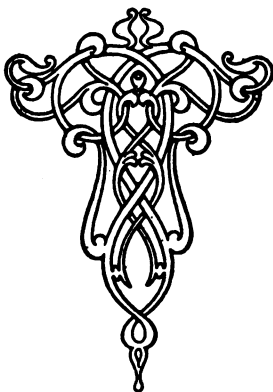


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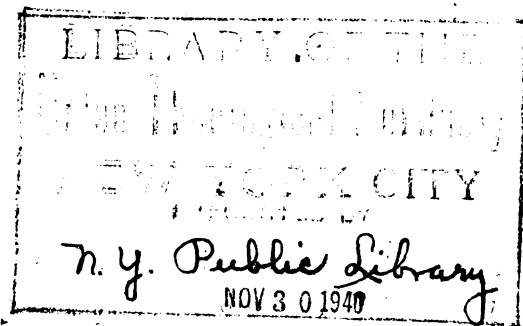
TOGETHER WITH PRACTICAL SUGGESTIONS
FOR THE CONDUCT OF THE AFTER-MEETING



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VII

GOD AND LOVE AND LIFE ETERNAL

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VII

GOD AND LOVE AND LIFE ETERNAL

"God so loved the world that he gave His only begotten Son that whosoever believeth in Him should not perish but have everlasting life."—ST. JOHN III. 16.

God and Love and Life Eternal—what a subject! No genius of man, no tongue of seraph or of archangel, can do it justice. The text which contains it is usually avoided. I have never preached on it before. In trying to deal with it the man in the pulpit feels like a child attempting to throw its little arms about the Rocky Mountains. Its very fullness is an embarrassment. It is immensely easier to drink out of a cup than out of the ocean. The weight of this passage, its infinite sweep, crushes a man into silence. It is the whole Bible in a sentence. No one else can condense like Jesus Christ. No one else can crowd the sun into a single dewdrop of speech like him. It points to unlimited intellectual power. Here in twenty-five words we have the whole content of the salvation of the Cross. In this short sentence we have the entire essence of the evangelical faith and doctrine. If ever there was *multum in parvo*, it is here. All our gospel songs, all our gospel victories, all Christian revivals from the beginning until now,

have come out of the truth of this text. All streams of gospel hope and life, flowing across the centuries and the continents, have issued from this fountain.

It is an expert that speaks in this passage—the supreme spiritual expert of the ages, and you know how we value expert testimony. When Lord Kelvin speaks on science, or Sir Alexander McKenzie on medicine, or John Ruskin on art, or Paderewski on music, or Marconi on electricity, or William E. Gladstone on statesmanship, all the world listens. It lifts its hat to the expert and gives him the right-of-way in his own field. Men are universally agreed that this is wise. And shall we not listen to Jesus Christ when he tells us of God and Love and Life Eternal? He speaks as one who knows, upon the highest theme of which it is possible to conceive—speaks of human need and the world's need of salvation, the costliest jewel, the most precious and transcendent gift which even God can offer to the sons of men.

First, he calls our attention to the *source* of this salvation. It is God. There everything begins. Sometimes the story of the gospel has been so told as to convey the impression that God had to be made willing to save the world by the atonement on the Cross. He has been represented as sternly and inexorably just, and that nothing could make him yield and manifest his mercy but the sacrifice of his only begotten Son. But no warrant can be found for that sort of teaching in the Bible. If anything is

made plain in the Holy Scriptures it is the fact that God does not love us because Christ died on the tree, but that Christ poured out his blood for us and drank the cup of crucifixion agony to the bitter dregs because God loved us. The Father's love was first, the Father's love is midst, and the Father's love will be last. All there is in Jesus living his life of poverty and humiliation, all there is in Jesus dying on the Cross, all there is in Jesus walking amongst us today, filling the world with light and hope, we owe to the love of God. That is the central truth of our religion, and to that truth let us cling in every wind that blows and in every experience of life. God loves us forever and ever, and Christianity and Christianity's Christ are the incarnation of that love in time and on the plane of humanity.

