

# SALVATION WITHOUT GUESSWORK

April 20, 1958

Scripture: I John 2:3-11

Is it possible to have salvation without guesswork? This question has confronted the human race for a long, long time. The answers leave us with a mass of confusion when we look at the variety of religions with their strange and varied plans for men's salvation. The answer from one group says that salvation is obtained by a long series of prayers, abstinence from certain dietary habits, and the keeping of rigid religious laws. Others claim that salvation is obtained by a long process of mortification where life is reduced to its lowest common denominator.

To millions salvation is a matter of ethical practices. Still to others it is a matter of legalism. To other millions salvation is an inner light that illuminates truth in contrast to error. And to make the answers more confusing there are millions to whom the idea of salvation is a non-essential. Yet, who with a rational mind can live in this kind of world with its injustices, miseries, and barbarous cruelties without admitting that man stands in need of salvation and a Savior?

A Christian can know that he is saved without any guesswork. This is not to admit cocksure, dogmatic finality; rather it is to admit that deep in the soul's recesses there is an abiding conviction that the experience with God through Christ Jesus is a positive, real encounter. Such a one doubts many things about his life as a Christian, many areas of mystery and thought; but the fact that his soul has been elevated to God through reconciliation is beyond question. This is his area of surety! While he stumbles, falters, and grows in halting random, nonetheless, he knows that it is not so much the distance covered as it is the direction taken that determines his ultimate destiny.

## CROSSBEARING

Then the question arises, "How can one know about his salvation without guesswork?" One sure way of knowing is

whether or not the person is bearing his own cross willingly. If the Saviour who made salvation possible had to bear a cross, shall those who follow in His footsteps be exempt? The servant is not above his Master.

When the cross is taken from the center of religion, then that religion collapses from sheer lack of weight in value. It does not mean that we must climb up Golgotha as Jesus did, but that we must be willing to get down under the load of life's burdens and lift them regardless of consequences. Not that we are liable to be nailed up, but that we should be willing to be for our Lord. Daily crossbearing means that we are to stick to the job of this business of religion—no shirking, no seasonal loyalties, no easing out of the hard pulls. Each dawn is to die to one's self.

But let it be understood that the cross is not a combination of distracting anxieties which results from financial bankruptcy, emotional dissipation, and intemperate living. It is not a cross of ill health, the result of a life lived in violation of God's laws. That kind of cross is not of God's but of our own hewing. It is not a cross of domestic failure where the home has dissolved because of willful sin in the lives of one or both partners. This type of circumstance is daily fare for millions, and to equate its nature with a cross that one must bear for his Lord is foolishness.

Rather, a Christian's cross is a type of divine necessity: God's handicap placed upon a person, His built-in governor to keep the motor of life from burning out—a God-appointed task, if you please, a job to do, a vision to realize, mountains to scale, castles to build. In the scaling, the climbing, the realization, there is struggle, disappointment; but these are the splinters in the cross.

To some, that cross is the cutting edge of criticism, criticism brought on by their stand for honesty, decency, fair play, and righteousness. To others, their cross is association with evil men in work. All these sometime constitute a weight of

necessity that is bearable only by Christian fortitude mingled with divine assurance.

#### RECOMMENDATION TO OTHERS

Then I suggest that you can know that you are saved apart from any guesswork if you are recommending the experience to someone else. If it ever happened to you personally, you will recommend its wondrous quality to someone else. No, a professional training is not needed to tell a person that life is now sweet, that each day is a doxology of praise, that each tomorrow is anticipated with some of the eagerness by which a child anticipates Christmas. Such is not a job; it is a privilege—not a religious elective, but a divine requirement.

Suppose tonight a special delivery letter came to you. Its contents revealed the fact that you had inherited a million dollars. How long would your telephone be silent? Would you go to bed in the usual manner? No, no! There are many close friends with whom you would share the good news. It would be almost impossible to restrain your emotions under such revealing change of status, plans, and hopes. But what is a million dollars compared to the legacy each Christian has in Christ Jesus?

Think of the peace of mind that can't be bought for two million dollars; of the sense of relationship in belonging to the greatest family on earth; of the fact that you are the child of a King, and that heaven was made for you and your kind! Oh, where is our sense of values? Why the muteness in the face of all this wonder? If you want to show the world what God is really like, then show it what He has made you like. This is the best proof that you have been saved: your willingness to relate it in zealous enthusiasm to others.

#### LIVING IN CONSCIOUS SIN

The guesswork can be taken out of salvation by an honest answer to the question, "Am I living in intentional sin?" The Epistle of 1st John reminds us that "If we say we have no sin, we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us." Still another reference says, "If any man be in Christ Jesus, he is a new creation." This

sounds something like a contradiction, doesn't it? When both are understood aright, they mean that as long as man is in the flesh he will be guilty of sinning but not intentional, willful acts of going against God's commandments.

