

THE GOSPEL IN EZEKIEL

Illustrated in a Series of Discourses

by

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CHAPTER SIX

GOD'S MOTIVE IN SALVATION

I do . . . for mine holy name's sake (Ezekiel 36:22).

There is a land lying beneath a burning sky, where the fields are seldom screened by a cloud, and almost never refreshed by a shower; and yet Egypt— for it is of it I speak— is as remarkable for the fertile character of its soil as for the hoar antiquity of its history. At least, it was so in days of old, when hungry nations were fed by its harvests, and its fields were the granaries of ancient Rome. Powers so prolific Egypt owed to the Nile— that river whose associations carry us upward to the beginning of all human history— upon whose banks, in the sepulchers of forgotten kings, stand the proudest monuments of human vanity— a river, the very name of which recalls some of the grandest scenes that have been acted on the stage of time.

The Nile is Egypt; in the course of long ages it has deposited her soil, and by an annual overflow it maintains her fertility. The limits of that flood are the limits of life and verdure; and without her Nile—that great artery of vegetable life—she would be another Sahara— a vast expanse of burning and barren sands. Humbled as she now is, let this gift of heaven be improved, as of old, by the skill and industry of her inhabitants, and, vivified by a free and Christian government, Egypt would rise from the sepulchers of her kings, and take a place once more in the van of nations.

The Truth shall prove her resurrection. The Gospel shall restore her to life and prosperity; and the day is coming when that land—rich now only in memories of the past, famous now only for her temples and gods, her pyramids and dusty tombs, for her throne of the Pharaohs, for her sacred stream, for the wonders God wrought of old in the field of Zoan, and, most dear above all to Christian hearts, for the asylum she opened to an infant Saviour— shall fulfill a noble destiny. Her day approaches. These prophecies regarding her wait their accomplishment—

“The Lord shall be known in Egypt;” and, **“Blessed be Egypt, my people.”**

From the earliest ages the source of this famous river was regarded with intensest interest. Whence it sprung, and how its annual flood was swelled, were the subjects of eager but ungratified curiosity.

One traveler after another had attempted to reach its cradle, and had failed or fallen in the attempt; and when—forcing his way upwards through many difficulties, and traveling along its banks, from where, by many mouths, it disgorged its waters into the sea, till its ample volume had shrunk into the narrowness of a mountain stream—our hardy countryman at length stood beside the long sought for fountain, he won for himself, by the achievement, an immortal reputation. I can fancy the pride with which, first of travelers, he looked on that mysterious fountain. How sweet its waters tasted! How he enjoyed his triumph, as he sat down by the cradle of a river, which had fed the millions of successive generations, and in days long gone by had saved in famine the race which gave a Redeemer to the world.

Now, what this river, which turns barren sands into the richest soil, is to Egypt, the Gospel of Jesus Christ is to the world. It flows through the earth, the “**river of the waters of life.**” Whether they now bloom in heaven, or are still in the nurseries of earth, every plant of grace owes to the Gospel its existence and renown.

Observe, however, that—although the parent of those harvests which angels shall reap and the heavens receive—no more in the case of the Gospel than of the Nile does the bounty of heaven suspend or supersede human exertions. No; but on earth’s improvement of heaven’s bounty the blessing of both are commonly suspended.

“**The hand of the diligent maketh rich:**” and as it is according to the industry or indolence of the inhabitants, that the Nile flows through barren sands, or waters smiling fields, so is it with the Gospel. It is a blessing only where it is sedulously and prayerfully improved, and when, like the overflowings of the Nile, which are conducted along their channels to irrigate its shores, those living waters, through the use of means, are turned on our hearts and habits. “**Not the hearers of the law are just before God, but the doers of the law shall be justified.**”

Now, if it is interesting to trace a Nile or Amazon to its source, how much more interesting to a Christian to explore the stream of eternal life, and trace it upward till we have reached the fountain. Bruce discovered—or thought he had discovered—the springs of Egypt’s river: he found them away among cloud-capped mountains, at an elevation of many thousand feet above the plains they watered.

Great men have been born in humble circumstances; but all great rivers boast of their lofty descent. It is when the traveler has left smiling valleys far beneath him, and toiling along rugged glens, and, pressing through deep mountain gorges, he at length reaches the chill shores of an icy sea, that he stands at the source of the Alpine river, which, cold as the snows that feed it, and a full grown stream at its birth, rushes out from the caverns of the hollowed glacier.

