

Sinful Man--The Object of God's Love

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But after that the kindness and love of God our Savior toward man appeared, not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to His mercy He saved us by the washing of regeneration and the renewing of the Holy Ghost which He shed on us abundantly through Jesus Christ our Savior. That, being justified by grace, we should be made heirs according to the hope of eternal life.

Now, the Holy Ghost describes us in verse three, and then He goes on into verse four, and verse four is like stepping into nice warm water. Verse three is like plunging into ice cold water. But verse three comes before verse four, and if we will not have verse three, we cannot have verse four. Verse three says, describing us, describing the nicest person here, we are all humble, and nobody would say that's me.

A man would say that's my wife, or a wife would say that's my husband, or the child would say that's my mother, or we always have somebody else in mind. I tell you frankly, I don't think it fits me by nature. But the nicest person here has to accept this as a reasonable facsimile of his photograph; foolish, disobedient, deceived, enslaved to lust, pleasure-mad, living in malice, envious, hateful, and hating one another.

Now, that's the description the Holy Ghost gives of us, and if we will not believe, or as bad as He says we are, we cannot believe that he's as good as he says he is. So this is our photograph.

Then comes this little glorious word, so small with such a variety of meanings. This little simple word, B-U-T, but, and the whole thing is changed. But after that, the kindness and love of God our Savior toward man appeared. I think this little word, but, as it's used by Paul, is one of the most powerful words in the entire Bible. It is repentance, it is rescue, it is deliverance, it is salvation, it is a thousand things, and here we have it coming between verse 3 and verse 4, rescuing those who are in verse 3 by the kindness and love of God in verse 4.

But, he says, and you know, I think that there will be scenes in heaven. I am very cautious in painting heavenly scenes. I have listened to some real oratory by men who know more about heaven, apparently, than John the Beloved did, and I'm very cautious about it.

Also, I'm very cautious about quoting God, unless I quote from the Scriptures themselves, or making dialogue between God and the soul. I am not sure that I know too much about the future life, since I know so very little about this life. But I think I could be nearly correct in imagining scenes that might be there in the days to come, when we meet somebody, we didn't expect to be there.

We've gotten over and entered the celestial city, and we see walking toward us a man whom we recognize, because personality persists in the world to come, individuality is

unchanged, our total being remains. Don't think of yourself as a ghost or a strange zombie. You are going to be you, only glorified. You are going to be recognizable. You'll have a memory. You will be able to call to memory things that happened below, just as Jesus, after he came out of the grave, remembered what he had told them while he was still with them before his crucifixion.

So, you're going to remember, and you're going to recognize this person coming toward you. And the last time you saw him, he was cross-eyed drunk, and you understood that he had lived and died that way. And the last you heard of him, he was somewhere in a coma, and there'd been little gaps, hiatus they call that, if you want to be real learned, little gaps in his history you didn't know about.

And you're going to say, are you here? And he'll smile and say, yes, I'm here, and shake hands with you. And you'll say, but how did you get here? The last time I saw you, you couldn't even stand up. You were a total hopeless alcoholic, and you had 14 jail sentences behind you, and you knew every warden in the state of Illinois, and every cop knew you, and your picture was in the post offices.

Now, here you are. How do you account for this? And he'll smile and say, but. But, after the kindness and love of God our Savior toward me appeared, something happened. Don't you suppose there are a lot of people, a lot of Jews who didn't know that man on the cross there, that repentant thief? Or a lot of Romans who didn't know anything about it, later on heard the gospel, and perhaps never heard of this man, this repentant thief, for the gospels were not immediately written.

And it's easy to imagine hundreds of Romans who believed in the gospel of Christ when Peter preached, and a little later as others preached, but who never saw, who had never heard of the story of the penitent thief on the cross. And the last they remembered of the penitent thief was he was hanging up there along with another thief, and that he'd been sentenced to die.

