

THE GOSPEL IN EZEKIEL

Illustrated in a Series of Discourses

by

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CHAPTER THIRTEEN

MAN JUSTIFIED THROUGH THE RIGHTEOUSNESS OF JESUS CHRIST

Then will I sprinkle clean water upon you, and ye shall be clean (Ezekiel 36:25).

The dinner was to prepare, the rooms were to be made ready, there were servants to direct, and guests to accommodate; there was the character of the house to maintain, and its whole machinery to keep oiled and in good working order—with these things Martha was busy. Not only busy, but, like many others, she was so intently engrossed with household cares, that, in a tone which had the sound of a gentle rebuke, our Lord said, “**Martha, thou art cumbered about many things; but one thing is needful.**” That observation applies as much to men as to women; more so, perhaps.

Furnished with clasping tendrils, and strong by the attachments which they form, the woodbine and ivy wind their arms round the tree, embrace it closely, and rising to its lofty boughs, and clinging to its rough bark, they give ornament and beauty—a vesture of soft green spangled with flowers—in return for the support they get.

Like these, woman, with her strong and warm affections—gentle, loving, confiding—is prone to attach herself to a nature stronger than her own, and to lean on it for support. And, whether it be that she is from this peculiar disposition less opposed to the faith which looks to another’s righteousness and leans on another’s strength, certain it is there is more religion among women than men.

If, on account of the elevation and high position which it has given her in Christian countries, woman owes most to religion, religion in turn owes most to her. You tell me that “**by woman came sin?**” I know it; but I set off this against the fact—by woman came the Saviour. Jesus was a virgin’s child. And, more than that, in those days when he walked this world, women were his trustiest, kindest friends.

Whoever betrayed, denied, deserted him—women never did. The nearest to his cross, and earliest at his sepulcher, they were faithful when others were faithless, and gave early promise of that devotedness to his cause, which their sex in all ages have honorably and preeminently displayed.

Go through our Christian households, and I will venture to say, that you will find more women than men, more wives than husbands, more sisters than brothers, who are living under the influence of religion. Many more children are to be found, who refer their earliest, deepest religious impressions to a mother's than to a father's piety.

But, be we men or women, "**One thing is needful.**" Yet how sad and strange it is, that this one needful thing, which, for that very reason, should be the most, is often the least sought after, which, for that very reason, should be the first, is often the last sought after; and sometimes, alas, never sought after at all.

It is the brightest feature in man's sad and sinful lot, that while amid the business and anxieties, and toils, and cares, and keen competitions of a world, which has so many blanks and so few prizes, there is, after all, but one thing needful. And especially blessed is it, that the only thing we really need is the only thing we are sure to get. Sought in sincerity, it was never sought in vain. Other gifts may be asked and refused; but it is true of this as of nothing else whatever, "**Ask and ye shall receive, seek and ye shall find, knock and it shall be opened to you.**"

Need I say that the one thing needful is salvation—that it must be that—can be nothing else than that to a man, the conscious possessor of a never-dying soul, who is burdened with a heavy load of guilt, and who, in an eternity which he is nearing every hour, descries a throne of rigid and righteous judgment, Oh, what has this wide world to offer comparable to salvation? What profit would it be to me, though I gained it all, if I lost my soul?

All those other things which we seek, all that we toil and travail for, all for which we daily fret and vex ourselves, nay, all for which some are fools enough to barter away their souls, compared to this are but mere spangles and tinsel, dross and dust—bubbles colored with rainbow hues that break at a touch, and, bursting, smart the eyes of the child who blows them. When a man lies stretched out on a bed of death, ah! he sees objects then in their due proportions.

From that point of view the highest objects of earthly ambition, the loftiest pinnacles of wealth, of power, of fame, dwindle down into littleness, and look as far beneath salvation as the loftiest Alp beneath the sun. Yet, strange to tell—incredible, did we not know it to be true—many, as if there was neither God in heaven, nor fire in hell, nor soul in man, feel no anxiety about the matter. They live and die like the beasts that perish. Is it otherwise with you? Anxious about what alone is worth your anxiety, are you pressing on the preacher the jailer's question, "**Sir, what must I do to be saved?**"

That great question—the greatest of all questions—is one which admits of a very short and intelligible answer. Capable of being much expanded, it can yet be brought within a very narrow compass.