But with that lofty birthplace it is only a humble image of salvation. How high its source! “**He showed me a pure river of water of life, clear as crystal, preceding out of the throne of God and of the Lamb.**” The stream of mercy flows from the throne of the Eternal; and here we seem to stand by its mysterious fountain: in contemplating the words of the text, we look upon its spring—“**I do this . . . for mine holy name’s sake.**”

In now entering on the question, What moved God to save man? let us—

I. *Attend to the expression, “my name’s sake.”*

This is a most comprehensive term. It indicates much more than what, in common language, is involved in a name. No doubt a name may sometimes convey much meaning.

- “**Adam**,” for instance, means “*clay*,” made of earth, he receives a name that reminds him of his origin.

- “**Isaac**,” again, means “*laughter*,” and in her son’s name God rebuked Sarah for the merriment with which, when listening with a woman’s curiosity behind the door, she heard of her coming child, and of fruit growing on such an old and withered stock as she was.

- “**Moses**,” again, means “*drawn from the water*,” and his name reminded him, who was to deliver others, how he himself had been delivered from death.

And in the name “**Jesus**,” our Lord received a name that revealed his office and anticipated his work—the angel said, “**Thou shalt call his name Jesus, for he shall save his people from their sins.**”

Commonly, however, a man’s name gives no idea of his properties, character, history, works, or life, and is nothing more than an appellation which he receives in infancy, and receives—since the flower is still in the bud—before his fortune can be told, or his character even guessed at. “What’s in a name?” Its chief end is just to prevent confusion, and distinguish one person from another.

The name of God, however, as employed by the sacred writers, has many and most important meanings. In the 20th Psalm, for instance, it embraces all the attributes of the Godhead. “**The name of the God of Jacob defend thee;**” that is—if paraphrased—may his arms be around thee; may his wisdom guide thee; may his power support thee; the bounty of God supply thy wants; the mercy of God forgive thy sins; the shield of heaven be over, and all its blessings on thee.

In the days of miracles, again, the name of Jesus carried with it the idea of his authority, and of the efficacy of his power. Uttered by the lips of faith, that name was a word of resistless might. It healed disease, shed light on darkness, and breathed life into cold death; it mastered devils, controlled the powers of hell, and commanded into immediate obedience the rudest elements of nature. Like Pharaoh’s signet on Joseph’s hand, he who used that name in faith, was for the time gifted with his Master’s power; whatever he loosed on earth was loosed in heaven; and whatever he bound on earth, was bound in heaven.

Standing over a cripple—one impotent from his mother’s womb—Peter looked on his deformity, and said, “**In the name of Jesus of Nazareth, rise up and walk.**”

And, lo! he who had never stood erect till now, bounded from the earth, and, in the joyful play of new-born faculties, walking, leaping, dancing and singing.

He ushered the Apostles into the astonished temple. Powerful, like prayer, or any other means of grace, as was this name when used by faith, yet on the lips of the unbelieving no name more useless; like a residuum from which the spirit had been evaporated, or a body bereft of life, it possessed no virtue or power at all.

There was no charm in the mere name of Jesus, either to pour light on a blind man's eyeball, or restore vigor to a withered limb. See how Sceva's seven sons learn that to their cost! Profaning this holy name, and employing it in their arts of witchcraft, they use it to cast out a devil; and—themselves Satan's servants—they find that **“Beelzebub casts not out devils.”** **“Jesus I know, and Paul I know,”** says the Evil One, **“but who are ye?”** Hell disowns their authority; the Demon defies them; he leaps on them with the fury of a savage beast; and—theirs the fate of the engineer who is hoisted on his own petard—they are driven off, disgraced and wounded, from the field.

Again, in Micah 4:5, where it is said, **“We will walk in the name of the Lord,”** the expression assumes a new meaning, and indicates the laws, statutes, and commandments of God. Again, in the beautiful and blessed promise, **“In all places where I record my name, there will I come unto thee and bless thee,”** the expression bears yet another meaning: it stands for God's ordinances and worship—rearing, as it were, by the hands of faith, a holy temple out of the rudest edifice, and converting into heaven-consecrated churches those rocky fastnesses and lonely moors where our fathers worshiped in the dark days of old.