Don't you suppose there'll be many a Roman that'll walk up and say to this thief, you here? Why, I remember when the newspapers came out and said that you'd been crucified for insurrection and thieving and all sorts of sins, and the thief would smile and say, but I was all you said I was, and worse, and I had been guilty of things the law never knew of and that I had never admitted. I was much worse than anybody here knows I was.

Only God knew how bad I was, but the kindness and love of God my Savior appeared to me, and by a flash of spiritual intuition I recognized Him as He died in the middle there between us two dying thieves, and I said, Lord, remember me. And He said, this day shalt thou be with Me in paradise.

So, I want to sort of tip you off, you people who will be in heaven before another century passes. I want to tip you off. Get ready for some delightful surprises, because you're going to find some people there you didn't know would make it. You're going to find people there, now this is not a plea to throw our arms around all religions and all cults and all Christ-denying branches of Christianity, no. We're going to have to come the only

way there is to come, but some people come that way and we don't know it. We lose track of them and that's it.

Well, the kindness and love of our Savior toward man appeared. Now notice it says the kindness and love of God our Savior, and there's nothing startling about that. There's nothing there to bother anybody. If I said the ocean is vast, nobody would ever blink an eye. If I would say the rain that falls from heaven is wet, nobody would ever move. They'd wonder why I'd said the obvious. And if I were to say the sun is bright, nobody would say anything else. They'd say, I wonder what he's getting at, because we all know the ocean is deep and vast. We all know that the rain is wet and we all know that the sun shines brightly.

So, when I say the kindness and love of God, nobody's going to even bat an eyelid on that. We've heard that all our lives. We know it's true. That's nothing to wonder at, because that's the kind of God God is. And incidentally, that's why unbelief is so wrong. It refuses to believe that God is the kind of God He is. But here we say the kindness and love of God our Savior, and there's nothing there to excite attention, because God is kind. God is love.

God being that kind of God, that's what you would expect. A loving, kindly, tender, well-reared, cultured mother, you expect her to get up and look after her baby. And if you say Mrs. Jones gets up at two o'clock in the morning and gives her baby a bottle, nobody's going to run and give her a medal. Of course, that's the way she is. We've known her since she was little, and that's the kind of woman she is. You could expect that of Mrs. Jones. That's all right, we say. We know that.

But listen, it says here the kindness and love of God our Savior toward man. What kind of man? Why, a foolish man and disobedient man, deceived man, enslaved man, pleasure-mad man, malicious man, envious man, hateful man. That's the one.

Now the love of God suddenly turns aside and flows in its fullness toward that kind of man. Put the two words toward man on there and you have a wonder of wonders. And you have the reason for and the source of many a great hymn such as Amazing Grace, how sweet the sound. Why did it amaze the man? Because God was gracious. No, God is gracious and nobody should stand amazed at God being love or God being kind or God being gracious.

But that the kind, gracious love of God should have as its object such a slavish, foolish, disobedient, deceived, lustful, malicious, envious, hateful person as I am, that's where the wonder lies, my brethren. And that is why the hymn writers have never yet gotten over trying to get us to sing the wonderful love of God and the kindnesses and the love of God toward man. Toward man, I say. Hateful and hating one another hasn't discouraged God, not changed his mind in the slightest about us.

What is man that thou art mindful of him, said David. And some of the scholars tell us that that word mindful means a fixture in the mind, that man is a fixture in God's mind. Why, the only eccentricity of the great perfect God is that He loves mankind with a fixture that He can't escape. He can't shake it off. He loves mankind. Because God is the

kind of God He is, we may expect Him to love us and we may expect Him to be kind to us.

And so, the “why” of His loving us, you see, is not in us at all. The why of His loving us is in Him. And the why of His being kind to us is in Him. And yet I would suggest three thoughts here that might help you intellectually, if it doesn't spiritually, why God loves us.

