PEACE WITH GOD

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LIVING STREAM MINISTRY

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by Watchman Nee

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CHAPTER ONE

PEACE WITH GOD

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Dear readers, are you at peace with God? This is a very important question! Salvation or perdition depends on whether or not you are at peace with God. If you are at peace with God, you are very secure because you have passed from death to life and received the blessing God has prepared in the Lord Jesus. But if you are not at peace with God, you are in a dangerous and pitiful condition because God's wrath abides upon you. How terrible this is! You should answer this question in an honest way. Are you at peace with God? You should not be careless or presumptuous. If you are at peace with God, you are at peace. If you are at enmity with God, you are at enmity. There is no middle ground.

If you have not drawn nigh to God by the death of the Lord Jesus, you are God's enemy. The world is at enmity with God. Fighting against heaven is not the meaning of being at enmity with God; you do not have to fight against heaven to be at enmity with God. When you walk according to the flesh and ignore God's demand, caring only for living in your lusts, you are at enmity with God. The Bible says, "The mind set on the flesh is enmity against God; for it is not subject to the law of God, for neither can it be" (Rom. 8:7). A man does not have to purposely oppose God or rebel against Him in order to become an enemy of God. Dear readers, as long as you set your mind on the flesh, this is enmity against God. You may agree with religion, admire Christ, and help the church. All these things are good. But they do not indicate that you are not an enemy of God. As long as you set your mind on the flesh, it is enmity against God. When you set your mind on the flesh, you are not subject to the law of God, neither can you be. Setting the mind on the flesh is rebelling against God's law. How holy and righteous is God's law! Can you keep His law? How many times have you walked according to your flesh and the lusts of your flesh? How mild is the expression "the mind set on"! It does not require a rebellious act to be at enmity with Him; all that is required is a little private act of setting the mind on the flesh in the hidden part of your

heart. This is enmity against God! Man not only disobeys God's law; he is even unable to submit to God's law. Man is corrupted in his very nature.

Dear ones, do you know that your nature is corrupted? Many times you consider God's law to be good and upright, and you desire to keep it. But what is the result? You find that you cannot keep the law. It is impossible for you to keep the law. Although at times you may want to keep God's law, there seems to be a power within that forces you to set your mind on the flesh and break God's law. Your nature is corrupted; it is impossible for you to obey God's law. You must acknowledge that you are completely corrupted before God's salvation can come. Is it not true that there are many times when you do not want to indulge yourself in dissipation and wantonness? Then why do you fall into them again and again? Man's nature is corrupted. The world is at enmity with God, and you are included in this world!

Moreover, is it not true that your heart loves the world? Does praise of the world touch your heart? "Adulteresses, do you not know that the friendship of the world is enmity with God? Therefore whoever determines to be a friend of the world is constituted an enemy of God" (James 4:4). This is God's Word. An actual act of adultery is not necessary in order to become an adulterer in the Lord's eyes. The meaning of adultery is having a friendship with those whom you should not have a friendship. The world crucified the Lord Jesus. How can you be friendly with those who crucified the Lord and not be an enemy of God? Has the world changed? Is the world better than when Christ was on earth? If it is not, why are you fellowshipping with the world? Look at the lovely worldly people, the interesting worldly things, and the adorable worldly objects. You have established an inseparable bond with the world through its people, things, and objects. Therefore, you are an enemy of God. A man who is not at peace with God through regeneration is filled with the thoughts of people, things, and objects in the world all day long. He seeks after worldly fame, profit, and power. His face is toward the earth, and his back is turned against heaven. He ignores God's demand and is an enemy of God. Readers, have you been washed in the precious blood of the Lord? If you have not, and if you are a friend of the world, you are an enemy of God.

Your conduct is a great proof that you are an enemy of God. You do not do what God wants, and you do what God does not want. Daily you commit many sins. Your evil acts are an expression of your inward enmity. You are "alienated and enemies in your mind because of your evil works" (Col. 1:21).

Evil works! Sins! Defilements! These are indelible evidences of man being at enmity with God. The Scripture says, "There is none righteous, not even one" (Rom. 3:10). No flesh can justify itself before God. No one in the world can be justified before God through his works. All the conduct of the world is evil work in the eyes of God. Although a great deal of behavior is acceptable before men, in God's eyes it is still full of defects and part of the "evil works." Does your conduct before God tell you that you are at enmity with Him? Do not think that you are better than others. You have to realize that there are many evil works such as pride, vainglory, and self-justification in all of the so-called good works! Please acknowledge your poor condition, and trust in the Lord Jesus Christ. There is still the possibility of salvation. But if you are self-satisfied and self-contented, you will die in your sins. May the Holy Spirit convict you of sin, so that you will realize your true condition! Unless those in the world put themselves in the place of a sinner and acknowledge that they are enemies of God, they cannot receive God's grace. Unless men confess that they cannot please God and that their nature, desires, and conduct are contrary to God, they will not and cannot come to the cross to seek for God's salvation. Unless men realize that it is terrible to be an enemy of God, and unless they are aware of the coming eternal wrath, they may say that they believe in Christ, but their believing will not be a true believing. What is man? Is he not but a speck of dust? Is he not but a worm? How small a place does he occupy in the universe! What is there to boast in? Who is God? He is the Almighty. Heaven is His throne, and the earth is His footstool. Trying to speak of His greatness would exhaust a man's lifetime. For a little mortal to be an enemy of the great God is not only unfortunate, but unthinkable. Can the world escape perdition when it is at enmity with God? No. The Bible says, "The wrath of God abides upon him" (John 3:36). Therefore, do not be deceived. Do not think that your outward behavior is very good. You have to realize that it is a fatal thing to be "enemies in your mind" (Col 1:21). Do not think that it is a small thing to be at enmity with God. Nothing is worse than this.

Thank and praise the Lord! He loves the world. He is not willing to see any perish. He desires that all men be saved. He does not want to condemn man for his sins. Although the world—you and I included—are at enmity with Him, He patiently forbears. He sent His only begotten Son, Jesus Christ, to the world to die on the cross for us, to be our propitiation, and to propitiate God's righteous wrath. He has suffered on our behalf all the punishment that we

deserve for our sins. We disobey God, oppose Him, and hate Him. The perdition that we deserve because of our nature, mind, and conduct have been borne by Him. He stood in the place of the sinner and enemy, saying, at the time of His crucifixion, "My God, My God, why have You forsaken Me?" (Matt. 27:46). He is God's Beloved. God is pleased with Him, and God is always near to Him. By taking up our sins and standing on our behalf as an enemy to suffer God's righteous judgment of wrath, He saw the dear Father forsake Him. Through His death and rejection for us, He has accomplished peace and salvation once for all. What grace this is!

Therefore, dear ones, through the accomplished salvation of the Lord Jesus, we are "reconcile[d]...to God through the cross" (Eph. 2:16). We do not have to try to change for the better, mortify ourselves, or inflict pain upon ourselves. None of these can satisfy God's heart. Everything that we need is "through the cross." Salvation is accomplished; there is nothing more to add. The Lord Jesus has "made peace through the blood of His cross" (Col. 1:20). When the Lord Jesus suffered on the cross, He shed His blood. His blood speaks better things than the blood of Abel. Peace has been established. Christ has fully accomplished salvation for us. We do not have to accomplish anything or strive for anything because everything is done.

Before the Lord Jesus accomplished salvation, God loved the world, but the sin of the world forbade Him from drawing near to men and forbade men from drawing near to God. Now the Son of God has died. "God in Christ was reconciling the world to Himself" (2 Cor. 5:19). Now the relationship between God and man is changed. The death of Christ did not change God's heart, because He has always loved the world. Neither has His death changed the heart of man, because the world still lives in sin and disobedience to God. But thank the Lord, when Christ died, the relationship between God and man changed. God has judged the Lord Jesus, and now He can receive the world without any obstacle. We can illustrate this matter with a story. Suppose that a judge had an only begotten son whom he loved dearly. Then the son stole some money which belonged to his father's office and ran away. Although the father still loved the son, the father-son relationship changed. Even though they were father and son, the father could not treat him as a son after he was caught. He must judge and condemn him, considering him the same as all the other criminals. Although his father loved him, the son could not break the law. But the father could sell his possessions to pay the penalties so his son could be free. Then the father could receive the son unhindered. We have

sinned and offended God. We deserve to be judged and condemned. We deserve to suffer eternal perdition. But God loves us. He Himself came to be a man—the Lord Jesus is God—and He suffered on the cross to pay the debt of sin for us; He has changed the relationship between God and man. Now God can receive sinners. Peace is established. The question is whether or not man will receive this peace. This will determine his salvation or perdition.

Readers, are you at peace with God? Are you saved? Are you at peace with God through the Lord Jesus? God's way is "peace toward God through our Lord Jesus Christ" (Rom. 5:1), and to be "reconciled to God through the death of His Son" (v. 10). It is not your own merit that puts you at peace with God. You may be a church member; you may have been baptized and have partaken of Holy Communion. You may go to church, read the Bible, and pray often. You may even have exhorted others to believe in the Lord. You may be a preacher, one who bears responsibilities in the church, or a church leader. But if you are not reconciled to God through the death of the Lord Jesus and have not believed that His death is for the accomplishment of salvation and for the bearing of your sins, you are still God's enemy and a perishing sinner. Do not think that work and zeal will reconcile you to God. No, the price for reconciliation with God is not that cheap. If God considered the death of the Lord Jesus to be necessary, He will not be satisfied with anything less than the death of the Lord Jesus. Man either is reconciled to God through the Lord Jesus or remains God's enemy through rejecting the Lord and trusting in himself. The result is eternal perdition.

God has paid all the price. He has accomplished a full salvation. The Lord Jesus has fully accomplished peace. Salvation and perdition are before you. You cannot be saved by your righteousness, and you do not have to perish because of your sin. The question is whether or not you will trust in the Lord Jesus' accomplished salvation.

During the American Civil War, one winning general told the enemy troops, "I am now setting aside a few miles as the zone of peace. If any enemy soldier drops his weapon and steps into this zone, he will be spared from death. Otherwise he will be killed." Many who believed the general ran into this zone. Everyone who dropped his weapon was saved. Those who doubted and refused to walk into the zone were slaughtered. Dear ones, God has ordained the cross of Golgotha as the place of peace. You were at enmity with God. If you are willing to forsake your sins, stand on the ground of the cross, and

trust in the peace that the Lord Jesus has accomplished, you will be saved. If you continue to doubt, you will die in your sins. Whether or not an enemy soldier will live or die depends on whether or not he will step into the zone. Perhaps some were standing outside the line; perhaps some were just a few feet away from the line and could have stepped inside with one stride. But they were still outside the line, and they were killed. Dear ones, do not delay! Do not miss by a step! Trust in the Lord and be saved. Why not do it now? "Let him who wills take the water of life freely" (Rev. 22:17). Come!

If you come and receive the Lord's accomplished peace, you will be delivered from your sins and need not fear the judgment of sin. The Scripture says, "God in Christ was reconciling the world to Himself, not accounting their offenses to them" (2 Cor. 5:19). What a joy this is! We will surely be saved. "We will be saved...having been reconciled" (Rom. 5:10). Since we have received salvation, sin will not condemn us anymore. What joy this is! "Boasting in God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have now received the reconciliation" (v. 11).

Dear ones, let me ask you again: Are you reconciled to God? You should answer this question quickly. Your destiny depends on how you answer this question today. "On behalf of Christ then we are ambassadors, as God entreats you through us; we beseech you on behalf of Christ, Be reconciled to God" (2 Cor. 5:20). "And coming, He announced peace as the gospel to you who were far off, and peace to those who were near" (Eph. 2:17). May the Holy Spirit touch the hearts of all those who read this article to receive the Lord as their Savior.

"Lord, I was Your enemy. Now through Your demonstration of love on the cross, and through the peace You established, I believe in You. Lord, save me, a sinner!"

CHAPTER TWO

CAN MORALITY SAVE US

(Can Man Be Saved by Doing Good?)

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(The translation of the Chinese title for this message is "Can Man Be Saved by Doing Good." The title above was given by the author on the English cover of the original magazine.)

Can man be saved by doing good? The world's answer is yes. But God's answer in the Bible is no. The authority to decide our salvation is in the hand of God. Salvation is not according to our will. Our salvation is related to God; we cannot make any decision on our own. We cannot be saved just because we think we are. Nor can we be unsaved just because we think we are. Readers, listen to the voice of God. You have to listen to what He has to say. Do not think that as long as you can do good, you will be saved. You have to know that this matter is decided by God.

Can morality save men? No. Absolutely no. Blessed is the man who knows this fact. Today men think that exhorting others to believe in Jesus is the same as exhorting them to do good. Little do they realize that exhorting men to believe in the Lord Jesus is really proving to them that they cannot do good. Even many believers do not realize that man is not saved by doing good. Their thought is to try their best to keep God's Word, attend services, offer money, help the church, and strive to be good, hoping that by so doing, they will be saved. Little do they realize that these things are all vain! These things do not help at all in the matter of their salvation. (Of course I do not mean that we should not keep God's Word, offer money, etc. I am saying that we cannot be saved by these things.)

It is most vain to argue and reason with man's words. Let us then turn to God's Word. Whatever God says is fixed. "For we account that a man is justified by faith apart from the works of the law" (Rom. 3:28). The meaning of "works of the law" here is to try to do good. The law was enacted by God. It shows men what they ought to do. If a man could keep God's law, he would be

the best person on earth. But God says here through the apostle that He has reckoned, that He is perfectly clear, that man is not justified by keeping the law and doing good. What is the meaning of justification? It means that God not only forgives your sins, but reckons you righteous. In other words, to be justified is to be saved. A justified person is a saved person. God teaches that you cannot be saved or justified by keeping the law. For this reason, my dear sinners, do not trust in your works, and do not think that you can be saved by doing good. Stop your own work! Confess that you are a hopeless sinner! Accept the Lord Jesus as your Savior, and you will be saved.

God is worthy of man's praise because His salvation of man is not based on man's good works. He says, "Where sin abounded, grace has superabounded" (Rom. 5:20). Readers, do you know that you are sinners? Does not your conscience condemn you? Do you not think that men such as you are helpless? Do not be deceived in thinking that you can be saved by doing good, or that you can be saved by joining a church, singing in a choir, praying, or attending services. Do not try to mend your transgressions by human ways. You are sinners, and no matter how much you mend yourselves, you are still sinners. It is like a black man from Africa. No matter how much he tries to put on powder or paints himself with white paint, he is still a black man. Do not try to do good by yourselves anymore! No matter how much you have sinned, the blood of the Lord is able to cleanse you. Come!

Mr. Spurgeon of England was an evangelist who was greatly used by the Lord. Once he said that if the Lord would save him only if he did good, he would never want to be a Christian. He gave an illustration. Suppose he had done many good things, and then presented this goodness before God and asked, "Since I have done so much good, can I be saved?" Since God is the God of all goodness, surely He would not approve of Spurgeon's goodness. He would shake his head and say, "You have not done enough!" Spurgeon said he would then go away in discouragement and would try to do better. After a few years, he would present his goodness before God again, asking God if his goodness was good enough, and if he could be saved. God would answer again, "You are still not good enough. You still cannot be saved." This could go on for two or three more times, and God would still not be satisfied. How then could he be saved? If God expected him to do good before he could be saved, He would probably never be satisfied, and Spurgeon would not be saved even if he worked himself to death. Is this not a pitiful thing? Spurgeon concluded that if God expected him to do good before he could be saved, then he would

not want to be a Christian in the first place because he would find out after striving for many years on earth that God would not be satisfied with him and whatever he would have done would have been in vain. We have to thank the Father because we do not have to do good. All we need to do is to believe in God's Son, and we shall be saved. Although it is true that God is not satisfied with our works, and although it is true that we do not have any merit of our own, He is pleased in His Son, the Lord Jesus. He is satisfied with the righteousness that the Lord Jesus accomplished on the cross. Although we cannot and will not do good by ourselves, the minute we believe in His Son and accept the merit of His Son's shed blood on the cross, we will be saved.

Dear readers, do not be deceived by Satan into thinking that you will be saved by doing good. You must realize that just as you cannot build a ladder that reaches heaven, you cannot secure God's salvation through doing good. We do not obtain God's justification through good works. Rather, we are "being justified freely by His grace through the redemption which is in Christ Jesus" (Rom. 3:24). "If by grace, it is no longer out of works; otherwise grace is no longer grace" (11:6). Are not these two verses very clear? We are justified and saved by God, not because of works, but because of His own grace. Grace and work are two principles that are completely opposite. Grace means that God is willing to save whether a man is good or bad. Man is not worthy to be saved, but because of mercy, God gives him salvation freely. Work, on the other hand, is very different. Work means that only good people will be saved, while bad ones will perish. In other words, man has to do good to save himself, and all those who cannot save themselves will perish. We know that we are all sinners. Although we may not have committed the sins of murder or arson, our nature is corrupted; our thoughts and conduct are full of deceit. We are truly sinners! How can we be saved through works? Thank and praise God that He does not save us because of our work. He is saving us because of His free grace, a grace which we do not deserve.

Many people today think that even though salvation is of God's grace, we should, nevertheless, have our work. They think that God's grace should be supplemented with our work before we can be saved; otherwise, we will still perish. Alas, the man in the flesh always wants to be saved by his own self! We should remember the words in Romans 11:6: "But if by grace, it is no longer out of works..." Grace and work cannot stand side by side. Either we have grace or we have work. We can never have grace and work at the same time. "Otherwise..." Here the apostle speaks from the negative angle. If one mixes

grace with work, then "grace is no longer grace." God's boundless, incomparable, royal grace, if supplemented by man's ragged works, will become something unseemly and awkward. Man's work will not accomplish God's grace. On the contrary, it will make grace "no longer grace." Therefore, sinners, if you want to be saved, you must never think that you should do good, or that doing good will help you to be saved. You should humble yourselves and acknowledge that you are helpless sinners. You should accept God's grace with faith and thanksgiving; by His Son's accomplishment on the cross, you will be saved. Wonderful grace is given freely to sinners!

We can look again at God's Word to see how good works cannot save. "A man is not justified out of works...we might be justified...not out of the works of law, because out of the works of law no flesh will be justified" (Gal. 2:16). "For as many as are of the works of law are under a curse" (3:10). "By law no one is justified before God" (v. 11). I have told you that the meaning of keeping the law is to do good. To be justified by the law means to be saved through works. What do these few verses say? Those who are saved are not saved through doing good. Not only will they not be saved through doing good, but they will be cursed if they want to be saved through good works! The Bible tells us explicitly that no one is saved through good works. If that is the case, why struggle to do something that can never be achieved? Friends, here is the Lord Jesus' accomplished work. He has paid all the price, and has been crucified on the cross for your sake. You do not need to mournfully seek for salvation. He has accomplished His work. If you receive what He has accomplished, you will be saved. Why struggle in your own ways? Believe in Him! After you believe in Him, praise Him because He has so loved you and has prepared salvation for you!

