

THE LIVING PULPIT,

OR

EIGHTEEN SERMONS

BY EMINENT LIVING DIVINES

OF

THE PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH.

WITH

A BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH OF THE EDITOR,

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## THE FAITHFUL SAYING.

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This is a faithful saying, and worthy of all acceptance, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners.—1 TIM. i. 15.

LET us analyze this saying. Let us separate its ideas, that we may give to each a distinct, though brief, consideration. Let us seriously mark their aspect and bearing with reference to our own character, course and destiny.

I. "*Christ Jesus came.*" We bid you notice this fact as essential to the power and glory of the evangelic doctrine. The grandeur of the person gives grandeur to the truth affirmed concerning him.

For whom do the words "Christ Jesus" designate? Beyond question, the Son of God. They do indeed express only the name he bore after the incarnation; but by constant usage of the scriptures, they then denote the person who became incarnate. Differing modes of existence and manifestation did not destroy the divine and eternal personality. The Word was made flesh, but in the flesh thus made he was still the word.

The affirmation, then, is of a divine person—the Son of God—second in the mysterious subsistence

of the infinite three. *He* came. Not an angel of light; not a saint in glory; not Gabriel, who ministered peradventure nearest the burning throne; not Moses or Isaiah, most exalted perhaps among the redeemed. No—not they; but *He* came by whose power Gabriel and his angelic associates were created, and by whose blood the lawgiver and the prophet alike were saved. At that sublime moment, when the eternal counsels were about to be expressed in the great acts of redemption, and because the exigencies of lost men transcended the wisdom and power of all creatures, it was the voice of Christ Jesus which broke upon the silence of heaven—“Lo, I come to do thy will, O God!”

The fact is incontestable—its importance and grandeur infinite. For how can the purpose and endeavours of such an one fail? What possible contingencies can arise, not foreseen by his omniscience? What combination of difficulties so great, that they must not vanish before his wisdom and power? If God undertake for the lost, no matter how extreme and appalling their state, they will be rescued.

This truth, we repeat, is essential. It is the foundation of the Christian system. If the victim on Calvary was not the incarnate Word—God though man, and man though God—the hope of salvation, by his obedience and death, is a dream. It may be thought by some consoling, inspiring, joyous, but it is a dream, to be dissipated for ever when we enter the grave. There never was a more absurd notion, than that salvation can be achieved for sinners by a creature. Show me that Christ Jesus

was not truly divine, and, by the same argument, I will show you that he cannot be a Saviour. And if he be not, who is? What shall dying men do, if they may not rest their souls on Christ, as the Son of God—the brightness of the divine glory, and the express image of the divine person? What can they do, but die without hope—yea, die for ever!

II. This divine Being came, continues the text, *into the world*; i. e. into this world.

Very many worlds God has made, of still greater extent and magnificence than this, to circle with it, in its majestic course around the centre of the system; but in no other have been enacted the scenes of redemption. It is an exclusive distinction of this world, that by the Church redeemed and existing on its bosom, is made known unto principalities and powers in heavenly places, the manifold wisdom of God, according to the eternal purpose, which he purposed in Christ Jesus our Lord. Bethlehem and Calvary are here. The garden of that untold agony—the sepulchre, hewn out in the rock, where the Prince of life lay in the embrace of death—the Mount of Olives, whence he ascended, leading captivity captive—all these are here.

The influences of the cross doubtless, indeed, reach to the outmost limits of God's vast creation, making manifest, as could have been done by nothing else, the wisdom, love, power and glory of Jehovah. But here the cross was reared. Its base was imbedded in the soil of earth; its top was fanned by the air and bathed in the light which fall upon us. Christ Jesus came into *this* world!

How did he come?



Not merely, does the apostle mean to say, in his essential and universal presence, as God. In this sense our world has been his dwelling-place from the morning of creation. His arm has upheld the stupendous structure. His power has constantly renewed the face of the earth, and carried forward all the processes and operations of nature. For as he created, so does he sustain all things by the word of his power; by him all things consist.