Well, the one is that God is love and only does the thing that is natural to Him. It is natural for the sun to shine, we say. It is natural for birds to fly and fishes to swim. It is natural for that which loves to be love. And so we say God loves us because it's the natural thing for Him to do. The second reason he loves us is that we're His creatures and He's pleased with everything he made.

When I was up at Glen Rocks, I took my bird book along, now don't smile, and my field glasses and I discovered two new birds. I guess I know around eighty now, species. That's not many, but that's a few. And I said to somebody, I just was asking God whether after all the tents are torn down and the big woe is over and the battle's done and we don't learn war no more and men, his brothers all over the world, I wonder if God won't let me spend a couple of centuries investigating his wonderful world. I love it. God made it. I can't help but love it.

I love to tramp through the woods and see chipmunks dash out and Vesper sparrows mount a high tree and sit and try to sing. That's the best you can say for a Vesper sparrow. He's just doing his best, but he's not much of a singer, but he's lovely to hear him in the evening.

Well, God's pleased with everything He made. And when sin came in and ruined it, then God started over to remake it. But He still loves it apart from sin and we're a part of His creation.

But there's a third reason. We're made in His image. And I don't make this as a statement, but I ask it as a question. Is the reason for God's undiscouraged and undiscourageable love for us, His persistent love for fallen man, could it be that He loves Himself in us? Could it be that the great God who sinlessly and perfectly loves Himself sees the tattered fragments of His own image in the fallen man and loves Himself in the man and seeks to redeem the man because that man has a family resemblance? Don't think I mean that he's saved. No. We must be born again to be saved. We must be renewed, as it says here, to be saved.

But still fallen man has in him, even the rich man in hell, even that rich man in hell had something divine in him because he said, O Father Abraham, will you please let somebody go and tell my brothers that they don't come to this terrible place? Why then I ask, why did he say that? He said it because there was yet compassion in his heart in hell, and compassion doesn't come from the devil.

I wonder if He loves Himself in us. Don't go away and say I said He did, but just say I asked the question, does He? Then he says, still quoting Paul, He saved us not by works of righteousness which we have done.

Why did He not save us by works of righteousness? Because there were none, and because there are none. But you say, was not that a work of righteousness when the poor man in hell wanted to deliver his brethren? No. That was a work of human sympathy which was given to the man by God in creation, but that same man willfully had rebelled against the Majesty in the heavens.

And remember that no king reigning by rights ever accepts the gifts of a rebel. And nothing that a rebel can do ever is accepted by the king against whom he rebels. And therefore there were no works of righteousness. The man who is in rebellion against God can never bring a gift to God. Cain tried it. Cain brought a gift to the God against whom he'd rebelled. And God turned his back on it, thought it was a beautiful gift, a gift of fruit and flowers, a beautiful gift. Any woman would accept it and smile and thank the man who gave it to her.

But God wouldn't take it, for it was given to him by a rebel. If that rebel had repented and gotten right and been forgiven, God would have accepted his fruit and his flowers gladly. But he wanted nothing from a rebel. He saved us not by works of righteousness. Why? Because there were none and are none, but according to His mercy. There's room for a whole sermon in itself. The salvation you have accords with the infinite mercy of God and not with any merit of yours.

I know that's old stuff and it sounds very fundamentalist, and I'm a fundamentalist. But it's true nevertheless. The infinite, limitless mercies of God. By how does He do it now? Does God suddenly become emotionally overcome? Does He get emotionally overcome and rush out and take us in? No, He doesn't. He does it by the washing of regeneration and the renewing of the Holy Ghost. You see, even infinite kindness and love can't receive an unregenerate sinner into heaven.

Even the infinite mercy of God, as limitless as human thought and beyond, could ever receive a sinner into the presence of the angels. Wisdom had to find a way to save that lustful, slavish, pleasure-mad, malicious, envious, hateful, lying man. It had to find a way to save the man, to justify him because God is just, and to cleanse him because God is holy.

