

# MODERN THEOLOGY AND THE PREACHING OF THE GOSPEL

## IV. FROM WHAT AND TO WHAT ARE WE SAVED?

WILLIAM ADAMS BROWN, PH.D., D.D.

Roosevelt Professor of Systematic Theology in Union Theological Seminary  
Author of "Christian Theology in Outline"

The subject which is next to engage our attention differs from those which we have been considering thus far in that it deals with a need of which everyone has direct and first-hand evidence. When we took up the Bible, we began by asking why we need a Bible, and it was necessary to do this, for there are people who do not seem to think we do. It is a fact—a lamentable fact—that for a great many people today the Bible is an all but unknown book. If they were in trouble, it would never occur to them to go to it for help. If they were in perplexity, it would never occur to them to go to it for guidance. They seldom read it. If you were to quote a familiar text they could not tell you from what book it came. It is more than likely that they would not even know that it came from the Bible at all. For all practical purposes the Bible has completely passed out of their lives.

It is so with the second great need of which we spoke—the need of God. Here, too, there are people who, so far as outward evidence is concerned, are unaware of their need. They are not conscious of God's presence in their lives. He is not a factor with which they feel they must reckon in the solution of their problems. They never pray. They do not go to church. They tell us that they believe in the religion of kindness and

that Nature is a good enough church for them.

If, then, we wish to commend our religion to people of this kind we must begin by showing why it is important to read the Bible and to believe in God. We must show that these fixed points in our Christian faith and practice are not arbitrary, but have found their place necessarily in answer to deep-seated human needs, needs that require only to be pointed out to be recognized.

But in the case of our present subject, no such preliminary explanation is necessary, for everybody who is old enough to know anything knows what it means to need salvation. Salvation means deliverance, help. It is the promise of relief from the evil of which life is full, the assurance of well-being and safety. To ask from what and to what we are saved is to ask from what evil we need to be delivered and what consequences we may expect to follow from the deliverance. This is a question of universal human interest. If you do not believe it, read the advertisement columns in the daily papers, or better still, the magazines, with their long list of remedies for the countless ills to which flesh is heir. Listen to the conversation of any group of men and women who know one another well enough to talk of the subjects that interest them most, and you

will find that they are talking about the need of salvation—either their own or somebody else's. They do not call it by that name, to be sure, but that is what they mean. There is no one, I repeat, old enough to know anything, who has not faced the fact of evil in his own experience and learned what it means to need deliverance. In every age, religion has made its most direct and persuasive appeal through its promise of help to people who were in trouble—in other words, because it has offered men salvation.

I have a friend, a man of singularly fine and unselfish feeling, who tells me that he thinks this matter of preaching salvation has been greatly overdone. Religion, he declares, is constantly presented as if it were a sort of medicine, a patent remedy, warranted to heal sickness and to cure sin, or, if not that, as a kind of life insurance policy, guaranteeing the insurer against the danger of loss and safeguarding him against the effects of his own misconduct and folly and that of others. But such a conception of religion, my friend holds, is altogether unworthy of its dignity. Religion is not something for the sick merely, but the well; not for the weak, but for the strong; not for the sinful, but for the righteous. Religion is the way by which we enter into the highest life possible and develop our capacities to the utmost. Religion is something for men at the height of their power and in the zenith of their prosperity, not simply for the hour of failure or the day of death. Religion is joy rather than comfort; fulness of life rather than safety; service rather than salvation.

<sup>1</sup> *Autobiography*, p. 214.