There are two verses which explain the question of salvation clearly. We can take a look at them. "For by grace you have been saved through faith, and this not of yourselves; it is the gift of God; not of works that no one should boast" (Eph. 2:8-9). After reading these two verses, we should realize that they concern the question of salvation. This is why in the first sentence there is the expression "you have been saved." This clearly concerns salvation.

How are you saved? Is it by good works? No. Is it because you are stronger than others? No. How then is man saved? The Bible tells us that salvation is by two things: God's grace and man's faith. "By grace you have been saved through faith" (2:8). Grace is given by God. God has prepared a Savior for us.

He has "caused the iniquity of us all to fall on Him" (Isa. 53:6) by sending Him to the cross to die and bear all the punishment for our sins. Through His suffering and bearing pain for us and by drinking the cup of God's righteous wrath, He accomplished a full salvation for us. How great is this grace! This is God's grace; it is the basis of salvation. Man can render no help; He has accomplished everything on our behalf. God has now prepared salvation and presented it before us. Salvation is placed before every sinner—it is placed before you.

We have seen God's grace manifested on the cross of Calvary. But how can we be saved? It is not by doing good or by mortifying ourselves. Neither is it by improvement or by attending church services. "By grace you have been saved through faith" (Eph. 2:8). Now we come to another aspect of salvation. No doubt God gives grace. Even though God gives grace, we cannot be saved unless we believe. The immense grace of God prepared a death-substituting salvation on the cross of Calvary for us. We must believe in Him before we can be saved.

What is the meaning of believing? To believe is to receive (John 1:12). God has prepared the grace. When we receive it, we are saved. If a man gives you something precious, it is yours when you receive it. When you receive the grace of salvation which God gives you, grace will be yours, and you will be saved. I must persuade you not to delay but to receive Him now. I wish that you would stretch out the hand of faith and accept God's great grace to you. Here is an illustration: a rich man saw many poor people about to die of cold in snowy winter weather. He became very charitable and began to investigate the names and addresses of many of the poor people. Then he ordered his servant to go out with a carriage full of coal to give to them. His servant accordingly took the carriage, and when he reached the first door, he asked if that house was the right number on the right street and if the name of the person living there was so-and-so. When the person who opened the door said yes, the servant told him that his master had sent him to offer coal. The poor man thought that this was a mistake; he thought that he did not have such a kind friend. As a result he closed his door to the servant. The servant could not do anything but go to another door. The man at the second door also thought that he did not have such a kind friend. Although the servant used many words to convince him, he was still doubtful and would not accept the coal. The servant had to go to another house. This happened at the next few houses. None of the people in those houses had faith. They all thought

that there could not be such a kind person who would buy coal and give it away for free. They would not accept the coal. Later the servant went to the house of a widow. When she learned of the intention of the servant, she gladly received the coal and thanked the master. With the coal she was able to pass through that winter. Friends, this is the way with God's grace; it is absolutely free. Now the servant of the master has sent the Lord's salvation to the door of your heart. If you would receive it, you will enjoy the joy of this salvation. Do not follow the example of the doubting ones, who simply inflicted sufferings on themselves and lost their opportunity forever! You only need to receive. You do not need to do anything else. Once you receive, it is yours.

Ephesians 2 does not stop at the teaching that salvation is of grace and through faith; it goes on to teach about the nature of salvation. "This" salvation is first "not of yourselves; it is the gift of God"; and second "not of works that no one should boast" (vv. 8-9). "This" refers to the great grace of salvation because the previous sentence speaks of salvation. There are also two types of "not" in salvation: first it is not of ourselves, and second it is not of works. How clear this is! Notice that salvation is not of ourselves. It does not matter whether you think you are more intelligent than others or more ignorant than others. It does not matter whether your morality is above others or below others. It does not matter whether you are very rich or penniless. These things have nothing to do with your salvation. If you receive God's grace, whether you are wise or foolish, moral or immoral, you will be saved. If you do not receive, no matter what kind of person you are, you will still perish. Salvation is not based on your condition. It is based on God's free gift. Salvation is not of works either. It does not depend on what kind of person you are, or your conduct. God did not say that those who do good will be saved. God said that salvation is not of works. You cannot be saved even if you are the best person on earth, and neither can you perish because you may be the worst person on earth. Perdition or salvation do not depend on your work, but on whether or not you will accept God's grace. My dear sinners, do not consider all your goodness! Consider rather your sins! Why would you not come before God with a contrite heart, confessing that you are a sinner, that you have no goodness to boast of, no merit to depend on, and trust solely in the grace that God has given you through the cross of His Son? I invite you to come quickly. While you are reading this, please kneel down and pray. Tell God that you will now receive the Lord Jesus as your Savior. Ask Him to forgive your sins, and be a saved person!

Why will God not save man according to his works? There are many reasons, but one is "that no one should boast" (2:9). If man is saved by his works, he will surely boast in himself and not give glory to God. The greatest sin of man is to forsake God, to be independent, not trusting in God. The same is true with respect to salvation. Why would someone want to be saved by his own works and not by the salvation that God has prepared? The reason is man's pride. How humbling it is for one to trust in God! There is nothing for that one to boast in! Man wants to be saved through his own works so that he can boast in himself. But God does not want man to be saved this way, for He does not want man to boast in himself. If one can boast in himself, his salvation is not the true salvation.

Let us look at another passage of the Scriptures. "Not out of works in righteousness which we did but according to His mercy He saved us" (Titus 3:5). After reading this verse, we see that even if we think that we have done much righteousness, God will not save us because of it. Do we really have any righteousness? "For all of us became like him who is unclean, / And all our righteousnesses are like a soiled garment" (Isa. 64:6). We think that our righteousnesses are worth much. But in God's eyes, they are nothing! If God is to save us according to our righteousness, we would all perish because all our righteousnesses, without exception, are as filthy rags. What kind of righteousness can this be considered as? How can it save us? Can God save us by our filthy, rag-like righteousness? No. No. Thank God that He has given us His grace. He saved us because He has mercy on us. He did not save us because of our righteousness. If He saved according to our righteousness, none of us would be saved. We cannot be saved through good works! The meaning of mercy is to give grace to a person who does not deserve it, despite his unworthiness, and to do so through love. We were the sinners. How could we have deserved God's salvation? Yet He has loved us without a reason. He passed over our sins and caused the Lord Jesus to die for us on the cross, bestowing grace to us. "According to His mercy He saved us" (Titus 3:5).

Therefore, readers, do not think that you can be saved by your good works! You should hurry to believe in the Lord Jesus. He does not want you to do good. He wants to save you. He will save you. You do not have to do good. You only have to believe in Him. Although you have not done any good and although you are most sinful, His crucifixion on the cross was a substitutionary death for you to redeem you from sin. He has borne your evil works and the sin of your evil works. You can now come just as you are before

Him, in your condition of failure in doing good works. Receive Him as the Savior. He will save you. He will receive you, and He will change you.

Perhaps you are a so-called member of a church already. Perhaps you have been baptized and have been received into the Holy Communion. Perhaps you are a leader of a church. But you should know that none of these will save you. If you do not believe in the Savior who has died for you and has borne your sins, whatever good you have done and whatever position you occupy will not change you from being a perishing man. You are still no different from anyone else! Before God, nothing will shelter a man from the wrath of God except the blood of the Lord Jesus. Any kind of good work will fail. Only the saving work of the cross of the Lord Jesus is trustworthy. Every way to salvation that depends on your own work is from the bottomless pit and is destined for hell. God has established only one way of salvation, which is to accept the grace which comes from the cross. There is no other way to be saved than to take God's way.

Finally, let me read you one verse from the Scriptures, "I do not nullify the grace of God; for if righteousness is through law, then Christ has died for nothing" (Gal. 2:21). Salvation does not come through good works. If a man can be saved through good works, then Christ has died in vain! If a man can satisfy God's heart by doing good himself, God would not have been so foolish as to send His Son to the world to die in vain and give up His life for nothing. If you think that doing good will help you be saved, you are nullifying the grace of God. Sinners, God may be foolish, but He is still wiser than you. If a man can be saved by good works, God would surely not have given up His Son in vain. Since He has caused His Son to die for us and bear our sins, this proves that we cannot do good and cannot be saved by doing good. He has established the way of salvation. If you will receive the Lord Jesus as the Savior, you will be saved. Alas, we are truly sinners! God indeed loves us! He is willing to receive us! Though we have no goodness to boast of and no righteousness to call our own, His salvation does not diminish. On the contrary, it is made more manifest. How wonderful this is! I wish that His love would touch you to come to Him in faith, saying, "O God! I am truly a sinner! I know that none of my good works are worth anything before You. I pray that You will receive me and save me because of the substitutionary death of the Savior Jesus Christ."

"Him who comes to Me I shall by no means cast out" (John 6:37).

CHAPTER THREE

THE SUFFERING OF THE CROSS

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Whenever the Holy Spirit touches me to consider how the Lord Jesus Christ died for me, a sinner, so that I could be free from the punishment of sin and have eternal life, I thank Him with tears for His grace. What suffering my Lord endured on the cross! "O my Lord, how piteous You were to die on lonely Calvary for my sins!"

The Lord Jesus was the God of glory in heaven. He was the Most Holy One. He did not have to die, and He could not die. But He had compassion for the sinners of the world. He came into this sinful world and took the form of a man. He stood in the position of a sinner and suffered the punishment which sinners deserve. He died so that we may have life. What love is this! Sins were committed by us, the sinners. Evils were done by us, the evil doers. But the punishment of sin, the suffering of hell, fell on the Lord Jesus Christ! What is this? This is substitution, this is love, and this is grace. O sinners, do you know that your sin has crucified the lovely Lord Jesus? I wish that you knew this and that through the love of the Lord Jesus, you would right now be moved to believe in this kind Savior.

When the Lord Jesus was incarnated into the world, He was born in a manger because there was no room for Him in the inn. How desolate and sad this is! But even today many people have no room for Christ in their hearts. The Bible records that after He was born, they wrapped Him in swaddling clothes and laid Him in a manger. How cold were the swaddling clothes! How hard was the manger! Is this the portion an honorable guest from heaven deserves from the hand of the world? As the Most High Lord, He did not have to come into such a situation. Since He loved you and me, He bore the suffering of this birth. Alas! Our sins afflicted Him.

He lived on this earth for over thirty years, without coming out from under the shadow of the cross for even a day. He had no settled home or the luxury

of a settled meal. Day by day He had no rest, but He was leading the world to believe in His coming death and to have the eternal blessing. While He lived on earth, nothing could refresh His heart. Although His disciples gave Him brief moments of joy, their doubt and ignorance and the world's unbelief and opposition, continually caused Him groaning and heartbreak. He realized that the world was hardened in its heart and could not be turned back. The result was His weeping over Jerusalem. He wept not only for that sinful city, but also for the rebellious hearts of today. O Lord, You became such a One because of my sin! If You did not love me, why did You suffer so many offenses from sinners? While the foxes had holes and the birds of the air had nests, the Son of Man, who loved us, had no place to lay His head! Why did He put Himself into such a situation? He did so only because He loved us. The sins we committed caused Him to suffer all this. In order to save us, He suffered hunger and cold, bearing insults and shame. For our sake He was often hungry and thirsty, traveling everywhere, and eventually dying on the cross. Oh, how great is this grace! Pitiful Savior! How detestable are my sins! You are truly my Savior! I am willing to believe in You.

Although Christ's sufferings on earth were hard to bear, they were relatively easy compared to His suffering on the cross, where He bore our sins for us. His suffering in His daily life was a foreshadowing of Calvary. He came, not to live, but to die. He came to die for us, that we might live. O sinners, you must realize that if it were not for your sins, the Lord Jesus would not have had to die, and He would not have died. What a pity that we are sinners. He came to die for us. Hard-hearted sinners, will you receive the Lord Jesus as your Savior? He has died for you. Why would you ignore Him?

Remember the night He was in Gethsemane. The night weather was very cold. Many people sat and warmed themselves at the fire (Mark 14:54). During such a cold night, your Savior was outside in the garden, praying earnestly. Even "His sweat became like great drops of blood falling down upon the ground" (Luke 22:44). What kind of scene is this? Do not laugh, and do not relax! Do not be indifferent, and do not be stubborn! Christ was this way because of your sins and because of my sins. It was as if God had begun putting our sins on Him already in the garden. The shadow of the cross came over Christ completely at that time. He was full of sorrow and pain, and in agony His sweat became like drops of blood. Oh, how I wish that you would know the suffering of sweating drops like blood! It was as if He saw, at that moment, all the sin and evil of the world, the awesomeness of God's wrath,

and Himself in the midst of them both. This was a foreshadowing of His bearing man's sin and God's wrath. Because of this He suffered such pain. Yet these were merely shadows of His coming crucifixion. But even while they were shadows, Lord, Your suffering was great.

Look! His captors came! He could have asked the Father to send twelve legions of angels to rescue Him, yet for the sake of saving us, He was willing to be arrested and have His hands bound. The Old Testament records that the angel of the Lord smote over one hundred thousand Assyrians (Isa. 37:36). One legion totals over six thousand. Surely twelve legions of angels is a large number! The power of twelve legions of angels would be great! On that day they could have easily slaughtered all the people of Jerusalem! But because He wanted to be our Savior, He bore the insults and was willing to be taken in order to die such a death. Was God taken away by man? Yes, because He wanted to save man. The God of heaven wanted to save the world, so He was willing to be taken like a thief by man! All of this was because of your sin and mine!

Behold, the Son of God taken away by man! First, He was taken to the high priest, Annas. There our Savior was struck by the hand of an ignorant servant! Why did He suffer such an offense from sinners? Because He wanted to save us from perdition and give us eternal life! Our sins afflicted Him!

Then men took Christ, bound, from Annas to Caiaphas. The Bible says that He was bound as a criminal. He stood in the position of a sinner, and He suffered what sinners deserve, in order to save them. When He was before the high priest, "they spit in His face and beat Him with their fists, and others slapped Him" (Matt. 26:67). Did He commit any sin? No one could convict Him of sins. He endured this treatment for no other reason than our sin!

Later, men brought our loving Lord Jesus to the council for another trial. There He suffered many malicious offenses and unbearable pain from the world! He wants to save us, the sinners, so He suffered to this extent. We inflicted these sufferings on Him!

The world mistreated Him without a cause. But it did not stop here. They did not give up until they had put Him to death. He was delivered to Pontius Pilate the governor and was maligned with the crime of rebellion. But God proved His Son's guiltlessness through Pontius Pilate. Three times the

governor repeated that He was innocent. Why, then, was He crucified? He was found guiltless. Why should a guiltless One need to suffer punishment for sin? There is no other reason than that there are sins in the world, and the world is sinful. "Him who did not know sin He made sin on our behalf that we might become the righteousness of God in Him" (2 Cor. 5:21). The sinless Jesus Christ was crucified because of your sins. Will you still harden your heart and refuse to receive Him as your Savior? O Lord, have pity on us!

In order to absolve himself of any responsibility, Pilate delivered the Lord Jesus to Herod. There He suffered the despising and mockery of the soldiers. They put a scarlet robe on Him. Did they respect the Lord Jesus? No! The Bible says that they mocked Him. O Savior Jesus, my sin afflicted You! You endured the insults and bore the shame because You love me. I want to believe in You and love You this very moment! Finally, they took the Lord Jesus back into the common hall of the governor. My dear sinners, do you realize that He never closed His eyelids during the long night until daybreak? He was bound by men and taken here and there. He was dragged over many miles through the night. How unbearable was the grinding He suffered! He bore it all because He loves you and He loves me. Although Pilate acknowledged His innocence, he crucified Him in the end against the law.

"And Pilate...scourged Jesus and delivered Him up to be crucified" (Mark 15:15). "Scourging" seems to be a common word, but how much suffering is involved! What does it mean? A Roman whip had a wooden handle and at the end of the wooden handle were many leather thongs. At the end of each thong were heavy metal pieces. The victim would be tied to a wooden stake, with his back bared to the whipper who held the wooden handle and whipped with the leather thongs. Three stripes alone could rip open the victim's body. For our sins, the glorious Christ suffered scourging on our behalf. Did the cruel Roman soldiers care about our Savior? No, they were just like all the other sinners. "Swift are their feet to shed blood" (Rom. 3:15). How sad that our Lord Jesus was put into their hands. But thank God! "By whose bruise you were healed" (1 Pet. 2:24). You who are wounded and sick in soul, come with haste to be healed, for He has already received the bruise.

"And they clothed Him in purple and wove a thorny crown and put it around His head. And they began to salute Him: Rejoice, King of the Jews!" (Mark 15:17-18). This kind of mocking and jeering was intolerable and shameful! The world did not give the Lord Jesus a glorious crown but a crown

of thorns. The Lord Jesus bore the curse for us! He wore a crown of thorns which come from the curse of the world's sins. How pointed and sharp were those thorns! How could His perfect forehead endure such piercing? Yes, He was willing to endure pain and shed His blood because He knew that if He did not suffer, we would perish forever.

"And they beat His head with a reed" (Mark 15:19). The Lord Jesus had a crown of thorns. Surely, this smiting with a reed would push the thorns into His flesh more deeply. As God, Jesus Christ had never experienced this manner of piercing pain. He took man's place and died on the cross because of His love for man, saving man from the eternal perdition of the lake of fire. For this reason, He endured such unspeakable suffering. The soldiers, as instruments of the world's sins, not only afflicted Christ's body, but even afflicted His soul. They "spat at Him. And kneeling down, they bowed before Him" (Mark 15:19). After they finished mocking Him, they led Him away to be crucified.

There a soldier offered Jesus wine, mingled with gall and myrrh, to drink. It is said that if one drank this wine, the pain of crucifixion would be lessened. But our Savior would not drink it. He did not escape any suffering. He had already counted the cost before He came. He was full of love for all the sinners of the world. He was willing to bear all the affliction and all the punishment for our sins. He tasted death for sinners once for all that we might have eternal life. He was willing to take the place of sinners by tasting all the bitterness of the punishment of sins, so that sinners might have the joy of His righteousness.

