet ignore the most tremendous and stupendous of all miracles—the resurrection of all mankind. They are making a firm stand for a whole Bible, yet practically expunge the great truth that "*all* who are in the grave shall hear His voice, and shall come forth." All the significance and power of the resurrection of the unbeliever is totally ignored and denied by many who consider themselves defenders of the faith and supporters of the Bible.

We consider, and rightly too, that our resurrection and vivification will be an essential part of our salvation. It will be the crowning glory of our deliverance. Yet when the same mighty power of God acts on behalf of the unbeliever, resurrection becomes damnation and vivification death! These, we are told, will have no effect on the character of the unbeliever at all! Since that is so it logically follows that character is not affected by resurrection or vivification, and, as a result, the saints will have just the same character in glory which they have today. The transformation will be entirely physical, not moral or spiritual. Our likeness to Christ will be limited to the brilliancy of our appearance. All the heartbreaking defects in our characters will be with us still, only unutterably more apparent and painful in His presence.

But enough! It is not true! Every experience through which we pass affects our characters, even in the present life. And we may rest assured that our character (how I hate to use a non-scriptural term!) will accord with the presence of His glory.

Our resurrection and vivification are simultaneous, but the unbeliever will be raised

long before he is vivified. The change which eventuates in the ultimate salvation of the unbeliever is wrought, not only by his resurrection, but by the august judgment session, when he stands in the presence of Christ, with all his unbelief swept away by the awful realization of His power and the justice of His throne. We are asked, Is it possible for them to repent? Rather, we would like to know, Is it possible for them *not* to repent, or change their minds? We cannot conceive an unrepentant sinner before the great white throne.

God's thoughts and man's imaginations are nowhere more at variance than on the subject of judgment, or punishment. God is love: man is hate. David was wise when he was given the choice of fleeing before his enemies or falling before the hand of Jehovah. He uttered a great truth when he exclaimed "Let us fall now into the hand of Jehovah, for His mercies are many: and let me not fall into the hand of man!" And surely his choice was vindicated, for, when the angel stretched out his hand upon Jerusalem to destroy it, Jehovah repented Him of the evil, and said to the angel that destroyed the people: "It is enough! Stay now thine hand" (2 Sam.24).

Jonah went through the streets of Nineveh, crying: "Yet forty days and Nineveh shall be overthrown!" "But God saw their works, that they turned from their evil way; and God repented concerning the evil that He said He would do unto them. And He did it not" (Jonah 3). And what did Jonah do? Was he not pleased at the success of his mission? Did he not glory in the character of His God? Alas! he was like the majority of the Lord's people today. Like Jonah, they imagine that God has a streak of hate in His character and that He wanted to destroy Nineveh to give it exercise. But He had an object in threatening its destruction. Now that they repented and the object was attained, why should He belie His character and destroy them from sheer vindictiveness? Jonah thought He ought: and so think those today whose prototype he was.

Is it not too bad that Jonah's God was a gracious God, and merciful, slow to anger, and of great, kindness, and repenting of the evil which He had threatened (Jonah 4:2). What did Jonah care for Nineveh? What pains had it cost him? What comfort did it bring to him? But God looked at it from His standpoint. In it there were sixty thousand souls more in tune with Him than

sulky Jonah. He was their Creator, and He had not created them for naught.

The thought that the resurrection and judgment of the unbeliever is only a prelude to his final "destruction" in the lake of fire must be judged by its moral effect, for it has no support whatever in the Scriptures. In the first place "destruction" (by which annihilation or extinction of being is intended), is *never used of the lake of fire or of the second death*. It is always used of the sinner before his resurrection at the great white throne. Those who are "destroyed" in Gehenna will be there. Those who "perished" in the wilderness and at the flood will be raised. "Destruction" is never annihilation. It never precludes resurrection and salvation. Indeed, *it is a necessary precursor of salvation*. The Lord came to seek and to save the "destroyed" (lost). So that, even if there were a single passage telling us that the unbeliever is "destroyed" in the second death (which there is not) we would still have every reason to believe God when He assures us that all who are dying in Adam shall be made alive in Christ.