No unjust person can enter the kingdom of God, so God has to justify the man. Love wants to do it, but justice forbids it, and wisdom knows how to do it, so wisdom sent Jesus Christ our Savior. This was through Jesus Christ our Savior, Jesus Christ our Savior. Notice it calls God our Savior in verse 4, and Jesus Christ our Savior in verse 6. And there is no incompatibility there. God the Father is our Savior, and God the Son is our Savior.

Old John Bunyan said that in his early Christian life he was very much worried about how Jesus Christ could be both God and man. He said, I wasn't willing to accept it on anybody's authority. God had to show me. I had to find it in the book, he said. He said, I got to reading in the book of Revelation, and it said, And behold, in the midst of the throne and in the midst of the elders there stood a Lamb. He said, The Holy Ghost showed me, in the midst of the throne there was His Godhead. In the midst of the elders

there was His humanity. He said, Oh, I did exceedingly rejoice. Exceedingly rejoiced to see that He stood with God at the throne as God and with man among the elders as man.

So, He's both God and man and was through Jesus Christ our Lord. He justifies and He cleanses and He washes and He regenerates and He renews and He does all these things through the mercy, through His mercy by the atonement in Christ's blood.

We're almost finished. Now notice it says "heirs" here. We are made heirs in verse 7, being justified by His grace, we should be made heirs according to the hope of eternal life. Heirs, that means we inherit everything God has. Heirs of God. You say, I can't believe it. Do you know why? Because you won't believe verse 3. If you don't believe you're as bad as God says you are, you'll never believe you're as well off as God says you are. Always remember, if you won't believe you're as bad off as he says you are, you'll never believe that you're as well off through grace. Because psychologically it can't be done.

If you hold out on God as to how bad you are, your nature won't permit you to take all the promises of God as to how good God is to you. You crimp yourself and crowd yourself. Be enlarged, O ye Corinthians, and see how bad you are in order you can see how good God is and how wonderful the grace of God is. Now we're heirs, and I was trying to think about this. Heirs, an heir of God, that I am one of God's heirs. You know we can't take it in.

Let's imagine a little boy who has lived in the slums of some great city, New York's East Side, say, and he's now eight or ten years old, and he's had a very narrow life. He's lived among ash cans and in alleys and stealing fruit from corner fruit stores and ducking policemen.

That's the way he's lived. He never had a new shirt on in his life, and his pants are hand down through four fellows up down to him, and his shoes, he never had a new pair on. And he's never slept anywhere but in a corner, and suddenly somebody comes along and adopts him off the street corner. We're one of the richest men in America, with yachts and outboard, or what do you call them, these big power motors, things that these rich men can run around.

I see them on the lakes, and estates of every kind, and utterly rich beyond the description. And we go to the boy and say, you know what, you're an heir. This man has adopted you, and you've suddenly inherited vast ranches in Arizona, and great estates in Canada, and huge estates down on the coast in Florida. It's all yours, to say nothing of money in the bank. The little fella doesn't understand. He'd exchange the whole business for a popsicle.

Sure, because you see, he can't think like that, and God doesn't blame you for not being able to think like that. You're used to poverty, spiritual poverty, anyhow. You're used to locking everything, shutting your door and locking, and saying, did you lock that? You're always used to living that way, living in the slums of the universe.

But there's only one place worse than earth, and you know what it is? Hell. Hell, the earth is suspended halfway between heaven and hell, not yet forsaken by heaven and

not yet committed to hell. Here we are, and that's what we're used to. And then suddenly we have somebody throw cold water on us and say, you're an heir of God.

We shake our heads and say, well, I'm willing to believe it, but I happen to faint as a notion what you're talking about. Read your Bible, study it, and pray, and keep on, grow and expand, and learn to think the way God thinks, and maybe sometime you'll know a little bit. But if you don't know here, you'll know there. The heirs of God, heirs of God according to the promise of eternal life.