"God so loved the world that he gave." "*So*"—a wonderful little word. We have no line to take its measure. Crowded into it is all the yearning heart of the Infinite Father. Even Christ could go no farther in condensation. No thought, no imagination in its wildest flights can soar to the limits of that "*so*." It is speech agonizing to say a little more, stopping only because it is up against the impossible.

"So loved the world that he *gave*." We knew that word was coming. There is no surprise in it. It must come, for love cannot do other than give. Love and Give are as inseparable as the Siamese twins, as inseparable as sun and heat. The world's word is

“get,” and it is supreme in all the literature of trade and commerce and exceedingly obtrusive even in the literature of the church. More ink is used in writing it in some one or other of its forms than in writing any other. But God’s word is “Give,” and we are God’s only in so far as we have entered into its secret. If we do not give time and thought and strength and service, if our life is a stagnant pond and not a running stream, receiving, taking in, but never flowing out to bless with ministries of helpfulness and love, we are still on the outward steps of the kingdom with our backs toward the door and the door is shut.

The next thought emphasized in this incomparable saying of our Lord is the *method* of salvation. When men enter upon any great enterprise, or inaugurate any great movement, or give themselves to the prosecution of any great work, they proceed according to a plan, and that plan is the wisest which it is possible for them to devise; and if men have a way of doing things and always choose what seems to them the best way, why not God? We may rest assured that with his purpose to save the world, of the many methods that may have occurred to His mind, He selected the only one that could secure the desired result and maintain the dignity of His throne and the stability of His divine government. So he chose the method of the Cross. “He gave his only begotten Son,” and “As Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness,

even so must the Son of Man be lifted up." It is the way of Calvary, of agony, and blood and death.

Into the woods my Master went,
Clean forespent—forespent.
Into the woods my Master came,
Forespent with love and shame.
But the leaves were not blind to him,
And the little gray leaves were kind to him,
And the thorn-tree had a mind to him,
When into the woods he came.

"Out of the woods my Master went,
And he was well content;
Out of the woods my Master came,
Content with death and shame.
When death and shame would woo him last,
From under the trees they drew him last,
'Twas on a tree they slew him last,
When out of the woods he came."

That was the way the God of love chose because he saw no other way that would meet all the conditions. "He gave His only begotten Son." Calvary is there, and from this mountain, breaking through the excessive light that enwraps it, we hear a voice saying in words of infinite sweetness, "He gave His only begotten Son." When that saying became a fact, history started off into a new stream, and the ship of civilization changed its course. A new Pilot had come to guide its destinies. Let skeptics doubt, and scoffers sneer, and blasphemers attack and atheists shut their eyes and say, "There is no sun"; let gamblers cast their dice about the foot of the cross, and buffoons and mockers go laughing by, if they will; but one thing they are compelled to admit, that empires have been lifted off their hinges by those pierced hands and

the whole world filled with new ideals by that tremendous sacrifice.

I do not wonder that the Master Himself likened this salvation to the pearl of great price. It is a most suggestive figure. The diamond, and ruby, the emerald, and sapphire, and other precious gems are hidden away in river beds or set in solid rocks, and there men seek them without loss of health or risk of life. Not so with the pearl. It belongs to the ocean. Not to the shore, but to the depths. To find it the pearl fisher must weight himself down with a stone, leap from the boatside and descend into the depths of the sea. Frequently he never rises again. Either the pressure is too great for him or he falls a prey to the shark or other monsters of the deep. It is an awful business, and furnishes an apt and striking illustration of what it cost to bring salvation to men. If ever anything was purchased at a great price, it was this. Christ's life for our life. The best beloved of Heaven nailed to the tree for us. "He gave His only begotten Son." That is God's method and that method was conceived and applied by the infinite love. There are so-called advance thinkers, and so-called liberal thinkers, even pronounced unbelievers, who say, "God is Love." It has so entered into our human thinking that men of all classes and schools are saying it. But where did they learn that God is Love? Somehow the discovery was never made till the Cross was set up. Socrates, and Plato, and Aristotle, and the philosophers of Rome, as well, had climbed very high in thought, but

they never got high enough to bring back this message. Nor did men ever learn it by turning the pages of creation. Tennyson tells us that nature is "red in tooth and claw," and so it is. Men never learned it from history, for history is full of discord, and conflict, and confusion. The only place it can be read is yonder—

"Without a city wall,
Where the dear Lord was crucified,
Who died to save us all."