I have much sympathy with this point of view. In our desire to help men in their troubles, we often overlook the positive aspects of our religion. We greatly need the kind of preaching of which my friend speaks, preaching that will emphasize the virile and heroic aspects of Christianity; preaching that will present religion as a generous and satisfying life, the one adequate outlet for the energies that in most of us are but half used; preaching that will sound the note of adventure and enthusiasm, such as was struck by James Chalmers, Robert Louis Stevenson's friend, when he wrote:

We want "men and women who think preaching and living the gospel to the heathen the grandest work on earth. . . . We want men who will thoroughly enjoy all kinds of roughing it, who will be glad when ease and comfort can be had, but who will look upon all that comes as only the pepper and salt giving zest to work, and creating the appetite for more."<sup>2</sup>

But while this is true, and we cannot emphasize it too strongly, it is not all the truth. Whatever may be the case in the bright future to which we look forward by and by when the spirit of Christ shall be everywhere victorious and God's will be done on earth as it is done in heaven, certainly here and now men are the victims of sickness and sorrow and sin and death and failure in all its countless and heart-breaking forms. However much more there may be in religion than the word "salvation" expresses, it remains true that if we are to reach men at the point of their present need, here is where we must begin.

But though we should all agree as to the need of salvation, we should find it less easy to agree as to the particular evil from which men most need to be saved. For there are so many kinds of evil. There are evils which attack us from without, and evils which have their seat within. There are evils which affect us as individuals, and there are social evils. There are ills of the body, and ills of the mind. There is ignorance; there is sorrow; there is sickness; there are failure and misfortune; and there is the great family of evils which have their source in a perverted will. Clearly, if we are to help people intelligently, we must decide which need is greatest and where salvation is to begin.

Here the preachers of a generation ago had a great advantage, for they knew just what they were trying to do. With most of the evils of which we have been speaking, they were not concerned—at least, not primarily. Their special ministry was to the soul of man. It was their aim to set men right with God. The salvation they preached was from sin and the punishment which was its inevitable consequence.

Study the career of any one of the older revivalists, and you cannot help being impressed with the businesslike way in which he set about his work. The first thing which he attempted to do when he came to a new place was to make his hearers realize their absolute helplessness apart from God. He began by preaching the law. He warned men of the inevitable consequences of their sin, and only when he saw that they had been brought to a proper sense of the seriousness of their condition was he ready to follow up the first impression

with the message of forgiveness and peace.

And not only did the preacher know what he was trying to do, *but the people knew too*. We used to hear a great deal when I was a boy about the way of salvation. It was a way that had been trodden so many times that it was possible for anyone who wished to know just where he was going. People might not choose to go, but they knew where the way was, and they had no doubt that if they followed it, it would take them where they wanted to go.

If we look more closely at the salvation which the old revivalists preached, we find that it had two characteristics. In the first place, it was salvation from punishment; and in the second place, it was salvation from a punishment which was to be inflicted by and by.

This does not mean, of course, that deliverance from punishment was the whole of the preacher's message. He knew as well as we that the evil of evils was sin itself. Indeed the worst punishment which God could inflict upon a man was simply to let him continue in his sin. But to his thought punishment was something independent of sin and added to it, something from which a man needed to be delivered for its own sake, even after he had turned from his sin. It was not enough to repent in order to be forgiven, even if you were able to do so, which you were not. There was a necessity in the nature of God which required that past sin should be punished, and it was because it provided a way of escape from this punishment that the preaching of the atonement brought such relief to tortured spirits.

But it was not simply punishment

from which men needed to be delivered, but future punishment. The great day of reckoning to which the soul looked forward was not in this life but in the life to come. For a time, to be sure, the wicked might flourish like the green bay tree, but in the end his doom was sure. When death came he would be brought to the bar of divine judgment and face the great alternative of heaven or hell.

Here too we must be on our guard against exaggeration. Many descriptions of the older preaching of future punishment fail to do justice to its spiritual profundity. The older preachers realized as well as we that the true hell is not without, but within. It is separation from the comfortable presence of God here and hereafter. None the less it is true that in their thought of this separation they had the future rather than the present in mind. They were thinking not so much of present deliverance from sin as of escape from those torments of mind and body which awaited the impenitent after death. The message of the preacher was that of evangelist to Christian: "Flee from the wrath to come."