Well, we scarcely know what it is. I wonder if that's why the Lord gave us the communion service, that we sort of might sort of get a hold of something we could see and taste. The ideal is that we be completely spiritual, but the Lord knows us too well to hope we can ever be completely spiritual as long as we're walking around in this mortal tabernacle.

So, He made everything spiritual but the wine and the bread. He said, now you can have this and look at this and feel it, touch it, taste it. He said, I'll let you have those two, no more. I'll let you have those two emblems, those two elements, those two symbols and signs of my death and resurrection and glory is coming again. And you keep on, be different from the world. Every so often, he didn't say how often, there's difference of opinion among the brethren, but every so often eat the bread and drink the wine and say the words and sing the hymns and pray and remember me till I come, and you'll become heirs of all that God has.

We Christians ought to be the happiest people in the world and the saddest, the saddest because we live in a heartbroken world and the happiest because we're heirs of the most gracious God. And that was Paul. Paul said sorrowful yet always rejoicing. How do you figure it? Some of you people with adding machine minds that insist on getting everything down and added up at the bottom and then prove it four ways to show it's correct. You won't do, you won't do.

God wants imaginative men and women that can intuit things, that the Holy Ghost can give flashes of understanding that you never can explain. And one of them is how a man can be rich and poor at the same time. Paul said poor yet making many rich, how did he do it? Can't put that in an adding machine, feed that into Mr. X and it won't come out.

Or how we can be sorrowful yet always rejoicing. How Jesus could sing a hymn and go to the Mount of Olives, there you have it, two peaks or a peak and a valley, the peak of song and the valley of suffering. We Christians are caught there, we never know from day to day whether we'll be on the mountain peak singing or in the valley suffering, but it doesn't make too much difference anyway because we're heirs of God.

And when we receive the bread and the wine, we tell the whole world that is interested to know this is just a little reminder, like the ring on my wife's finger, reminding, just, it isn't the marriage, but it's just a little symbol we recognize since we're here on earth. And this is a symbol we recognize, perhaps it's deeper than that, but it is that. It's beyond that, but it is that. And it tells us that He died, that He rose, that He lives, that He pleads, and He's coming back again. Amen? Amen.

Now we'll have the communion service, and any persons that we say visitors, but really, you're not visiting here, nobody's visiting here. We use that, we call them guests, we have a guest card, and I guess it's just the paucity of the English language, but really, I'm as much a guest here as you are. Nobody runs this church, this is the house of God, this is the body of Christ, or part of the body of Christ, and you have as much right at the table as I do. So nobody can shut you out.

Let me give you this little thought, and then we'll have our communion service. In a Baptist church in Louisville, Kentucky, a closed communion Baptist church, the pastor was a very warm friend of, well, it was his brother-in-law, they pointed the church out and told me the story, his brother-in-law, who was a pastor in the Presbyterian church. And the brother-in-law, Presbyterian brother-in-law, was visiting the Baptist pastor.

He came Sunday, the first Sunday, and they had communion. What could this pastor do? His brother-in-law was out of the fold, and so he did his best. He said, my friends, if this were my table, I'd invite you to it, and I'd invite everybody to it. And there wouldn't be anybody that I'd exclude, I'd invite everybody to it. He said, my brother-in-law is here and he's Presbyterian, and I'd invite him to it if it was my table. But he says, since it's my father's table, I have no right to invite anybody. So, he said, but the children will know, and they'll come.

That was an easy way out, or he thought it was. So, the Presbyterian pastor got up down front and said, could I say a word? And of course he had to grant him the right. He said, I agree with my brother-in-law. This is not his table. This is his father's table. And since his father and my father is the same father, then this is my father's table. And he said, if the pastor can't invite me to my father's table, he can't exclude me from my father's table. And he went up and got up and went and took communion along with the rest.

I think that's just delightful, myself. I think it's just delightful. I can't invite you and I can't exclude you. Let every man examine himself. Amen.