

Sermons on Important Subjects

by

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SERMON II

"The Method of Salvation through Jesus Christ"

*"For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son,
that whosoever believeth in him should not perish,
but have everlasting life."*

John 3:16

I have been solicitously thinking in what way my life (redeemed from the grave) may be of most service to my dear people. And I would collect all the feeble remains of my strength into one vigorous effort this day to promote this benevolent end. If I knew what subject has the most direct tendency to save your souls, that is the subject to which my heart would cling with peculiar endearment and which I would make the matter of the present discourse.

And when I consider I am speaking to an assembly of sinners--guilty, depraved, helpless creatures--and that if ever you be saved it will be only through Jesus Christ in that way which the gospel reveals, [and] when I consider that your everlasting life and happiness turn upon this hinge, namely, the reception you give to this Saviour and this way of salvation, I say, when I consider these things I can think of no subject I can more properly choose than to recommend the Lord Jesus to your acceptance and to explain and inculcate the method of salvation through his mediation. Or, in other words, to preach the pure gospel to you, for the gospel in the most proper sense is nothing else but a revelation of a way of salvation for sinners of Adam's race.

My text furnishes me with proper materials for my purpose. Let heaven and earth hear it with wonder, joy, and raptures of praise! *"God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever, or that every one that believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life."*

This is a part of the most important evening conversation that ever was held; I mean that between Christ and Nicodemus, a Pharisee and ruler of the Jews. Our Lord first instructs him in the doctrine of regeneration, that grand constituent of a Christian and prerequisite to our admission into the kingdom of heaven. And then he proceeds to inform him of the gospel method of salvation, which contains these two grand articles--the death of Christ as the great foundation of blessedness, and faith in him as the great qualification upon the part of the sinner.

He presents this important doctrine to us in various forms with a very significant repetition. *"As Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so shall the Son of man be lifted up,"* that is, hung on high on a cross, *"that whosoever believeth in him should not perish but have everlasting*

life." Then follows my text, which expresses the same doctrine with great force: "*God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son,*" gave him up to death, "*that whosoever believeth in him should not perish but have everlasting life.*" He goes on to mention a wonder. This earth is a rebellious province of Jehovah's dominions, and therefore if his Son should ever visit it, one would think it would be as an angry judge or as the executioner of his Father's vengeance. But Oh, astonishing! "*God sent not his Son into the world to condemn the world, but that the world through him might be saved.*"

Hence the terms of life and death are thus fixed. "*He that believeth in him is not condemned: but he that believeth not is condemned already, because he hath not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God.*" Sure the heavenly rivers of pleasure flow in these verses! Never, methinks, was there so much gospel expressed in so few words! Here take the gospel in miniature and bind it to your hearts forever. These verses alone, methinks, are a sufficient remedy for a dying world.

The truths I would infer from the text for present improvement are these: [1] that through Jesus Christ a way is opened for your salvation; [2] that the grand pre-requisite to your being saved in this way is faith in Jesus Christ; [3] that every one without exception, whatever his former character has been, that is enabled to comply with this pre-requisite shall certainly be saved; and [4] that the constitution of this method of salvation, or the mission of Christ into our world as the Saviour of sinners, is a most striking and astonishing instance and display of the love of God.

I. My text implies that without Christ you are all in a perishing condition. This holds true of you in particular because it holds true of the world universally. For the world was undoubtedly in a perishing condition without Christ, and none but he could relieve it. Otherwise God would never have given his only begotten Son to save it. God is not ostentatious or prodigal of his gifts, especially of so inestimable a gift as his Son, whom he loves infinitely more than the whole creation. So great, so dear a person would not have been sent upon a mission which could have been discharged by any other being. Thousands of rams must bleed in sacrifice, or ten thousands of rivers of oil must flow; our firstborn must die for our transgressions and the fruit of our body for the sin of our souls; or Gabriel, or some of the upper ranks of angels, must leave their thrones and hang upon a cross if such methods of salvation had been sufficient.

All this would have been nothing in comparison of the only begotten Son of God leaving his native heaven and all its glories, assuming our degraded nature, spending thirty-three long and tedious years in poverty, disgrace and persecution, dying as a malefactor and a slave in the midst of ignominy and torture, and lying a mangled breathless corpse in the grave. We may be sure there was the highest degree of necessity for it, otherwise God would not have given up his dear Son to such a horrid scene of sufferings.

This then was the true state of the world, and consequently yours without Christ. It was hopeless and desperate in every view. In that situation there would not have been so much goodness in the world as to try the efficacy of sacrifices, prayers, tears, reformation, and repentance; or they would have been tried in vain. It would have been inconsistent with the honour of the divine perfections and government to admit sacrifices, prayers, tears, repentance, and reformation as a sufficient atonement.