Here, then, we have a perfectly definite program. The minister of an earlier day, I repeat, knew just what he wanted to do. If you had asked him for his answer to our question today: From what and to what are we saved? his answer would have been instant and precise: We are saved from hell and to heaven.

There are many people today who no longer find this answer satisfying. A change has come over men's thought, but above all, over their feeling, of which

the thoughtful preacher is obliged to take account.

This change is due to two causes. It is due partly to a change in the conception of punishment, and partly to a new sense of the importance of the present life.

I have already had occasion to refer in another connection to the change which has taken place in our conception of justice. We no longer think of it as something which exacts punishment for its own sake. We think of justice as a means of bringing about right relations between man and his fellow-man, and punishment as one among other instruments to be used for that purpose. According to this view punishment is not something from which we need to be saved. It is itself the means of our salvation. Instead of being the vindication of an abstract principle of right, it is a tool put into our hands for the discipline and reformation of the offender. We have found in our prisons and our reformatories that when we treat men fairly, kindly, and hopefully, they respond to our treatment, and we see no reason why, when we are persuaded that their lives have been changed, they should not again be restored to society. We do not believe that God is less good than man, and so it is natural for us to think of him, too, as making justice the instrument of his love.

But it is not simply that we have a different conception of punishment. Our whole perspective has altered. The other-worldly Christianity of another generation has yielded to a view of religion which is primarily concerned with the life that now is. We wish a salvation for today—a salvation which can

deal with the specific evils of whose presence we are most conscious here and now—political evils like injustice, economic evils like poverty, physical evils like disease. It is not enough to believe that individuals here and there may be delivered from their present sinful environment. We wish to be assured that the environment itself is to be transformed into one that will favor and not hinder freedom and progress.

Into the causes of this change I need not enter here. In part it is due to a clearer recognition of the unity of life. We have learned for one thing that there is no such thing as a purely isolated individual, that we are literally members one of another, so involved with the men and women by our side, in a hundred complex relationships, that it is absolutely impossible for us to separate our interests from theirs. We have learned, too, how intimately and in how many ways the spiritual graces we value most highly are rooted in the homely soil of economic opportunity. We see that drunkenness and immorality are not simply sins of individuals. They are symptoms of an unsound social order, and so we are shifting our point of attack. We are trying not to save individual drunkards and prostitutes but simply to create such social standards and habits as will make their existence forever impossible, and in our devotion to this immediate task we have lost sight for the moment of the more distant future for which the present is a preparation.

I am not concerned here with passing judgment upon the change, but simply with registering the fact. We may admit that there is a truth in the older view

of punishment which many of us have too lightly dismissed. If punishment is really to reform, it must be recognized by the one who receives it as just. Take away its inevitableness and you impair its disciplinary value. The lawlessness which is so serious a menace to our social and political life is due in no small part to the fact that so many men have lost the sense of accountability to an authority which cannot be evaded.

We may admit, too, that any gospel of salvation which confines itself to the present merely, and does not take into account the longer future, is bound in the long run to prove unsatisfying. The richer and fuller we make life here, the more we put into it of spiritual meaning and value, the less we shall be content with the thought of its ultimate cessation. But however this may be, the fact remains that in both the respects to which I have referred, there has been a change of emphasis with which we must reckon. Even if we do not feel it ourselves, others do. There are many people for whom the old form of appeal has lost its force, and if our preaching of salvation is to be effective we must have some clear-cut message to take its place. What shall that message be?

This brings us to the first of our two questions: From what are we saved? The older answer was: "We are saved from punishment." In contrast to this, it would seem natural to say that we are saved from sin. If the older preaching was at fault in making too much of the consequences, let us go back to the cause. Sin at least is a present fact whose existence everyone recognizes, and no one will deny that we need to be saved from it.

But the trouble with this answer is that it is too vague. No doubt, everyone will admit that we need to be saved from sin in general, but our trouble begins when we try to deal with sins in detail. How can we tell whether any particular act is a sin? Is there any principle which will determine this for us?