There will always be those times when we fail to live up to our higher selves, times when truth is modified by some compromising expediency, times when we fail to glow with faithful radiance out of deference to depressive glooms. But to lie, cheat, steal, or profane His name willfully—no, a Christian will not do these things. The day one truly meets Jesus and accepts Him as Lord and Master, that day the person has no appetite left for his old nature.

But someone says, "Preacher, isn't that expecting a miracle?" Of course, it is; that is exactly what happens. No miracle takes precedence over the fact that God can cleanse a human heart and will. No one suddenly becomes saintly. That process is the result of long years of nurture and culture in the divine graces. But to say that one is saved and the person continues to live in willful sin is to mock the name of Christ! To make a public or private profession of faith and a few months later to be found in the same vulgar crowd, exercising the mind in the same lustful directions, speaking the same old tongue, participating in the same worldly amusements, doling out a few coins to the cause of Christ in the same miserly fashion as though God were a shoeshine boy is as foolproof a way as one ever needs to answer in one resounding "No!" he has not been saved. And there is no guesswork about that fact!

How can you know you are saved? Are you trying to grow a soul like that of your Saviour? Does each day find you discontented with yesterday's performance and newly dedicated to today's? The born-again Christian knows that purity must precede paradise (and always in that order). He knows that he cannot lift others unless he stands higher than they are, that "the blind cannot lead the blind."

#### GOD REACHED DOWN

One day the preacher asked an old Indian chief how he was so sure about his salvation as a Christian. Without the

wily art of rationalizing, the chief built a small fire. In the middle of the fire he left a clear circle about two feet in diameter. In the middle he placed a crawling worm. The worm crawled out to the edge of the fire but could not escape on any side. Finally, out of complete exhaustion, the worm stopped to die. The the Indian chief reached over and picked the worm up and took it out of the circle of fire.

Said he, "That is the way I was saved. In frantic fear and foolish boast I floundered around in my soul. I was encircled by fire. God reached down and got me by the hands of Jesus and lifted me out. There is no guesswork about that to me."

That is the only way it can happen with one exception: you must be willing to be lifted out of the flame.

## THY NEIGHBOR AS THYSELF

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"And the second commandment is liken unto the first: thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself." Let us be honest: has God demanded the impossible? Is it possible to feel about one's neighbor as closely as he feels about himself? These questions must be answered as honestly as we know how because our world is suffering from the disease of lovelessness, a disease that is malignant.

Let us begin by noticing that the commandment is not a mild suggestion, not a pale, ethical statement on human relations, not a weak prompting. Instead, an imperative command, it is an order given, carrying the force of, "You do it." But the question keeps coming up, "Can one obey a command to love?" Isn't love a spontaneous thing that flows out of life without coercive stimuli? One would think that of all the areas that should remain inviolate it would be that of love. Wherein is man free if love is coerced? What right has God to command our loving? He has every right to do exactly that! God has made us, and One can do with His own what He pleases.

Love is the only force that can conquer selfishness, and thus to conquer is the prime mission of God on earth. It is not enough to be prim, clean, honorable, and correct; one can be thus while remaining icy cold in his human relations. Without love religion makes no sense, and this is the sense that God has given to religion.

### A DIVINE COMMAND

Musicians are agreed that when a note is sounded, the adjacent notes instantly reverberate to the ear of a real musician. If middle C is struck, the notes of B and

D are nearby in the philosophy of music to a tuned ear. When the middle C of love is struck on life's diapason, then all related virtues are set in vibration. From this harmonious note must be played all the music of interpersonal relationships. Yes, it is a divine command (this business of loving) primarily because God knows that most of us would never do it if we were left to our own volition.

The same reasoning runs through the armed forces so far as orders are concerned. That is why the armed forces do not leave it up to every private as to whether he wants to sleep through calisthenics, or whether he wants to go into battle. There would be few battles won if each could write his own orders. Isn't that dictation? In a very definite sense it is. But until man learns to do by free volition what must be done, then God has to keep on telling us, "Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself."

It should be remembered that this commandment did not come until man had been commanded to love God first. Man will never love and can never love his neighbor until he learns to love the Creator of his neighbor. God's kind of love is the only incubator of man's love to man. This is the starting point for this miraculous relation. When man loves God sufficiently, the rest comes easily. One will never have an honorable estimate of others, nor be willing to go out of his way on behalf of others until it stems from heart love for God.

### THE NATURE OF LOVE

Now let us look at the meaning of this all-powerful emotion called love. Herein