What a melancholy view of the world have we now before us! We know the state of mankind only under the gracious government of a Mediator, and we but seldom realize what our miserable condition would have been had this gracious administration never been set up. But exclude a Saviour in your thoughts for a moment and then take a view of the world: helpless, hopeless, under the righteous displeasure of God, and despairing of relief, the very suburbs of hell, the range of malignant devils, the region of guilt, misery and despair, the mouth of the infernal pit, the gate of hell! This would have been the condition of our world had it not been for that Jesus who redeemed it. And yet in this very world he is neglected and despised.

But you will ask me, "How comes it that the world was in such an undone, helpless, hopeless condition without Christ? Or what are the reasons of all this?"

The true account of this will appear from these two considerations: that all mankind are sinners, and that no other method but the mediation of Christ could render the salvation of sinners consistent with the honour of the divine perfections and government, with the public good, and even with the nature of things.

All mankind are sinners. This is too evident to need proof. They are sinners, rebels against the greatest and best of Beings, against their Maker, their liberal Benefactor, and their rightful Sovereign, to whom they are under stronger and more endearing obligations than they can be under to any creature or even to the entire system of creatures. Sinners, rebels in every part of our guilty globe, none righteous, no not one. All sinners without exception. Sinners from age to age for thousands of years. Thousands, millions, innumerable multitudes of sinners. What an obnoxious race is this! There appears no difficulty in the way of justice to punish such creatures. But what seeming insuperable difficulties appear in the way of their salvation! Let me mention a few of them to recommend that blessed Saviour who has removed them all.

If such sinners be saved, how shall the holiness and justice of God be displayed? How shall he give an honourable view of himself to all worlds as a Being of perfect purity and an enemy to all moral evil?

If such sinners be saved, how shall the honour of the divine government and law be secured? How will the dignity of the law appear if a race of rebels may trifle with it with impunity? What a sorry law must that be that has no sanctions, or whose sanctions may be dispensed with at pleasure! What a contemptible government that may be insulted and rejected, and the offender admitted into favour without exemplary punishment! No government can subsist upon such principles of excessive indulgence.

How can such sinners be saved and yet the good of the public secured, which is always the end of every wise and good ruler? By the public good I do not mean the happiness of mankind alone, but I mean the happiness of all worlds of reasonable creatures collectively (in comparison of which the happiness of mankind alone may be only a private interest, which should always give way to the public good). Now sin has a direct tendency, not only according to law but according to the nature of things, to scatter misery and ruin wherever its infection reaches. Therefore the public good cannot be properly consulted without giving a loud and effectual warning against all sin and dealing with offenders in such a manner as to deter

others from offending. But how can this be done? How can the sinner be saved and yet the evil of sin be displayed, and all other beings be deterred from it forever? How can sin be discouraged by pardoning it, its evil displayed by letting the criminal escape punishment? These are such difficulties that nothing but divine wisdom could ever surmount them.

These difficulties lie in the way of a mere pardon and exemption from punishment. But salvation includes more than this. When sinners are saved they are not only pardoned but received into high favor--made the children, the friends, the courtiers of the King of Heaven. They are not only delivered from punishment but also advanced to a state of perfect positive happiness, and nothing short of this can render such creatures as we happy. Now in this view the difficulties rise still higher; and it is the more worthy of observation, as this is not generally the case in human governments. And as men are apt to form their notions of the divine government by human, they are less sensible of these difficulties.

But this is indeed the true state of the case here. How can the sinner be not only delivered from punishment but also advanced to a state of perfect happiness? Not only escape the displeasure of his offended Sovereign but be received into full favour and advanced to the highest honour and dignity? How can this be done without casting a cloud over the purity and justice of the Lord of all--without sinking his law and government into contempt, without diminishing the evil of sin and emboldening others to venture upon it, and so at once injuring the character of the Supreme Ruler and the public good? How can sinners, I say, be saved without the salvation being attended with these bad consequences?

And here you must remember that these consequences must be provided against. To save men at random without considering the consequences, to distribute happiness to private persons with an undistinguishing hand--this would be at once inconsistent with the character of the supreme Magistrate of the universe and with the public good. Private persons are at liberty to forgive private offences; nay, it is their duty to forgive. And they can hardly offend by way of excess in the generous virtues of mercy and compassion. But the case is otherwise with a magistrate. He is obliged to consult the dignity of his government and the interest of the public. And he may easily carry his lenity to a very dangerous extreme, and by his tenderness to criminals do an extensive injury to the state.

This is particularly the case with regard to the great God, the universal supreme Magistrate of all worlds. And this ought to be seriously considered by those men of loose principles among us who look upon God only under the fond character of a father, or a being of infinite mercy, and thence conclude they have little to fear from him for all their audacious iniquities. There is no absolute necessity that sinners should be saved. Justice may be suffered to take place upon them. But there is the most absolute necessity that the Ruler of the world should both be, and appear to be, holy and just. There is the most absolute necessity that he should support the dignity of his government and guard it from contempt, that he should strike all worlds with a proper horror of sin and represent it in its genuine infernal colours, and so consult the good of the whole rather than a part. There is, I say, the highest and most absolute necessity for these things, and they cannot be dispensed with as matters of arbitrary pleasure. And unless these ends can be answered in the salvation of men, they cannot be saved at all. No, they must all perish rather than God should act out of character as the supreme Magistrate of the universe, or bestow private favours to criminals to the detriment of the public.