Let no one suppose that we plead for the repeal of God's word regarding the doom of the unbeliever. Far from it. But we do plead for the removal of those harsh, human perversions of His word, which seek to make Him a man like ourselves, hateful and hating one another vindictive and vicious in our views of the so-called "penalties" of sin. We plead for a revision of our vocabulary on this important theme. Many of our words and expressions are not only unscriptural but positively anti-scriptural.

Let those who constantly refer to the lake of fire as a place of *punishment, chastening, destruction apollumi, extermination olethros*, and the like, reflect on the fact that these terms are not used specifically of the burning lake. With the possible exception of the destruction of the wild beast (Rev.17:8,11) all refer to previous judgments, and none of them preclude the resurrection of those to whom they are applied. In other words, the strongest terms to be found in the Scriptures are *avoided* when speaking of this final infliction. The true scriptural phrase to use when we desire to describe its action is "the second death."

The terms *destroy* and *destruction* are so often used of irrecoverable ruin that a few examples will be given to show how far this is from the

truth. The rendering "lost" is always the translation of the word for destroy. It would be the utmost folly for the Son of Mankind to seek, much less to save those who are annihilated. The lost sheep and the lost coin and the lost prodigal all had been destroyed, yet all were found and saved. Were the whole world lost, or destroyed in the lake of fire, that would be no hindrance to salvation. Rather, it would be the very sphere in which alone salvation can operate. Christ cannot save anyone unless first he is destroyed, or lost.

Such is the salvation of the unbeliever. It is not only in absolute accord with every passage in the word of God, but in utmost harmony with the God Who is revealed through that word. How can anyone who truly loves Him rest satisfied with less than this, the only true, the only scriptural solution? How infinitely it lifts Him above the defeated, vindictive deity of Christendom! How grandly it accords with all those attributes which theology gives Him with its left hand and fishes from Him with its right! Is He love? Then how can He bear the very thought of eternal torment for a single one of His creatures, much less for myriads of millions? Is He omnipotent? Then why is He unable to rescue them? The Buddha of Christendom is great in name, but small in deed. He makes great claims but does not live up to his reputation.

Let those who are fond of reasoning about the destiny of the universe adept their own premises and follow them out logically and the inevitable conclusion will be a universal reconciliation. Try it and see. All will acknowledge these premises:

God is love		therefore?
God is omnipotent		

God is not love if He will not do all He can for His creatures, neither is He omnipotent if He is unable to save them. Hence the God of theology is magnificent but the god of eschatology is a myth.

Both revelation and reason are arrayed against the false delusion of unending torment for the unbeliever. It degrades the sacrifice of Christ to a mere attempt to remedy an evil which it cannot cure. O, my brethren, why do you limit His love, why do you paralyze His power? Is the Christ Who saved *you* capable of completing His work by saving all like you? Or, if He *can*, why *will* He not? Would *you*, if you could?

Confess that this terrible doctrine cannot but lead you to doubt His perfections. It brings you up to a blank wall, to a pit of dense darkness. But the blessed truth opens up a glorious vista flooded with the love light of God.

This leaves the way open to consider the moral effect of this doctrine as it relates to our conception of God's love. The sinner is dead, and, apart from the power of God in resurrection, quite as good as annihilated. What possible benefit can accrue to the sinner to expend unmeasured power in his resurrection and unstinted force in his judgment, only to return him to oblivion? From the sinner's side it would be unutterably cruel and vindictive.

But, we are told, God's justice demands it. There is an element of truth in this. But if God's justice must be displayed at the expense of His love, the extinction of the unbeliever in the lake of fire, far from forever removing an eyesore from the universe, places a blot upon His character which eternity itself can never erase. If we do not doubt His willingness to save them, then we must acknowledge His inability. If we cannot question His power, then we must limit His love, and then we endanger the very foundation on which all eternal bliss must be established.