At Calvary men crucified Him. Did just the Roman soldiers and Jewish council crucify Jesus Christ? In reality our sins crucified Him! A cross is constructed of a horizontal and a vertical piece of wood. The soldiers laid the Lord Jesus on the cross, propped open His hand, and nailed His hand to the wood with large iron nails. His flesh was broken, His blood flowed, and the pain pierced His inward parts! The same was done to His other hand and feet! Then they erected the cross, and all the weight of the Lord's body hung on those iron nails! Was God too severe in judging the Lord Jesus this way? No! The sins of the world are truly heavy! Our sins are numerous! The proper punishment for sins is eternal suffering in hell. The suffering of the Lord Jesus on the cross was what we sinners should have suffered. God's judgment of Him was not too severe because we should have suffered such punishment.

The work of the Lord Jesus' death for sinners is accomplished. Therefore, "He who believes into Him is not condemned; but he who does not believe has been condemned already, because he has not believed into the name of the only begotten Son of God" (John 3:18). Our sins are like iron nails; they have crucified the Lord Jesus. When the Lord was crucified on the cross, He bled, and His blood soaked the iron nails. Our sin has crucified Him, but His blood covers our sin! This is salvation, yes, what a salvation! "And the blood of Jesus His Son cleanses us from every sin" (1 John 1:7b).

The Lord Jesus was lifted up on the cross. Sinners, look at His blood-like sweat! Look at His forehead, bleeding from the piercing of thorns! Look at the blood on His back from the stripes! Look at the blood on His hands and feet! Look at the blood beneath His arms! Look at the blood from His whole body! Oh, look at the blood from His very heart! "Without shedding of blood there is no forgiveness" (Heb. 9:22b). This bleeding Savior can forgive your sins. Why do you delay? Do not be cheated by thinking that He bled and suffered only as a pattern for man. The Lord Jesus Himself said, "For this is My blood of the covenant, which is being poured out for many for forgiveness of sins" (Matt. 26:28). Please do not misunderstand; He shed His blood in your stead, and He was crucified in your place. All the suffering He endured was to bear your sins. "For Christ also has suffered once for sins, the Righteous on behalf of the unrighteous, that He might bring you to God" (1 Pet. 3:18). "Who Himself bore up our sins in His body on the tree" (2:24). Sinners, if you are oppressed by sin, where are your sins? Will you bear them by yourself or hand them over to Christ? You must remember well: the death of Christ is a death for you. He loves you. Do not harden your heart. You should consider His sufferings so that, on the one hand, you may know His love and, on the other hand, realize the suffering of the coming judgment if you do not believe in Him.

We have mentioned the suffering in His body. The suffering in His heart was not any less! His disciples escaped and hid. Some cheated and betrayed Him, and some denied Him! How lonesome He was as He hung on the cross. He tread the winepress alone! No one had compassion on Him. It was a dark scene indeed! He is God, the Most Holy One, who hates sin to the uttermost. But He bore the sins of the world; He was made sin for the world. No one can fully understand such humiliation. On the one hand, Satan and his evil demons mocked Him. "If You are the Son of God, come down from the cross!" (Matt. 27:40). On the other hand, God abandoned Him. "My God, My God, why have You forsaken Me?" (Matt. 27:46). What a desolate scene! Friends,

God hates sins even if they are upon His only begotten Son, who was bearing the sins of others. God cannot tolerate sin. He had to forsake His Son even when He was bearing the sins of others. God also has to forsake sinful sinners. If you will not receive Christ as your Savior, you will be forsaken by God forever. O Lord Jesus, the suffering which You endured on the cross is beyond my mind to fathom. O Lord, You suffered to the uttermost. How pitiful You were! I want to receive You as my Savior today.

Psalm 22 describes the suffering of the Lord Jesus on the cross. David, in his experience, prophesied of the Lord's suffering. Verses 11 through 18 say, "Trouble is near, / For there is none to help me." This speaks of the scattering of the disciples. "Many bulls surround me, / The mighty bulls of Bashan encompass me. / They open their mouth at me, / Like a ravening and roaring lion." This was the rampage of Satan and his forces against the Lord. It could have been through men. "I am poured out like water." Isaiah 53:12 also says, "He poured out His soul unto death." What a suffering to pour out one's life in such a way! "All my bones are out of joint. / My heart is like wax." This describes His suffering as He hung on the cross. His heart was broken. "My strength is dried up like a shard, / And my tongue is stuck to my jaws; / You have put me in the dust of death." This was the judgment of God's flaming wrath on Him at the cross. This was also bearing man's suffering in the lake of fire. At this time, He said, "I thirst." If you compare this with the rich man's unbearable thirst in Hades, you will begin to realize the suffering of the Lord Jesus. "For dogs surround me; / A congregation of evildoers encloses me." This describes the scene around the cross. "They pierce my hands and feet." This refers to nailing His hands and feet. The Son of God was crucified on a cross! "I count all my bones." This shows the suffering of being nailed on the cross. "They divide my garments to themselves, / And for my clothing they cast lots." This was fully fulfilled on Calvary. I hope that whoever reads these few lines will ponder over these verses from the Bible until the crucifixion of the Lord Jesus becomes a vivid reality before their eyes. Alas, His death was the most cruel death in the history of the world. No one ever died as He did! Because He was full of compassion to redeem all sinners, He died such a death. Readers, if the punishment of the lake of fire cannot cause you to fear, you should be moved by the love He demonstrated on the cross and receive Him.

Now salvation is accomplished! You do not need to do anything. The Lord Jesus has completed the work of salvation for you. He paid the entire price so that you could receive a free salvation. You do not have to pay anything.

He came down from heaven so that you could ascend to heaven.

He bore the offenses of sinners so that you could obtain God's acceptance.

He was forsaken by God for a time so that you could be welcomed by God forever.

He became poor so that you might become rich.

He died on the cross so that you might live in heaven eternally.

What love can be greater than this? Sinners, please do not remain hard-hearted, and do not delay. This is the moment you should come swiftly to Him. He has not given up hope for you.

"Surely He has borne our sicknesses, / And carried our sorrows; / Yet we ourselves esteemed Him stricken, / Smitten of God and afflicted. / But He was pierced because of our transgressions; / He was crushed because of our iniquities; / The chastening for our peace was upon Him, / And by His stripes we have been healed. / We all like sheep have gone astray; / Each of us has turned to his own way, / And Jehovah has caused the iniquity of us all / To fall on Him" (Isa. 53:4-6).

"What must I do to be saved?...Believe on the Lord Jesus, and you shall be saved" (Acts 16:30-31).

CHAPTER FOUR

THE LAMB OF THE PASSOVER

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Scripture Reading: Exo. 12

God's people, the Israelites, were enslaved in Egypt for many years. God saw their affliction and brought down ten plagues upon the Egyptians to punish them so that they would release His chosen people. After nine plagues had passed, the Egyptians were still hard-hearted. They did not want to lose their slaves. Therefore, God sent down the last plague to show His wondrous might and accomplish His deliverance.

We want to see how the last plague shows us the way of our salvation. God told the Israelites that He had decreed that all the firstborn in the land of Egypt should die. Whether the firstborn of an Israelite or Egyptian, God had decreed that they should die. "All the firstborn in the land of Egypt shall die" (Exo. 11:5). But God established a way of salvation. He told the Israelites that every household should prepare a lamb without blemish, kill the lamb, put its blood in a basin, and with a bunch of hyssop strike the blood on the two side posts and upper doorpost of each house. At midnight the angel of the Lord would pass through the land of Egypt and smite all the firstborn in houses that did not have the blood of the lamb on the side posts and upper doorpost. By midnight Jehovah had smitten the firstborn of many Egyptians in the houses which did not have the blood of the lamb on the side posts and upper doorpost. Those who did not die denote those who are saved, while those who died denote those who are perishing.

We should realize that all the firstborn in Egypt should have died. Egypt was under God's judgment. The Israelites were also under God's judgment. The firstborn typifies all sinners (1 Cor. 15:46). Egypt typifies the world, and Pharaoh typifies the devil. All sinners who live in the world and have become the slaves of the devil are under God's judgment. They will all receive God's punishment, eternal death. All have sinned and there is no distinction (Rom. 3:22-23). The wages of sin is death (Rom. 6:23). My dear sinners, please do

not take this matter lightly. Do not forget this! You are a sinner, your sins will be punished, and this punishment is eternal perdition and suffering in the lake of fire. You ought to consider your sins more! You ought to consider the punishment that awaits you! Regardless of whether you attend a church, the wrath of God is always upon you unless you are saved and delivered from your sins (John 3:36). O sinners! Do not forget that God is righteous. He surely will judge sins.

Nevertheless, we are not without hope; there is still a way to salvation. Although we do not have a way by ourselves, God has a way. There is no other way of salvation except God's way. The Bible says, "Neither is there another name [but Jesus] under heaven given among men in which we must be saved" (Acts 4:12). He told the Israelites to prepare a lamb. This lamb was their savior. The blood of the lamb saved them from death.

This lamb of the Passover signifies our Lord Jesus Christ, for the Scripture says, "For our Passover, Christ, also has been sacrificed" (1 Cor. 5:7). "Behold, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world!" (John 1:29). "You were redeemed...with precious blood, as of a Lamb without blemish and without spot, the blood of Christ" (1 Pet. 1:18-19). In the past God saved the Israelites with the lamb. Now He is saving us through the Lord Jesus. The Lord Jesus is our Lamb. The Israelites were saved by the lambs and we are saved by the Lord Jesus.

Do you want to be saved? If not, there is nothing more to say. But if you know that you are a sinner under the judgment of God and cannot escape His righteous judgment, and you wish to be saved, there is a saving way. God has prepared a salvation. He wants to save you.

The Lord Jesus has been crucified on the cross for our sins. Salvation has been accomplished, and whoever accepts Him as their personal Savior will be saved. The Israelites could not be saved by any other means. They relied on the blood of the lambs. Similarly, only the precious blood of the Lord Jesus can save you. Only the precious blood can save sinners!

Suppose that I could go back in time with you to the house of an Israelite. (Of course, this is only hypothetical.) Suppose we found a father and son sitting comfortably at home, and I asked him, "I heard that God is going to kill

your son at midnight tonight. Why are you still sitting here comfortably? Aren't you afraid of death?"

The man might answer, "We have nothing to fear, for God has prepared a lamb for us, and the lamb can save our lives. Look at my lamb! How fat! How white! How attractive! How lovable! And listen to the pleasing sound he makes! My lamb is the best; the lambs of my neighbors are not as good as mine. Since I have such a nice, good, and kind lamb, what more do I fear?"

What he said seems to be correct, but I tell you, at midnight his son will die! He will be killed by the angel of God!

Why? Has the word of God come in vain? Does he not have a lamb?

Indeed, he has a lamb. But God wants a dead lamb, not a living one. Let me tell you, a living Lord Jesus cannot save us; only a crucified Lord Jesus can save us. While the Lord Jesus was living on earth, He could not save us. Only after He was crucified could He redeem us. Bethlehem, Nazareth, and Galilee are places that condemn us; only Golgotha is the place which gives us eternal life. Do not marvel at this statement. Many people claim that Jesus is our model, a great man and a great teacher. Others think of Him as a man of good behavior, good morals, noble humanity, and great might. But, let me tell you, the more excellent the Lord Jesus is, the more your inadequacy is exposed! His goodness cannot save you; it will only condemn you! When God sees Him, God is satisfied. Although we may try our best to imitate Him, the more we try, the more our inward sinful nature and outward evil acts demonstrate our unworthiness. Our conduct will never please God. The more we imitate, the more we find that we will not and cannot imitate Him.

Do not be deceived! Although you may speak about the excellency of Christ's humanity and the loftiness of His morality, only He is excellent and only He is lofty. He and you have no relationship. Thank and praise God! His Son did not come into the world to be our model. God does not want us to imitate Christ with our own efforts so that we can be saved. He sent His Son to die for us sinners and accomplish salvation on our behalf. We do not need to do anything by ourselves, because He has already accomplished everything. We were sinners and the punishment we deserved was death and perdition. However, the punishment we deserved and the judgment we should have received have all been borne and received by the Lord Jesus. He died as sin in

our place. His death should have been ours, but He died in our place. Therefore, we do not need to be punished for our sins anymore. "Surely He has borne our sicknesses, / And carried our sorrows / ...But He was pierced because of our transgressions; / He was crushed because of our iniquities; / The chastening for our peace was upon Him, / And by His stripes we have been healed" (Isa. 53:4-5).

We are all sinners (Rom. 3:9-20) and deserve to die (Ezek. 18:4). If the Lord Jesus had come only to live for us, what could have saved us from our sins and delivered us from perdition? Praise be to God that He did not come to live, but to die—to die in our place, to bear our sins, and to receive the punishment due to us. Since we have Him as our Substitute, we do not need to die anymore! We now have a way to salvation! If we merely take Jesus as a model, intending to imitate Him as a means of salvation, we will end up perishing because there is no one on earth who can be like the Lord Jesus. No one can be saved by trying to imitate the Lord Jesus (Gal. 2). Those who believe on His substitutional work shall be saved! (Acts 16:31). The word of God says, "Without shedding of blood there is no forgiveness" (Heb. 9:22).

Suppose we go to the next house and see the parents and children there, and we asked them: "I heard that God is going to kill your firstborn tonight. Is it true?"

They may answer, "Yes."

Then I would ask again, "Why are you not afraid? Do you realize that your firstborn will die soon?"

They might answer, "We are not afraid because God has established a salvation. He told us to prepare a lamb, kill it, and put the blood in a basin. Look! The lamb has been killed, and the blood is in the basin. We Israelites are sinners, but the lamb has died on our behalf. Therefore, we have no fear."

But, let me tell you, at midnight, the firstborn of this family will still be killed by God's righteous wrath! If you act like those of that household, you will also perish!

Consider what the fault is of this man. The first household lost their firstborn because of the absence of the blood of the lamb. But the second

household had a live lamb, slaughtered it, and shed its blood. Why then should they perish? They had the blood, but where was the blood? Blood in the basin cannot save a man. Unless the blood of the lamb was sprinkled upon the side posts and the upper doorpost, it could not save them from death.

There are too many people like the ones in this household. I am afraid that these people may even be members of a church! You have already heard the gospel of the Lord Jesus and also know that He died on behalf of the sinners of the world. You have read from the Bible and newspapers about the Lord Jesus' substitutional death. You have heard it from the pulpits. But you have not come to God devotedly to receive His Son as your Savior. You know that the death of the Lord Jesus is a substitute for sinners; but you have not accepted Him as your personal Savior. You know that He died for the world, but do you believe that He died as sin for you? In your mentality you have heard and known all these things. But you have not exercised your heart to believe and to trust in Him. You have heard and known, but you stop right there and do not go further to seek after God's grace. You may be tired of hearing the teaching of the cross of the Lord Jesus, but you still have not mixed your faith with the Word preached to you (Heb. 4:2). You are still a man of perdition! Although you have known, you have not believed. Because you have not exercised your faith to receive the Lord Jesus as your personal Savior, your knowledge cannot help you at all, and you are still a man bound for hell! Blood that is in the basin, but unapplied to the side posts and upper doorpost, cannot save you. If the heart (Rom. 10:10) has not believed in the Lord Jesus, what good is the knowledge of the gospel in the head? Salvation is not for the one who knows, but for the one who believes (Acts 16:31; John 3:16).

Therefore, let me ask you, has the upper doorpost of your heart been sprinkled with the precious blood? Have you received the Lord Jesus in your heart as your Savior? I am not asking about your age or family status, nor do I inquire about your education or health. There is only one question in the world, the most important one—have you been saved? Have you received eternal life? Do you have the precious blood sprinkled upon the upper doorpost of your heart? This is the most vital question! Please answer God. Have you been saved?

Blood in the basin, if not applied to the side posts and upper doorpost, is unable to save men. Although you know that the Lord Jesus has died for you,

you will still perish if you do not exercise faith to apply His blood on the upper doorpost of your heart. The night of judgment is coming soon! The sinner-judging angels of the Lord will soon come forth! Eternity is now before you! Eternal life and eternal death are both eternal!! My dear sinners, apply the blood now! What are you waiting for? While you are reading this line, pause for a few minutes and pray, "O God, have pity on me, a sinner! I want to believe in the Lord Jesus as my personal Savior. Lord, forgive all my sins." The Lord will save you. Only come quickly!

On that night the Israelites used hyssop to dip in the blood and strike on the upper doorpost. If you want to rely on the precious blood of the Lord Jesus, you must have your own hyssop. According to the Scripture, hyssop is the smallest of all plants (1 Kings 4:33) and is despised by men. Speaking truthfully, I have never seen a proud man who can believe in the Lord Jesus. Unless we see ourselves as sinners and are willing to stand in the position of a sinner, we will not receive the Lord Jesus as our Savior. Therefore, you who are proud, please do not be proud any longer. Humble yourself before the feet of the Lord Jesus. Confess that you are a sinner; accept His salvation, and you will be saved!

When the blood was still in the basin, the Israelites were not safe; when the blood was applied, they were safe. If anyone knows about the salvation of the Lord Jesus but does not accept Him with faith, he is in danger. But the moment his heart is cleansed by the precious blood of the Lord Jesus, he is secure forevermore. What a pity that so many who have believed in the Lord Jesus do not know that they are secure and will not come into judgment!

Have you believed in the Lord Jesus? Have you been saved? Many Christians answer "yes" to the first question, but concerning the second question, I am afraid that many answer, "I don't know," "I dare not say," or, "I hope I can be saved."

These answers are not correct because the Bible says, "Believe on the Lord Jesus, and you shall be saved" (Acts 16:31). If you believe in the Lord Jesus, then you will be saved. This is the Word of God. How can you believe in the Lord Jesus and yet not be saved? If you are not saved, even if you have believed in the Lord Jesus, then has not the Word of God become void? If this is the case, then the Lord is a liar! The Bible says, "This is the testimony of God that He has testified concerning His Son...And this is the testimony, that

God gave to us eternal life and this life is in His Son. He who has the Son has the life; he who does not have the Son of God does not have the life. I have written these things to you that you may know that you have eternal life, to you who believe into the name of the Son of God...He who does not believe God has made Him a liar because he has not believed in the testimony which God has testified concerning His Son" (1 John 5:9, 11-13, 10). The teaching of the Scripture is this: He who believes in the Lord Jesus has the Lord Jesus, and he who has Him has eternal life. Those who have read this testimony of God can know that they have eternal life. If a man does not believe that God has given us eternal life and does not believe that he who has the Son of God has life, he has made God a liar! We should not make God a liar. He said that we can be saved by believing, and that if we have His Son, we have eternal life. Since we have believed and received His Son, the Lord Jesus, as our Savior, surely we are already saved. The word of the Scripture says that we can know whether we have been saved.