And in this lay the difficulty. Call a council of all the sages and wise men of the world and they can never get over this difficulty, without borrowing assistance from the gospel. Nay, this, no doubt, puzzled all the angelic intelligences, who pry so deep into the mysteries of heaven before the gospel was fully revealed. Methinks the angels, when they saw the fall of man, gave him up as desperate. "Alas," they cried, "the poor creature is gone! He and all his numerous race are lost forever." This, they knew, had been the doom of their fellow-angels that sinned; and could they hope better for man? Then they had not seen any of the wonders of pardoning love and mercy. And could they have once thought that *that* glorious person--who filled the middle throne and was their Creator and Lord--would ever become a man and die like a criminal to redeem an inferior rank of creatures? No, this thought they would probably have shuddered at as blasphemy.

And must we then give up ourselves and all our race as lost beyond recovery? There are huge and seemingly insuperable difficulties in the way, and we have seen that neither men nor angels can prescribe any relief. But "*sing, O ye heavens, for the Lord hath done it: shout ye lower parts of the earth: break forth into singing, ye mountains, O forest, and every tree therein: for the Lord hath redeemed Jacob, and glorified himself in Israel*" (Isaiah 44:23). Which leads me to add:

II. My text implies that through Jesus Christ a way is opened for your salvation. He and he only was found equal to the undertaking. And before him all these mountains become a plain, all these difficulties vanish. And now God can be just, can secure the dignity of his character as the Ruler of the world, and answer all the ends of government and yet justify and save the sinner that believeth in Jesus.

This is plainly implied in this glorious epitome of the gospel: "*God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life.*" Without this gift all was lost; but now, whosoever believeth in him may be saved, [and] saved in a most honourable way. This will appear more particularly if we consider the tendency the mediation of Christ had to remove the difficulties mentioned. But I would premise two general remarks.

The first is, that God being considered in this affair in his public character as supreme Magistrate, or Governor of the world, all the punishment which he is concerned to see inflicted upon sin is only such as answers the ends of government. Private revenge must vent itself on the very person of the offender or be disappointed. But to a ruler, as such, it may in some cases be indifferent--whether the punishment be sustained by the very person that offended or by a substitute suffering in his stead. It may also be indifferent whether the very same punishment, as to kind and degree, threatened in the law be inflicted or a punishment equivalent to it. If the honour of the ruler and his government be maintained, if all disobedience be properly discountenanced, if, in short, all the ends of government can be answered, such things as these are indifferences. Consequently, if these ends should be answered by Christ's suffering in the stead of sinners, there would be no objection against it.

This remark introduces another, namely, (2) that Jesus Christ was such a person; that his suffering as the substitute or surety of sinners answered all the ends of government, which

could be answered by the execution of the punishment upon the sinners themselves. To impose suffering upon the innocent when unwilling is unjust. But Jesus was willing to undertake the dreadful task. And besides, he was a person (*sui juris*) at his own disposal, his own property, and therefore he had a right to dispose of his life as he pleased. And there was a merit in his consenting to that which he was not obliged to, previous to his consent. He was also a person of infinite dignity and infinitely beloved by his Father. And these considerations rendered the merit of his sufferings for a short time, and another kind of punishment than that of hell, equal--more than equal--to the everlasting sufferings of sinners themselves.

Jesus Christ was also above law. That is, [he was] not obliged to be subject to that law which he had made for his creatures; and consequently his obedience to the law not being necessary for himself, might be imputed to others. Whereas creatures are incapable of works of supererogation, or of doing more than they are bound to do, being obliged to obey their divine lawgiver for themselves to the utmost extent of their abilities. And consequently their obedience, however perfect, can be sufficient only for themselves, but cannot be imputed for others.

Thus it appears, in general, that the ends of government are as effectually answered by the sufferings of Christ in the room of sinners as they could be by the everlasting punishment of the sinners themselves. Nay, we shall presently find they are answered in a more striking and illustrious manner.

To mention particulars: Was it necessary that the holiness and justice of God should be displayed in the salvation of sinners? See how bright they shine in a suffering Saviour! Now it appears that such is the holiness and justice of God, that he will not let even his own Son escape unpunished when he stands in the law-place of sinners, though guilty only by the slight stain (may I so speak) of imputation. Could the execution of everlasting punishment upon the hateful criminals themselves ever give so bright a display of these attributes? It were impossible.