The river, which there flows between distant banks, and yonder expands itself out into a lake, reflecting on its mirror face the bright heavens above and the dark hills around, is here brought—where its foaming waters flash past, loud as thunder, and quick as lightning, or creep sullenly along at the bottom of the deep, dark gorge—within narrow bounds; bounds so narrow, that with nerve enough, by one brave leap from rock to rock, I could clear its breadth.

Even so all the wide expanse of doctrines to be believed, and duties to be done, which might be expatiated over in reply to the question, “**What must I do to be saved?**” is contracted, compressed, comprehended in the Apostle’s brief speech, “**Believe in the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved.**”

Bring out from the dust of six thousand years the old covenant of Eden, and on that soiled and torn banner, you read the fading motto, “Do and live,” but what read we on the folds of this banner, which, defiant of hell and the world, waves above Calvary, and under which believers march to crowns and victory? The eye of a sinner’s hope kindles at the sight of another and better motto; for there, inscribed in the blood of Jesus, like red letters on a snow-white ground, we read, “Believe and live.”

Salvation is the one thing needful for man, and faith is the one thing needful for salvation.

Like other things, however, that are one in the aggregate, this one thing consists of many parts.

- My hand, for instance, is one, yet it has five fingers.
- This body is one, yet it has many organs.
- The Nile or Ganges is one river, but one which is fed by many tributaries, and disgorges its waters into the sea by the channels of many mouths.
- A tree is one vegetable form, but one that has many roots below, and many branches above.

And even so, to leave the other figures, and select the last, is that “**Tree of Life,**” which has Christ for its root and for its fruit holiness and heaven, I have seen a tree which, after rising in a single stem, divided itself into two great boughs, which, stretched out to the air and light, and dews and heat, were afterwards divided and subdivided into innumerable branches.

So with redemption. The subject presents itself to our eye under two grand divisions.

- First, the remission or pardon of sin;
- Second, the renovation of the soul.

While salvation is the one thing needful, the two things needful to it are sin pardoned and the soul renewed.

For, suppose that your sins were pardoned, but that your heart remained in its corruption, the door of heaven remains shut; because, “**Without holiness no man shall see the Lord.**” Then, again, although your hearts were renewed, unless your sins also were pardoned, that door stands shut; because of the sentence, “**The soul that sinneth shall die.**” The door of heaven, like that of some treasure chest or gate of citadel, guarded with jealous care, is thus barred by two strong bolts; “**There shall in no wise enter into it any thing that defileth, neither whatsoever worketh abomination, or maketh a lie; but they which are written in the Lamb’s book of life.**” Both bolts must be drawn before we can enter; we must be pardoned as well as renewed, and renewed as well as pardoned.

Leaving the renovation of the soul to be afterwards considered, I resume my observations on the pardon of sin, and justification of the sinner, as expressed and promised in these words: “**I will sprinkle clean water upon you, and ye shall be clean.**”

Having endeavored to prove, first, that God’s people are not chosen because they are holy, but that they may become so; and, secondly, that man does not justify himself, but is justified by God, I now remark—

III. That we are not justified or cleansed from the guilt of sin through the administration or efficacy of any outward ordinance.

“**I will sprinkle clean water upon you, and you shall be clean.**”

Now, since the cleansing is accomplished through the application of water—and water sprinkled—surely, *some may say, this refers to baptism.*

The element used in that ordinance is water, and the method of some using it is by sprinkling. And seeing that God says, “**I will sprinkle clean water upon you, and ye shall be clean;**” and by that, certainly, means that he will cleanse his people from sin; and seeing that he thus appears to connect the forgiveness of sin with the sprinkling of water, is there not something—if not much—in these words, favorable to the views of those who maintain that baptism, when duly administered, removes original sin, and confers on its recipients the grace of regeneration?

No; nothing of the kind, as we shall prove.

Three hundred years ago, our church, with an open Bible on her banner, and this motto, “**Search the Scriptures,**” on its scroll, marched out from the gates of Rome. Did they come clean out of Babylon? Experience shows, that it is much easier to leave our mother country than drop our mother tongue. Across the seas which they sail, and to the lands which they settle on, the emigrants carry their prejudices, passions and even superstitions. They people the glens and valleys of the new world with the fairies that dance on the green, and the specters that walk by night among the haunted ruins of the old country.