I once went to a certain place to preach, and I asked those who truly believed in the Lord Jesus as their Savior to raise their hands. Nearly everyone put up a hand. Then I asked those who were sure that they had been saved to raise their hands. Not one hand was raised! My visits to other places also led to the same experience. There are many who believe in the Lord Jesus, but there are few who know that they are saved! After I read the Bible, I could not understand how people could believe in the Lord Jesus and yet not know that they were saved. The Bible definitely says that those who believe in the Lord Jesus have eternal life. How can we believe in Him and yet not be saved? God cannot lie. To entertain such a thought is blasphemous enough; how much more serious is it to openly doubt His Word! He said that if we believe we have eternal life. We believe, and we surely have eternal life. "He who believes into the Son has eternal life" (John 3:36). This is the Word of God.

Let us consider the condition of another household in Israel. Suppose we went to a third house, and the moment we reached the door, we saw the upper doorpost and side posts smeared with the blood of the lamb. As we entered into the house, we saw the killed lamb and the basin with hyssop by its side. However, the people in the house were sitting and crying, with their firstborn also looking pale, crying, and trembling. They acted as if a great calamity was going to come upon them. If I asked them, "Why are you so sad?", they would answer, "Sir, don't you know about the calamity that will befall us at midnight? At that time God will kill all the firstborn in Egypt, and our son will be among

them." Then they might cry again. But I would ask them, "Has God not established a way of salvation for you? Did He not order you to kill the lamb and smear the blood on the upper doorpost and side posts? Is your door not smeared with blood already? Why are you still worrying?"

They might answer, "Yes, God has indeed said this, and we have done so accordingly. But we don't feel that we are safe."

Then I would do my best to persuade them not to worry and cry because they have the precious blood, and they are in a safe and sound position. Despite my efforts, they may continue to worry over the thought that it is impossible to know they are safe just by the smearing of the blood on the upper doorpost.

Is it reasonable for this household to be so worried? Yes or no? You might laugh at their foolishness because once the blood was on their upper doorpost, everything was all right. Continuing to worry and suffer would merely be self-inflicted agony. But many times we are the same as they. Having believed in the Lord Jesus, having accepted Him as our personal Savior, and having applied His precious blood on the upper doorpost of our heart, we have entered into a safe and sound position. We are saved and will no longer perish! What more do we fear? Why do we still worry? The moment we believed in the Lord Jesus, we were safe. If we have not accepted the Lord Jesus as our Savior, then we ought to worry and cry for we are condemned already (John 3:18). If, however, we have believed in the substitutional death of the Lord Jesus on the cross, then we have no reason or right to worry and cry, because we are already saved. We ought to rejoice because God has already saved us. We have not saved ourselves. God has saved us. What a wonderful grace! We ought to start praising the grace of the Lord and worry no more. "Truly, truly, I say to you, he who hears My word and believes Him who sent Me has eternal life, and does not come into judgment but has passed out of death into life" (John 5:24). Therefore, we are already saved! Heaven is guaranteed to us!

Many people cannot understand how someone can be saved merely by believing in the Lord Jesus. Their difficulty lies in being unable to feel that they have been saved. I often hear people saying, "I have truly believed in the Lord Jesus as my Savior, but in my heart I still cannot feel that I am saved." Let us read Exodus 12:13, "And when I see the blood, I will pass over you, and the plague shall not be upon you to destroy you." Who saw the blood? God

saw it, not the firstborn. The blood was applied to the upper doorpost and side posts; the firstborn could not see it, and even if they could, it would have been of no use. God said that He would see the blood, and when He saw the blood, He would not smite us. We do not realize how much value there is in the blood of the Lord Jesus. We cannot understand how God profoundly values the blood of the Lord Jesus. But God said that when He saw the blood, He would pass over. He will save all those who have the precious blood of His Son. Our duty is to believe in the Lord Jesus' substitutional death and His shedding of the blood on the cross. God sees the blood, He will save us. Whether we feel it or not matters little. The Scripture does not say that we are saved when we feel that we are saved, and that if we do not feel so, then we will perish. What the Scripture says is that God will pass over when He sees the blood. Therefore, dear friends, do not rely on your volatile feelings. God's words are reliable. When He sees us believing in the Lord Jesus, He will save us. What more do we have to fear? Even if we feel nothing, God has already seen. Could the Israelites, who remained indoors, see the blood on their upper doorpost? Therefore, there is nothing strange if we do not feel anything!

Some brothers always worry. They think that they are not yet saved, even though they have believed in the Lord Jesus as their Savior, because they repeatedly fall. Many times they are weak. The more they look at themselves, the more they think they are unworthy to be saved. They honestly believe in the Lord Jesus as their Savior. They know the grace of the Lord is great; however, when they look at their own failures, they are unable to believe that they are saved. But these thoughts are in vain. Let us again read God's Word. "When I see the blood, I will pass over you" (Exo. 12:13). What is the basis for God's salvation? What does God see? The Bible says that God sees the blood and nothing else. God saves us because of the precious blood of the Lord Jesus and only because of the precious blood of His Son, not because of a change in ourselves or in our conduct. The Scripture does not say, "When I see your good conduct, I will pass over you." Nor does it say, "When I see your perfect life, I will pass over you." It says, "When I see the blood, I will pass over you." The blood! We must pay attention to the blood. God sees the blood, not us, or even less, our conduct. Salvation and damnation are according to the presence or absence of the blood. Even if you were the best man in the world, if you do not believe in the precious blood of the Lord Jesus, you are still a man of perdition. If you were the worst man in the world, and by faith applied the precious blood of the Lord Jesus, you would immediately be saved.

The precious blood can save sinners! The precious blood is especially for saving sinners! "For by grace you have been saved through faith, and this not of yourselves; it is the gift of God; not of works that no one should boast" (Eph. 2:8-9). We are saved entirely by the grace of God; it has absolutely nothing to do with our conduct. The more we look at ourselves, the more we will feel that we are not worthy to be saved and have less peace. Therefore, we should look to the Lord Jesus and rely on Him alone. Look to Him, and we will have peace and joy in our hearts. Although we are not trustworthy, He is trustworthy. The more we look to Him, the more we will be purified and sanctified.

The Israelites were saved because they relied on the blood of the lamb, not because of their own merits. The Egyptians perished because they did not have the precious blood of the lamb, not because of their evil deeds. Salvation or perdition depends on whether we rely on the precious blood of the lamb. If we have the precious blood, then we are saved. Otherwise, our situation is dangerous! Let us now leave the Israelites and come to the Egyptians. Suppose we entered into an Egyptian house and found them enjoying their family life, and I asked, "Why are you so happy? God said that He will kill your son by midnight tonight!"

They might answer, "Sir, my son is different from other people's sons. He has never committed murder or arson. He is just and honest. He has done everything according to his conscience. Will God punish such a man?"

I would say, "If you do not have the blood of the lamb on your upper doorpost, God will not pass over him. He will destroy him."

They might respond, "Others may need the blood of the lamb, but good people have no need of the blood of the lamb."

When midnight came, their son would perish! Let me tell you, the consequence for all those who rely on their own righteousness, rather than the precious blood of the Lord Jesus, is eternal perdition! Although you are better than your neighbor, and in the eyes of the world you are an honest man, can your small merit save you from the wrath of the most righteous God? All our righteousness is not up to God's standard. He still sees us as sinners; without the blood of the Lamb for our ransom, we will perish. Although the Israelites were evil (as we see from their experience in the wilderness), they had the blood of the lamb to redeem them from their sins. Therefore, they

were saved. Although the Egyptians may have been good, they did not have the blood of the lamb to redeem them. Therefore, they perished. Salvation or perdition is not according to ourselves or our behavior; it is according to whether we accept the redeeming Savior who has died for us. In the book of Revelation the ones in heaven are there because of the precious blood of the Lamb, not because of their own conduct. Saved ones can go to heaven because they "have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb" (Rev. 7:9-17).

As the Passover approached and the hours ticked away, the time came! The hour of judgment came! "At midnight the Lord smote all the firstborn in the land of Egypt" (Exo. 12:29). This is the destiny of those who do not believe in the gospel of the Lord Jesus! I advise you to no longer rely on your own conduct because of the imminent coming of eternity. Do not excuse yourself or delay any longer. Believe quickly in the Lord Jesus. While today is still today, come quickly! "Behold, now is the well-acceptable time; behold, now is the day of salvation" (2 Cor. 6:2).

"There was not a house where there was not one dead" (Exo. 12:30). In every Egyptian house, someone died. Even the Israelite homes were not without their dead! Both the Egyptian and Israelites had a death in each house! The only difference was that in the houses of the Israelites, the dead one was a lamb, while in the Egyptian houses it was a man. In every house there was death, either of a person or of a lamb. How frightful! How solemn! Either a man or a lamb died.

Dear readers, I do not know who you would rather see die. Would you rather bear all your sins and die, or would you believe in and rely on Jesus, the Lamb of God, and let Him die for you? Either you die or He dies for you; it is either one or the other! If the Lord Jesus does not die for you, then you must die. Who will die? Thank and praise God because "while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us" (Rom. 5:8). You do not have to die; you do not have to perish for your sins. From this point on, you will not perish because you are a sinner, but because you have not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God (John 3:18). Therefore, do not let the Lord Jesus say to you, "You are not willing to come to Me that you may have life" (John 5:40). "Let him who wills take the water of life freely" (Rev. 22:17). How I desire that you would just come to God with a believing heart, praying, "O God, I am a

sinner who deserves perdition, but I believe that your Son has died for me. Forgive all my previous sins so that from now on I will be saved."

CHAPTER FIVE

WHY GOOD MEN GO TO HELL

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Scripture Reading: Luke 18:9-14

This portion of the Bible is a parable told by the Lord Jesus Christ Himself. He said that two men went up into the temple to pray; one was a Pharisee, one of the best of persons, and the other was a tax collector, one of the worst of persons. The Lord Jesus said that as a result of their prayers, the wicked tax collector was justified and the good Pharisee was not justified. What does "to be justified" mean? To be justified is to be declared innocent in a law court. To not be justified is to be declared guilty and to receive punishment. "Justified" is what believers usually mean by "saved." Making it more plain, "to be justified" is to go to heaven. To not be justified is to perish and go to hell. The Lord Jesus said that a good person goes to hell and a wicked person goes to heaven. A good man goes to hell! And a wicked man goes to heaven! Yes, this is what the Lord Jesus said.

We all think that the good person should go to heaven and the wicked to hell, but the Lord Jesus said that the good person would go to hell and the wicked person to heaven. Do not be surprised and think that this is new or strange. If any person is going to heaven, he must be a sinner. In heaven you cannot find a good person. In heaven everyone is a sinner! What about hell? There are plenty of good people in hell! Do not think that you will not go to hell because you are good. Let me say that there are plenty of people in hell just like you! Some are even better than you! By themselves, those who are both wicked and good should go to hell. By believing in the Lord Jesus, however, good men can go to heaven and wicked men also can go to heaven. In this parable, our Lord Jesus Christ told a story of a good man going to hell and a wicked man going to heaven. Those who label themselves as a righteous person and think of themselves as an excellent man among men, please listen to the Lord Jesus' words: good men may go to hell! Those who humble themselves and confess that they are sinners, judging themselves not worthy

to be saved, should not be discouraged because wicked men may go to heaven!

We need to consider the good man, whom the Lord talked about, who was perishing. We want to see how good he was, and if he was a good man, why he would still go to hell.

Verse 10 says that he was a Pharisee. Very often we think that Pharisees were hypocrites, the worst people. But this was not always true; they had many good qualities. Pharisees zealously kept the law (Phil. 3:5). They were not like the modernists, the Sadducees, who did not believe this or that. They believed in God's Word and kept God's law and dared not doubt one word. Even so, the Lord Jesus said this Pharisee perished!

Christians, when coming to revival conferences and walking on the street, often feel shameful when they are seen carrying a big heavy Bible. We would rather leave it at home and come to the meeting without a Bible or with a small New Testament to avoid men's eyes. We are afraid that people will call us superstitious. We are afraid of being ridiculed. But it was not so with the Pharisees: they wrote Scripture on the fringes of their garments, they were not afraid of being ridiculed, and they were bold to confess to everyone that they believed in God.

I know of many Christians who dare not pray and give thanks for the meal before men when they go to an unbeliever's home or an unbelieving friend comes to their home for a meal! Since their consciences bother them if they do not give thanks, they pray to God in their heart with open eyes! How shy they are! How timid! They dare not admit that they are Christians before others. This was not the situation with the Pharisees. They would pray at the crosswalk. Let us not mention what kind of motive they may have had; their outward performance alone was much higher than that of ordinary Christians. However, the Lord Jesus said that this Pharisee was fallen and would go to hell. Pharisees were high class people in the society of those days. They were a very gentle, noble, and cultured people. But God does not care for social status. He is righteous; He will not regret sending you to hell if you deserve it. Do not say in your heart, "Is it possible for people like me—so fine, so gentle, so smart with a Ph.D. degree, and so rich—to go to hell?" Let me say that there are plenty of people just like you in hell, even some wiser, prettier, richer, and gentler than you! A person is never too good to go to hell! The

Lord Jesus said that this Pharisee would perish. Although he was one of the high class, he would perish. So please do not depend on your social status. When this gentle Pharisee came to pray at the temple, he prayed, "God!" (Luke 18:11). Please listen to this word, "God." He was neither an atheist nor a fool, since he did not say that there was no God; neither was he a wicked person doing evil and abominable deeds (Psa. 14:1). He believed that there was a God. Even though he could not see Him, he knew that God is clearly seen since the creation of the world (Rom. 1:19-20). He was not an unreligious person; he believed that there was a God. In spite of this, he still was not saved. He could not avoid going to hell and perishing. He was a very pious and religious man; he came to God's presence and prayed. He was a good man. Nevertheless, the Lord said that this pious, good man was going to hell. Please remember that a good man, who even believes that there is a God, can go to hell! What will happen to those who do not believe!

The Pharisee prayed, "God, I thank You that I am not like the rest of men," and then he named many types of sinners. He told the Lord that he was not evil like the rest of men, that he had not committed as many sins as others and that he was among the best of men, unlike others. Indeed, this Pharisee was a good man! He was rare among men! Yet the Lord said that this unusually good man would go to hell and perish forever. You may think, "Perhaps this Pharisee was going to hell because he was a hypocrite. If he was genuinely good, he would surely go to heaven." But there is no indication that he was a hypocrite. I can tell you that he was indeed rare among men, yet there are other people who are also moral. He was truly a morally perfect man. He prayed saying that he did not sin as others and had many good points. The Lord did not deny this; He did not say that the Pharisee's words were false. For this reason we know that he must have been a good person. Furthermore, in verse 9 the Lord indicated that he was "righteous." This proves that he was an ideally good man. But good men go to hell, and good men should go to hell!

We should remember that he said to God, "I am not like the rest of men." Many times when I preach the gospel, I ask, "Do you know that you are a sinner and that you need a Savior as a substitute to redeem you?" Many have replied, "I have never killed anyone and burned down buildings. In what way have I sinned? I do everything according to my conscience. I am much better than my friends and neighbors. I am better than all." An unbeliever might add, "I am even better than many Christians! I am better than they without even

believing in Jesus." Yes, maybe you can say this to me, but can you say to the Lord, "God, I thank You that I do not sin like the rest of men. I am better than all others"? I am afraid you can only utter self-justifying words to me but not to God. You dare to boast before men of your virtues. But you would not dare to say before God that you are better than all others. You may deceive men but not God. You may boast to me. You may deceive parents, husband, wife, children, relatives, friends, and the world. But you cannot deceive God. What you dare to say before men, you dare not say before God because God examines your inward parts. The Pharisee acted according to his conscience. He not only boasted to men that he was a perfect and righteous man, unlike others who had committed sins, he dared to say even to God, "God, I thank You that I am not like the rest of men—extortioners, unjust, adulterers." His conscience did not even slightly condemn him; he could boldly declare his righteous acts before God. Truly, he was better than others, better than you and I. But the Lord said that this good man, who was rare among men, would go to hell. If such a good man will go to hell, then what will happen to those who are not as good as he, who do not come up to his standard, and who have sinned as the rest of the world? Should they go to hell and receive more punishment? "If they do these things with the tree full of sap, what will happen with the one that is dry?" (Luke 23:31) If an extremely good person goes to hell, what will happen to us sinners? Do not be so self-confident. Although you are good, you cannot escape the fire of hell. Oh, you who are self-righteous, please do not be at peace. Your own righteousness cannot save you.

He was not an extortioner. Extortion is taking what should not be taken by force or by power. This Pharisee did not extort others, even though he had the power. I wonder how many of you reading this message have extorted someone's riches by your own power. You know it; God also knows it. What a common thing it is to dominate others by means of your power! But this Pharisee did not do this; he did not extort. Yet the Lord said that he could not be spared from going to hell. Good men go to hell. If a good man like this Pharisee was going to hell, then what about extortioners?

Furthermore, he was not unjust. Whatever is not fair is unjust. Being unjust is the most common sin today. Not only is there much unjust conduct, but there are many unjust objects. In your home, bedroom, classroom, living room, and office is there anything that is not yours, but has become yours? Please search your bedroom, living room, closet, pocket to see if there are

items that were obtained in an unjust way. Please check your own heart, and ask yourself if there is anything that you have gained in an unjust way. It is still unjust, even if it is only one dress or one penny. To put it politely, we acquired these things in an unjust way; putting it frankly, these things were stolen from others! To be unjust is to steal! Did you ever steal any money from others? Did you ever steal any article? Did you borrow from others and never return the borrowed thing? All this is unjust!

Once I held a meeting at Changchow. A young student who had stolen five dollars from her teacher was there. After she attended the meeting, she realized that what she had done was a sin. The Spirit urged her, and she confessed to her mother and returned the money to her teacher. Another young girl student who had stolen two loquats from her supervisor was also there. Her supervisor was a very strict person; the students were afraid to talk to her. After this young student received the Lord's grace, she realized that she should clear up this unjust matter; she went to her supervisor and boldly confessed her sin.