Again, was it a difficulty to save sinners and yet maintain the rights of the divine government and the honour of the law? See how this difficulty is removed by the obedience and death of Christ! Now it appears that the rights of the divine government are so sacred and inviolable that they must be maintained, though the darling Son of God should fall a sacrifice to justice, and that not one offence against this government can be pardoned without his making a full atonement. Now it appears that the Supreme Ruler is not to be trifled with, but that his injured honour must be repaired though at the expense of his Son's blood and life. Now the precept of the law is perfectly obeyed in every part and a full equivalent to its penalty endured by a person of infinite dignity. And it is only upon this footing, that is, of complete satisfaction to all the demands of the law, that any of the rebellious sons of men can be restored into favour.

This is a satisfaction which Christ alone could give; to sinners it is utterly impossible, either by doing or suffering. They cannot *do* all the things that are written in the law, nor can they *endure* its penalty without being forever miserable. And therefore the law has received a more complete satisfaction in Christ than it would ever receive from the offenders themselves.

Further, was it a difficulty how sinners might be saved and yet the evil of sin be displayed in all its horrors? Go to the cross of Christ. There, ye fools that make a mock of sin, there learn its malignity and its hatefulness to the great God. There you may see it is so great an evil that when it is but imputed to the man that is God's fellow, as the surety of sinners, it cannot escape punishment. No, when that dreadful stain lay upon him, immediately the commission was given to divine justice, "*Awake O sword, against my shepherd, against the man that is my fellow, saith the Lord of hosts; smite the Shepherd*" (Zech. 13:7). When Christ stood in the room of sinners, even the Father spared not his own Son but gave him up to death. That the criminals themselves, who are an inferior race of creatures, should not escape would not be strange. But what an enormous evil must that be which cannot be connived at even in the favourite of heaven, the only begotten Son of God! Surely nothing besides could give so striking a display of its malignity!

Was it a difficulty how to reconcile the salvation of sinners and the public good? That is, how to forgive sin and yet give an effectual warning against it? How to receive the sinner into favour and advance him to the highest honour and happiness, and in the meantime deter all other beings from offending? All this is provided for in the sufferings of Christ as a surety. Let all worlds look to his cross and receive the warning which his wounds and groans and blood and dying agonies proclaim aloud. And sure they can never dare to offend after the example of man. Now they may see that the only instance of pardon to be found in the universe was not brought about but by such means as are not likely to be repeated--by the incarnation and death of the Lord of glory. And can they flatter themselves that he will leave his throne and hang upon a cross as often as any of his creatures wantonly dare to offend him? No. Such a miracle as this, the utmost effort of divine grace, is not often to be renewed. And therefore if they dare to sin, it is at their peril. They have no reason to flatter themselves [that] they shall be favoured like fallen man, but rather to expect [that] they shall share in the doom of the fallen angels.

Or if they should think sin may escape with but a slight punishment, here they may be convinced of the contrary. If the Darling of heaven, the Lord of Glory, though personally innocent suffers so much when sin is but imputed to him, what shall the sinners themselves feel who can claim no favour upon the footing of their own importance or personal innocence? "*If these things be done in the green tree, what shall be done in the dry?*"

Thus, my brethren, you may see how a way is opened through Jesus Christ for your salvation. All the ends of government may be answered and yet you pardoned and made happy. Those attributes of the divine nature such as mercy and justice, which seemed to clash, are now reconciled. Now they mingle their beams and both shine with a brighter glory in the salvation of sinners than either of them could apart. And must you not acknowledge this divine God-like scheme? Can you look round you over the works of the creation and see the divine wisdom in every object, and can you not perceive the divine agency in this still more glorious work of redemption? Redemption which gives a full view of the Deity, not as the sun in eclipse--half dark, half bright--but as

"A God all o'er, consummate, absolute,
Full orb'd, in his whole round of rays complete."

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And shall not men and angels join in wonder and praise at the survey of this amazing scheme? Angels are rapt in wonder and praise, and will be so to all eternity. See how they pry into this mystery! Hark how they sing "*Glory to God in the highest*" and celebrate the Lamb that was slain! And shall not men, who are personally interested in the affair, join with them? O, are there none to join with them in this assembly? Surely, none can refuse!

Now since all obstructions are removed on God's part that lay in the way of our salvation, why should we not all be saved together? What is there to hinder our crowding into heaven promiscuously? Or what is there requisite on our part in order to make us partakers of this salvation? Here it is proper to pass on to the next truth inferred from the text, namely:

III. That the grand pre-requisite to your being saved in this way is faith in Jesus Christ. Though the obstructions on God's part are removed by the death of Christ, yet there is one remaining in the sinner which cannot be removed without his consent, and which, while it remains, renders his salvation impossible in the nature of things. That is the depravity and corruption of his nature. Till this is cured he cannot relish those fruitions and employments in which the happiness of heaven consists, and consequently he cannot be happy there. Therefore there is a necessity, in the very nature of things, that he should be made holy in order to be saved. Nay, his salvation itself consists in holiness.

Now faith is the root of all holiness in a sinner. Without a firm realizing belief of the great truths of the gospel, it is impossible a sinner should be sanctified by their influence. And without a particular faith in Jesus Christ, he cannot derive from him those sanctifying influences by which alone he can be made holy, and which are conveyed through Jesus Christ and through him alone.