So I fear that, on departing from the Church of Rome, we carried into Protestantism—as was not unnatural—some of her ancient superstitions; just as our fathers carried into their practice some of her intolerant principles. We cannot approve of their intolerance, yet it admits of an apology. They had been suckled by the wolf, and it was no great wonder that, with the milk of the wolf, they should have imbibed something of her nature.

It is not the privilege and happiness of man to pass through his changes like the Saviour. When Jesus rose, a conqueror from the grave, he left the dead clothes behind him; but look at this apparition, from which sisters and friends shrink back. Some scream with terror, and all afraid to touch him, they leave him to stand in the dark mouth of his grave, till the word is given, “**Loose him, and let him go.**” Lazarus comes forth alive, but he is bound hand and foot; he leaves the sepulcher, but with his graveclothes on.

And prone as we of Scotland are, to boast that our fathers, with Knox at their head, came forth from Borne with less of her old superstitions about them than most other churches, to what else than some lingering remains of popery can we ascribe the extreme anxiety which some parents show to have baptism administered to a dying child? Does not this look very like a rag of the old faith? It smells of the sepulcher.

Summoned once, and in haste, to the dying bed of a mother, who was anxious to see her child baptized ere she herself expired, I found that with her I could sympathize. The last act of sinning life—the last effort of her throbbing heart—was to give her infant to God. With her dying arms she laid the new-born lamb on the Shepherd's bosom, and as the babe slept, unconscious of the affecting scene, it received a double baptism. Ere the water was sprinkled by our hands on its face, the mother had breathed her last. She left the babe motherless, to be baptized by the water that fell from our agitated hand and by the big bitter tears that rolled down on its sweet face from a father's cheeks.

There was sorrow—bitter sorrow there; beside that dead mother deep solemnity, but no superstition; and if there was a mother's weakness in the wish, it was one which we felt it no sin to sympathize with and comply with. But sympathize with those we cannot, who, when death has stamped his seal on an infant's brow, hurry off for a minister that he may baptize the dying.

I cannot believe that there is any virtue in water to save its soul, I recoil with horror from the thought that a God of mercy would suspend its salvation on a mere outward ordinance. Is there no reason to suspect that at the root of this anxious and unnecessary haste, there lies some lurking feeling that baptism—if not essential—is at least serviceable to salvation, and has some connection, near or remote, with regeneration and the remission of sins?

Now, with all respect and due regard to the feelings of others, so far as they are conscientious, we cannot look upon such notions as else than the rags of an old superstition. We acknowledge no authority in these matters but the word of God. And there I can see no foundation for the idea, that baptism and salvation—baptism and regeneration—are necessarily linked together, or are in any respect inseparably connected.

Were it so, baptism were the highest, holiest ordinance in the universe of God. Had it been so, it is not reasonable to suppose that our Lord would have left a rite of such transcendent importance to be administered in every case by inferiors—by the hands of his servants. Were baptism thus identified with regeneration and the “**new creature**,” would the Apostle Paul, who gloried in preaching, have spoken of it as an inferior ordinance? He declared with manifest satisfaction that he had not been sent to baptize but to preach; and, leaving the administration of the rite to his inferiors, he even thanked God that he had baptized none of them. Then, do the cases, for instance, of Simon Magus and the Ethiopian give any sanction to this theory of baptismal power? Assuredly not.

Look at Simon Magus! He was baptized by apostolic hands; and in his case the ordinance, beyond all doubt and controversy, was duly administered. Does his conduct warrant us to believe that his sins were pardoned, or his heart renewed? By no means.

On the contrary, this man is declared, on apostolic authority—by the voice of Simon Peter himself, to be still, although baptized by that Apostle's hands, "**In the gall of bitterness and the bond of iniquity!**" Shocked to find a baptized man, offering with money to buy the Holy Ghost, Peter, bursting with indignation, said, "**Thy money perish with thee, because thou hast thought that the gift of God may be purchased with money. Thou hast neither part nor lot in this matter; for thy heart is not right in the sight of God. Repent, therefore, of this thy wickedness, and pray God if perhaps the thought of thine heart may be forgive thee, for I perceive that thou art in the gall of bitter ness and the bond of iniquity.**"

Surely it is much more reasonable to believe that Simon Magus, although baptized, was not regenerated, than to believe that an inspired Apostle would speak in such terms of a regenerate man. How could he be regenerate when we hear heaven itself pronouncing him by the lips of its messenger to be still "**in the gall of bitterness and bond of iniquity.**"

Look next at the Ethiopian eunuch. Was he not *baptized* and *regenerate*? True; but observe that that order should be reversed; he was *regenerate* and *baptized*—regenerate before he was baptized—not born again in his baptism, but born again before it.