Nor did he come, does the apostle mean to say, in the form and presence, which anciently he so often assumed, as the angel of the covenant. It was thus he appeared to the patriarchs and saints of former dispensations. It was thus he was present with Abraham at that strange sacrifice on Moriah, and the day before the fiery overthrow of Sodom and Gomorrah. It was thus he revealed himself to Jacob at Peniel, in that wondrous conflict wherein the patriarch prevailed with God. It was thus he went before his people in the wilderness, when he said, Surely they are my people, they will not lie; so he was their Saviour. In all their affliction he was afflicted, and the angel of his presence saved them, and he bore them, and carried them all the days of old.

It was another and more marvellous presence of the Son of God the apostle contemplates—his presence by incarnation in the son of Mary, in reference to which the angel said to the shepherds, "Unto you is born this day a Saviour, which is Christ the Lord." "Who being in the form of God, and thought it not robbery to be equal with God, made himself of no reputation, and took upon him the

form of a servant, and was made in the likeness of men." For "forasmuch as the children are partakers of flesh and blood, he also himself likewise took part of the same." And so "the Word which was in the beginning with God, the Word which was God, by whom all things were made, and without whom was nothing made which was made; the Word became flesh, and dwelt among us, and we saw his glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth."

In this manner "Christ Jesus came into the world." It is a stupendous truth. It would exceed belief, as it does comprehension, did it not rest on the testimony of God; and if, furthermore, immeasurably vast and mysterious as it is, we could not see its divine adaptation and imperative necessity in reference to us as sinners. We have been startled, my brethren, at recent and passing political events. They seem to us great—momentous. To see kings abdicating; thrones and principedoms falling; the masses, so long trampled beneath the hoofs of power, rising; and then the re-action, the crushing again of hope, the re-ascendance of despotism, and the suppressed heavings of outraged humanity, while the whole aspect of human things becomes dark and perilous—oh, how all this engrosses the minds of thoughtful men! And yet inexpressibly tame, trivial, empty, are these things, in comparison with the unique, unparalleled, infinite truth, that "Christ Jesus came into the world;" that being God, he was found in fashion as a man; that occupying the throne, and receiving the adorations of the universe, he came down to the dependance of a creature and

the reproach of worms; that the source of all authority, he made himself subject to law; and the fountain of all life, he came under the power of death; that, compelled by no perils that were invading his presence, but moved by the miseries which were overwhelming us, he came; that, the King of kings, and the Lord of lords, he came to raise us to his own blessedness, to invest us with his own glory, to make us kings and priests unto God for ever!

For mark, now, the complete statement of the text, that,

III. "Christ Jesus came into the world *to save sinners!*" We must form our estimate of Christianity from its real nature and design. If we conceive of it wrongly, we shall judge of it unfairly. In its influence indeed on all the faculties, and all the interests of men, it bears the proof of its divine source, and of its power for good. It has ameliorated the physical condition of the race; it has given impulse and expansion to the mental powers; it has imparted tenderness and purity to the social and domestic affections. Civilization has followed in its progress. Commerce and the arts have flourished in its presence. Literature and science have felt no other influence so genial and enriching. Where it has reigned, law has become the expression of justice, and government the safeguard of liberty. It is impossible to over-estimate the legitimate and benign effects of the gospel of Christ, on the entire condition of men, as the denizens of this world, as well as the heirs of immortality.

But, then, these effects have all been indirect and secondary, as compared with the main purpose for which "Christ Jesus came into this world." That

purpose was "*to save sinners.*" If you contemplate his mission and work apart from the light of this vast central truth, you may yet see much in them to admire, but you will fail to comprehend their real grandeur and glory. Jesus Christ, my brethren, was far more than a social or civil reformer, attempting to dry up the streams of human degradation and misery, while he left untouched their prolific and inexhaustible fountain. He was far more than a master in philosophy, who came to solve the problems of science, and elaborate systems of morals and metaphysics, after the manner of Plato or Aristotle. He was far more than a jurisconsult or statesman, whose mission it was to announce legal and political maxims, and propose models of constitutions and governments. He was a Saviour! The objects of his grace were sinners. They had broken the law of God. They had incurred his holy displeasure. They had yielded themselves as the bond-slaves of Satan. They were therefore sinking, helpless and hopeless, to eternal ruin. Christ Jesus came to *save* them.