Further, it would be highly incongruous--and indeed impossible--to save a sinner against his will or in a way he dislikes. Now faith, as you shall see presently, principally consists in a hearty consent to and approbation of the way of salvation through Jesus Christ. [This is] the only way in which a sinner can be saved consistently with the divine honour; so that the constitution of the gospel is not only just, but as merciful as it can be when it ordains that only "*he that believeth shall be saved; but that he that believeth not shall be damned.*"

Again, we cannot be saved through Jesus Christ till his righteousness be so far made ours as that it will answer the demands of the law for us, and procure the favour of God to us. But his righteousness cannot be thus imputed to us, or accounted ours in law, till we are so united to him as to be one in law, or one legal person with him. Now faith is the bond of union. Faith is that which interests us in Christ. And therefore without faith we cannot receive any benefit from his righteousness.

Here then a most interesting inquiry presents itself: "What is it to believe in Jesus Christ, or what is that faith which is the grand pre-requisite to salvation?" If you are capable of attention to the most interesting affair in all the world, attend to this with the utmost seriousness and solemnity.

Faith in Christ includes something speculative in it. That is, it includes a speculative, rational

belief, upon the testimony of God that Jesus Christ is the only Saviour of men. But yet it is not entirely a speculation, like the faith of multitudes among us. It is a more practical experimental thing. And that you may understand its nature, you must take notice of the following particulars:

(1) Faith presupposes a deep sense of our undone, helpless condition. I told you before, this is the condition of the world without Christ. And you must be sensible at heart that this is your condition in particular before you can believe in him as your Saviour. He came to be a Saviour in a desperate case, when no relief could possibly be had from any other quarter. And you cannot receive him under that character till you feel yourselves in such a case. Therefore, in order to your believing, all your pleas and excuses for your sins must be silenced, all your high conceit of your own goodness must be mortified, all your dependence upon your own righteousness--upon the merit of your prayers, your repentance, and good works--must be cast down; and you must feel that indeed you lie at mercy, that God may justly reject you forever, and that all you can do can bring him under no obligation to save you. These things you must be deeply sensible of, otherwise you can never receive the Lord Jesus in that view in which he is proposed to you, namely, as a Saviour in a desperate case.

I wish and pray you may this day see yourselves in this true, though mortifying, light. It is the want [lack] of this sense of things that keeps such crowds of persons unbelievers among us. It is the want of this that causes the Lord Jesus to be so little esteemed, so little sought for, so little desired among us. In short, it is the want of this that is the great occasion of so many perishing from under the gospel, and, as it were, from between the hands of a Saviour. It is this, alas, that causes them to perish (like the impenitent thief on the cross) with a Saviour by their side! O that you once rightly knew yourselves, you would then soon know Jesus Christ and receive salvation from his hands!

(2) Faith implies the enlightening of the understanding to discover the suitableness of Jesus Christ as a Saviour, and the excellency of the way of salvation through him. While the sinner lies undone and helpless in himself and looking about in vain for some relief, it pleases a gracious God to shine into his heart and enable him to see his glory in the face of Jesus Christ. Now this once neglected Saviour appears not only absolutely necessary but also all-glorious and lovely, and the sinner's heart is rapt away and forever captivated with his beauty. Now the neglected gospel appears in a new light, as different from all his former apprehensions as if it were quite another thing. I have not time at present to enlarge upon this discovering of Christ and the gospel which faith includes. And indeed should I dwell upon it ever so long, I could not convey just ideas of it to such of you as have never had the happy experience of it. In short, the Lord Jesus and the way of salvation through him appear perfectly suitable, all-sufficient, and all-glorious. And in consequence of this:

(3) The sinner is enabled to embrace this Saviour with all his heart and to give a voluntary cheerful consent to this glorious scheme of salvation. Now all his former unwillingness and reluctance are subdued, and his heart no more draws back from the terms of the gospel but he complies with them, and that not merely out of constraint and necessity but out of free choice, and with the greatest pleasure and delight. How does his heart now cling to the blessed Jesus with the most affectionate endearment! How is he lost in wonder, joy, and gratitude at the survey of the divine perfections as displayed in this method of redemption! How does he

rejoice in it as not only bringing happiness to him, but glory to God; as making his salvation not only consistent with but a bright illustration of the divine perfections and the dignity of his government! While he had no other but the low and selfish principles of corrupt nature, he had no concern about the honour of God. If he might be but saved, it was all he was solicitous about. But now he has a noble generous heart. Now he is concerned that God should be honoured in his salvation; and this method of salvation is recommended and endeared to him by the thought that it secures to God the supremacy, and makes his salvation subservient to the divine glory.