"He gave His only begotten Son." There, and there only, can men read the blessed truth that God is Love.

Then, after this, how natural and how logical to emphasize the *scope* of this salvation. "The world," and "whosoever," are the words that indicate the reach of it. How they rebuke our little narrow programs and condemn all our small class and race antipathies. When we talk about the gospel for the black man, and for the yellow man, and for the red man, and make our appeals to send it out and give it to every creature, there are people who object and call our concern folly, and our plea sentimentalism. They think of us as somewhat belated, a good deal blinded, and as belonging to a past that has gone, and they are almost sorry to think that we are not up to date. These are the people who boast of their breadth and their advanced views and their progressiveness and all that sort of thing, when, as a matter of fact, they are like moles that have no vision, and no horizon, and no outlook, and no sympathy—nothing but the

small hole in which they burrow and hide and close their ears to the appeals of human need, as those appeals come from the four corners of the earth. "God so loved the world"—they clip off the edges of it with the shears of their selfishness, and clip them off, and clip them off, until they come to themselves—

"Me and my wife,
My son John and his wife,
Us four and no more."

It is simply amazing how men and women can read this gospel and profess to believe this gospel and seek to convey the impression that this gospel means something to them, and at the same time go through it and strike out the accent of Jesus, and limit the purpose of Jesus and run their pens through the program of Jesus, and blot out the great commission of Jesus. He says, "world." He says, "whosoever." His love throws itself about humanity and for humanity He died—for the whole, struggling, sinning, dying race of men. But they say: "Never mind about the Mongolian. Never mind about the Malay. Never mind about the Hottentot. Let us stay at home and mind our own business." Poor, shriveled, narrow souls. Poor pagans, masquerading in the garb of Christians. Do such people do any religious work at home, and about their own doors? Not very much as a rule, and that for the reason that they do not have the religious heart, which is a heart of sympathy and love. A good many of them are like a certain tight-fisted man about whom I have read. He was a church member, but

regarded Foreign Missions with a sort of superior contempt. Asked to give to this cause, he felt that his intelligence had been insulted. Then he was asked to give to Home Missions, but he refused on the ground that Home Mission money was not wisely expended. The town in which he lived was about to improve and beautify its cemetery, and it was thought that, being a man of means, and that some day his body would probably be laid there, he would surely make a liberal subscription to this cause, but "No," he said; "It does not appeal to me; those who are in can't get out, and those who are out don't want to get in"; and so he gave nothing. I repeat, it is amazing how many can read the gospel, and hear the gospel, and sing the gospel, and then do nothing to send the gospel to all the ends of the earth. All we can say is that such people have never got into the mighty swing of the purposes of Jesus. If His purpose were their purpose, His mind their mind, His love their love, they, too, would say, "the world," and "whosoever"; they would throw away their shears and let the great earth-embracing words stand as Jesus spoke them.

And now note the *condition* of this salvation. "Whosoever believeth in Him." It is impossible to conceive of anything more simple or more fundamental. Men sometimes ask why everything on the human side should be made to turn on faith. It is enough to reply, because faith is the mainspring of human conduct. It is the basis and inspiration of everything men do in the world. It is faith that moves

the machinery of life; faith that plows the soil and sows the seed; faith that leads men to go down to the sea in ships and do business upon great waters; faith that lies back of all exploration and all discovery and all conquest. Take faith out of the commercial world and immediately there is panic, banks closing their doors, and failure following upon the heels of failure. No barbarism is ever tamed, no forests are ever subdued, no mysterious seas are ever crossed, no new civilization is ever planted by skeptics who sit in their easy chairs and doubt.

The Bible is the most philosophical of books. It goes to the bottom of things. It knows that a man never does anything, never goes anywhere, never gives himself heart and soul to a cause until a mighty faith pushes him on. He may think about a thing, and think about it until doomsday, and never act. He may speculate and theorize and reason, and never move a step this way or that way. But when faith, or belief, rises up in him, it sets the whole man in motion. Where faith goes the whole being goes. That is the reason why the emphasis is on belief.

