

Sermon II

"The Love of God in the Gift of His Son"

by

Henry Martyn

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

John 3:16

Love! Does God love? *Can* God love? This soft affection is found among creatures; and in exact proportion to its extent and power do peace and harmony prevail. When we love and are loved, we ourselves are happy and make others so. But can it be said of God that he loves?--of him, whom you represent as a jealous God, a great and dreadful God, who cast down the angels and reserves them in everlasting chains unto the judgment of the great day, and who will turn the nations into hell if they forget him? Yes, though he has done these things, and must do them again, yet he loves. You will wonder how such opposite attributes as love and unbending justice can consist together, or else you will begin to suspect that the love of God, of which we are speaking, is only the love which he feels for those who are worthy of it.

Let us advance a step farther in the text and see that *God so loved **the world***--the world, which St. John says, *lies in wickedness*.

No sign of worthiness appears here. "*We were sometimes foolish, disobedient, deceived, serving divers lusts and pleasures, living in malice and envy, hateful and hating one another*" (Tit. 3:3); that is, detestable ourselves and detesting one another. Nothing amiable appears yet. But perhaps they still retained some respect for God, though they were so full of hatred to one another. But "*the Lord looked down from heaven,*" and behold, "*there was none doing good, no not one*" (Ps. 14:2,3). "*Every imagination of the thoughts of the heart was only evil continually*" (Gen. 6:5).

It was not the mere infirmity of nature that led men into such an extent of depravity, but radical enmity in the heart. The heart, in its natural state, is

not merely an enemy to religion but enmity itself against God, being made up of malice and ill-will, and spiteful opposition to God for imposing the restraints of his laws upon us and preparing a place of punishment. We accounted him unjust and tyrannical. We would rather he were less holy, and still more, that he did not exist at all.

Now God, we are sure, must have been privy to these thoughts. Had we attempted it, we could not have concealed them. His eye is fixed on the heart. He knows, and ever has known, all that is passing there; is fully acquainted with the malignity of every thought. But perhaps God thinks more lightly of these things than we would have thought he does; and if he had punished them, the punishment would not have been very terrible. But you will notice one expression of our text--*that they should not perish*. The idea of **perishing** leaves no room for recovery. Absolute ruin, then, would have been the consequence if justice had taken its course.

Thus we need not go beyond our text to find proofs of our being unworthy of God's love. When he undertook to introduce a new dispensation whereby men might be saved, he found them perishing. But in the government of a good and righteous God, no creature could have perished without deserving it. If men deserved to perish, they could not be worthy of his love.

Possibly this thought may occur to some: that men fill so high a place in the universe that the preservation of them might be an object of importance; that perhaps God might take measures for preventing their excision in order to preserve the integrity of his universal empire.

But, alas, the earth with its grandeur is but a speck before God. Could then the destruction of it, with all its inhabitants, diminish anything of God's glory? Would there not remain multitudes enough of holy creatures, yea of millions of worlds, to glorify him? Or if we were to suppose the whole universe with all its wonders to be blotted out and brought to nothing, would not he remain the same Great God, infinitely happy in himself alone? Could he not, if he pleased, call forth another world with the same ease as when he spoke this world into being?

But, in truth, so far is the salvation of men from being necessary to God's glory that he would have been glorified by our destruction. While our earth sank in ruins, the inhabitants of heaven might praise God in the same strains as those in which they will praise him at the fall of his other enemies; for thus they will sing in heaven at the final execution of judgment, "*We give thee thanks, O Lord God Almighty, which art, and was,*

and art to come; because thou has taken to thee thy great power and has reigned" (Rev. 11:17). And, again, they glorify him for the ruin of his enemies: "*Great and marvelous are thy works, Lord God Almighty; just and true are thy ways, thou King of saints*" (Rev. 15:3). Thus might the song of triumph be sung at the destruction of the race of men. They might have sung as we perished, "Just and true are thy ways!"

If then God was under no obligation to do anything for us, but on the contrary might have justly left us to perish; if he might in righteous judgment have sent *indignation and wrath, tribulation and anguish on every soul of man* (Rom. 2:8,9) because they were enemies and rebels, then there is no way of accounting for his being willing to save us except by saying that he chose that it should be so. It was mere sovereign grace that moved him to have compassion on us. He might have left it undone with perfect justice, propriety, and honor to himself. That he has done it at all, in any manner, is an interposition unexpected and extraordinary.

If it is an act of mercy that God should suspend our punishment, what shall we say then, when God has *so loved the world as to **give his only-begotten Son***?

He loved us, but could not resign his rights or put up with a partial fulfillment of his will. A Person must be found capable of bearing the sins of men; and where was such a one but in the bosom of God himself? If God will save sinners, he must give none other than his own Son! His love to the world may be great, but will it draw from him a gift like this?

"*Take now your son,*" said God to Abraham, "*your only son, whom you love, and offer him up there.*" This was the severity of the trial, that Abraham was to give up his only-beloved child. We pretend not to define accurately the relation which subsists between the Father and the Son. So far we may be certain that Christ is at least as dear to his Father as a child to an earthly parent. If this be the case, can the Father give him? Is there any example of such generosity on earth that we may be encouraged to hope? Was ever a person known to give his fortune to another who had no claim upon him, or to give the life of one of his own children for the sake of a friend? Much less would he do it for the sake of a person indifferent to him; still less for one who had used him ill; still less if he was still raging with enmity. Least of all would he give an only child for such a person in such circumstances. . . .