This is a question which comes home with increasing force to every conscientious Christian. One of the most striking facts in the social life of today is the breaking-down of standards. The definite rules in which the older ethics formulated the ideal of human conduct can no longer count on an undivided public opinion. This is not necessarily due to any lack of moral sensitiveness. It is due in part to the growing complexity of modern life. New conditions are constantly arising which could not be foreseen; new factors entering the field which must be taken into account. I am not thinking simply of the changes which affect our individual standards, such as the new economic conditions which have modified our attitude toward Sunday observance, or the new attitude toward intellectual inquiry which has been the fruit of modern science. I am thinking of a whole group of sins which have grown out of the new social and economic environment, for which the older ethics made no explicit provision—the sins of the corporation, for example, sins for which we can hold no single individual exclusively responsible because we all alike share the responsibility. We need some principle at once definite and flexible which will unify our thinking and act as a positive guide in the new conditions which we face today.

Such a principle modern theology gives us in its teaching concerning the normative significance of Jesus Christ. Sin, it tells us, is any departure from the standard he has established, on the part either of the individual or of society. Sin is un-Christlikeness, and that is only another way of saying that it is selfishness. Sin is the preference from motives of self-indulgence of any other end for the supreme end which Christ has revealed, namely, the kingdom of God.

Such a definition helps us in two ways. In the first place, it gives us a general principle, simple enough to be easily intelligible, yet at the same time comprehensive enough to take in all forms of evil; and in the second place, it helps us to deal with specific evils by showing us wherein their real evil consists.

Take, for example, that old vice of intemperance which has been the text of so many a sermon. What is the real sin of drunkenness? There is a sin against the individual, no doubt, but there is a greater sin against society. The worst evil of the drink habit consists in the consequences which follow from it for others. It consists in the temptation which it puts in the way of those who have not the strength to resist. It consists in the decreased social efficiency of the men who have formed the habit, the fact that they are no longer so effective as workers, so responsible in positions of trust, so lovable and dependable as husbands and fathers; in the fact, in short, that they are no longer able worthily to fill their places in the great family of God.

It is so with all the other sins which are commonly catalogued as individual, such as gambling or impurity. The evil in each case includes not only the effect

produced upon the man himself, but the social consequences which follow from it. It is the fact that the self-indulgence which the habit fosters is bound to bear fruit in cruelty, misery, and degradation.

But our principle has a much wider application. It bears not only upon the individual sins which formed the staple of the older preaching, but upon those newer forms of social sin which have grown out of the changed conditions of our modern industrial life. It gives us a principle by which we can judge social practice everywhere. Does it advance or hinder the kingdom of God? Is it an expression of brotherhood, or its repudiation? Here is a wide field into which our present plan will not allow us to go in detail. It includes whatever affects the social welfare and efficiency of the people; the method of producing wealth and of distributing it; the conditions of housing and of education; the prevalence of social habits and standards—all, in short, that is either uplifting or debasing in a community.

Some years ago the country was stirred by the accounts of a lynching in a northern state, where a wounded negro under trial for his life was taken by force from his bed in a hospital by a mob of armed men, carried to a public place in the neighborhood, and burned to death in the presence of a crowd of more than four thousand people, none of whom made any protest or attempt at rescue. How shall we judge such an occurrence from the Christian standpoint? What is the sin which calls for national repentance? Not simply that the thing was done, but that conditions existed that made it possible. The sin was the

sin not simply of the men who piled the fagots or set the torch, not simply of the men who looked on with approval or at least acquiescence, but of the whole community in which there had grown up a spirit of brutality and lawlessness making possible such an outbreak. It was the sin of the churches which had failed in their preaching of brotherhood; it was the sin of the schools which had failed in their teaching of responsibility; it was the sin of the government which had failed in its enforcement of order; it was the sin of all of us whose omissions and commissions go to make up that mysterious force which we call public opinion, and which here, as so often in the past, had proved itself impotent for good. *If we had been the men we ought to be*, the evil thing could never have happened. The salvation we need—the salvation which is to deliver us from our real sin—cannot stop with the surface evils which show themselves openly in the body politic, but must attack the un-Christlikeness which is their underlying cause.