(4) Faith in Jesus Christ implies a humble trust or dependence upon him alone for the pardon of sin, acceptance with God, and every blessing. As I told you before, the sinner's self-confidence is mortified. He gives up all hopes of acceptance upon the footing of his own righteousness. He is filled with self-despair, and yet he does not despair absolutely. He does not give up himself as lost, but has cheerful hopes of becoming a child of God and being forever happy--guilty and unworthy as he is. And what are these hopes founded upon? Why, upon the mere free grace and mercy of God through the righteousness of Jesus Christ. On this he ventures a guilty, unworthy, helpless soul; and finds it a firm immoveable foundation, while every other ground of dependence proves but a quicksand.

There are many that flatter themselves [that] they put their trust in God. But their trust wants [lacks] sundry qualifications essential to a true faith. It is not the trust of a humble, helpless soul that draws all its encouragement from the mere mercy of God and the free indefinite offer of the gospel, but it is the presumptuous trust of a proud, self-confident sinner who draws his encouragement in part, at least, from his own imaginary goodness and importance. It is not a trust in the mercy of God through Jesus Christ as the only medium through which it can be honourably conveyed; but [instead it is] either in the absolute mercy of God without a proper reference to a Mediator, or in his mercy as in some measure deserved or moved by something in the sinner. Examine whether your trust in God will stand this test.

I have now given you a brief answer to that grand question, "What is it to believe in Jesus Christ?" And I hope you understand it, though I have not enlarged so much upon it as I willingly would. I shall only add that this faith may also be known by its inseparable effects, which are such as follow. Faith purifies the heart and is a lively principle of inward holiness. Faith is always productive of good works and leads us to universal obedience. Faith overcomes the world and all its temptations. Faith realizes eternal things and brings them near, and hence it is defined by the apostle, "*The substance of things hoped for, and the evidence of things not seen*" (Heb. 11:1).

Here I have a very important question to propose to you: Who among you can say, "Well, notwithstanding all my imperfections and all my doubts and fears, I cannot but humbly hope, after the best examination I can make, that such a faith has been produced in this heart of mine?" And can you say so indeed? Then I bring you glad tidings of great joy: you shall be saved. Yes, saved you shall be in spite of earth and hell, saved however great your past sins have been. Which thought introduces the glorious truth that comes next in order, namely:

IV. My text implies that every one without exception, whatever his former character has been, that is enabled to believe in Jesus Christ shall certainly be saved. The number or aggravations

of sin do not alter the case. And the reason is, the sinner is not received into favour in whole or in part upon the account of anything personal, but solely and entirely upon the account of the righteousness of Jesus Christ. Now this righteousness is perfectly equal to all the demands of the law. And, therefore, when this righteousness is made over to the sinner as his by imputation, the law has no more demands upon him for great sins than for small, for many than for few, because all demands are fully satisfied by the obedience of Jesus Christ to the law. You see that sinners of all characters who believe in him are put upon an equality in this respect. They are all admitted upon one common footing--the righteousness of Christ; and that is as sufficient for one as another.

This encouraging truth has the most abundant support from the holy scriptures. Observe the agreeable indefinite *whosoever* so often repeated: "*Whosoever believeth in him shall not perish, but have everlasting life.*" Whosoever he be, however vile, however guilty, however unworthy, if he does but believe he shall not perish but have everlasting life. What an agreeable assurance is this from the lips of him who has the final states of men at his disposal! The same blessed lips have also declared, "*Him that cometh unto me I will in no wise cast out*" (John 6:37). And, "*Whosoever will, let him take the water of life freely*" (Rev. 22:17). He has given you more than bare words to establish you in the belief of this truth. Upon this principle he has acted, choosing some of the most abandoned sinners to make them examples--not of his justice, as we might expect, but of his mercy, for the encouragements of others.

In the days of his flesh, he was reproached by his enemies for his friendship to publicans and sinners. But sure it is, instead of reproaching we must love him on this account. When he rose from the dead he did not rise with angry resentment against his murderers. No, but he singles them out from a world of sinners to make them the first offers of pardon through the blood which they had just shed. He orders "*that repentance and remission of sins should be preached in his name to all nations, beginning at Jerusalem*" (Luke 24:47). At Jerusalem, where he had been crucified a few days before, there he orders the first publication of pardon and life to be made.

You may see what monsters of sin he chose to make the monuments of his grace in Corinth. "*Neither fornicators, nor idolators, nor adulterers, nor effeminate, nor abusers of themselves with mankind, nor thieves, nor covetous, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor extortioners, shall inherit the kingdom of God.*" What a dismal catalogue is this! It is no wonder such a crew should not inherit the kingdom of heaven. They are fit only for the infernal prison. And yet, astonishing, it follows, "*such were some of you; but ye are washed, but ye are sanctified, but ye are justified in the name of the Lord Jesus, and by the spirit of our God*" (1 Cor. 6:9-11)! What sinner after this can despair of mercy upon his believing in Jesus!

St. Paul was another instance of the same kind. "*This,*" says he, "*is a faithful saying,*" a saying that may be depended on as true, "*and worthy of all acceptation,*" from a guilty world, "*that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners, of whom I am chief. Howbeit, for this cause I obtained mercy, that in me the chief, Jesus Christ might show forth all long-suffering, for a pattern to them which should hereafter believe in him to life everlasting*" (1 Tim. 1:15, 16). A sinner of less size would not have answered this end so well. But if Saul the persecutor obtains mercy upon his believing, who can despair?

