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Rev. Hargrave's Sermons



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APPALACHIA

For God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in Him should not perish, but have eternal life.

St. John 3:16.

Christ.

Men are not driven into the Kingdom of God by fear, nor are they often led by argument. With most men the kindness are not intellectual but moral, lie not in the mind but in the motions and the will. To these the appeal must be made, and this verse contains the most powerful that God Himself can make. It is addressed to the strongest motives that sway the hearts of men, gratitude and duty and hope and love.

The great truth which the text conveys may be expressed in many ways. Let us take Christ as the theme, and see how He is presented to us here.

I. He is the Gift of God. God so loved that He gave. Love is always giving. It is the nature of love to give as it is the nature of the sun to shine. The higher and purer the love, the more freely and abundantly does it give. The infinite love of God gave His Son, only begotten, and beloved, and in that gift are comprehended all the blessings that heaven can bestow. "He that spared not His own Son, but delivered Him up for us all, how shall He not also with Him freely give us all things?" All things are ours if we are Christ's.

II. He is the Object of our Faith. "That whosoever believeth on Him," To believe on Him is to recognize and acknowledge Him as the Son of God, the only Saviour, and in simple trust surrender ourselves to Him, so that His will becomes the master of our life. God gives, that is grace. Man accepts the gift, that is faith. The gift is ours simply because it is offered to us. It becomes ours when we take it. That is the office of faith, and the vital element of faith is trust, the yielding of self to Him as Lord and Master. Faith may be feeble, but it lays hold upon a mighty Saviour, able to save unto the uttermost All who come unto God through Him.

III. He is the source of Life. Life is born of life, and the original and eternal life from which all life proceeds is God. He imparts life to men through His Son. "God gave unto us eternal life, and that life is in His Son. He that hath the Son hath life; he that hath not the Son of God hath not life," This is the true life, divine, eternal, which bears the image of God and holds unbroken fellowship with Him. The story of redemption may be told in a sentence: "God loves and gives, man believes and lives."

Illustration: We are told of an African people who read John 14:1 in this way. "Let not your heart be troubled because ye believe in God." From their ancestral religion they had brought over the thought of God as a thought of fear. But we cannot be afraid of God who gave

His Son to die for us unless we willfully refuse His proffered grace. How can we harden our hearts against the appeal of love?

God gave His Son to die that we might live. If He had not died, we all would have to die the eternal death. We would be worse than the heathen, if we were not grateful for the redemptive work of Christ. A story is told that, "A few months before the death of Robert Louis Stevenson, the great English writer, certain Samoan chiefs whom he had befriended while they were under imprisonment for political causes, and whose release he had been instrumental in effecting testified their gratitude by building an important piece of road leading to Mr. Stevenson's Samoan country house, Vailina. At a corner of the road there was erected a notice, prepared by the chiefs and bearing their names, which reads:

"The Road of the Loving Heart. Remembering the great love of his highness, Tusitala, and his loving care when we were in prison and sore distressed, we have prepared him an enduring present, this road which we have dug to last for ever."

What should our gratitude prompt us to build for Him while we were in prison to Satan, He effected our release. Now, that we are free, is it too much to ask that we build Him a monument which shall be a living testimonial to the fact of our gratitude to Him for what He has done for us. One has said that there is but one calamity, sin. Christ gives one power over Sin. Hence, we are forced to cry out, Glory to God, for His unspeakable Gift.

Again, it is one's duty to pay homage to the Christ. "To have simply done one's duty is no mean victory, says a writer." To stand like the anvil below the blows of the hammer-and firmly resist the force of a repeated temptation, in ground and heroic. To be venal is no venial fault, no price which can be weighed in gold can pay a man for the sale of one ounce of his manliness. Conscience is a Samson whose locks are easily shorn, only that they never grow again; whose eyes once put out, or seared with a hot iron, no prayer will restore. And men, as great and wise as Bacon, have, like him, been compelled to confess to their own meanness and the mercenary character of their virtue," When duty calls to service, how many hold back until assured of the pay? What does duty demand of us in our relation to the Christ? "What a watchword," says one. Conscience is the very representative of God in the soul. We say the man has a conscience, but Dr. Dormer says, "Conscience has the mane" that is, we are in its grip; and if we do not do as we ought, we shall by-and-by bitterly regret it. There is no safety in doing evil. We ought to make duty our delight. Then it ceases to be a yoke chafing and fretting, and is more like a wing lifting us than like "lead which we lift."

There is also an appeal to the motive of hope. "The believer comes to the bounds of his mortal life, and says "more beyond." "Godliness hath promise of the life that now is, and of that

which is to come." Death effects a swift transition. "It is said that an Alpine hunter, in passing over the mer de Glace, lost his hold, and slipped into a frightful crevasse. Catching, in his swift descent, against the points of rocks and projecting spurns of ice, he broke his fall, and reached the bottom alive, but only to face death in a more terrible form. On either hand the icy walls rose high, and above he saw only a strip of the blue sky. At his feet trickled a little stream formed from the melting glacier. There was but one possible chance of escape-to follow this rivulet, which might lead to some unknown crevice or passage. In silence and terror he picked his way along till his advance was stopped by a giant cliff that rose up before him, while the river rolled darkly below. He heard the roaring of the waters, which seemed to wait for him. What should he do?. Death was beside him and behind him, and, as he feared, before him.

There was no time for reflection or delay. He paused an instant, and plunged into the stream. One minute of breathless suspense-a sense of darkness and coldness, and yet of swift motion, as if he were gliding through the shades below and then a light began to glimmer faintly on the waters, and the next instant he was amid the green fields, and the flowers, and the summer sunshine of the valley of Charnouni. So it is when believers die. They come to the bank of the river, and it is cold and dark. Nature shrinks from the fatal plunge. Yet one chilly moment, and all fear is left behind, and the Christian is amid the fields of the paradise of God. To him, death is the gateway of life," Hope sustains him through the darkness of despair and ushers him into the presence of Christ. The final motive that the text appears to be is love, God loves us, and we love Him. God showed His love for us by giving us His Son to die for us. What a sacrifice of love. "The scene is laid at Calvary. Jesus is upon the cross. The brow once crowned with glory is now crowned with thorns. The hands so often outstretched in love and mercy are now pinioned to the cross. The heart that throbbed and ached with human sorrow is now pierced with a spear. Oh, it is a sad moment in the history of the world! The earth trembles, the mountains quake; and the sun veils itself in darkness, for God's Son is dying.

But listen! "It is finished! It is finished! It is finished!"

The great plan of redemption, born in the heart of love, has now received its finishing touch, and God and the world stand reconciled.

Oh, dear friends, this was for us! Shall we not respond, not only with our hearts, but with our substance-yea with all that we have-to gladden His dear heart and spread His kingdom from pole to pole,"

God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son that whosoever believeth on Him should not perish, but have everlasting life-Amen.

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Again, it is one's duty
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 "To have simply done one's
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says a writer, "To stand ^{9.}
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