We have answered the first half of our question: From what are we saved? We are to be saved from un-Christlikeness which is selfishness. But our task is incomplete until we have answered the second part as well. To what are we saved? Here again the answer is clear. We are to be saved to Christlikeness, which means saviorhood.

This idea of salvation to service is no new idea. You will find it splendidly expressed in Luther's great tract *On Christian Liberty*. "A Christian man," says Luther, "is the most free lord of all men and subject to none; a Christian man is the most dutiful servant of all

and subject to every one."<sup>1</sup> He is free since Christ has saved him; he is servant since it is his part to be a Christ to others. Yet, closely as the two aspects of the Christian life are connected, they are yet independent. Service to Luther was something added to salvation, not a part of salvation itself. Salvation was complete when the saved man knew himself forgiven through Jesus Christ. Service was the life that followed as a consequence of this forgiveness. It was the way the Christian took of showing his thankfulness for having been saved.

To understand the significance of this distinction we must remember Luther's situation. He was facing a church that taught salvation by works, and he wished to make it perfectly clear that salvation was not something which a man could earn by his own merits, but must come to him as a free gift. Salvation was the renewal of fellowship with God which came with the consciousness of forgiveness. It was filial confidence, the upward look of the child to the father. Salvation, in a word, was sonship.

This is the meaning of that old doctrine of justification by faith, which has so often been misunderstood. Justification by faith is the theologian's way of saying what Jesus said when he talked about the childlike spirit, and it was to safeguard this great truth against the assaults of legalism in every form that the Reformers and their successors were so careful to distinguish between justification and sanctification; between salvation, which is forgiveness, and its consequence, which is service.

But we see today that the connection is even closer. Service is not something

added to salvation as its consequence. It is a part of salvation itself. You cannot love the God whom Christ revealed without beginning to love your fellow-man. The same experience which reveals to you your sonship shows you your brotherhood too. The test of being saved oneself is that one begins to save others.

This insistence upon the indissoluble connection between salvation and service is the characteristic note of our modern Christianity. It is not simply that we have come to see that you cannot have a salvation for the individual alone, but that we should not be satisfied with it, even if we could get it. We feel so keenly our kinship with the men and women all about us who are struggling for a larger and a fuller life that we cannot be content with any solution of our own problem which does not bring deliverance to them.

But when we ask ourselves what we can do to help these brothers of ours we find less clearness. We are saved to be saviors. But what does it mean to be a savior? From what and to what are we who have been saved to save others? Clearly from the same evil from which we have been saved ourselves. We are to save men from un-Christlikeness, which is selfishness, to Christlikeness, which means saviorhood.

When we bring our modern Christianity to this test the result is less satisfactory. There is an immense amount of activity among Christians. From morning till night, and often far into the night, we are at work with our clubs and our societies and our committee meetings. There is no one of all the

<sup>1</sup> Wace's ed., 1883, p. 104.



long list of ills at which we glanced a moment ago which is not being somewhere and somehow attacked. But the results do not seem commensurate with the effort. The forces of the enemy multiply faster than we can shoot them down. The weeds grow faster than we can pull them up. And the reason is not far to seek. We are dealing with consequences rather than causes, with symptoms rather than with the disease. In our own way we are repeating the mistake of the older preachers who tried to save men from punishment rather than from sin. All these evils of which we have been speaking are the effects of one fundamental and deep-seated evil—the radical selfishness of the human heart. We shall never have men really saved till we have saved them from this. How are we to do it?