Once more we affirm, without the slightest fear of contradiction, that the judgment of the unbeliever is confined to the period between the resurrection and the second death. If this is the end of the unbeliever, if the mighty miracle of resurrection and the awful judgment session have no other object than the infliction of the pains and penalties each deserves, we despair—not for the unbeliever, for his fate is not the paramount consideration—we despair for *the character of God*, Who uses power unstinted to satisfy the stern demands of justice, yet outrages every instinct of His love. No amount of sophistry will ever annihilate the stubborn fact that they are *His* creatures, and their final fate is just as much His work as was their creation at the first. As creatures, they had no more command of their destiny than they had of their birth or their environment. All was of God. He held the reins. And let us remember that salvation depends, not on character, or attainments such as might be within the reach of mortals, but upon the knowledge of the One Whose very name will be unknown to the great majority who stand before

Him in that awful day. They are not saved *because God has not saved them*, and for no other reason whatever. If their existence has been futile and a blot upon the universe, the final disgrace falls upon God, Who was the only One Who could have averted the disaster.

The resurrection and judgment of unbelievers leaves no reasonable alternative but their ultimate salvation. Without such an outcome, so great and stupendous an exhibition of hatred and futile rage would throw a pall of settled gloom across God's glory for all eternity. Only the wickedest of men are unsatisfied when their enemies are dead, and would bring them back from the grave to endure still further torment.

But we do not need to rest on reason. At best, it is usually the refuge of unbelief. God has spoken, and real reason rests on His revelation. He is the Saviour of all mankind, especially of those who believe. God give us grace to glory in such a God!

In that marvelous revelation concerning the vivification of all found in the fifteenth of first Corinthians there is a notable omission which has a vital bearing on the resurrection of judgment which We are considering. The words "And if anyone was not found written in the scroll of life," has led a few kind hearts into the supposition that some, perhaps many, are not cast into the lake of fire, but live on with the saints during the eon of the eons, which follows. This would transform this resurrection into a partial vivification.

But the great outline of vivification sketched by the apostle includes only three classes at three distinct epochs. After the Firstfruit, Christ, all who are His are made alive at His presence. The last class is vivified at the consummation. There is no class in between. The resurrection of judgment, before the great white throne, is ignored altogether. No one will be *vivified*, in the full sense of that word, when the unbelievers are raised from the dead. All die again. All return into the domains of death during the eons.

The death which comes at the close of this life is the effect of natural law, not of a divine decision. Sin, in Scripture, is represented as a great Slaveholder. He does not pay *wages*, as our version puts it (Rom.6:23). Who ever heard of a *slave getting wages*? He deals out rations. Sin's ration is death. The sting of death is sin. Sin,

fully consummated, is bringing forth death (James 1:15). Only in the case of criminals, is death the result of a judicial decree, yet, even then, it is at the hand of man and not of God.

The fact that the believer and the unbeliever share alike in the first death ought to be sufficient proof that it is not, in any sense, a judicial infliction on God's part. The saint is assured of immunity from all judgment yet he does not escape the first death. Death as the *penalty* of sin cannot be inflicted until after judgment has held its session. If God's decree calls for such a penalty for sin, this is not satisfied with the death common to all in Adam. Hence judgment is followed by the second death.

In the opening chapters of Romans Paul lays the foundation on which God's just judgment is based. He closes his indictment of mankind with these words: "...God's just statute, that such as are committing them are *deserving of death*..." As the first death cannot be the effect of any judicial procedure on God's part, it is evident that the death penalty awaits all who come into the judgment. Whatever may be the variety and degree of the tribulation and anguish meted out to each, one common end awaits them all—the second death.

This divine decree is in fullest harmony with the great truth that eonian life is only for the believer. Only those chosen by His sovereign grace have the privilege of living with Christ for the eons of the eons and of being associated With Him in His work of reconciling the universe to God. A result of the unbeliever's judgment consists in exclusion from these blessings and dignities. "He who is believing into the Son has eonian life, yet he who is stubborn as to the Son shall not be seeing life, but the indignation of God is remaining on him."