Contenting ourselves with these illustrations of the various meanings of this expression in Scripture, I now remark, that here the **“name”** of God comprehends everything, which directly or remotely affects the divine honor and glory; whatever touches, to use the words of our catechism, **“His titles, attributes, ordinances, word, or works; or anything whereby God maketh himself known.”**

II. We are to understand that the motive which moved God to save man was regard to his own glory.

“Where is boasting then?” we may ask with the Apostle, and leave him to answer, **“it is excluded,”** If salvation is not of merit, but of mercy—not of earth, but heaven—**“not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God”**—**“Not by might nor by power, but my Spirit, saith the Lord of Hosts,”** it is beyond all doubt **“excluded.”**

- Grace glorifies man, no doubt; but for what purpose? that he may glorify God.
- Grace saves man, but saves him that he may sing, not his own praises, but a Saviour's.
- Grace exalts man, but exalts him, that, like an exhalation, sun-drawn from the ground, and raised to heaven, each of us may form a sparkling drop in the bow, which encircles the head that God crowns with glory, and man once crowned with thorns.

Even our Lord himself, although in a sense the “fellow” of his Father, and reckoning it no robbery to make himself equal with God, kept his eye steadily on that lofty mark. His Father's, not his own glory, was the burden of Jesus' prayers and the end of Jesus' sufferings: born for it in a stable, he bled for it on a cross, and was buried for it in a sepulcher.

When, on the solemn eve of his last and awful sufferings, our champion buckled on his armor for the closing struggle, ere he joined battle with men, with death, and with him that had the power of death, that is, the devil, was not this his prayer— **“Father, glorify thy Son, that thy Son also may glorify thee?”** Dutiful Son! Pattern to all children of filial piety! Thou didst forget thine own sufferings in a mother’s; and was more concerned for thy Father’s honor than thine own.

This doctrine, that God saves men for his own glory, is a grand and very precious truth; yet there is a way of stating it which seems as offensive as it is unscriptural. Concave mirrors magnify the features nearest to them into undue and monstrous size; and in common mirrors, ill cast and of uneven surface, the most beautiful face is distorted into deformity.

And, as if their minds were of such a cast and character, there are some good men who, not exhibiting Bible truth in its proper harmony and proportions, represent Jesus Christ in this matter of salvation as affected by no motive whatever but a regard to his Father’s glory, and even God himself as moved only by respect to his own. Excluding from their view the commiseration and love of God, or reducing these into very shrunk dimensions, they magnify one doctrine at the expense of another, and, indeed, go to sever some of the most sacred and tender ties which bind a believer to his God.

Now, it appears to us that this ill-proportioned theology—the doctrine that the only motive in redemption was a regard to God’s glory—receives no countenance from the Bible. Does not God **“pity us, as a father pitieth his children?”** Taught to address Him by the endearing appellation of Father, Oh what affection, love, and lovingkindness, are expressed in that tender term! And if, on seeing some earthly father, whom a child’s scream has reached and roused, rush up the blazing stairs, or leap into the boiling flood, it were wrong, it were cruel, it were a shame, to suspect him of being destitute of affection—of being moved to this noble act by no other motive than a regard to his own honor—and by no other voice than the calm command of duty—how much more wrong were it to harbor such suspicions of **“our Father who is in heaven.”**

I know that we should approach so high a theme with the greatest reverence, and that it becomes us to speak on such a subject, and, indeed, on anything that touches the secret movements of the Divine mind, with most profound humility. Yet, reasoning from the form of the shadow to the object which projects it—from man to God—I would venture to say, that it is with Him as with us, when we are moved to a single action by the united influence of various motives.

To borrow an example from the place I fill:—The minister, worthy of his office, appears before his assembled people to preach; and, in doing so, he is moved by a variety of motives. Love to God, love to Jesus, love to sinners, love to saints, a regard to God’s glory, and regard to man’s good; these, like the air, water, light, heat, electricity, gravitation, which act together in the process of vegetation, may all combine to form one sermon. They are present, and act not as conflicting but concurring motives in the preacher’s breast. This difference, however, there always is between us and God, that although our motives—like the Rhone, which is formed of two rivers, the one pure as the sky above it, the other turbid and discolored—are ever mixtures of good and evil, all the emotions of the Divine mind, all the influences that move God to action, are of the purest nature.