Well, how were we saved ourselves? What was it that delivered us from the bondage of our own self-love and introduced us to the life of service? This is a very searching question for it pierces to the very roots of our being and forces us to ask ourselves anew how far we are saved ourselves—saved, I mean, in the full Christian sense of that great word. It is a question which each must answer for himself, in the solitude of his own soul. But I am sure of one thing, that so far as we can truthfully answer it in the affirmative we shall confess that what saved us was someone's love. There is only one way to produce love, and that is by loving. "We love," says the apostle, "because he first loved us."<sup>1</sup>

This doctrine of salvation by love is the characteristic feature of the Christian religion. Ever since we were children

we have been told that God is love. "God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten son that whosoever believeth on him should not perish, but have eternal life."<sup>2</sup> We have heard the words so often that they have almost ceased to convey any meaning to us. To appreciate what such a phrase as salvation by love really means when applied to God we have to make a distinct effort of the imagination.

What does it mean to love in the sense in which Jesus used the term? It means to respect another's individuality. It means to make the interests of another your own interests, his fortune your fortune, his welfare your welfare. It means to desire earnestly his highest good. It means to carry him on your heart, hour by hour, day by day, year by year.

That was what gave Jesus his great power over men. He was the great lover. He was always thinking about other people's welfare. He went about doing good. He healed the sick, he fed the hungry, he comforted the sad, he forgave the sinful, he taught the ignorant. But these, after all, were only symptoms of something deeper. Jesus *cared* for men. He believed in their capacity for infinite development. He carried them on his heart, as the shepherd carries his sheep.

Now the Bible tells us that this is what God is always doing. He is doing a thousand things for us, supplying our physical needs through the bounties of Nature, ministering to our sense of beauty by sunrise and evening star, guiding our consciences by the warnings of his Spirit, rousing us to new activity

<sup>1</sup> I John 4: 19.

<sup>2</sup> John 3: 16.

by the call of duty or the spur of danger; in countless ways by his overshadowing providence making life the wonderful and fascinating thing it is, but above and beyond all this, he *cares* for us. He carries us on his heart, as the good father carries his children. He is the great Shepherd of our souls.

And that is what he wants us to do for one another. It is a good thing to feed the hungry and to clothe the naked and to visit the prisoner—nay, it is a necessary thing. Jesus has told us that they are his representatives and that when we minister to them we are ministering to him. But without love what is our ministering worth? "If I bestow all my goods to feed the poor, and if I give my body to be burned, but have not love, it profiteth me nothing."<sup>1</sup> There is a worse evil than thirst from which men need deliverance—a worse evil than cold, a worse evil than imprisonment, a worse evil than nakedness, and that is selfishness, and the only thing that can save from this is love.

Near one of our great cities there is a reformatory for girls. It was the outgrowth of the efforts of a good woman who believed that the indiscriminate association of first offenders with hardened criminals was responsible for the destruction of many lives that might be saved to usefulness and self-respect. From the first the reformatory has been singularly fortunate in its management. It has been free from the curse of politics. It has secured the most highly trained women for its positions of responsibility, and its record of lives saved and characters transformed is a most encouraging witness to what can be accomplished by

the resources of modern science and modern philanthropy.

To this reformatory there came one day a girl with whom the superintendent and teachers could do nothing. Handsome, strong, intelligent, she was utterly reckless and self-willed, and much of the time it was necessary to keep her under physical restraint to prevent her from doing injury to herself and others. Her story, as it was subsequently learned, was the familiar story of early mismanagement resulting in the exaggeration of the evils it was designed to cure. "Kate," her parents used to say, "if you do this I'll kill you." "But I very soon found," she said, "that they did not kill me, and I determined that the way to have my own way was to have it, and I did." Against this ingrained self-will all the resources of the institution were tried in vain. Kindness and sternness, gentleness and force were equally ineffective, and all who had to do with Kate were in despair.