How save them? In the evangelic sense, what is salvation? The inquiry is important. In the scriptures themselves the term is relative. It is sometimes used without any reference to that great spiritual and eternal deliverance contemplated here. A man may be saved from sickness, danger, fear; from a great variety of evils, merely temporal. The term, therefore, must have its meaning in each several instance, from that of which it is the contrast. Christ Jesus came to save *sinners*. Salvation, then, in this case, must be understood by the present character and condition of those who are to be its subjects.



Who, then, and what are sinners? In what condition are they? They are those who have apostatized from God, and broken his law. That law is perfect, eternal, unchanging. Its demands can never be mitigated—its sanctions must be enforced. It is preposterous to think of any other alternative. The earth and the heavens may pass away, but the law of God, in its undiminished authority and extent, and its retributive power, must remain for ever. It cannot pass away.

The effect of this violation of the law is twofold.

In the first place, it changes the *relations* of men to the divine government. They are thenceforth condemned. The fearful penalty of sin is denounced against them. Its execution may be delayed, but at length it must come. From the absolute perfection of the law, there is no possibility, for one who has sinned, of regaining his position and immunities as an innocent man. Guilty he must remain. The penalty, therefore, must be exacted. It is eternal death.

In the second place, it changes the *affections* of men towards God. The very nature of the soul is vitiated by sin. What was pure and perfect becomes defaced and polluted. Love to God gives place to aversion and hate. All the moral faculties are perverted and defiled. Selfishness becomes the master principle or affection. Self, the reigning God. If the divine law, therefore, did not for ever bar sinners from heaven, and subject them to woe, their own depraved nature and sinful passions would.

The salvation of sinners, consequently, has respect to their legal condemnation, and their moral depravity.

To be effectual, it must remove the curse of the law which is upon them, and it must form them anew in the likeness of God. Under this conception of it, "Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners." Immense, we repeat, and never enough valued, are the benign influences of his coming and work on the social, intellectual, and political condition and prospects of men. He gave the most salutary precepts. He enjoined and exemplified the most pure and heavenly affections. He announced the essential principles of truth and righteousness, and demanded of all men, through all time, affectionate and holy submission. His words have been light to the mind, and life to the soul. Wherever they have been permitted to go forth in their fulness and purity, they have regenerated society, and remodelled governments. They are achieving social and civil results now, in view of which hoary oppression trembles. O! if while they are giving to the masses the knowledge of their rights, they shall also be received far enough to awaken within them the sense of their responsibilities—to lead them to identify rational and enduring liberty with the spirit and principles of the government of God—who can express what scenes of prosperity and happiness may yet appear! If men will obey the gospel—Europe, yes, the world shall be gloriously free. If they will not do this, agitation and revolution are in vain. Despotism may indeed give place, at every now and then, but only to a more desolating anarchy. And anarchy, after a little, will lash itself into exhaustion, and subside in the embrace of a still more absolute despotism. The essential elements and means of social well-being,

mental elevation, and political freedom, are in the instructions and institutions of Jesus Christ.

The mission, however, of the divine Redeemer related directly and chiefly to the souls of men. He came to save *sinners*. Is it inquired again, How save them? The answer is, by delivering them from the condemnation of the broken law, and by renewing them after the image of God, in righteousness and true holiness. This is salvation. Less than this is not salvation.

But this question, thus answered, throws us back on a greater question. How can sinful men be delivered from the curse of the law? Helpless they are. They cannot meet its demands. They cannot satisfy, except by enduring its terrific penalty. While they are condemned by it, and utterly without strength, it must remain, in its precepts and its sanctions, unchanging and eternal. How, then, can sinners be saved?

In the verdict of enlightened reason, two conditions must concur in order to this result.