God cherishes, indeed, such respect to his own glory, that, had the salvation of the world been incompatible with that— this world had been left to perish. Dreadful thought! How should we adore and extol the wisdom which discovered a way to harmonize the glory of God, and the good of men. He was moved by regard to both. It is an imperfect vision that sees but one motive. This lofty subject resembles those binary stars which look to the naked eye as but one, but which, brought into the field of the telescope, resolve themselves into two orbs, rolling in their brightness and beauty around a common center. Blessed be his holy name!

- **“He so loved the world, that He gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth on Him should not perish, but have everlasting life.”**

- **“He commendeth his love to us, in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us.”**

Never, therefore, let us exalt this doctrine of the divine glory, at the expense of the divine love. God’s love to sinners is his mightiest, his heart-softening argument; and it were doing Him, his gospel, and our own souls great injustice, if we should overlook the love that gives Divinity its name, and which, sending in his Son a Saviour from the Father’s bosom, was eulogized by an Apostle as possessed of a *“height, and depth, and breadth, and length, which passeth knowledge.”*

III. *Observe, that in saving man for his “holy name’s sake,” or for his own honor and glory, God exhibits the mercy, holiness, love, and other attributes of the Godhead.*

The truth is, that God saves man for much the same reasons as at first he made him. Why did God make man? What moved God to make him? The ball rolls forward over the ground, and the ship moves onward through the sea, by virtue of an external force—the hand projects the one, and the wind, caught in her sails, impels the other. But no foreign agent imparted an impulse to creating power; nor did any one command or compel God to make man. It is his prerogative to command—the creature’s duty to obey.

Why, then, did He make man? Did He need to make him? Was it with Him as with some lordly master, who depends for his comfort on his servants?—as with a king, whose glory lies in the numbers of his courtiers, or the brilliancy of his court?—as with the greatest general, who owes his victories to the bravery of his soldiers, and who, whatever his military skill, would win no battles and wear no laurels without an army at his back? Assuredly not. **“Our goodness extendeth not to Thee;”** our wealth, makes God no richer, our praise makes Him no happier. **“Hear, my people, and I will speak, I will take no bullock out of thy house, or he goat out of thy fold; for every beast of the forest is mine, and the cattle upon a thousand hills. I know all the fowls of the mountains and the wild beasts of the field are mine. If I were hungry, I would not tell thee, for the world is mine, and the fullness thereof.”**

What moved God, then, to make man? or, to enlarge the question so as to embrace creation, when there was neither world rolling, nor sun shining, nor angel singing—when there was neither life nor death, nor birth nor burial, nor sight nor sound, no wave of ocean breaking, no wing of angel moving—when, as in a past eternity, God dwelt alone in silent, solemn, awful, but happy solitude, what moved Him to make creatures at all?

Or with these worlds, suns and systems, to garnish the heavens, and people an empty universe?

These are the deep things of God, and it becomes finite and fallible minds such as ours to approach them modestly. If the fabric of nature, if the machine of Providence, with its wheels rolling within wheels in many and complicated parts—if these, and the scheme of redemption, are full of inscrutable mysteries—how much more the vast mind that designed and executed them?

The meanest of his works are full of Himself, and of mysteries which, when apprehended, are not comprehended. If I adore divinity in the humble daisy; and if in the creature, that lives for a day and dances in a sunbeam, I see the wisdom that made the sun—how can I lay aside the telescope by which I have held communion with the distant heavens, or the microscope that reveals a world of wonders in cue drop of water, without concluding that, if the works of God are so wonderful, how much more wonderful his own infinite and eternal mind?

“Those are thy glorious works, Parent of good.
Almighty! thine this universal frame,
Thus wondrous fair; thyself how wondrous then
Unspeakable! who sitt’st above these heavens,
To us invisible, or dimly seen
In these thy lowest works; yet these declare
Thy goodness beyond thought, and power divine.”

By turning the eye inward, however, on our own mind, we can form some conception of the divine mind, even as a captive child, born and retained in a dark dungeon, may learn some notion of the sun from the beam that, streaming through a chink of the riven wall, travels the gray lonely floor; or even as, although I had never walked its pebbly shore, nor heard the voice of its thundering breakers, nor played with its swelling waves, I could still form some feeble conception of the ocean from a lake, from a pool, from a little drop of water, even from this sparkling dew-drop, which, born from the womb of night, and cradled in the bosom of a flower, lies waiting, like a soul under the sun of righteousness, to be exhaled to heaven.