Why did Philip baptize him? He granted him baptism, because he believed with all his heart. But can a man believe till he is renewed?

In other words, can a dead man move, or cry, or wish, or walk? This stifled shriek, this awful sound within the coffin, these struggles to force up the lid and throw off the cerements, prove that the dead has come to life—that he has passed "**from death to life.**"

And did not the Ethiopian give proof of spiritual life previous to his baptism? Ere he had left the chariot, ere his feet had been dipped in the stream, ere one drop of its water had fallen on his bended head, the Spirit of the living God had fallen on his heart. Hear the narrative:—"**And, as they went on their way, they came unto a certain water; and the eunuch said, See, here is water; what doth hinder me to be baptized? and Philip said. If thou believest with all thine heart, thou mayest.**" And he answered and said, "**I believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God.**"

These cases are not reconcilable with the notion that baptism has any necessary connection with the forgiveness of sin, and the renewing of the Holy Ghost. They prove that baptism and regeneration do not, and cannot stand to each other in the relation of cause and effect. Otherwise, the case of the Ethiopian were an illustration of what the world never saw—would be an example of what were a contradiction and an absurdity—of something far more wonderful than a miracle—of such an impossibility as a son older than his father, or as a thunder-peal that preceded the flash in which it originated—of, in short, an effect in the order of time preceding its own cause.

Besides, does not the sad and melancholy history, alas! of thousands prove that the outward ordinance is often administered without any corresponding administration of renewing grace? The altar and the offering are there, but no fire descends from heaven on the sacrifice.

Grant that in our case, and in that of any other such church as ours, the cause of the failure is to be found in our lack of apostolic succession; grant that in our case the water, if not actually polluted by unconsecrated bands, is deprived of all its virtue by the channel through which it flows; grant that we have no commission to baptize, and that therefore what we do in such holy offices is null and void; grant the relevancy of all these allegations (each and all of which we deny)—is it not an undeniable and melancholy fact, that the lives of persons in all churches—even of the most transcendental in their claims—demonstrate that many are baptized with water who have never been baptized with the Holy Ghost.

The question, therefore, that we would urge on your most serious consideration, does not concern the sign, but the thing signified. If you have got the living element, I care little, or, rather, nothing, through what church, or by what channel it may flow. Have you got the grace of God? In the words of an apostle, “**Have ye received the Holy Ghost?**”

IV. We are justified, or cleansed from the guilt of sin by the blood of Christ. “Without the shedding of blood there is no remission;” and none we may add, without its application.

Where do we find this doctrine in the text? By what process of spiritual chemistry can this truth be extracted from it? There is water, and clean water, and sprinkling of water, it may be said, but no word of blood; there is neither sign nor spot of blood upon the page. True; so it looks at first sight; but without the hand of Moses we shall see this water turned into blood. It may appear difficult, without Moses’ rod, to repeat the miracle of Egypt; yet this is plain, that here, as elsewhere, water is but the sign of spiritual blessings. And a most expressive symbol we shall find it, if we but think of the important part that this element plays in the economy of nature.

It covers more than two thirds of the entire globe; it is universally diffused through the ambient air; by the clouds it forms it tempers the force of a fiery sun; it drapes the heavens with curtains of the most gorgeous colors, dyed in the rosy tints of morn, or in evening’s golden hues; and it fills the floating reservoirs of the sky, to descend, when burst by lightning, or breaking by their own weight, in refreshing showers on the thirsty ground.

The circulation of water is to the world what that of blood is to the body, and that of grace to the soul. It is its life. Withdraw it, and all that lives would die; forests, fields, beasts, man himself would die. This world would become one vast grave. Water constitutes as much the life as the beauty of the landscape.