Two weeks later I went to the Kulangsu Bible Association. The manager told me that he had received a letter and dictionary from Changchow. In the letter the writer stated, "I took this book from the Association without paying for it. I now know that this is unjust so I am returning it." Oh! Brothers and sisters, I do not know if there is any injustice among you; I hope that there is none among you, but I am afraid that there are some unjust ones among us, and I am also afraid that there are some unjust things among you! This Pharisee was not unjust. He dared to say to the Lord that he was not unjust. But the Lord said that even though he was a good man and not unjust, he was not justified and could not be saved! A good man can go to hell! If a just man can perish, how much more will unjust ones perish and go to hell? Needless to say, you and I should go to hell.

He did not commit adultery. I do not know how many reading this message have committed adultery. You know and God knows. The sin of adultery is filthy! But many have defiled their beds through their flesh! If we agree that lusting in the heart is committing a sin, then there will be very few perfect people in the world! The Lord said, "That every one who looks at a woman in order to lust after her has already committed adultery with her in his heart" (Matt. 5:28). Today few keep their bodies clean; even fewer keep their minds clean. God surely will punish those who commit this kind of sin. He has to

punish sin. This Pharisee was a moral person; he did not do anything unclean. He never committed adultery. But the Lord said that the good Pharisee, who did not commit adultery, would perish and go to hell. The destination of a good man is hell! If such a good person is going to hell, then what about evil ones and adulterers? Will not adulterers, all the more, go to hell?

The Pharisee not only abstained from many evil things on the negative side, but did many commendable things on the positive side. He "fast[ed] twice a week" (v. 12). I am afraid that many people have never fasted once since they became a Christian! They may not even know what it means to fast! But this Pharisee was very strict; he mastered his body and did not give in to the passion of his lust. He was a self-disciplined person. He served God in a godly and dedicated way. The law did not require a man to fast twice a week. He had even fulfilled what the law did not require of him. Despite all this, the Lord said that he would perish and go to hell. Surely those who are worse than he will receive a more severe punishment. If this is the case, how can one hope to be saved?

He gave tithes of all that he had acquired. He was not a miser; he was a very generous person. His principle was to tithe. Very few Christians today give even one percent, much less ten percent. When offering time comes, many think that a silver dollar is too big and a silver dime too small. But a copper coin is neither too big nor too small, so they offer it! This was not the case with the Pharisee. He was full of thoughts about accumulating wealth in heaven. Yet the Lord said that he would go to hell. A person who gives his labor and money still can suffer perdition! If a good man can go to hell, what kind of punishment will miserly ones receive?

From these points we can see that the Pharisee was a good and perfect man. Not only was he good in men's eyes, but he was also perfect and without blemish in his own eyes. We cannot say that he was a saint, but he was a very rare and good man in this world. Nevertheless, the Lord declared that he was not justified, that he was not saved, and that he was going to perish! If we think that we can be saved by doing good or that we are saved because we are good, we should realize that even if we are as good as this Pharisee, we still cannot be saved. How can we be saved by doing good? How could the Pharisee possibly have been saved just by being a good man? Therefore, good people should not be complacent! We should not think that we can be saved because we are good. We have to realize, according to the Lord's judgment,

that we still belong to hell! Sinners, do not think that we should improve ourselves gradually and then be saved after we have been good. Let me tell you that this is Satan's gospel. Not only are we incapable of doing good, even if we could do as well as this Pharisee, we would still go to hell! What use is it to do good? The Lord purposely chose this ideal and good person and said that he was still going to perish in order to disappoint those who rely on their self-righteousness and let them know that their self-righteousness cannot save them. The way of salvation has nothing to do with ourselves (Eph. 2:8-9). If anyone wishes to be saved, they should not look to the way of self-improvement. In order to be saved, one has to believe on the Lord Jesus (Acts 16:31).

Since this Pharisee was such a good man, why did he end up going to hell? What are the reasons? Now we will see the reasons why this good man would go to hell.

First, he was one like those who "trusted in themselves that they were righteous" (Luke 18:9). He was an outstanding person according to moral standards. He was very content and thought that he could be saved. It seemed that no one else could go to heaven if he could not go. To "trust" means to depend upon. He depended upon his own righteous works and thought his righteous works could justify or save him. He did not realize that "all of us became like him who is unclean, / And all our righteousnesses are like a soiled garment" (Isa. 64:6). None of these things can cover our shame and shelter us from God's condemnation. He did not know that in God's eyes, "there is none righteous, not even one" (Rom. 3:10). He thought that he was "not like the rest of men," that he was the one and only righteous man on earth! He thought that he conducted himself according to the law and even did more than what the law required. Therefore, he thought he would surely be justified. He is just like many others who think that they can be saved by good works. But the Bible says, "Out of the works of the law no flesh shall be justified before Him" (Rom. 3:20). It also says, "For we [the apostles] account that a man is justified...apart from the works of the law" (Rom. 3:28). "A man is not justified out of works of law...we might be justified...not out of the works of law, because out of the works of law no flesh will be justified" (Gal. 2:16). "By law no one is justified before God" (3:11). "Not out of works in righteousness which we did...He saved us" (Titus 3:5). "The works of law" mean good works. Not being justified by the works of the law means that one cannot be saved by doing good works. This has been repeatedly made clear in

the Bible. Although the Pharisee had righteous works, he did not realize that his righteous works could not save him. He was one of those who "trusted in themselves that they were righteous." He wanted to go to heaven, but eventually he ended up in hell. How pitiful! He thought his own righteousness was sufficient and did not seek the righteousness which was prepared by God in Christ Jesus. As a result, he fell into perdition. Man's righteousness does not satisfy God; He will not save anyone unless He sees His own righteousness. Because this Pharisee was "ignorant of God's righteousness and sought to establish [his] own righteousness, [he was] not subject to the righteousness of God" (Rom. 10:3). To not be subject is to rebel. This man was a rebel in the face of God. How could he have any hope of being saved?

Oh, how numerous are the descendants of this Pharisee today! Many still think that they are a good man, that they are therefore saved. Many think that they should do good in order to be saved. But the Lord said that good men go to hell. If you are this type of person, please turn back quickly and believe in the Lord Jesus because your good works cannot save you. Nothing in this world is less dependable than your own righteousness. The righteous Pharisee who depended upon his own righteousness has already gone to hell and has become a pattern to those who want to be saved through doing good works. Why should you suffer by following in the same footsteps?

He not only was one who "trusted in themselves that they were righteous" but also "exalt[ed] himself" (v. 14). Self- exalting ones go to hell. As a preacher, I have never seen a proud person become saved. If a man wants to be saved, he must admit that he is a helpless and hopeless sinner, unable to save himself and unable to trust himself. He must admit that he deserves hell. He needs to prostrate himself before the cross to beg for grace and believe in Jesus of Nazareth who was crucified in a shameful way to be his vicarious Savior. How humbling this is! Without humbling ourselves, who can do this? There is nothing under heaven more humbling than to believe in the Lord Jesus as the Savior! Worldly people are very unwilling to confess that they cannot do good! Self-exalting ones are not willing to come to the despised cross to seek grace. A self-exalting man cannot be saved. He likes to say that he can do good and can patch up all his wrong doings with his own good works. Even if he cannot, he will try to bear his own responsibility. It is hard for him to confess that he is a sinner and that Jesus Christ is his Savior! Oh, proud one, please do not be so proud anymore. Humble yourself before God. Otherwise, your pride will cause you to go to hell!

Moreover, the Pharisee did not ask God for grace. He thought that a person as qualified as he was did not need to ask God for grace. If a righteous man like the Pharisee is sufficiently qualified to be saved, why ask God for grace? Since he already has done good works, why is there a need for him to lose face by asking for grace? Although he went up to the temple to pray, the Lord said that he "prayed these things to himself." Please read verses 11 and 12 again and see whether or not he prayed. He did not come to the temple of God saying, "God, I have this and that shortage. Please fill me." He did not say, "God, I cannot save myself. Please save me." Rather, he said, "God, I thank You, because I can be good without Your help. I never did this or that evil thing. On the contrary, I have done many good things." He did not pray! He did not beseech God! He thought that he was the top person and that he was good to the uttermost. He did not come to pray; he came to give a report! He came before God just to give Him a report and to let Him know all his merits. He seemed to be saying, "God, I thank You, I did not do many sinful things; instead, I did many good things. I am afraid that You do not know about it, so I came to give You a report." He did not ask God for grace. He was truly a good man, according to his own estimate and others' evaluation. But he was an outsider to God's holiness. He had never seen God; he did not know God. So he dared to boast before the God of all holiness and all goodness! If the eyes of his heart had not been completely blinded, he would not have been so foolish. Even though he and all the others thought he was a good person, in God's eyes he was still a sinner. He was not justified, and he needed to be saved. If he would not be saved, he would perish and go to hell. In the same way that a great sinner needs a Savior to redeem him and suffer the penalty of sin for him, this so-called righteous person needs the same in God's eyes. But he was blind to this need. He never knew God or God's grace. Therefore, he did not know that he was also a sinner before God. He also needed a Savior. He was too self-content and too proud! He thought that he was capable and able! When he arrived in hell, he surely was shocked and thought he had gone to the wrong place! Little did he realize that this very place was his real home!

The Pharisee had already perished. We need to take this case as a warning. He made two great mistakes regarding salvation: (1) he thought that in order to be saved he should do good, and (2) since he was good, he was surely saved. He did not know that these thoughts were absurd. When we read Ephesians 2:8-9, we can see that we are not saved by our good works but by believing in the grace of the Lord Jesus. "He who believes into Him is not condemned; but

he who does not believe has been condemned already" (John 3:18). Whether a person will be saved or will perish depends on whether or not he believes and receives the salvation that has been accomplished by the Lord Jesus on the cross. It does not depend on our own goodness or badness. Since we are not saved by doing good, someone who is just good cannot be saved. Dear readers, do not think that you can be saved by accumulating good works little by little. I know and God knows that you are unable to do good. Even if you are able, the God of all goodness does not consider your goodness as good. Good works can never save you. You cannot buy God's salvation by doing good. You should first be saved, then do good works. Do not change the order, thinking that first you should do good works, and then you will be saved. Please come now and receive the Lord Jesus as your Savior and be saved.

Now we are going to see the wicked person who was saved, and find out how wicked he was and why he could go to heaven. He was a tax collector (Luke 18:10). According to the situation in Jewish society at the time, a tax collector was the most despised among all classes of people. The Chinese consider a robber to be the worst man and a harlot to be the worst woman. We have a saying, "a man-robber and a woman-harlot." For the Jews, the lowest, most ignoble, wicked, and dirty profession for a man was to be a tax collector! For a male to be a tax collector and a female to be a harlot is the most despicable thing! But the Lord Jesus said that even though he was despised by men, he was justified by God; he was saved and could go to heaven!

In those days the Jews were under the dictatorship of the Roman government, and the Romans taxed the Jews by the system of collecting tribute money. The government would set the amount of tax in a certain place and then hire people to collect it. These tax collectors collected tribute for the Roman government. When they took the job of collecting tribute, they would extort a tribute of their own choosing, so that the excess tax would be theirs. As a group, they helped evildoers do evil and cared for even the smallest, trifling amounts. They only cared for their own gain; therefore, they were considered by society as the most low and despised of men. This was the tax collector in the eyes of the world. If you asked a Jew which kind of person was the worst, he would certainly answer, "a tax collector." But the Lord Jesus said that the tax collector would go to heaven. Wicked men can go to heaven! If the sinful and wicked, such as this tax collector, can be saved, what is possible for those who are less sinful!

He was a sinner (v. 13). His own conscience accused him. Everything he did was against God's laws. He could not keep God's commandments. His thoughts were filthy. His eyes beheld things that should not be seen. His mouth spoke things that should not be spoken. His hands did evil and his feet walked in wickedness. He was totally filled with lusts and all things of ungodliness. He only knew how to take advantage of others. He was a miser; he only cared to fill his own bag. He did not care for anything, much less righteousness or morality. He turned his ear away from the cries of orphans and widows. As long as he accumulated thousands and tens of thousands for his wealth, he did not care whether others were sinking in the mire. He did not worship God. His deeds, behavior, and motives were all against God. In brief, he was a sinner. But the Lord Jesus said that this tax collector was justified and that sinners can go to heaven.

O sinners of this world, you know that you are a sinner. You think that you are incurable and not worthy to be saved. When you examine your own thoughts and behavior, your conscience condemns your sins and convinces you that you deserve to perish. Dear sinners, let me say that you do not have to be disappointed or worry. The Lord Jesus said that the wicked can go to heaven. Oh, distressed ones, you do not have to be discouraged. Here is the gospel. Even though you are a sinner, sinners can obtain eternal life. You cannot save yourself, but you can be saved. The way of salvation is in the Lord Jesus. Come and receive His salvation! The Pharisee said he was "not like the rest of men—extortioners, unjust, adulterers, or even like this tax collector" (v. 11). From this statement, we can deduce that this tax collector was an extortioner, an unjust person, an adulterer, and one with all kinds of sins. This tax collector usurped power to oppress and extort people. Everything he did was full of injustice. In his house there were articles which he owned illegally; he had used crafty methods to obtain them. He committed adultery, sinning against his own body. He got involved in all kinds of unclean things and committed all kinds of sins. Nevertheless, the Lord Jesus judged and said that this tax collector could go to heaven.

From a worldly point of view, this type of sinner deserves more than perdition. According to worldly judgment, nice people should go to heaven and evil ones to hell. If we made the decision, only good people would be saved and wicked people would perish. If we made the decision, the Pharisee would certainly receive eternal life, and the tax collector would be sentenced to condemnation. Fortunately, there is no room for men to say anything

regarding salvation and perdition. Fortunately, it is our Lord Jesus Christ who set the rule by saying that good people should go to hell. Since the evil ones can go to heaven, we have a chance to be saved. There are very few good people in the world; all are sinners (Rom. 3). If only good people can be saved, then how many will be saved? Will not all perish? Fortunately, the Lord Jesus made the rule that sinners can go to heaven. Therefore, we sinners have the hope of being saved. Praise the Lord!

Once I took the Lien Shien Steamer from Shanghai back to Fukien. I shared the gospel with a well-known businessman from Fukien. I told him the gospel of the Lord Jesus' vicarious death and His redemption. He answered by saying, "What Confucius said was the best: ‘One who sins against heaven shall not be forgiven.’ " I asked him, "Sir, according to what you have heard and seen, how many people have not sinned against heaven?" He was silent for a while and answered, "I am afraid that there is not one!" I asked, "Very well then, since all have sinned against heaven, can anyone be forgiven? If this is so, what else can be said? We are all here waiting to be sentenced." He could say nothing. Yes, we all are sinners and should perish. But God is full of grace; He has the gospel. Although everyone thinks that they have sinned against heaven and cannot be forgiven, God has bestowed grace upon everyone who has sinned against heaven. He has prepared a Savior to die for them to redeem them so all sinners can have a chance to be saved and go to heaven. Therefore, sinners, come quickly and receive God's salvation. The evil can go to heaven; this is the gospel.

This tax collector was a most wicked person. Yet he was saved. Does this mean that we should commit sins and become evildoers in order to be saved? Does this mean that we can sin as we please in order to obtain salvation? No, absolutely not! The Lord Jesus said that sinners can be saved. He did not say that sinners would be saved because they commit sins. By himself, a sinner will perish. If he relies on a third party, he can be saved. Now we want to see the reason why this tax collector, who had committed such sins, could actually be saved. In this way we, who are sinners like him, can learn from him and obtain salvation, so that evildoers like us can also go to heaven.

Although he was sold to sin, he was not proud before God and did not presume that he had anything. The Lord Jesus said that he humbled himself before God. The Scriptures say that "God resists the proud but gives grace to the humble" (James 4:6). He knew his own deeds. He knew he had nothing to

boast about. He saw his many defects. He knew he deserved to be condemned. So he humbled himself before God. When he came to the temple of God, he stood "at a distance, [and] would not even lift up his eyes to heaven." He knew that God is most holy and most righteous and that a person like him was unworthy of coming close to God or looking to Him. He had no good works to report to God. He knew he could not save himself, so he came to God for grace.

"God...gives grace to the humble." If you are proud, thinking you have everything and are short of nothing, may the Spirit open the eyes of your heart so that you will see all your shortcomings and come to God for grace. If you know your shortcomings, I hope you will not be proud and deceive yourself and end up perishing. Pride has misled many to not believe in the Savior, and therefore, they perished. I hope that pride will not mislead you! He prayed before God, "God, be propitiated to me, the sinner!" (v. 13). He was not like the Pharisee who despised "the rest," speaking about the sins of others. He confessed that he himself was a sinner: "me, the sinner!" How hard it is for men to utter these words! Men are willing to admit that "all have sinned" (Rom. 3:23), but are not willing to say "I have sinned." Men are willing to admit and say that all are sinners (Rom. 3:10-12), but they are not willing to say "me, the sinner!" Saying this is very shameful! This tax collector put himself in the position of a sinner. This is the position that everyone who wants to go to heaven should and must put himself. Let me say, if there is a saved person in this world, that person must be a sinner. No one who is not a sinner can go to heaven. If you go to heaven and ask those who are already there about their past qualifications, they will unanimously answer and say that they all were sinners in the past. Everyone who is in heaven is a saved sinner who has received grace. They have nothing special. Heaven is specifically prepared for sinners. If one does not confess himself that he is a sinner, he has no qualification to enter into heaven! Heaven only welcomes tax collectors and harlots. All the sinners who believe in the Lord Jesus may come!

The Lord Jesus said, "For I did not come to call the righteous, but sinners" (Matt. 9:13). He also said, "For the Son of Man has come to seek and to save that which is lost" (Luke 19:10). If you are a righteous man, His coming is not to call, seek out, and save you. But He will save you if you admit that you are a sinner and are lost. Putting yourself in the position of a sinner is the first step in salvation. Although this tax collector was a sinner, who should have

perished, he was saved because he did not pretend to be a person without sin. He admitted that he was a sinner.

The renowned British preacher Spurgeon had a dream one night. In the dream he saw himself standing outside the gate of heaven, and a group of bright and glowing saints were standing in a line holding banners of victory, singing and marching through the gate of heaven. As soon as they entered through the gate, Spurgeon heard many joyful voices and praises welcoming them. Then he asked one angel, "Who are these ones who are so welcomed by heaven?" The angel answered, "They are the ancient prophets." Spurgeon said, "Alas, I am not a prophet, I am not worthy to enter in with them." Later, another group also marched through the gate and received a great welcome. He asked the angel again, "Who are they?" The angel answered, "They are the ancient saints." Spurgeon knew that he was not one of the ancient saints and felt unworthy to enter through the gate with them. A little later, another group came; they were the ancient martyrs. Spurgeon dared not join in with them either. Finally, another group with a multitude much greater than the first three came. Among this group Spurgeon recognized two people. One was the woman who anointed the Lord with ointment; the other one was the robber who was crucified with the Lord. Spurgeon thought that when this group entered into heaven it would be quiet, but to his great surprise, the welcome and applause was seven times greater than the welcome for the first three groups. Spurgeon asked, "Who are they?" The angel answered, "They are ones who were dead in sin and were made alive by the Lord Jesus." Then Spurgeon rejoiced and said, "Praise be unto the Lord Jesus forever! The people in this last group are my companions." Then he woke up. Although this was a dream, it was real! The Lord of heaven welcomes sinners.