But God "*so loved the world that he **gave** his only-begotten Son.*" "*Herein*

is love, not that we loved God, but that he loved us, and sent his Son to be the propitiation for our sins" (1 John 4:10). "Herein is love," as if there were love in nothing else. May we not say, that to give us a being among rational creatures--therein is love? To have our life carried on so many years as a taper in the hands of providence--therein is love? To have food and raiment and kind friends--therein is love? To give us heaven--therein is love? No! Herein is love, that God gave his Son! He gave him unasked for. Man would never have conceived such a request, or if he had, he would not have dared to urge it. God foresaw how his Son would be treated, yet he gave him notwithstanding to shame and to spitting, to pain and to sorrow, to a suffering life and disgraceful death--for so God loved the world; such anxiety, such desire and concern was there in the heart of God for the salvation of sinners!

The further we advance in the text the more conspicuously will this truth appear. God gave his Son that ***whoever believes in him should not perish.***

The plan of salvation by Jesus Christ is altogether peculiar. In it all men alike are considered as perishing--the virtuous as well as the profligate--because they have both broken that Law which allows of no violation and provides no remedy. But the Son of God having appeared on the theater of the world and suffered the penalty due to us, God sends forth this message into the world, and at this moment is delivering it to you--that he is willing to grant pardon and bliss to the sinner who comes to him through Christ. Whoever will venture to rest the whole weight of his concerns for eternity on this rock shall find that it will not fail him. Though pursued by avenging justice, whoever will flee to this city shall be safe; yea, if he be a murderer he shall be safe. Whoever believes (it matters not what he has been), only let him be convinced that he deserves punishment, and let him plead the death of Christ, and then the sentence of death shall be reversed and a free pardon granted. He shall not perish, as he otherwise would have done. He shall not perish though Satan would persuade him that he will. He shall not perish though his remaining sinfulness threatens him every moment. He is *kept by the power of God through faith (1 Pet. 1:5), and therefore he shall not perish.*

Those who engage in trivial objections say, "Is not this the dangerous doctrine of salvation by faith only?" Would to God that they who thus idly speak would conceive rightly of their guilt, corruption, and danger! If they saw themselves on the brink of everlasting perdition, where they all are by nature, they would no longer think of their works as meriting favor or

purchasing an interest in Christ; but they would cry, "Save, Lord, or I perish!" They would then see that if pardon be not by faith only, they are lost. They suppose we lay stress on faith in contradistinction to other good works; whereas faith is only an act of the mind, whereby it gives up all hopes founded on itself and reposes on the mercy of God in Christ. May the sinner after this live as he will, or does he even wish such a thing? Perish the thought! There is such a word as *gratitude* in his vocabulary. Knowing why Christ came, it is his business to become more holy from day to day; and for this purpose the Spirit of God is given him. . . .

Let those who believe in Christ remember that they are warranted to expect every real blessing--such as assurance of pardon, heavenly mindedness, and everything consolatory, sanctifying and adorning--for he that "*spared not his own Son, but delivered him up for us all, how shall he not with him also freely give us all things!*" (Rom. 8:32). All is yours, for you are Christ's. If God has parted so freely with that which is so far dearer to him than anything else, how shall he deny you anything afterward! If he has so freely given you the greater mercies, how can you suppose he would deny you the less? And if he has given you this gift when you were alienated from him, it is not to be imagined that he will deny you any inferior mercy when you are in a state of amity with him. "*If, when we were enemies, we were reconciled to God by the death of his Son, much more, being reconciled, we shall be saved by his life*" (Rom. 5:10).

Oh, what numerous, connected, well-secured, precious, and everlasting blessings and joys have we in our Lord Jesus Christ! Let us return again, with gratitude ever new, to the glorious theme and take a view of it in its lengths and breadths and depths and heights. Let us proclaim to all around us this glad, this glorious, this joy-inspiring news of a Savior born. Let us blow the great trumpet and make it known among the nations that the year of Jubilee is come. Come, ye sinners, draw near to the fountain of living waters. Drink, drink deep, of the sacred stream. Drink in eternal life. When millions of years shall have passed away, your joys will be but beginning; and when millions more shall have passed away, they shall be no nearer ending.

Let us, then, join the choir of angels and adore with songs of highest praise the love and mercy of our God. Let there be a new song in our mouths and in our hearts, even praises to our God. Let our meditation of him be sweet, and let our souls, which he has redeemed, rejoice in God our only Lord.

While we are rejoicing in the bounty of God, let us also delight to imitate it.

God gave his Son to them who had no claim. Hesitate not to give to those whole helpless penury is a claim upon you. Give liberally, give cheerfully, and all the Christmas Song will belong to you. You will have a right to sing not only *Glory to God in the highest*, but *Peace on earth and goodwill toward men!*

Sermon II from *Twenty Sermons* by Henry Martyn (London: L. B. Seeley, Fleet Street, 1822). **Note:** Liberty has been taken for some light editing, paraphrasing, and condensing. Also, punctuation and KJV-era pronouns and verb forms have been modernized, and long paragraphs have been divided.