But let us be quite clear as to the full meaning of that word. I say to a man: "What do you think of Christ?" and he replies: "I think He is the Son of God. I am satisfied that He is what He claimed to be." That is the answer of the intellect. Tens of thousands stop there. But that answer does not commit them; it does not convey them over to Christ in the entirety of their nature. To think that Christ

is the Savior, is one thing. To believe on Him as the Savior and as my Savior, is a very different thing. Let me illustrate: Here is a physician, well known in the community. I have arrived at a certain definite opinion about him. I am convinced that his medical skill and ability are unquestioned. But here is another physician. I believe in him. That means, when I am sick I go to him, or when any of the members of my family are sick I put them under his care. My belief, you see, makes it a personal matter, brings me into direct connection with him. Or again: here is a bridge spanning a great abyss. It is the only way over from this side to that. I look at it; I study it; I reason about it. I am satisfied that it is well constructed, that its architectural principles are sound, and its material of the best quality. My intellect can ask for nothing more. But that does not take me over. Still I remain on this side. But now belief rises up in me. Faith says to me: "Start; make the venture; step out upon the bridge; commit yourself to it absolutely, and it will bear you over." That commitment is belief, and "Whosoever believeth in Him shall not perish, but have everlasting life."

There is a legend that a French Bishop, fleeing from his enemies, came with twelve companions to the seashore. At their wits' end to know what to do, they found two driftwood logs lying on the beach. They pushed them into the water and cast themselves upon them. The logs formed themselves into the shape of a cross, and they were borne by favorable

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winds to the Flemish shore. Thus the Bishop and his friends were saved. The lesson of the legend is that no one ever cast himself upon the crucified Christ, conscious of his own utter helplessness, who was not saved. It is that casting, that cutting loose from everything else, that act of faith, that throws him upon the redeeming arm of Jesus, that brings salvation. "Whosoever," black man, or white man, poor man, or rich man, depraved man, or decent man, "Whosoever believeth in Him shall not perish but have everlasting life."

A final word as to that—the *outcome* of it. The fruit of this salvation, the fruit that grew on the tree of Calvary, is everlasting life. Not merely endless being, or eternal existence—simply going on and on forever. That is a wholly different thing. The word "life," as used in the gospel of John, means nothing less than the very tides of God, pulsing and flowing through our humanity; it means the ocean crowding into the bay, with its infinite sweetness and purity, and fulness and power; it means abounding joy, and abounding strength, and abounding blessedness, moving up, advancing, going from height to some higher height, from summit to loftier summit, still as long as Heaven is Heaven, and God is God. Merely to exist, merely to continue to retain consciousness, to know that I am I, and to keep on knowing it when all the stars are dead, is not to live. Devils exist. The spirits of the wicked, the abominable who refuse the calls of infinite mercy, exist; the slum people of our

cities, the dregs and wrecks and castaways of humanity, exist; but existence and life may be as distinct, as widely separated, as night from day, as the desert from the garden and meadow. To live is to be in tune with God. It is to have the spirit of God, and the love of God, and the peace of God, and the bliss of God, and the salvation of God—in one word, it is to have God himself grafted into our nature, filling it with his own sap and causing it to blossom with the flowers of paradise and yield fruit that is glorious and divine.

“Everlasting life”—is there anything else so worthy of striving for? Anything else that should so arouse all our manhood and womanhood to obtain? It is something that begins here, begins with faith, and goes on like a river, widening and deepening and swelling into increasing volume through time and into eternity. Go down where men are imbruted by sin; down where vice broods and breeds, where immortality in basest forms holds carnival, and you see that their great lack is life. Go among men who are slaves to business, chained to the chariot wheels of trade, pursuing the dollar at the expense of health and happiness and culture, and you see that their great lack is life. Go among the Four Hundred, where fashion reigns and affectation struts and surfeit brings disgust, where minds are inane and faces bear no marks of character, and you see that the great lack is life.

But here, for you, for them, for all, is the Lord and

Giver of life. He waits to bestow the priceless gift, and, in return for it, all he asks is faith, for "Who-soever believeth in Him shall not perish but have everlasting life."