The first step the Holy Spirit takes in the heart of a man is to make him realize his sin. The first step God takes in saving a sinner is to send His Spirit to work in his heart and convict him of his sins. I once held a meeting in a certain place, and some grade-school girls were deeply moved by the Holy Spirit. They deeply realized that they were sinners. After the meeting they waited for me to fellowship with them. I saw that none of their eyes were dry. Every one of them was sorrowful for her sins. They told me that they were very sorry. They knew that they were sinners but they did not know whether they could be saved. I told them that knowing that they were sinners was proof of the Holy Spirit's working in their hearts. I then read John 3:16 and 5:24 and other promises to them and helped them realize that since they

knew they were sinners, they could receive eternal life and be saved if they believed and received the Lord Jesus as their Savior. The Holy Spirit opened their eyes and they experienced the salvation of the cross and the enjoyment of salvation. They are still joyful and rejoicing in the Lord every day. Therefore, if this very hour the Holy Spirit shows you your sins, it is because He wants to save you, not because He wants to condemn your sins.

This tax collector not only put himself in the position of a sinner; he was also genuinely grieved because of his sins. He "beat his breast." He hated himself. When he considered how he committed sins in the past, sorrow uncontrollably rose up within him. He was in anguish and beat his breast. Certainly those who overlook their sins and do not feel sorrowful for them will easily commit sins again. "For sorrow according to God works repentance unto salvation, which is without regret" (2 Cor. 7:10). The Bible says that God dwells "with the contrite and lowly of spirit, / To revive the spirit of the lowly / And to revive the heart of the contrite" (Isa. 57:15). "The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit: / a broken and a contrite heart, O God, / thou wilt not despise" (Psa. 51:17). Therefore, dear sinners, it does not matter how great your sins are; what matters is that you do not want to admit that you are a sinner and feel sorrowful for your sins. If you overlook your sins and refuse to put yourself in the position of a sinner, you will surely not seek after the Savior. Even if the Savior is sent to the door of your heart, you will not receive Him. Actually, humbling yourself is not worth anything. Neither is putting yourself in the position of a sinner or being sorrowful for your sins worth anything. However, unless a man humbles himself, unless he sees himself as a sinner, and unless he feels sorrowful for his sins, he surely will not seek after the Savior of sinners, the Lord Jesus Christ. This tax collector's humbling of himself, acknowledging himself as a sinner, and sorrow for his sins could not save him; it could not give him eternal life. These steps only prepared his heart to receive salvation.

The one and only reason this sinner was saved was because he believed the vicarious salvation of the cross. Even though he humbled himself, the humbling could not save him. Even though he was sorrowful, the sorrow could not save him. Even though he confessed himself to be a sinner, the confession could not save him. Even though all these prepared him to receive salvation, these could not save him. Although without these you will perish, these things alone will not save you. A sinner is saved only through the

salvation that the Lord Jesus accomplished on the cross and not through anything else.

He prayed, "God, be propitiated to me, the sinner!" Other ways to translate this phrase in the Greek text include: "God, make propitiation for me, a sinner!" or "God, allow me, a sinner, to be propitiated." This is the cross. No one can be saved without the cross. Perhaps when the tax collector was standing in the temple praying, the Holy Spirit moved his heart to convict him of his sins. Perhaps he saw from far off the priest in the outer court offering sacrifices. He saw the sacrifices slain on behalf of the sinners. Therefore, he asked God, "Make propitiation for me, a sinner." He knew he was a sinner. He knew that there was a punishment for sins. A sinner could never be justified or go to heaven. He also knew that if there was not a redeeming Savior for his sins, he would perish. His heart looked to the Savior; his heart looked to the sin offering. He cried out to God and was saved. Surely heaven was his.

He came to God not to ask God to help him change himself when he went home because he knew that he could not change. He could not improve or correct himself. He knew he had sin. He would perish because he had sins and did not have the One who could substitute for the punishment for sins. He looked to the substitutionary Savior; therefore, he was saved. Dear readers, we all are sinners and cannot save ourselves. Therefore, the Lord Jesus came specifically to save us. He did not come to be our model or to be our pattern, He came to die for us. He came to die for you and me. You and I have sins and deserve to die. The Lord Jesus came to die for your sins and mine. Therefore, you and I do not have to die. "Who Himself bore up our sins in His body on the tree" (1 Pet. 2:24). "For Christ also has suffered once for sins, the Righteous on behalf of the unrighteous" (3:18). "And He Himself is the propitiation for our sins" (1 John 2:2). This matter is most important. Since the Lord Jesus died and propitiated for us, now we do not have to perish but can be saved. If the Lord Jesus did not die and propitiate for us, we would have to bear our own sins and die, that is, perish. It is true that the tax collector was a sinner. But he depended on the Savior who died for him and who propitiated for him. Therefore, he had no sins and did not have to die or go to hell. The tax collector was able to go to heaven not because of his own merit but because of the merit of a third party, the merit of the Savior's saving work. Likewise, all those who go to heaven are justified not because of their own righteous deeds, but because they rely on the work of the cross of the Lord Jesus.

The tax collector came before God for the propitiation of sins. "For whoever calls upon the name of the Lord shall be saved. How then shall they call upon Him into whom they have not believed?" (Rom. 10:13-14). The tax collector cried to God because he first believed in God. He was saved because he believed God would propitiate for his sins. Justification is by faith and salvation is also by faith. He knew well the truth concerning salvation: "For by grace you have been saved through faith" (Eph. 2:8). He knew he lacked something. He also knew that except for God's mercy, nothing else could make up for his lack. He asked God to have mercy on him. He knew that salvation was by grace and "not out of works in righteousness which we did but according to His mercy He saved us" (Titus 3:5). He knew God gives grace through the Savior and that he needed a Savior to die for him to propitiate for his sins. He prayed for God's grace and beseeched for God's redemption. He asked by faith, and He believed in his heart. Therefore, he obtained it.

The tax collector went to heaven because he obtained God's mercy and received the Savior's propitiation for him, not because he was remarkable and outstanding. For a sinner to go to heaven, there is no need to pay a price because the Lord Jesus has already paid the full price on the cross on our behalf. The Pharisee perished because he did not have a Savior. The tax collector was saved because he had a Savior. Salvation and perdition have nothing to do with you or your behavior. A man as good as the Pharisee could not avoid going to hell, while a man as wicked as the tax collector could go to heaven. One went to hell not because he was wicked, and the other went to heaven not because he was good. The difference between them was whether or not they believed in the Lord Jesus who died for us on the cross. That was all! "He who believes into the Son has eternal life; but he who disobeys the Son shall not see life, but the wrath of God abides upon him" (John 3:36). The decision between eternal life and eternal death depends solely upon whether or not one believes. Today I beg and beseech you to quickly believe in the Lord Jesus' vicarious death, and you will be saved.

The good man went to hell and the wicked man went to heaven. The good man did not go to hell because of his goodness, but because he did not believe in the Lord Jesus as his Savior. The wicked man did not go to heaven because of his wickedness, but because he believed in the Lord Jesus as his Savior. Therefore, if you want salvation, you must realize that salvation is not merchandise. You do not have to gradually behave yourself better and earn your salvation as a reward. Salvation is God's free grace, freely given to all

sinners who believe. God does not care how wicked you are. If you are willing to receive the Lord Jesus as your Savior and if you believe that His death was for you, you will be saved. The Lord Jesus has already borne all the punishment for your sins; no sin will be able to stand up to accuse you in the day of judgment. You are completely and absolutely saved. God does not care how good you are. If you do not receive the Lord Jesus to be your Savior and if you do not believe that His death was for you, you will surely perish. Your goodness cannot cover your wickedness and cannot redeem your wickedness; you will still perish. God has ordained that those who believe in the Lord Jesus will be saved and that those who do not believe will perish. Good unbelievers will go to hell, but wicked believers will go to heaven.

Therefore, good man, please do not be proud, because your goodness will not save you! Therefore, wicked man, do not be discouraged, because your sins will not condemn you. Thank and praise God! How wonderful is His salvation! The people of the world are like this tax collector, helpless and hopeless sinners, and we all deserve eternal punishment in the future. Yet God caused the Lord Jesus to die for us on the cross, so that when we believe in Him and receive Him as our Savior, we will be saved. How great is this grace! So sinner, please follow the tax collector! Humble yourself before God. Confess your sins. Come before God with faith, asking God, "God, be merciful to me, a sinner. Save me by the Lord Jesus' substitutionary death on the cross!" God will surely save you. Thank God that He has such a salvation.

CHAPTER SIX

THE ROBBER SAVED

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We will first read two sections of the Bible. Mark 15:27-32 tells about the Lord Jesus being crucified on the cross. "And with Him they [those who nailed the Lord Jesus] crucified two robbers, one on His right and one on His left....And those who were passing by blasphemed Him, wagging their heads and saying, Aha! You who destroy the temple and build it in three days, Save Yourself and come down from the cross! Likewise also the chief priests with the scribes mocked Him with one another and said, He saved others; Himself He cannot save. Let the Christ, the King of Israel, come down now from the cross that we may see and believe. Those who were crucified with Him also reproached Him."

"And one of the criminals who were hanged there blasphemed Him, saying, Are You not the Christ? Save Yourself and us! But the other, answering, rebuked him and said, Do you not even fear God, since you are in the same judgment? And we justly, for we are receiving what we deserve for what we did, but this Man has done nothing amiss. And he said, Jesus, remember me when You come into Your kingdom. And He said to him, Truly I say to you, Today you shall be with Me in Paradise" (Luke 23:39-43).

These two sections of the Bible tell us the story of a robber who was saved shortly before his death. This is a strange story! A robber was saved! We think that the robber should be punished, that the death-defying prisoner should descend to the deepest part of hell to receive the gravest punishment, and that salvation should belong to the good people in the world. Can robbers be saved? Yes, robbers can be saved because in these verses a robber was saved. This robber was saved before his death! We often think that if a man does good all his life, he will gradually obtain salvation. We often think that salvation can be accomplished by our efforts through months and years of accumulated hard work. Is it possible that someone who committed robbery all his life, someone who had criminal offenses, was suddenly saved in the moment just before his death? Very much so. Someone who has done evil all his life, who

has never done anything good, can be saved immediately upon believing in the Lord Jesus. Man can be saved in a brief moment, within the shortest time, when he believes in the Lord Jesus. What an amazing story! What a wonderful salvation!

The Lord Jesus said to the robber, "Today you shall be with Me in Paradise." Where the Lord would be, he would be also. He was saved, no more to perish. Now we would like to see what type of person this saved man was.

I. THE CONDUCT OF THIS SAVED PERSON

He was a robber. For someone to become a robber, his character must be completely bankrupt. No position for man can be lower than that of a robber. As a robber, he had fallen to the lowest state that a man can ever sink to. A robber is lawless, without any regard for the law in his eyes, lazy, unwilling to work to feed himself; greedy, coveting other people's possessions; cruel, usurping others' possessions and killing, causing havoc to human lives. How reckless and unrestrained is he! He steals other people's belongings and loots other people's possessions. From man's viewpoint, it is absolutely hopeless to save this type of person.

As a robber, he trespassed against the law and was captured by the Roman government. He went through the judicial procedure of the Roman court. Being condemned as a criminal of gross sin, he was given the most severe punishment—crucifixion. Compared with man's law, God's law is stricter and more refined. In many instances man's law does not or cannot condemn certain things as sin, but God's law shuts them all up in the realm of sin so that man can have nothing more to say. Man's law condemns the conduct of man. It cannot touch the intent of the heart. If a manifested conduct is condemned by man's law, how much more is it condemned before the stricter and more refined law of God? He was a robber. Under Roman law he was declared guilty and sentenced to death. Can such a person obtain God's grace? If he was condemned by men, who can only see outward conduct without seeing the heart, God, who searches man's inward parts and examines man's conduct, should condemn him much more. Does not the soul of such a man deserve to perish?

He was not only branded as a robber by man and sentenced to death by the Roman government, he even deserved unpardoned death in his own eyes. He told the other robber who was nailed with him, "And we justly, for we are

receiving what we deserve for what we did" (Luke 23:41). At this juncture between life and death, he had forgotten how the government had condemned him and how the people had mocked him. As he recalled his lifelong behavior, he could not help but confess that he deserved his death sentence because his deeds befitted the punishment of the cross. At this moment the sorrow and pain of his conscience was far more unbearable than the pain he suffered in his flesh. Having been enlightened by God, he knew his own sin; therefore, he could confess it as sin. In man's view and according to man's decision, can a man convicted by his conscience have the hope of salvation? It seemed that he deserved more than perdition!

When the Lord Jesus was on the cross, according to the verses in Mark, there were three groups of people who mocked Him: (1) those who passed by, (2) the chief priest and the scribes, and (3) the thieves who were nailed next to him. On the cross, the two saw and heard many people mocking the Lord Jesus, so they also joined with the others to mock Him. This robber was a man with no backbone. He saw how other people wronged Christ and opposed Christ; and without even knowing the reason for it, he just turned with the tide. Seeing everyone mocking in this way, he also joined in with the crowd. He should not have had any deep hatred or enmity towards Christ. However, when he saw the majority of the people doing wrong to Christ, he also joined the crowd, following blindly to blaspheme Him. Those who do wrong to Christ ought to perish; many have thought this.

Yet, one robber was saved. A robber was saved! A criminal was saved! A thief was saved! One condemned to die was saved! One who wronged Christ was saved! One who committed sin to the uttermost so that even he could not deny his guilt was saved! Therefore, who cannot be saved? Who is not qualified to be saved? O sinners of the world, this is the gospel! This is grace! He who can be viewed as having no possibility of being saved, God, in His mighty grace, saves, giving him eternal life that he may enjoy the bliss of Paradise. You may be a great sinner; you may think that you do not deserve to be saved but rather should perish, but God has decided to grant you grace and give you salvation. Do not be mistaken by thinking that salvation is reserved only for deserving ones and that you are not deserving of it. According to fact, no one in the world deserves salvation. But no one in the world is unqualified for salvation according to God's mercy. If God does not bestow grace and He deals with us according to our sins, even the most noble sages in the world will perish. Who is not a sinner before God? But if He bestows grace, who will

not be saved? If a robber can be saved, you too can be saved. If a man will humble himself and will wait on God's grace, God will give grace to him, because God gives grace to the humble.

The wonderful thing about the gospel is that God sent His Son to save sinners—not the righteous. "Faithful is the word and worthy of all acceptance, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners" (1 Tim. 1:15). This is contrary to the mind of the world. Nevertheless, this is a glorious fact. No matter how much you have sinned, Christ can save you. He saved the robber; He also saved the harlot. He saves sinners. He does not forsake you because of your sins, but rather, He came to save you because of your sins. No matter what kind of person you are, if only you are willing to come to Him, He is willing to save you. I remember a story. Once a man came to see Mr. Moody, and he said, "You don't have to persuade me to be a Christian or persuade me to believe in the Lord Jesus." Moody asked him, "Why is this?" He answered, "You don't know how hard my heart is!" Moody said with a smile, "Aha! So that's why. Don't worry; Christ did not say only the soft-hearted ones may come and that the hard-hearted ones need not come. Rather, He said that one can come whatever his heart is like. So it does not matter whether your heart is hard or soft, black or white. Every kind of heart can come." Indeed, Christ receives sinners; He comforts them and saves them. Since He was willing to save this robber, He is also willing to save you and me. In the eyes of the robber himself, he was a sinner. According to the world's classification, he was a sinner. According to the judgment of the Roman government, he was a sinner. Nevertheless, Christ saves sinners. What grace this is! What is this? This is salvation. This is Christ saving sinners in grace.

II. THE CAUSE OF THE ROBBER'S REPENTANCE

We do not know why this robber, who joined the other robber and with the same heart and same voice mocked the Lord Jesus in the beginning, suddenly changed and believed in Christ. I think it was mainly because the words of Christ's prayer in Luke 23:34 touched his heart. "Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing." Such mercy, such lovingkindness, such tenderness, and such bountiful grace moved the heart of the robber. It took away his prejudice, melted his evil heart, and caused him to realize that the One nailed beside him was indeed Christ, the Son of God. The cross of the Romans had hardened his heart to mock Christ, but the cross of the Lord Jesus caused him to repent and believe in the Savior. The law and

punishment cannot save man; only grace and love can bring a sinner to tears and weeping to come before God in self-condemnation, asking for His grace and mercy.

III. THE EXPRESSION OF FAITH

A. Rebuking His Companion

In any case it was a definite fact that this robber believed in the Lord Jesus on the cross. His faith was shown in his words, in his attitude, and in his prayer. First, he expressed his faith because he rebuked the other robber. When the other robber mocked Christ and attacked Him with his words once again, he might have thought that his companion, who joined his mocking with the same heart and same voice the last time, would join him again after he got started. Little did he expect that before he had finished his reviling, the other one would immediately rebuke him. The robber rebuked him saying, "Do you not even fear God, since you are in the same judgment?" (Luke 23:40). The punishment which they all suffered was the crucifixion of the cross. What this robber meant was, "Even though you and I are nailed on the cross, do you still not fear God? You are on the cross, and your life is almost over. Do you still not fear God? In a few hours you are going to die. Do you still not fear God? Eternity is already set before you. Hell and heaven are both eternal. Do you still not fear God? Eternal life or eternal death, salvation or perdition—within these few short hours they will be determined. Do you still not fear God? At this juncture of life and death, everything depends on how you use this fading time. Do you still not fear God? Once these few short moments are past, once your breath departs from your body, eternal life or eternal perdition will be forever sealed, and nothing will change. Do you still not fear God? Since you have received such punishment from men, are you not afraid of punishment from God? If man's punishment is hard to bear, what about God's punishment? Do you still not fear God? If today's punishment is unbearable enough, what about eternity's? Do you still not fear God? If man's punishment and man's law end our life, should we not be afraid of the eternal death in the future? You have suffered the world's punishment. Do you still want to suffer God's punishment? Does not such grave punishment, such painful and severe punishment, make your heart fear hell? Eternal life or eternal death will be determined within the shortest time. I think this is the hour for you to fear God and His punishment. You have never feared anything in your entire life. Should you not fear God now?"