Look at man, then: be he a poet or a man of mechanical genius or artistic skill, a statesman or a philanthropist, or, better than all, a man who glows with piety: we see that his happiness does not lie in indolence, but in the gratification of his tastes and feelings, and the active exercise of his faculties.

Assume the same to be true of God— a conception which, while it exalts, endears our Heavenly Father. It presents Him in this most winning and attractive aspect, that the very happiness of Godhead lies in the forth-putting— along with other attributes— of his goodness, love, and mercy.

Now, we may be mistaken, and I would not venture to speak dogmatically here; yet this does appear to shed a ray— a beam, if not a flood of light, on some mysterious passages in the providence of God.

Shores on which man has never landed lie paved with shells; fields which his foot has never trod are carpeted with flowers; seas where he has never dived are inlaid with pearls; and caverns into which he has never mined are radiant with gems of the finest form and the fairest colors. Well, it may be, and has been asked, for what purpose this lavish expenditure of skill and beauty on scenes, when there is neither an eye of intelligence to admire, nor piety to adore the Maker?

The poet, lamenting genius unknown, unpatronized, sinking into an ignoble grave, has sung of **“flowers that waste their sweetness on the desert air;”** and up on the unfrequented shelf of a mountain rock, or rooted in the crevice of an old castle wall, I have found such a flower, opening its modest beauty to the sun, and putting to shame the proudest efforts of human skill.

Did you never sit down beside such a flower, and courting its gentle company, ask the question, Fair creature! for what end were you made, and made so very beautiful? It certainly does look a waste of power and skill divine. Yet may it not be, that angels, as they fly by on their missions of mercy, have stayed their wing over that lowly flower, and hovered there awhile, to admire its colors and adore its Maker? But whether or not God himself is there. Invisible, He walks these unfrequented solitudes, and with ineffable complacency looks on this little flower as his own mighty work, and as a mirror of his infinite perfections, “God,” it is said, “shall rejoice in his work,” **“The LORD hath made all things for himself: yea, even the wicked for the day of evil.”**

The minnow plays in a shallow pool, and leviathan cleaves the depths of ocean—winged insects sport in a sunbeam, and winged angels sing before the throne; and whether we fix our eye on the one or the other, the whole fabric of creation appears to prove that the Lord delights in the evolution of his powers, in the display of his wisdom, love, and goodness; and, just as it is to the delight which God enjoys in the exercise of them that we owe this beautiful creation, so it is to his delight in the exercise of his pity, love, and mercy, that we owe salvation, with all its blessings.

Let us be humble and thankful. Man had as little to do with saving as with making himself: the creation of Eden and the cross of Calvary are equally the work of God; and the Lord stands forth before the universe as not by one tittle less the Saviour than the Creator of the world. To display his glory in radiant effulgence—to blaze it out on the eyes of delighted and adoring angels—to evoke the hidden attribute of mercy—to give expression to his love and pity—God resolved to save, and, in saving man, to turn this world into a theater for the most affecting tragedy and amazing love.

Salvation is finished. It is offered. Shall it be rejected? Take the good of it, and give Him the glory. **“He is the God of salvation;” “in his name we will set up our banners.”**

- In that ladder whereby faith climbs her way aloft to heaven, there is not a round that we can call our own.

- In this ark which, with open door, offers an asylum in the coming storm, a refuge in the rising flood—from stem to stern and keel to deck there is neither nail, nor plank, nor beam, that we can claim as ours.

The plan of redemption was the design of infinite wisdom; its execution was left to dying love; and it is Mercy, generous Mercy, whose fair form stands in the open door, bidding, entreating, beseeching you all to come in.

Listen to the voice of Jesus, **“Come unto me, all ye that labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest.”** And let his mother teach you how to speak, and learn from angels how to sing. With her—the casket of a divine jewel, who held the babe yet unborn in her virgin womb—with Mary say, **“My soul doth magnify the Lord; my spirit hath rejoiced in God my Saviour; for he that is mighty hath done great things to me, and holy is his name.”**

Or, hark to the angels’ song! glowing with seraphic fire, borrow seraphic words; and sing with them, ere they wheel their bright ranks for upward flight, **“Glory to God in the highest; on earth, peace and good will to men.”**

~ end of chapter 6 ~

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