The principle of substitution must have a place in the government of God. As by no possibility those who are condemned by the law, can deliver themselves from its curse, it results, that if they are saved at all, it must be by the interposition of some one not thus condemned, in their behalf, who can and will meet for them its claims and its penalties. If in their case there can be no substitution, there can be no salvation.

This substitution, moreover, must be made by one whose personal character is not only holy, as for instance, an unfallen angel, but who also is not origin-

ally subject to the law. It would be manifestly impossible for any one, whose own obedience was demanded, and to the extent (as from the essential perfection of the law it must be) of *all* his affections and faculties, to render an obedience in behalf of others. This condition, therefore, excludes every creature, whether man or angel, from the work of saving sinners; for every creature is under law—under law which exacts and exhausts his whole powers in obedience for himself. To find that a qualified substitute for the guilty, we must go beyond the sphere where the law of God has jurisdiction! And where is that? Oh! where is that? No where, except within the splendors of the uncreated glory! No where, except with reference to Him who sits upon Godhead's throne! The result is clear and irresistible. There must be a divine Saviour, or there can be no Saviour!

The inquiry was one of infinite moment; will God interpose? Will He, whom we have sinned against, and by whom we are so righteously condemned, will he, can he, interpose? Thanks unto his name, grateful as we can render and eternal as our being, God has interposed! "Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners!" The simple, yet wonderful announcement, involves all that we have thus represented as indispensable to salvation. For gather up now into one view what it does involve.

The Word was God. He was God before he came in the flesh. He remained God after he thus came. The two natures, in mysterious union, constituted one divine person, Jesus Christ. He owed no obedience to the law, therefore, on his own account.



He was the supreme Lawgiver. His subjection to it was voluntary, even when he became incarnate. He was made under the law, not as the inseparable result of his being born of a woman, but according to his own will, that he might redeem them which were under the law. His whole obedience, therefore, and his whole endurance, were available for those for whom he obeyed and suffered.

For this interposition of the divine Redeemer was not for himself. It was vicarious. It was made on the declared principle of substitution—the just for the unjust. Indeed, as it could not be on his own account, who had never sinned, and needed no salvation, it must have been for the sake of others. And so the constant testimony is, “he bore *our* griefs and carried *our* sorrows. The chastisement of our peace was *upon* him.” “He bare *our* sins in his own body on the tree.”

Substitution involves imputation. The two are inseparable. They are essential parts of one whole. If Christ obeyed the divine law, and endured its penalty in my stead, and for my benefit, that obedience and endurance are mine, by being set to my account; or what is precisely the same thing, by being imputed to me. And this truth is perfectly intelligible. Men recognise it, and act in accordance with it, in the most common, as well as the most weighty, affairs of life. The principle on which it rests is incorporated in all law, and exemplified in all government. It is worse than folly to attempt to expel it from the word and government of God. Despite all human opinions and reasonings it will remain eternally true, that “as by one man’s disobedience many were made sinners, so by the obedience of one many

shall be made righteous;" that God "hath made Him who knew no sin, to be sin for us, that we might be made the righteousness of God in him!"

The result now of these truths is indeed glorious. In his incarnation, in his obedience, in his unexampled sufferings and death, Jesus Christ was the substitute for sinners. Who can express then the hope that thus comes to the lost? For though he became man, that he might obey and might die, Jesus Christ was yet God. The worth, therefore, and the sufficiency of his atonement are immeasurable; as much so as is his divinity. Contemplated in its essential nature and intrinsic efficacy, it is absolutely without limit. You may compare it to the horizon, which, as you approach it, ever recedes and widens. Or you may compare it to an ocean, whose depths reach no bottom, and whose waves break on no shore. But all comparisons fail, all language, and all thought, are beggared in the attempt to express or conceive the illimitable fulness and sufficiency of the atonement.

But there arises a difficulty here—a difficulty which at times presses on serious and thoughtful minds. The penalty of the law is death. To meet and endure that was requisite in order to atonement. How could Christ Jesus endure this penalty?