Gentlemen, time is passing by minute after minute, hour after hour, and day after day; in a wink of the eye, a month and a year passes by us. Oh! How short is our lifetime! Age will not wait for us! In a short time eternity will be before our eyes! Who can know how long they will live? Are our lives not like a breath of air, which soon disappears? Are our lives not like the wild flowers, which blossom in the morning and wither at dusk? Oh! How uncertain is life! Why are we still so infatuated with the world, sin, and lust? Is not the future of your spirit very important? Therefore, how can you, for the sake of a temporary moment in time, despise the eternal future? Ah! Life is fleeting and uncertain. Life and death can change place in us at any time. At any time our spirit can depart from our body. If you have never thought about the question of eternity, and have never paid attention to the question of the future, is it not time to fear God? If we do not pay attention to the question of our spirit now, we will never have another chance in the future. If you do not have salvation now, you will never have it in eternity. You must believe in the Lord Jesus quickly and receive His salvation while you still have your life. Death is already operating in our body! Sickness, pain, troubles, weakness, and worry are all the forerunners of death! The seed of death is within our body! We do not know when it will grow and bear fruit. Young people, you cannot be forever young. Old people, your hour is almost here. If you do not accept the Lord now, how much longer will you wait? Your destination will soon be determined; are you not afraid of God?

Perhaps God's punishing hand is upon you; you have suffered, lost your loved ones, or met with defeat, sickness, disability, or disasters. You are already suffering punishment. Will you not turn back? Will you still not fear God? All the sufferings that God has inflicted upon your flesh have come because of His love. You have gone too far away from Him! You do not believe in Him any longer! Aside from this material world and its lust and glory, you no longer realize that there is a God! You also do not want the Savior, the Lord Jesus, whom He has established! You have gone too far away from Him! He has no choice but to chastise you and to call you back. You have been punished. Do you still not fear God?

B. Confessing His Sins

We have seen how this robber rebuked his companion, expressing his own faith. Now we want to also see that he not only expressed his faith by rebuking his companion, but in his confession he declared that he had believed in the

Lord Jesus. Let us read verse 41. "And we justly, for we are receiving what we deserve for what we did." What do these words mean? "And we justly" means they deserved a brutal death for their punishment. The punishment that they received, the punishment of the cross, befitted what they had done. They were robbers. They had sinned, murdered, and committed arson. Moreover, there were sins in their hearts. Nothing of what they did, thought, or said was good. Being put to death in this way was most just and reasonable. The law did not mistreat them because before God, before man, and even before their own eyes, they were truly sinners!

The robber acknowledged that he deserved the punishment he had received. It was his own sins, his own conduct, that brought him this just penalty. He confessed that he was a sinner. He did not use any words to cover up his own sins. He also did not use any reasons to hide the guilt of his sin. He did not say, "I was a robber, but I did it according to my conscience. If I had not been a robber, my stomach would have gone hungry and my body would have gotten cold. I was forced to extort for lack of clothing and food. Life as a robber is a kind of business! Why can't this be?" Yet he did not talk in this way. He was moved by the Holy Spirit to confess that he was a sinner. He confessed this before his companion; he confessed this before the Lord Jesus; he also confessed this before those who were watching his execution. He did not forgive himself in any way; he confessed that he was a sinner. Normally it is very hard for robbers to confess their sins because their hearts are so perverse. "Swift are their feet to shed blood, destruction and misery are in their ways" (Rom. 3:15-16). But as soon as the Holy Spirit worked, this robber acted contrary to his normal behavior and confessed that he was a sinner. He wanted a Savior because he was a sinner. He wanted a Savior so he believed, asked for, and received one.

I am a gospel preacher. The first thing that I do is to lead people to know that they are sinners. This is a very hard thing to do. Some people answer me, saying, "I have not murdered anyone, and I have not committed any arson. What sin do I have?" And others would say, "Whatever I do, I do according to my conscience. What sin do I have?" Whenever I try to prove their sins to people, they always have many excuses. Even when people sometimes admit that they are sinners, they say, "Everyone in the world is a sinner, so what does it matter if I am just one of them?" They are willing to admit that everyone in the world is a sinner, but they will not admit in a simple way that they themselves are sinners. They do not realize that besides murder and

arson there are many more sins! Pride in the heart, jealousy, unclean thoughts, lies of the mouth, sudden temper, all these are sins. Have you not committed these? Saying that you have no sin because you act according to your conscience is not altogether true, because I do not know what kind of conscience you have. If it has been darkened and deadened, it will not have a high standard to direct you. I remember once when I was going from Shanghai to Tientsin, I met someone from my hometown in the boat. His bed was opposite mine, so we soon began to talk. He was a dentist in Shanghai. He was a very good-looking young man. He did not know that I was a preacher. He told me of his experience in Shanghai. According to him, scores of young women had been seduced by him. He was very proud of himself when he said this. After he had finished speaking, I began to preach the gospel to him. I also had my story to tell. I told him how I had believed in the Lord Jesus and was saved. I said to him, "You are a sinner, and if you sin like that, you will perish in the future." He replied, "All my life I have done things according to my conscience." He would not accept my gospel. Gentlemen! Please listen to his reply. He ruined the chastity of scores of women, but he still said that he acted according to his conscience. Oh! What sort of conscience is this? Just think for yourselves. What sort of conscience is this? Is it reliable?

The first step the Holy Spirit does in a man's heart is to cause him to reprove his sins. This causes him to realize that he is a sinner and needs a Savior. It will lead him to trust in the Lord Jesus. If you will not allow the Holy Spirit to prove to you by the Scripture that you are a sinner, and if you resist God's evaluation concerning you and do not acknowledge that you are a sinner, it will be impossible for you to receive God's salvation. If you are not a sinner, why should you be saved? If you are not a sinner, why should the Lord Jesus die for you and save you? Confessing that you are a sinner is the prerequisite for being saved. I urge you to be humble and not be proud; do not be afraid of losing face; confess that you are a sinner! I often feel that the more a person is a sinner, the harder it is for him to confess that he is a sinner. He is too proud! If you tell him to confess his sins, he will lose face too much! For this reason he will not do it. The greater the sinner, the more he will say that he is good. He will even say that he is better than other people. This is because he is ignorant of himself. The more one knows himself, the more he will cry aloud, "There is nothing good in me, but only evil." The more one knows God's holiness, the more he will acknowledge that he is sinful and evil

to the uttermost. I urge you at this time to be honest with yourself; let the Holy Spirit move in your heart to convict you of your own sins.

C. Confessing the Lord

The robber not only rebuked the other robber and confessed that he himself was a sinner, but he also confessed that the Lord Jesus had no sin. Please read the last part of verse 41. "But this Man [meaning the Lord Jesus] has done nothing amiss." He seemed to be saying, "The three of us are being punished together. Two of us are robbers, and this manner of execution is indeed just; but this Man, Jesus Christ, did not commit sin. None of the things He did was bad; everything was proper and most holy. But He is being punished together with us sinners. What does this mean? Robbers should be nailed to the cross. But should this One who is not a robber also be nailed to the cross? We are condemned because of our evil conduct, but should this One, whose conduct is the best, be condemned also? We sinners deserve death. There is no argument about that. But this Man, the most holy and most perfect One, why does He deserve death? The guilty ones should die. This is reasonable. But what is the reason for this guiltless One to die? Sinners should perish. This is most justifiable. But what does it mean for the sinless One to suffer the pain of perdition? We robbers have nothing to say about our dying; but why does He, the Christ of God, have to go through the same fate as we?" This really is an amazing question! Truly, no one in the world could answer it! We must see what the Bible says. "For while we were yet weak, in due time Christ died for the ungodly" (Rom. 5:6). "While we were yet sinners, Christ died for us" (v. 8). "Who Himself bore up our sins in His body on the tree" (1 Pet. 2:24). "For Christ also has suffered once for sins, the Righteous on behalf of the unrighteous" (1 Pet. 3:18). These verses in the Bible tell us why Christ died. He died on behalf of sinners. He died in substitution for your sins and my sins. "Substitution!" "Substitution!" Please take note of this word. There is no other word more important than this. Without substitution, there would be no gospel. Without the substitution, there would be no salvation. Without the substitution, there would be no need for preaching. If Christ had not died in substitution for sinners, I would not believe in Christ, and I would also urge you not to believe in Him. If He had not died on our behalf, we would still have to bear our own sins, and we would still have to perish. What use would it be for us to believe in Him? But thanks and praise be to God! Although His Son has no sin, God gladly gave Him up for us sinners. On our behalf Christ

bore all the punishment of our sins and died upon the cross so that whenever we believe in Him, we will have eternal life and not perish.

It is very meaningful to see this robber speaking about the Lord Jesus' guiltless punishment. He saw the Lord's death; he also acknowledged that the Lord is sinless. But why must a sinless person die? He implicitly acknowledged that Christ's death was on his behalf. He believed in the salvation of the cross. He believed in the Lord Jesus' substitutionary death. For this reason he was saved. My dear sinners, there is only one way to be saved: believe in the crucified Lord Jesus Christ. If you believe that He has died for you on the cross, you will immediately have eternal life. You have sinned; you should perish. Sin and the consequence of sin are two things that cannot be separated. Once you sin, there is a consequence of sin, a punishment: hell and perdition. If you have not sinned, there is nothing to say. If you are altogether righteous and holy, who can punish you? If you have sinned, the punishment of sin will surely fall upon you. Do you want to perish? If you want to perish, then I have nothing to say; but if you do not want to perish, then salvation is here. The sinless Lord Jesus Christ has died in your place upon the cross, bearing all the consequences that you should have received for your sin. Are you willing to believe in Him right now? "He who believes has eternal life" (John 6:47).

D. Prayer

The robber not only believed the substitutionary death of the Lord Jesus, but he also prayed out from his faith a most sincere prayer. He prayed, "Jesus, remember me when You come into Your kingdom" (Luke 23:42). Let us look at another verse from the Bible, Romans 10:13. "For whoever calls upon the name of the Lord shall be saved." He called on the Lord; therefore, he was saved. Let us look at the next verse, verse 14. "How then shall they call upon Him into whom they have not believed?" After seeing this, we know that faith comes before calling. Without faith, there would be no prayer. Prayer issues from faith. Prayer is the ultimate expression of faith. Faith is the cause; prayer is the effect. We need to pay attention to one thing: although the robber rebuked his companion, he was not saved because of his rebuking. Although this robber confessed that he was a sinner, he was not saved because of such a confession. Although this robber prayed and asked the Lord Jesus to save him, his salvation was not due to his prayer. You must remember that repentance cannot save a sinner; confession cannot save a sinner; praying cannot save a

sinner. A sinner is saved because of one thing only: believing in the Lord Jesus Christ's substitutionary death, that is, believing that the Lord Jesus has died for him on the cross. Before this robber prayed, he had the faith; he had accepted the Lord Jesus as his Savior. His prayer was just a spontaneous calling that issued from his faith. One who believes in the Lord's substitutionary death spontaneously cries out to the Lord for salvation. His salvation is not due to calling but due to his believing. Dear sinners, do not trust in your works. Your works cannot save you. Even good works such as repentance, confession, and prayer will not save you. If you want to be saved, please accept with faith the Lord Jesus as your personal Savior, believing that He has borne all of your sins' punishment on the cross. Once you believe, you are saved. Once you believe, you have eternal life. Will you believe?

The robber thought that being saved is something in the future; therefore, he begged Jesus to remember him when He came into His kingdom (Luke 23:42). This is the salvation of the Old Testament. He realized that he had nothing good to be proud of, nor any righteousness to brag about; he could not ask the Lord to save him according to his own merit. He said to the Lord, "Remember me." He meant that he considered himself unworthy and unqualified, seemingly with not much hope for salvation. If the Lord Jesus would remember him, there was no need of anything else. Just to remember him once would be good enough. He knew all those who were remembered by God would receive exceedingly great grace. So he begged in such a way. Although what he asked for was not perfect, the Lord Jesus Christ did listen to him. The Lord promised him something that he had not asked for, something beyond his expectation. Oh sinners, the Lord is very willing to treat you this way. Do you want Him to treat you this way? There is not much time left! Eternal life or eternal death will soon be decided! Are you willing to take advantage of this crucial five minutes to believe in this Savior who has died for you? At this moment are you willing to call on His name with a believing heart and ask Him to save you? Alas! How great are our sins! How deep is our agony! How long is the final judgment! How terrible it will be! How dangerous is our present position! What confusion! If you do not call on Him now, when will you do so? If you do not come before God with tears and sorrow now and seek His salvation now, how long are you going to wait? I hope that you will quickly turn and be awakened right now. Please take a few minutes in silence now, bow your head, and pray to God. Ask Him to save you for the sake of His Son, the Lord Jesus Christ.

IV. THE NATURE OF HIS FAITH

Through his rebuke, his confession of sin, his acknowledgment of the Lord, and his prayer, the robber expressed his faith. We may say that it was the most difficult time for him to believe in the Lord. According to historical records, during that day in Jerusalem there were more than a million people. All of them were crying out together, "Crucify Him!" "Crucify Him!" "Away with Him!" "Away with Him!" At that time almost all of the Lord's disciples were scattered. His enemies were many and His friends were few. And yet, on the hill of Golgotha, there was one nailed beside Him, who, despite the opinion of the multitude, singly opposed their view and confessed that this One who was crucified with him was the Savior! Even more, he believed in Him as his personal Savior! What kind of faith is this? This is a faith that is opposed to the whole world. The One whom the world crucified, he believed was the Savior. The One whom the world condemned, he acknowledged as the sinless One. Although the world criticizes Christ, he still believed in Him. Although the world persecutes Christ and tries to crucify Him, yet I believe. Although the world cries, "Away with Him!" "Away with Him!" "There should not be a religion like this in the world!", still I believe. Although the world opposed the Lord Jesus and His disciples with intense pressure, inflicting much suffering on them, I still believe. Dear friends, if you do not believe in Jesus Christ, I beg you and I urge you today to believe in Him immediately. This is beneficial to you; it will give you eternal life if you are willing to believe in Him. The Holy Spirit and those who preach the gospel all desire that you will, like the robber, not fear the crowd and come forward to believe in the Lord Jesus. You should not be cowards, hiding yourselves, fearing to believe in Him just because the world opposes, persecutes, mocks, and despises Him. If it is proper to believe in Him and you are an intelligent person, you should not shrink back because of the opposition of others. Committing sin is a truly shameful thing; believing in the Savior is something most glorious. This robber did not lose his dignity because of the crowd. He was not a yes-man; he did not say what others were saying. He would not say, "Crucify Him!", just because the multitude said, "Crucify Him!" He had been that type of person before, but he awoke. Even though the Savior was crucified on the same kind of cross that he was nailed to, and even though they both went through the same experience, he believed in Him. If we consider Christ to be believable and the gospel of His cross to be credible, we should not blindly follow other people because of their criticisms. Do not think that you will lose your dignity when you trust in Christ. In fact, it takes dignity to believe in Christ.

V. WHAT HE BELIEVED

The robber believed that Christ could save him. He was not like some people who regard Christ simply as a human example for people to imitate. He was not like others who regard Christ merely as a great teacher, teaching people and preaching doctrines of equality, love, freedom, and so forth. He was not like still others who regard Christ merely as a social worker, a reformer, coming to serve and reform the Jewish society. All these beliefs seem to be significant. In reality they are insignificant. They seem real yet they are empty. These beliefs could not help him. He was dying! Although the Lord Jesus was perhaps the best example, could just an example help him? He was fast approaching death! The most urgent problem in his heart was the problem of the salvation of his spirit. "Where will I go when I die?" Could Christ teach him anything as a great teacher at this moment? To those who were living, Christ's reforming of and service to society may have had some contribution; but to the low-class, sinful robber, a criminal whose breath was waning and whose death was imminent, what help could He render? The Lord Jesus whom he believed in was not the Lord Jesus cheered by the crowd, written about, and discussed in the papers. He was the Lord Jesus who could comfort his heart before death, forgive his sins, save his spirit and soul, and give him eternal life. This Lord Jesus can remember him and can save him.

Men and women, please be careful as to what you believe in. Remember that Christ came to be the redeeming Savior and not anything else. Whoever believes that He died on his behalf shall be saved.

VI. THE LORD'S ANSWER— HAVING ETERNAL LIFE "TODAY"

Now let us see how the Lord Jesus answered the robber. Please read Luke 23:43. "And He said to him, Truly I say to you, Today you shall be with Me in Paradise." Paradise is where those who believe in the Lord Jesus dwell after they have died. It is a very joyful place. In other words, Paradise is heaven (Rev. 2:7). Therefore, the Lord Jesus Christ promised, "You are saved today; you already have eternal life; heaven is assured for you." Please remember that salvation is immediate; you do not have to wait until the future. The Bible said, "He who believes has eternal life" (John 6:47). Whenever you believe, you have eternal life. You do not have to wait until the future to find out. If you believe today, you will be saved today; you do not have to wait until you die and stand before God to find out. The word in John 5:24 says it most

clearly. "Truly, truly, I say to you, He who hears My word and believes Him who sent Me has eternal life, and does not come into judgment but has passed out of death into life." Here it tells us that he who hears the gospel of the Lord and believes on the heavenly Father (1) has eternal life, (2) shall not come into judgment, and (3) has passed out of death into life. The Lord Jesus said that he who believes has eternal life. We have believed. Do we have eternal life? The Lord Jesus said that he who believes shall not come into judgment. We have believed. Will we be judged? The Lord Jesus said that he who believes has passed out of death into life. We have already believed. Have we passed out of death into life? The Lord will never lie. Whatever He says is true. His promise will never change; even now, it has not lost its effectiveness. We must not doubt God's Word and His promise. If we doubt, that sin will be great! Since the Lord Jesus promised, certainly it must be true. We who have believed in Him have eternal life now; we are not in condemnation now; we have passed out of death into life now. The question for us is whether or not we have believed in Him. If not, how perilous it is for us! If so, what have we to fear? God has already given us eternal life; God has already justified us. Who can condemn us? "He who believes into Him is not condemned" (John 3:18).