It is true both in a spiritual and in an earthly sense, that the world lives because heaven weeps over it. It was Christ’s choicest figure of himself, when, turning on his own person the eyes of thousands, as on a perennial fountain—one never sealed by winter’s frost, nor dried by summer suns—free, fall, patent to all, he stood up on the last and great day of the feast, and cried, “**If any man thirst, let him come unto me and drink.**”

And in case any of you should be thirsting for eternal life, let me say, that thus Jesus now addresses us. Would God, he were as precious to us as water in the sight of him who is dying of thirst! With blood-shot eyes, his throat black as coal, his tongue cleaving to the roof of his mouth, the desert reeling round him, Oh! what will the traveler not give for one cup of water?

Fill it with water, he will give it back to you filled, twice, ten times over with gold. Would to God that our thirst for Jesus Christ were as ardent; that in like manner He were all our salvation, and all our desire.

The property of water, however, to which reference is made here, is a different one from any of these. It is not the property by which it sustains or revives life, yet it is one for which this element is as well known, and as universally used. All the world wash with water, as well as drink water; and the reference here is to that solvent power, by virtue of which water dissolves impurities—turning white what is black, and cleansing whatever is foul. It stands here, therefore, the figure of that which cleanses.

The object to be cleansed is the soul; the defilement to be cleansed away is sin; and we now, therefore, address ourselves to the all-important question—*Of what is this water the figure?*

The key to the question lies in the epithet clean water. Let us analyze this water. It is not water in the state in which it descends from the skies, or flows in rivers, or may be drawn from a common well; for, observe, it is not said, then will I sprinkle water, but “**clean water on you, and ye shall be clean.**” The water is such as the Jews understood by clean water—not free from impurity, and in itself clean, but water that maketh clean—in the words of the ceremonial law, “**water of purifying.**”

This was prepared according to a divinely appointed ritual. Look how it was prepared, and you shall see it reddening and changing into blood.

Gathering the lowing herds from their different pastures, they sought up and down among them, till a red heifer was found—red from horn to hoof, and mottled by no other color—one all red, and on whose free neck yoke had never been.

Separated from the herd, she is led by priestly procession, accompanied by the people outside the camp; and there, struck by a mortal blow, she falls under the hands of the priest. As the blood gushes to the knife, he catches it in his hand, and seven times casts it in a bloody shower towards the tabernacle. So soon as the victim is dead, it is heaved on the burning pile, and, while the smoke of the sacrifice floats away to heaven, horn and hoof, skin, flesh, and bone, are all reduced to ashes.

These ashes, carefully collected, are mixed with pure water in a pure vessel—and that water is the clean water of my text.

See now how plainly—when understood aright—this expression refers to a vicarious sacrifice, and the merits of an atoning death. What was that heifer?

- Spotless and separated from the herd, *she is a type of him* who was without spot or blemish, holy, harmless, undefiled, and separate from sinners.
- With neck on which yoke had never lain, *she is a type of Him*, who said, “**The prince of this world cometh, and he hath nothing in me.**”

- Red is color, *she is a type of Him*, whose feet were dipped in the blood of his enemies, and, as seen coming from Bozrah, was “**red in his apparel, traveling in the greatness of his might.**”
- What is this public procession, which conducts the heifer without the camp, *but a figure* of the march to Calvary?
- What is her bloody death, *but a type* of that which Jesus suffered amid the agonies of the cross?
- What are these fires that bum so fiercely, and consume the victim, *but a faint image of the wrath of God*, under which his soul was “**withered like grass?**”
- What was the water mingled with this heifer’s ashes, *but a type of the righteousness*, which, imputed and applied to sinners, makes sinners just?

For, as the Jew on whom that water was sprinkled became ceremonially clean, so guilt of original and actual sin—all guilt is removed from him (much the happier man) whom God sprinkles with the blood of Calvary—and to whom sovereign mercy imputes the merits of a Saviour’s sacrifice.

Let me further illustrate this.

There was another method of preparing this clean water, which, although in some respects different, was the same in this, that it also implied the death of a vicarious sacrifice.

The leper, a mass of sores from crown to heel, a banished man—banished from city, synagogue, the dwellings of men, and the house of God—the victim of a loathsome disease, which made his presence an offense to others, and his life a burden to himself, was a hideous, doleful, revolting emblem of a sinner.