It is a difficulty, and perhaps it were both more wise and reverent to recognise the impracticableness of its full solution now, and silently wait for the light of eternity. Thus much, however, is obvious, that a penalty must adapt itself in its actual infliction to the nature, and be affected by the dignity, of the being on whom it may fall. So the penalty of the divine law, while remaining the same in its own nature, must manifestly become different in some re-

spects when inflicted on different orders of creatures, as on angels, and on men. Hence this point has sometimes been represented thus: "All creatures must endure the penalty of the law, if it fall on them, for ever, because they are finite. The eternity of their woe is thus incidental; i. e., it results, not of necessity from the law, but from their nature. The duration of suffering, therefore, is not absolutely necessary to the proper infliction of the penalty by *whomsoever* endured, but it is thus necessary when endured by those who are finite; i. e., by creatures. The Son of God, however, was not a creature. By virtue of his divine, and, therefore, infinite nature, or being, he could exhaust in a limited period that penalty which a creature could never exhaust. It indeed assailed him. It beat upon his humanity. It bore him to the very gates of hell, but his divinity broke the fierceness of its power. It cried out for blood. Its cry was inexorable—unceasing. Along the flight of weary centuries, it had made even the altar and the temple of Jehovah's worship the place of slaughter. Nor could it be satisfied with the life of beasts. It kindled on the souls of men. It drank up their spirits. It burned on from generation to generation. But when it reached the sacrifice on Calvary, the son of man, yet also the Son of God, its rage was spent, its power destroyed. It could not long grapple for the mastery with an uncreated arm. It kindled fiercely on his humanity, and wasted it. It burned towards his divinity, and expired!" "He hath redeemed us from the curse of the law, *being made a curse for us!*"

It is thus, brethren, that Christ Jesus saved sinners from the condemnation of the law. The re-

maining exigency of their condition he meets by sending into their souls the Holy Spirit. By his presence and power they are made alive from the dead; they exercise new and sacred affections; they become partakers of vast and immortal hopes; in every taste and susceptibility of their moral being; they are formed and fitted for the glorious and eternal kingdom of God. So great, so entire, so enduring is the salvation by Jesus Christ.

IV. In reference to all this we now add, "*it is a faithful saying.*" It is no more immense and wonderful than it is true. It is to be believed, therefore, without fear and without hesitation. Every sinner this side of death may rest his soul on it securely.

The *testimony* of God demonstrates its truth. Over and over again the Scriptures present us with the doctrine of atonement by Jesus Christ. Every where they reveal him as a divine person; though now, for the purposes of redemption, in mysterious but real association with humanity. Every where they represent his obedience even unto death, and in death as vicarious, as in the place and for the benefit of sinners. With the clearness and vividness of a sunbeam they trace these words, and such as these— "He was wounded for our transgressions, he was bruised for our iniquities; on him was laid the iniquity of us all." In the view of his cross, and as the divine solution of the appalling sacrifice there, they exclaim, "Herein is love, not that we loved God, but that he loved us, and sent his Son to be the propitiation for our sins!" Yea, that "God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life!"



The *influence*, moreover, of this blessed doctrine, when it is really received, demonstrates its truth. All those effects which it is designed to produce are realized. The sinner is forgiven. He has peace with God. He has the witness of the Spirit. His affections are changed. The objects of his supreme desire and pursuit are new and sacred. He takes pleasure in spiritual things. He becomes increasingly like Christ. His life is a service to God. His death even is a victory over death, and his eternity is heaven.

Yes, beloved brethren, it is a faithful saying. Patriarchs believed it, though to them the great sacrifice was still in the distant future. Prophets foretold it in their most glowing and majestic strains, and they trusted in what they thus foretold. Apostles proclaimed it, and rejoiced that they might seal their testimony with their blood. Martyrs confessed it, and its celestial power was that which took their terror from the fiercest flames. Multitudes in every age have borne witness by lives of holiness and deaths of triumph, that "Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners!" Oh! men and brethren, must the sacred succession stop? Shall this faithful saying have no more witnesses here? Is it possible that you should feel you do not need the blood of atonement? Or can you suppose for a moment, that in the flow of ages its fulness is exhausted? You do not need it if you have never sinned. It is exhausted, if that which is infinite can fail. But neither the one nor the other of these things is true. You have sinned—often, long, fearfully. The atonement of Christ remains, and will remain, in its undiminished fulness and glory; and, therefore, worthy,

V. As the apostle finally adds, "*worthy of all acception.*" The meaning is, it is worthy of a prompt, cordial, grateful, whole-souled reception by sinners, and by all sinners.