These words are awful enough in their bearing on the unbeliever without changing the inspired original, as most or all of our versions do, to the indefinite, thus denying the great truth that all shall be made alive at the consummation. "Shall not see life" denotes a fact and is timeless. "Shall not be seeing life" is definite, and confines the sense to the future eons which are in question. The unbeliever can have no share in the life of the eons.

God is light and God is love. The unbeliever learns the first at the great white throne. He

realizes the second at the consummation. Just as, in the epistle to the Romans, we are first acquainted with the just God, Who justifies us, and later with God the reconciler, Who invites us into His heart, so the salvation of the unbeliever divides itself into the judgment session, where he is judged in fact as we are by faith, and the ultimate vivification, when death is abolished, and God becomes All in all.

But, some will ask, if they were condemned to death, how can they be raised again? What right have they to the grace and life that will be their portion? We answer, *none*. They will have no more claim on the ecstatic bliss of that unending day than or you, or any believer! What right have we? None at all. But *in Christ* we have a perfect title to every favor. So it will be with the unbeliever. It is not written that "As in Adam all are dying, so all shall be made alive," but "so, *in Christ*, all shall be made alive." Adam's death involves all, irrespective of their deserts. Christ's life extends to all, apart from their personal merits

And here is where the unbeliever learns to love God. The judgment has exposed his own unworthiness. The grace of vivification will illumine his heart with the love of God in Christ. Then shall be fulfilled God's universal goal:

*"...to Me will bow every knee,
And every tongue will be acclaiming God."*

This is the method He will use to bend the stubborn knees. He will not use physical force but moral suasion. Neither will He wring out a *confession of sin* from every tongue. The word here used means more than that. When our Lord said "I *thank* Thee, O Father" (Matt.11:25; Luke 10:21) He used this term. It includes a complete acknowledgment and acquiescence in the divine will.

This is God's way with the unbeliever. We are fond of recalling God's dealings with us to bring us to Himself. Some have been driven to Him through the loss of earthly possessions. Others found Him in the midst of trials. His written word alone has led myriads to see themselves and the loveliness of His Christ. But no believer today has passed through any experience which even approaches the stupendous realities which await the unbeliever. With the very earth swept from beneath his feet, with his sins staring at him and open to every eye, with the awful Presence on the

great white throne, all superimposed on a personal experience of the greatest of all miracles—what more could possibly be done to turn him back to God? Who ever doubts that Lazarus or the widow of Nain's son was saved? Others believed who merely heard and saw, but had none of the personal knowledge, they possessed. So, who can doubt that such an awful scene and such a stupendous experience will turn the hearts of all unbelievers toward the God of their salvation?

Some have sneeringly asked whether punishment will reform the sinner, and have pointed out the hardening effects of judgment. But this rests on the vulgar and unscriptural notion of punishment apart from resurrection. Others make judgment the end and an end in itself, little heeding the effect of this on God. But this judgment scene is not the end nor an end. When we see a sinner, convicted of sin, burdened with fear, we rejoice to behold the work of God, knowing that it is but the beginning of His operations. So the great white throne judgment is but the preliminary to God's greater work at the consummation.

The crowning and conclusive exhibition of God's power and love toward the unbeliever awaits the consummation. The eons are past. All sin is banished. Evil is no more. The Son of God has nearly completed His mediatorial work. All the living are in perfect accord with God. Nothing remains but the conquest of death and the reconciliation of its denizens. It is the only enemy left in all God's universe. Then, and not till then, will the vast concourse of mankind emerge from the domain of death never to enter it again. Then that voice for which we wait, that will call His own from the graves, and that once before had called them back to life, will speak with power, and death will be despoiled, the last enemy laid low. Then shall all awake to live in the light and love of Him Who will have become in truth the Saviour of all mankind.

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