Now let us see how—when God was pleased to cure him—his ceremonial uncleanness was removed. On the happy occasion, which was to restore him to the arms of his wife, the sweet society of his children, the brotherhood of men, and the presence of God—two living birds were taken. They must be doves or turtles—the gentlest of all God’s creatures, and therefore the more fitting emblems of his Son.

They are held over a vessel, already filled with running water. One is slain. The blood, as it flows over the snowy plumage of the fluttering bird, falls into the water; and that, dyed by the crimson stream, now becomes “water of purifying”—the clean water of the text. With this sacred lavation the priest sprinkles the man who had been a leper, and now ceremonially clean, that blessed moment he is folded in the embrace of his wife; kisses his children, and walks with them, a happy man, at the head of a happy family, into the house of God.

But there were two birds. We have seen one disposed of. What has become of the other? With beating heart it is still a prisoner in the hands of the priest; and the close of this ceremonial offers us a beautiful and most vivid picture of the removal of guilt. The living bird, type of a sinner to whom a Saviour’s merits are to be imputed, is dipped head, feet, wings, and feathers—plunged overhead—into the blood-dyed water. It is “**baptized unto death.**” And, brought out before the people—all crimsoned with blood—the priest opens his consecrated hand, and restores the captive to liberty.

Image of a pardoned one on his path to glory, it spreads out its wings, and, beating the air with rapid and rejoicing strokes, flies away to its forest or rocky home.

You will now understand the nature of this clean water; and cannot fail, I think, to see, that although clothed in a Jewish dress, justification by faith in the righteousness of Jesus—that paramount article of our creed which Luther called the test of a falling or standing church—is the doctrine of my text.

Thus understood, my text sheds, we think, a valuable light on one of the most prominent, and best known and most important passages in the word of God.

When Nicodemus, not yet prepared to confess Christ before the world, muffled himself up in his cloak, and, stealing forth under the cloud of night, sought an interview with our Lord, Jesus said to him—“**Except a man be born again, he cannot see the Kingdom of God,**” adding, by way of explanation, the no less memorable words—“**Except a man be born of water and of the Spirit he cannot see the Kingdom of God.**” Now, as commonly understood, these words refer only to the renewing of the Holy Ghost. It is generally thought that the water there is but an emblem of the Spirit, and that our Lord just meant to say—“Except a man’s soul is purified by the Spirit’s regenerating influence, as his body is by water, he cannot be an heir of grace and an heir of heaven.”

We venture to think, that on that occasion, and in these words, our Lord preached the Gospel more fully. Turn the light of my text upon them, read them in connection with it, understand by the water of Christ’s address the water of my text, and his language to Nicodemus expands into a full Gospel.

If the water in his address meant only the Holy Spirit, he told a truth, but not the whole truth. Are not more than regenerating influences needed, that a man may enter the kingdom of heaven? For that end, is not the blood of the Saviour as necessary as the renewing of the Holy Ghost? But let our Lord, in speaking to Nicodemus—who as a Jew would at once catch the allusion—have an eye to the clean water of the ceremonial law; let the water there refer, like the water here, to an atoning sacrifice, and the Gospel in that celebrated passage shines forth in its effulgent radiance.

Our Lord tells him what I preach, and pray you to ponder on, that except you are washed in his blood, as well as renewed by his Spirit, you cannot see the Kingdom of God.

The doctrine of my text, and, indeed, of all Scripture is, that nothing saves but blood.

In that, as in other senses, “**the life is in the blood.**” There may be the sprinkling of water, but without the shedding and sprinkling of blood, there is no remission—no remission, though the water fall from the holiest hand, and be itself the purest that ever dripped from mossy well or mountain spring. It is what came from the bosom of the upper heavens, of which that visible firmament is but the starry floor, that takes sin away.

- It is not the tears that fall from weeping heavens, but those that fell from Jesus’ eyes;

- It is not the rain that drops from dissolving clouds, but the blood that dropped from a wounded Saviour;
- It is not what falls when lightnings flash, and thunders roll along shaking skies, but what fell when the sword of justice was flashed in his dying eye, and the law pealed its loudest thunders on his bleeding head—
- It is that which brings peace and pardon to the guilty soul, and fills to the brim this crimson fountain, which is opened for all uncleanness.