You see upon the whole, my brethren, you are not excluded from Christ and life by the greatness of your sins. But if you perish, it must be from another cause. It must be on account of your wilful unbelief in not accepting of Jesus Christ as your Saviour. If you reject him, then indeed you must perish, however small your sins have been. For it is only his death that can make atonement for the slightest guilt. And if you have no interest in that, the guilt of the smallest sin will sink you into ruin.

Here is a door wide enough for you all, if you will but enter in by faith. Come then, enter in, you that have hitherto claimed a horrid precedence in sin, that have been ringleaders in vice. Come now, take the lead and show others the way to Jesus Christ. Harlots, publicans, thieves, and murderers, if such be among you, there is salvation even for you if you will but believe. Oh, how astonishing is the love of God discovered in this way!--a consideration which introduces the last inference from my text, namely:

V. That the constitution of this method of salvation, or the mission of a Saviour into our world, is a most striking and astonishing display of the love of God: "*God so loved the world as to give his only begotten Son,*" &c.

View the scheme all through and you will discover love--infinite love--in every part of it. Consider the great God as self-happy and independent upon all his creatures; and what but love, self-moved love, could excite him to make such provision for an inferior part of them! Consider the world sunk in sin, not only without merit but most deserving of everlasting punishment; and what but love could move him to have mercy upon such a world? Consider the Saviour provided--not an angel, not the highest creature, but his Son, his only begotten Son; and what but love could move him to appoint such a Saviour? Consider the manner in which he was sent--as a gift, as a free unmerited gift, "*God gave his only begotten Son*"; and what but infinite love could give such an unspeakable gift? Consider the blessings conferred through this Saviour: deliverance from perdition and the enjoyment of everlasting life; and what but the love of a God could confer such blessings? Consider the condition upon which these blessings are offered: faith--that humble self-emptied grace so suitable to the circumstances of a poor sinner, that brings nothing but receives all; and what but divine love could make such a gracious appointment? "*It is by faith, that it may be of grace*" (Rom. 4:16). Consider the indefinite extent, or the universality of the offer, which takes in sinners of the vilest character and excepts against none: "*Whosoever believeth shall not perish,*" &c. O what love is this!

But I must leave it as the theme of your meditations, not only in the house of your pilgrimage but through all eternity. Eternity will be short enough to pry into this mystery, and it will employ the understandings of men and angels through the revolutions of eternal ages.

And now, my brethren, to draw towards a conclusion, I would hold a treaty with you this day about the reconciliation to God through Jesus Christ. I have this day set life and death before you. I have opened to you the method of salvation through Jesus Christ--the only method in which you can be saved, the only method that could afford a gleam of hope to such a sinner as I in my late approach to the eternal world. And now I would bring the matter home, and propose it to you all, to consent to be saved in this method; or in other words, to believe in the

only begotten Son of God. This proposal I seriously make to you, and let heaven and earth and your own consciences witness that it is made to you.

I also insist for a determinate answer this day. The matter will not admit of a delay, and the duty is so plain that there is no need of time to deliberate. A Roman ambassador treating about peace with the ambassador of a neighbouring state (if I remember rightly), and finding him desirous to gain time by shuffling and tedious negotiations, drew a circle about him and said, "I demand an answer before you go out of this circle." Such a circle let the walls of this house, or the extent of my voice, be to you. Before you leave this house or go out of hearing, I insist on a full decisive answer to this proposal: whether you will believe in Jesus Christ this day or not.

But before I proceed any farther, I would remove one stumbling block out of your way. You are apt to object, "You teach us that faith is the gift of God, and that we cannot believe of ourselves. Why then do you exhort us to it, or how can we be concerned to endeavour that which it is impossible for us to do?"

In answer to this, I grant the premises are true; and God forbid I should so much as intimate that faith is the spontaneous growth of corrupt nature or that you can come to Christ without the Father's drawing you. But the conclusions you draw from these premises are very erroneous. I exhort and persuade you to believe in Jesus Christ because it is while such means are used with sinners, and by the use of them, that it pleases God to enable them to comply, or to work faith in them. I would therefore use those means which God is pleased to bless for this end. I exhort you to believe in order to set you upon the trial; for it is putting it to trial--and that only--which can fully convince you of your own inability to believe. And till you are convinced of this, you can never expect strength from God.

I exhort you to believe, because sinful and enfeebled as you are, you are capable of using various preparatives to faith. You may attend upon prayer, hearing, and all the outward means of grace with natural seriousness. You may endeavour to get acquainted with your own helpless condition and, as it were, put yourselves in the way of divine mercy. And though all these means cannot of themselves produce faith in you, yet it is only in the use of these means [that] you are to expect divine grace to work it in you. Never was it yet produced in one soul while lying supine lazy, and inactive.