Shall we stop to say, that *all sinners need* this salvation? They do need it. No necessity can be more obvious or more imperative. Under the divine government, where there is sin, there must be atonement, or there must be death. This necessity grounds itself in the divine nature. Justice is an essential, and therefore immutable attribute of God. It is inseparable from his being, as much so as his spirituality — his infinity — his almighty power. Should he therefore cease to be just, he would cease to be God. For him, therefore, to pass by or forgive sin, on the ground of mere sovereignty, or expediency, or general benevolence, irrespective of the great principles and claims of justice, we hold to be impossible; as clearly and inexorably so, as it would be for him to be unjust. The necessity of atonement, therefore, in the case of sin, and if it be pardoned, is absolute. Where it is not found, the sinner must die. Are you sinners? You need then an atonement. You all need it. There are no creatures in the wide universe who have a more personal or a deeper interest in the saying — that "Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners." In the truth of his atoning sacrifice is your only hope for eternity. In your acceptance of and reliance on that sacrifice, by faith, is all your salvation!

Or shall we detain you to repeat that this salvation is *sufficient* for all sinners? It certainly is thus

sufficient. We speak, of course, of its essential nature and fulness. Viewed in itself, the sacrifice on the cross has a worth, and adequacy absolutely unlimited. They are restricted only by the revealed purpose of God to apply the atonement to those alone who believe. This purpose does indeed exist; and, like God himself, it is immutable. How could it be otherwise? No remedy can be effective, unless it be applied. It may possess the most unquestionable and powerful healing properties—but what will these avail, if the diseased and the sick will not use it? God gave his Son, that whosoever *believeth* in him may have everlasting life. But, wonderful as was this gift, illimitable as were the virtue and merit of the sacrifice so made, he that believeth not must perish. It is God's own avowal. The atonement itself, with all its fulness of grace, power and glory, cannot save those, who by unbelief persist in rejecting it as the ground and means of salvation. That there are such persons, and will continue to be, the history of men and the word of God render certain. But the limitation of the atonement so resulting, is from causes external to itself. It remains still in its own glorious all-sufficiency. If sinful men will receive it and rely on it, no matter who they are, nor how many, nor how multiplied or grievous their sins, it will be effectual; it will save them. If they will not receive it, the die is cast; there is no atonement for them; they must perish in their iniquities. It is a result certain as the being of God. It is a result demanded and secured by every principle of fitness and right, by the perfection of the divine character, and the inviolability of the divine government.

Do you, then, believe in Christ? Will you believe in Christ? In this case the atonement is divinely sufficient. There is not a sin against you, in the book of God, which, in view of it, will not be forgiven. There is not a stain of guilt upon your soul, which, through its efficacy, will not be washed out. There is not a want of your immortal being, which, for the Redeemer's sake, will not be freely and for ever supplied. Oh, it is indeed "a faithful saying, and worthy of all acceptation, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners!"

My brethren, worldly themes occupy you. Truths like these seem to you perhaps foreign, unattractive, spiritless. The scenes of time, which ever flit by you, like shadows, are in your view real and important. Well, they are so. They have a significance deeper than you are aware. They have a relation to eternity, solemn and fearful. They have an imperishable record before God; a record to be read in the judgment. But forgetful of this significance and this relation, you contemplate these scenes in only their present aspect. Such is their power over you, that we fear you will still turn away from the cross, but if you do, remember, "Christ dieth no more!" We fear you will still close your hearts to the glorious truth, that "Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners;" but if you do, remember "there remaineth no more sacrifice for sins!" The great work of expiation is finished. It stands before you God's amazing provision for the wants of men; unexampled—sufficient—alone. In view of it, he demands now your decision. It is for you to receive Jesus Christ and live—or to reject Jesus Christ and die.