“**I**,” not my ordinances, not baptism, nor the supper, nor preaching, nor prayer, not these, but “**I**,” says Jesus, “**am the way**.” Not a way, *but the way*. There is but one way. Let me warn you, that although there is but one way of getting to heaven, there are two ways of missing it; and what—at first seems strange—these two ways go off in opposite directions; the one to this side and the other to that.

Yet, as one man traveling due westward, and another due eastward, at the same rate of so many miles a day, would meet again face to face somewhere on the opposite side of the globe, beneath our feet, the travelers by the two opposite paths I speak of meet again—meet in perdition.

This doctrine of salvation by the blood and righteousness of Christ will—God blessing and enabling you to believe it—guard you against both errors—on this side against presumption, and on that against despair. Some—and of these the Pharisee is a type—believed that they are not sinners; or, if sinners, that God is not angry with them, and will not punish them.

What an exposure of the delusion is that cross! The Son of God dies there. Unless he dies, your sin is not forgiven, Others—and of these Iscariot is the type—turning away from God, believe that he is so angry with them that he will not pardon. They look on God as a stem, austere, vindictive and implacable Divinity; in whom the hatred of sin, like a roaring whirlpool, has swallowed up all other feelings—in whom the love, kindness, and pity of the Father is lost in the sternness of the Judge.

And so—nor any wonder when such is their belief—they shun God, they hate God, they try to shut him out from their thoughts and wish—how vain the wish!—that there were no God at all. But where, let me ask, do we find this implacable God? If I ascend into heaven, he is not there; there God sits enthroned, the father of a happy family—like an effulgent sun, pouring gladness and glory upon all. I return to this earth—go up and down the world—seek him, but he is not here; I cannot find a trace or footprint of him here.

I see God’s sun shining without distinction on the evil and the good, and his rain falling with the same affluent abundance on the fields of the just and the unjust. Fields, forests, mountains, smiling valleys, and sunny seas, are not more full of creatures than of happiness; and from the deep bass of ocean to the ringing carol of the lark, nature forms one choir, and chants her hymns to God.

I open the Bible, but he is not here—Gift of our heavenly Father, dying legacy of an incarnate Son, revelation of a kind and winning Spirit’s love shines on thy every page, and in thy very name thy loving mercy is proclaimed—Gospel, glad tidings, good tidings, of good.

Of this God, this appalling specter, whom Despair eyes with a dark and horrid scowl, Heaven says, he is not in me; Earth says, he is not in me; the Bible says, he is not in me.

Where is he, then? With head averted, hair standing on end, and stony horror in her looks. Despair points to the pit, saying—look there! What have you to say to that?

In the first place, I have certainly not to say that that hell is but the dream which haunts a guilty conscience—nor yet to deny that there is a hell. No: nor, further, to conceal it although I could. It were no kindness to spread a covering over the pit; that is the cunning hunter's business; and the business of him who hunts the world for souls. It is an awful thought, that pit; it is an awful reality, that pit; it is an awful abode, that pit; and this is an awful declaration, "**The wicked shall be cast into hell, and all the nations that fear not God.**"

But over against these stern declarations, and between the pit and you, a high red cross is standing.

Mercy descends from heaven, lights upon its summit, and preaches hope to despair, pardon to guilt, salvation to the lost. Free as the winds that fan her cheek, free as the sunbeams that shine on her golden tresses, she invites all to come, opens her arms to embrace the world, and in a voice that rings like a silver trumpet, cries, "O, Earth, Earth, Earth, hear the word of the Lord."

A beautiful vision! Her eye, so pitiful, swims in tears as she looks on poor sinners, and, not willing that any should perish, she bids you read on that cross, where it is written, not in letters of gold, but blood, this greatest oath—these blessed words:—"As I live, saith the Lord I have no pleasure in the death of the wicked."

"As I live, says God, I have no pleasure in the death of the wicked. By my cross and agony, by this thorny crown and bloody tree, as I die, says Jesus, I have no pleasure in the death of the wicked!"

Holy Spirit! Dove of heaven! hovering over us, staying, lingering, refusing to be driven away, thou sayest, as I now plead, entreat, implore, "**I have no pleasure in the death of the wicked.**"

~ end of chapter 13 ~

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