One night a message came to the superintendent from the matron in charge of the cottage where Kate was living to come over at once, as the girl was rebellious and her outcries were keeping all the other inmates awake. When the superintendent came she found Kate confined in a cell in handcuffs, sitting on the floor, since she had torn everything else in the cell to pieces. Like a wild animal she tossed from side to side, screaming in such a way that rest was impossible for anyone within range of her voice. The superintendent entered the cell, sat down beside her on the floor and tried to coax or reason her into a better frame of mind. At last,

<sup>1</sup> I Cor. 13:3.

exhausted in body and worn out in spirit, she lost her self-control, and before she realized what she was doing, had burst into tears. Instantly Kate stopped screaming and for some time sat regarding her companion in silence. At last she spoke: "Miss Smith," she asked, "are you crying?" "Yes, Kate," the superintendent answered. "Why are you crying?" Kate continued. "I am crying because of you, to think that after all my effort I am unable to do anything for your good." Again there was silence. Then Kate said abruptly: "Miss Smith, that is the first time in my life that anyone ever shed a tear for me. This breaks my heart; I cannot stand it. You can take the handcuffs off. You won't have any more trouble with me."

The superintendent took her at her word. The handcuffs were removed and the miracle was wrought, not instantly or without many a struggle and some failures, yet certainly, the wild beast was tamed, the devil cast out, and Kate, once the despair of the institution, became the mainstay of superintendent and matron in dealing with the new cases that baffled them. "Leave her to me," she would say. "I know how she feels, I can deal with her," and she did. The saved had become a savior, and a savior she remains to this day.

It is the old story of redemptive love. You can hear its like in any rescue mission. But the interesting thing about the story and the reason I have told it here is that it did not happen at a rescue mission, but at a state reformatory which is the expression of the latest word in scientific charity. When everything had been tried that science could

suggest, the old doctor Love was called in and wrought the cure.

This does not mean that modern methods are useless; that we have nothing to learn from the new philanthropy as to how to help men and women in their need. You will surely not so far misunderstand me. Love cannot work in a vacuum. Like every other workman it needs tools, and the better the tools the better it can work. The inspiring thing about the whole scientific movement is that it has so mightily enlarged our capacity for service by showing us how many more things we can do than we had supposed to help people in their need. But after all, all these things are tools. Mighty as the instruments of love, in and of themselves, they are impotent. It is as true today as when Christ lived and died, that the only sure way to save is to love.

Now love is the most costly thing in the world. It cost Christ Calvary, and every man who shares Christ's spirit and gives himself to his work will find that he too will have to pay the price. "If any man would come after me, said Jesus, let him deny himself, and take up his cross and follow me."<sup>1</sup> It is a law of life that we can have only what we pay for, and the things that are most valuable cost most.

That is the meaning of the doctrine of the atonement—that great truth which lies at the heart of the Christian religion. It is the expression of the fact that the law of cost is valid for God as well as for man. God, too, can have only what he pays for; and for him, too, the things which he values most highly cost most. God could not save without loving, and

<sup>1</sup> Mark 9: 34.

he could not love without suffering. Even before Christ came Isaiah had grasped this great secret when he wrote of God: "In all their affliction he was afflicted; in his love and in his pity he redeemed them and he bare them and carried them all the days of old."<sup>1</sup> God is the great sufferer because he is the great lover. Atonement is not something which happens outside of God to make forgiveness possible. *Atonement is something which happens in God.* It was what it cost God to bear the world's sin, your sin and mine.

Religion is fellowship with God, and fellowship means unity in thought, in purpose, and in feeling. To be a Christian means to make God's point of view one's own—to feel toward men as he feels toward them, to desire for them what he desires for them, to care for them so much that one is willing to suffer for them—nay, to love them so much that one cannot help suffering for them, when one sees them fail of their highest good.