I hope you now see good reasons why I should exhort you to believe, and also perceive my design in it. I therefore renew the proposal to you that you should this day, as guilty, unworthy, self-despairing sinners, accept of the only begotten Son of God as your Saviour and fall in with the gospel-method of Salvation. And I once more demand your answer. I would by no means, if possible, leave the pulpit this day till I have effectually recommended the blessed Jesus, my Lord and Master, to your acceptance. I am strongly bound by the vows and resolutions of a sick-bed to recommend him to you; and now I would endeavour to perform my vows. I would have us all this day, before we part, consent to God's covenant, that we may go away justified to our houses.

To this I persuade and exhort you in the name and by the authority of the great God, by the death of Jesus Christ for sinners, by your own most urgent and absolute necessity, by the

immense blessings proposed in the gospel, and by the heavy curse denounced against unbelievers.

All the blessings of the gospel--pardon of sin, sanctifying grace, eternal life, and whatever you can want--shall become yours this day if you but believe in the Son of God. Then let desolation overrun our land, let public and private calamities crowd upon you and make you so many Jobs for poverty and affliction; still your main interest is secure. The storms and waves of trouble can only bear you to heaven and hasten your passage to the harbour of eternal rest. Let devils accuse you before God, let conscience indict you and bring you in guilty, let the fiery law make its demands upon you. You have a righteousness in Jesus Christ that is sufficient to answer all demands; and having received it by faith, you may plead it as your own in law. Happy souls! Rejoice in hope of the glory of God, for your hope will never make you ashamed!

But I expect, as usual, some of you will refuse to comply with this proposal. This, alas! has been the usual fate of the blessed gospel in all ages and in all countries. As some have received it, so some have rejected it. That old complaint of Isaiah has been justly repeated thousands of times: "*Who hath believed our report? And to whom is the arm of the Lord revealed?*" (Isa. 53:1). And is there no reason to pour it out from a broken heart over some of you, my dear people! Are you all this day determined to believe? If so, I pronounce you blessed in the name of the Lord. But if not, I must denounce your doom.

Be it known to you, then, from the living God, that if you thus continue in unbelief you shut the door of mercy against yourselves and exclude yourselves from eternal life. Whatever splendid appearances of virtue, whatever amiable qualities, whatever seeming good works you have, the express sentence of the gospel lies in full force against you: "*He that believeth not shall be damned*" (Mark 16:16). "*He that believeth not is condemned already, because he hath not believed on the only begotten Son of God*" (John 3:18). "*He that believeth not shall not see life; but the wrath of God abideth upon him*" (John 3:36). This is your doom repeatedly pronounced by him whom you must own to be the best friend of human nature. And if he condemn, who can justify you?

Be it also known to you that you will not only perish, but you will perish with peculiar aggravations. You will fall with no common ruin. You will envy the lot of Heathens who perished without the law; for O! you incur the peculiarly enormous guilt of rejecting the gospel and putting contempt upon the Son of God. This is a horrid exploit of wickedness, and this God resents above all the other crimes of which human nature is capable. Hence Christ is come for judgment as well as for mercy into this world, and he is set for the fall as well as the rising again of many in Israel. You now enjoy the light of the gospel, which has conducted many through this dark world to eternal day. But remember also, "*this is the condemnation,*" that is, it is the occasion of the most aggravated condemnation, "*that light is come into the world, and men love darkness rather than light.*" On this principle Jesus pronounced the doom of Chorazin and Bethsaida more intolerable than that of Sodom and Gomorrah (Matt. 11:21, 22). And would it not be hard to find a place in Virginia where the doom of unbelievers is likely to be so terrible as among us?

And now does not all this move you? Are you not alarmed at the thought of perishing, of perishing by the hand of a Saviour rejected and despised? Perishing under the stain of his

profaned blood? Perishing not only under the curse of the law, but under that of the gospel which is vastly heavier? O, are you hardy enough to venture upon such a doom! This doom is unavoidable if you refuse to comply with the proposal now made to you.

I must now conclude the treaty. But for my own acquittance, I must take witness that I have endeavoured to discharge my commission, whatever reception you give it. I call heaven and earth, and your own consciences, to witness that life and salvation through Jesus Christ have been offered to you on this day; and if you reject it, remember it. Remember it whenever you see this place. Remember it whenever you see my face, or one another. Remember it, that you may witness for me at the supreme tribunal that I am clear of your blood. Alas, you will remember it among a thousand painful reflections millions of ages hence, when the remembrance of it will rend your hearts like a vulture. Many sermons forgotten upon earth are remembered in hell, and haunt the guilty mind forever. O that you would believe and so prevent this dreadful effect from the present sermon!

Sermon II, "The Method of Salvation through Jesus Christ" in Samuel Davies, *Sermons on Important Subjects*, vol. I, 5th ed. (London: printed for W. Davies, 1804). Note: The text has not been modified, except that punctuation has been modernized and long paragraphs have been divided.