This does not mean that we are to go through life heavy-hearted, as though the burden of the world's salvation rested upon our shoulders; as though God's redemption needed some supplement that our suffering must supply. It does not mean that we should always be looking on the dark side of life, that we are to be blind to the joy and beauty of which the world is full. It does not require us to shut our eyes to the fact that God's method is one of progress, and that the standards by which we judge the beginners in the moral life are very different from those which we apply to those who are further advanced. But it

<sup>1</sup> Isa. 63:9.

does mean that the standards which we apply must be those of Christ. It means that we shall grieve over the things that grieved him and rejoice over that which gave him joy. It means that that mind should be in us which was also in Christ Jesus, of whom we read that, "being in the form of God," he "counted it not a prize to be on an equality with God, but emptied himself, taking the form of a servant, being made in the likeness of men, and being found in fashion as a man, he humbled himself, becoming obedient even unto death, yea the death of the cross."<sup>2</sup>

Have we the mind of Christ? Is our attitude toward life and its problems his attitude? Does he determine our estimate of values? Do we measure success by the standard by which he measures it—our own success, the success of our children, of our churches, of the community in which we live, of society as a whole? Is love our final test of salvation?

Above all, have we the heart of Christ? Does he set the tone of our feeling? Do we grieve as he grieved over loveless lives? Do we find our greatest happiness in the winning of new recruits to that great purpose of love to which he gave his life? Can we say with truth, as he said, that "it is more blessed to give than to receive"? If so—and only so—are we ready for the work to which he has called us as preachers of his salvation.

I thank thee, Lord, for strength of arm  
 To earn my bread,  
 And that beyond my need is meat  
 For friend unfed.  
 I thank thee much for bread to live,  
 I thank thee more for bread to give.

<sup>2</sup> Phil. 2:7, 8.

I thank thee, Lord, for snug thatched roof  
 In cold and storm,  
 And that beyond my need is room  
 For friend forlorn.  
 I thank thee much for place to rest,  
 But more for shelter for my guest.

I thank thee, Lord, for lavish love  
 On me bestowed,  
 Enough to share with loveless folk,  
 To ease their load.  
 Thy love to me I ill could spare,  
 Yet dearer is the love I share.<sup>1</sup>

---

## THE TEACHING OF JESUS

---

LUCIUS HOPKINS MILLER

Professor of Biblical Instruction, Princeton University

---

*This is the third of a series of articles by Professor Miller dealing with Jesus. The others have been in the November number, "The Source of Our Information regarding the Life of Jesus," and in the February number, "The Life of Jesus in the Light of Modern Criticism." We suggest the reading of this article in connection with the sermon in this number by Dr. Ross.*

So much is made of the supposed insufficiency and uncertainty of the Gospels that it is well to lay this boggy to rest at once, so far as the teaching of Jesus is concerned. Of course, we should like to have a much fuller record, but that is no reason for shutting our eyes to the fact that we have, nevertheless, a fairly large amount of reported teaching. But is it credibly reported? This question raises serious problems into which we cannot enter here. But the existence of these problems need not paralyze our practical judgment. We may leave much in doubt without depriving ourselves of the assurance that we do know, or can know, the main lines along which Jesus' thought ran. To be sure, Jesus spoke in Aramaic and all the Gospels were written in Greek. Further the accounts of what he said have certainly been colored by the minds through which the stream of tradition flowed.

But let all be said that can be said, and we may still maintain that we know what Jesus taught.

A few words about interpretation. In interpreting the Bible many mistakes are made and many errors arise. Jesus' teaching has not been exempt from these things. It is so easy to see in a word what we wish to see in it, and it is so comfortable to insert our pet convictions in a verse, surreptitiously, and then to draw them out again triumphantly, with an air of scientific discovery and of divine authority. In interpreting the teaching of Jesus we must not change parables into allegories, seeking all sorts of complicated meanings where usually one great truth is to be found. We must remember that "the words of Jesus are important, not as precepts, but as indicative of principles," for he was not interested in regulating the outward life but in filling the soul with

<sup>1</sup> Davis, *The Better Prayer*.