Therefore, we should know that having salvation and eternal life is not something that one finds out about in the future, nor is it something that one receives in the future. We can know now, and we can receive today. Are you one who has believed in the Lord Jesus? I often ask Christians, "Are you saved?" Let me also ask you this same question, "Are you saved?" There are many people who answer, "Mr. Nee, I dare not say so. But I do hope to be saved." And some people say, "I do not know now. I must wait until I die, and after God judges me, I will know." But please listen to what the Lord Jesus said to this robber, "Today you shall be with Me in Paradise." Today! Today! Not tomorrow. Salvation is a matter for today, not for the future. The Lord Jesus seemed to be saying to the robber, "You do not have to wait until I come again to remember you; today you will be saved." The Lord Jesus is still saying to every sinner who believes in Him, "You do not have to wait until I come again to judge, before you can have eternal life; you have been saved now." Therefore, do not doubt. If He has said that you have eternal life, do you not have eternal life? Once there was a doctor who went to see a young woman who was sick in bed. Her sickness was very grave, and she was at the brink of death. The doctor came from out of town and was not allowed to

render any physical help to the patient at the local hospital. The doctor asked the young woman, "Do you have the peace within?" She said, "No." The doctor asked her, "Have you believed on Jesus Christ as your Savior?" She answered, "Yes, I have." "Then why do you still not have peace?" he asked. She responded, "I am afraid of perishing." The doctor then read a verse in the Bible to her. The verse was John 6:47. "He who believes has eternal life." The doctor asked her, "This verse says he who believes has what?" She said, "This verse said, he who believes has eternal life." "Do you believe?" She said, "I do." "Then do you have eternal life?" he asked. She said, "I do not feel it. I'm afraid I do not have it." The doctor said to her again, "What does this verse say about he who believes?" She answered, "He has eternal life." "Do you believe?" She said, "Yes." The doctor then said, "Now, what does this verse say that you have?" The woman replied, "I say that I do not have eternal life, but this verse says that I have eternal life." Please listen! "I say that I do not have eternal life, but the Bible says that I have eternal life." The doctor then asked her, "Are you more reliable? Or is the Bible more reliable?" She said, "Of course, the Bible is more reliable." "Very well," said the doctor, "Do you have eternal life now?" The woman then answered joyfully, "God says that I have it. I already have eternal life." I am afraid many people are like this young woman. They believe in the Lord Jesus, but they doubt the Word of God and His promise. They think that salvation cannot be so fast, and that one cannot have eternal life immediately after believing. If you ask, "Do you believe in the Lord?", they will answer, "Yes, we believe." But if you ask them, "Do you have eternal life?", they will not dare to say yes. How many people, after hearing this gospel, have said, "I thought I did not have eternal life, but the Bible says I have eternal life!" Please do not worry about what you think or feel. God's Word says that you are saved, and the Lord Jesus says that you have eternal life; what else is there to doubt? Now is the time for us to praise the Lord, not the time to doubt. Hallelujah! Thank and praise the Lord, for He has granted us grace so freely and has saved us.

Look at the robber. He believed on the word of the Lord Jesus. He did not doubt at all. He heard the Lord say to him, "Today you shall be with Me in Paradise," and he believed that he had already obtained the blessing of his soul. He did not say to the Lord, "Lord, am I to be saved just like that?" He did not come to beg the Lord again, saying, "Lord, please do not forget to save me today!" Neither did he ask the Lord, "What shall I do in order to be saved?" After he heard the Lord saying that he would be saved that same day,

he simply believed. He just rested in the Lord's word and did not raise any more questions. The word of the Lord is the guarantee of our salvation. If He says we are saved, then we are saved. If He says we are lost, then we are lost. When the Lord Jesus said, "He who believes into Him is not condemned" (John 3:18), then he who believes into Him will surely not be condemned. The Lord Jesus also said, "He who does not believe has been condemned already" (John 3:18). Surely those who do not believe in Him, their sins have been judged already. Therefore, let me ask you some questions right now: "Do you have eternal life? Are you saved?" If you have believed in Him, you can boldly answer, "Thank God for His grace. I have eternal life!"

VII. NOT A QUESTION OF BEHAVIOR

The robber was not saved because of his good behavior. He could not do good, nor had he ever done any good. His salvation was completely based upon the accomplishment of Christ's death on his behalf. Please notice this. The qualification of a sinner for salvation is wholly related to Christ; it has nothing to do with the self. The robber was qualified to enter into Paradise not through any merit of his own. On the contrary, he had no merit at all. He was saved solely through the merit of Christ. If he had remained in the world, he should have grown in his spiritual life. This would have been the natural result of the new life he had received. However, he did not remain in the world; he did not have any works. The redemption of Christ alone was sufficient for him to go to heaven. After a man believes in the Lord, he should, of course, progress to good works which spontaneously come with the new life. However, good works do not make a believer more qualified to be saved. If he does not remain long in the world, he will naturally have no works. He need only depend on the merit of Christ to go to heaven. After someone believes in the Lord, he may perform many good works; but these good works do not help him as far as salvation is concerned. These good deeds will not add any merit to him or make him more qualified for salvation. Whether a believer dies immediately after believing or whether he continues in the world for decades, his qualification for salvation depends entirely on the merit of Christ's shed blood which was for the redemption of sins. If he does not die, he should grow, because the life he received when he believed in the Lord must grow. Yet this growth will not help him become more qualified to receive eternal life. If he dies immediately, Christ's merit is sufficient to allow him to enter into Paradise.

At Golgotha there were three crosses. In the middle was the cross of the Savior. On one side, there was the cross of the robber who was saved; on the other side, there was the cross of the robber who perished. The lives of the robber who was saved and robber who perished were separated by the cross of the Savior! These three crosses represent all the crosses in the world. These three crosses solve all the problems of sins in the world. The cross in the middle bore sins without hiding them. The cross on one side hid sins without bearing them, while the cross on the other side bore and hid sins. The robber who was saved was a sinner. He had sin in his heart and he hid his sin. But the Lord Jesus died for him and bore his sins. Therefore, although he hid his sins, he did not have to bear them. The Lord Jesus Christ has no sin. His death bore the sinners' sins on their behalf. As such He did not hide the sins. He only bore the sins, the sins of others. He is the only person in the world who could do this. The robber who perished was a robber, so he too hid his sins in his heart. He did not believe that the Lord Jesus died for him; therefore, he did not receive the merit of the Lord Jesus' bearing of his sins. For this reason, he had to bear his own sins. Hence, he both hid his sins and bore his sins. These two robbers typify all the sinners of the world. The difference between salvation and perdition is to believe or not believe in the substitutionary death of the cross. In the case of the robber who was saved, he hid his sins. But he trusted in the Lord Jesus Christ, therefore, he did not bear his sins. He had sins, but One died in his place. So he did not have to bear his own sins. The robber who perished was the same as the robber who was saved—both were sinners. However, he had to bear his sins himself and perish forever because he did not believe in the Lord Jesus' death for him. The cross of the Lord Jesus separates all the sinners in the world into two big categories: the perishing and the saved. Those who believe in the cross are saved. Those who do not believe in the cross perish. On which side do you belong?

The robber who was saved was not saved through his goodness; he was a robber and had no goodness. The robber who perished did not perish through his own evil, because his saved companion was also a robber just like him. It was not a case of the better one saved and the worse one lost. The conducts of the two were no different. Their only difference was faith. Therefore, you need to see clearly that salvation has nothing to do with being good or bad. These two were both robbers; however, one was saved and one perished. The occupation of these two was the same—both were robbers. They were very

much one in heart—they robbed together as partners. They murdered together and committed arson together. They were like a left and right hand. They cooperated with each other and helped each other. Even their destiny was the same—they were both taken by the Roman government. They were judged together and sentenced together. They even received the same punishment—they were both crucified on a cross. On the cross they mocked Christ in unison (Mark 15:32). I suppose it would be difficult in this world to find another pair of people like these two who lived together, died together, and were together in so many things. In their lifetime they traveled on the same path and received the same end in their physical bodies. However, their conditions in eternity are completely different and completely opposite from each other. After their death there was the difference of heaven and hell between them! One entered into Paradise, being called a son of God, and received eternal blessing. One was thrown into Hades to live with the devil and received eternal sufferings. At what point did this difference commence? It began during their last five minutes. One believed the Lord Jesus, so he had eternal life. One did not believe the Lord Jesus, so he was condemned. Please listen! The difference between salvation and perdition is not determined by your poverty, riches, foolishness, wisdom, tallness, shortness, honorableness, lowliness, goodness, or evil. Salvation or perdition is determined by whether or not you believe in the Lord Jesus' substitutionary death.

VIII. ETERNAL SEPARATION

Although in life the two robbers were very close, even inseparable, now they are separated forever! You and your wife may be very close to each other. If she has already believed in the Lord and if you do not believe, you will be forever separated! Do you have a saved mother? You may truly love her very much. However, if you do not believe in the Lord Jesus, I am afraid you will be forever separated from her! Do you have a deceased father who was saved? If you do not believe in the Lord Jesus, you will never see him again! Do you have a little child whom you love? He is so young and innocent that he cannot yet believe. As such, he cannot now bear his own responsibility. The merit of the Lord Jesus' substitutionary death has come upon him, and he is saved. For older ones, who can bear their own responsibilities, if you do not believe in the Lord Jesus, I am afraid that father and son, and mother and son will be separated and never be together again! Parents, please come quickly! Do you have relatives on the earth? If you want to be happily united forever, you must believe in the Lord Jesus. I am afraid that tonight, among those sitting here,

many of you will be separated forever! Many loving couples will be separated forever! Many intimate friends will be separated forever! Many fathers and sons, mothers and daughters, brothers and sisters will be separated forever! Alas! What a heartbreaking separation! What a sorrowful separation! There is no need to have such a separation! You must quickly believe in the Lord Jesus for your soul's sake. You must quickly believe in the Lord Jesus for your loved one's sake. You must quickly believe in the Lord Jesus for the sake of the dreadfulness of hell. You must quickly believe in the Lord Jesus for the sake of our heavenly Father's mercy and love and Christ's grace.

The matter of salvation should be decided before our breath expires. The robber was about to die. But he was not yet dead. He had the opportunity to be saved. Once he died, there would be no more opportunity. The Lord Jesus can save sinners. If He can save the robber, who can He not save? Therefore, do not fear that your sins are too great. You must believe in the Lord Jesus while you are still alive. You must confess Him as your Savior and Lord before the world. I urge you to make a decision right now. May the Holy Spirit help you make the right decision.

"Lord, right now I want to accept You as my Savior. Save me! Be merciful to a sinner like me so that I may not be condemned but may have eternal life."

CHAPTER SEVEN

ASSURANCE OF SALVATION

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(Talks to Young Christians)

Every time I go to a place to preach God's gospel of grace, I always ask the local Christians one question. I believe all those who can answer me with a clear "yes" are joyfully enjoying the grace of God. The question is, "Are you already saved?" In other words, do you really know that you are saved? Among a thousand people, one can only find two or three who know that they are saved. Sometimes, among a whole congregation, one cannot find one person who knows that he is saved. Then I ask these ones, "You have received the Lord Jesus and have accepted Him as your personal Savior. You have trusted in the blood of His cross to wash away your sins. Why do you still not know that you are saved? If a man falls into the water, and another man pulls him out, after the first man comes to his senses, he will surely know whether he is still in the water or safe on the shore. You should know whether you are a perishing man or a saved man who has obtained God's grace." Many people would not respond clearly with words, but their answer always seems to be, "I do not know if I have been saved. How can I say that I am saved while I am still living on earth?"

I think many of the readers of this message would answer this way! This is exactly where our mistake lies. Our belief in the Lord Jesus is not like gambling, winning when we are lucky and losing when we are not lucky. The salvation that comes through believing in the cross of the Lord Jesus is fully guaranteed. We do not have to wait until we die before we can know if we are saved or not. We can know this now. This is the clear teaching of the Bible. Please read a few verses:

"Therefore let it be known to you, men, brothers, that through this One forgiveness of sins is announced to you; and from all the things from which you were not able to be justified by the law of Moses, in this One everyone who believes is justified" (Acts 13:38-39).

We cannot obtain justification by God through our own work. We have many sins, which make our heart sad whenever we think about them and cause us to think that we are not saved. But although we can fail, the Lord Jesus is still trustworthy. If we believe in Him, our sins will be forgiven. All those who believe in Him will be justified. How great is the Lord's salvation! God's Word says, "Let it be known to you." We should know what? We should know that once we have believed in the Lord Jesus, our sins are forgiven, and we are justified. You are saved! When God says, "Let it be known to you," we can know if we are saved or not. We should not refuse Him. We should commit our sins to the Savior and believe in His accomplished salvation for us. We will then be saved.

"This is the testimony of God that He has testified concerning His Son. He who believes into the Son of God has the testimony in himself; he who does not believe God has made Him a liar because he has not believed in the testimony which God has testified concerning His Son. And this is the testimony, that God gave to us eternal life and this life is in His Son. He who has the Son has the life; he who does not have the Son of God does not have the life. I have written these things to you that you may know that you have eternal life, to you who believe into the name of the Son of God" (1 John 5:9-13).

He who has the Lord Jesus has life. He who does not have Him does not have life. Have you accepted the Lord Jesus as your Savior? If you have, you have life already, and you are saved. The Lord Jesus said Himself: "He who believes has eternal life" (John 6:47). God has testified for His Son that He has given to us eternal life. This passage of the Scripture says that if we do not believe in the testimony that we have eternal life, then we are making God a liar. God says all those who have trusted and accepted the Lord Jesus have eternal life. Would God lie? We should believe that we who have been washed by His blood are saved already. God said, through the apostle John, that He wrote these words that we may know that we are saved.

The testimony of the Bible is that we can know if we are saved. This is not something that happens only after we die; we do not have to wait until the coming age before we know. While we are living on earth today, we should know if we are saved or not. If we are not, we should make haste to believe in Jesus Christ and come to God through trusting in His saving accomplishment for us. If we are saved, we should give much thanks to God's grace and should

live on earth like saved persons. "Behold, now is the well-acceptable time; behold, now is the day of salvation" (2 Cor. 6:2). God accepts us now and saves us now, rather than after we die.

Sometimes, when I ask a person if he is saved, he answers, "I am only trying my best to do good and to serve God, hoping that I can eventually be saved." Alas, this is also wrong. This means that he does not understand the way of salvation. Do you think that you can be saved in the future by trying your best to do good and to serve God? We have to know that none of our merits and works are acceptable before God. "All our righteousnesses are like a soiled garment" (Isa. 64:6). Do you think that merit and work will save you? No, ten thousand times no! The Bible clearly says, "You have been saved...not of yourselves; it is the gift of God; not of works that no one should boast" (Eph. 2:8-9). Salvation comes through trusting in the Lord Jesus, "who Himself bore up our sins in His body on the tree" (1 Pet. 2:24), "the Righteous on behalf of the unrighteous, that He might bring you to God" (3:18). He has accomplished the work of salvation. All you have to do is to believe and obey Him. "Believe on the Lord Jesus, and you shall be saved" (Acts 16:31). Do not try to be saved by your own work. No matter how good your works are, they cannot save you, for "you have been saved...not of works" (Eph. 2:8-9). If you trust in the accomplishment of the substitutional death of the Lord Jesus on the cross, you will be saved. If you do not accept the Lord Jesus as the Savior, there will be no hope for your salvation because you cannot save yourself. If you accept the Lord Jesus as the sin offering, you do not have to hope to be saved because you have eternal life already.

We only hope for things that we have not yet obtained. If we have them already, we do not need to hope for them anymore. When a child's father leaves his home, the child hopes very much to see the father. But when the father returns home, the child is extremely glad. If the mother asks the child, "Do you still hope to see your father?", the child will answer, "I have seen my father already. Why do I still have to hope to see him?" Indeed, if we have obtained something already, we do not need to hope for it anymore. Either the world believes in Jesus and is saved and has eternal life, or it is not saved and is perishing. There is no middle ground between the two things. "Every one who believes into Him...[has] eternal life...he who does not believe has been condemned already" (John 3:16-18). The Bible divides humanity into two classes: those who are saved and those who are perishing. There is not a third class of those who hope to be saved. If you have indeed believed in Jesus

Christ as your Savior and have believed in His death on the cross where He bore your sins for you, you are saved already. You do not have to hope to be saved anymore. If some would ask a man who has been rescued out of the water, "What do you want?", would he say, "I hope to get on shore"? Is such an answer sensible? Brothers, if you have believed in the Lord Jesus, you have eternal life already. Why are you still doubting? You have received it already. Why still hope for it? Simply praise the Lord instead!

There are others, when I ask about the question of salvation, that answer, "While I live on earth today, I indeed trust in the accomplished work of the redemption of the Lord Jesus. But I dare not say whether I am saved or not. I have to wait until I die and go before the Father to be judged as either a goat or a sheep. If He says that I am a sheep, then I will be saved and be most happy. If He says that I am a goat, then I will perish and go to hell in misery."

Alas, is this future not a pitiful one? Speaking truthfully, if I did not know that I was saved, I would be afraid that I would be unable to take my meal today; and I would not be able to sleep tonight. Thank the Father, for He has accepted us and has given us the eternal life! Do you really believe in the merit of the Lord Jesus' redemption? If we have believed in Him, do we have to wait until we die before we know whether we are saved or perishing? Please look at the word of the Bible. The Lord's own words are the most trustworthy of all.

"For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that every one who believes into Him would not perish, but would have eternal life" (John 3:16). Is not this verse very clear? "For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son." This is what God has done. He has loved and He has given. He has given the Lord Jesus to the world, to die for the world and accomplish salvation on the cross, so that everyone who believes in the Lord Jesus would have eternal life and not perish. If you have believed in the Lord Jesus, you have eternal life already and will no longer perish. John 3:16 is the most recited verse. But unfortunately, many people are not familiar with John 3:16 after all. John 3:16 clearly says that as soon as you believe in the Lord Jesus, you do not perish, but have eternal life. But many believers change John 3:16! If they have believed in the Lord as their Savior but consider that they are not yet saved, they change John 3:16! They change it without knowing about it! They change John 3:16 to something like this:

"For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that every one who believes into Him will perhaps not perish, and perhaps have eternal life after a month, two months, a year, ten years, a few decades, or after they die."

Thank God that the Bible is not written this way. The Bible has not put those words there. The Bible links "every one who believes into Him" with "would not perish, but would have eternal life." Whenever we believe in the Lord Jesus and have our sins washed by the blood; at that moment, we do not perish, but have eternal life. "Every one who believes into Him...would have eternal life" (John 3:16), without waiting until they die to have it.

The parable of the goats and the sheep has been misinterpreted by the church throughout the centuries. It has been applied to the believers. The word "nations" in Matthew 25:32 refers to the Gentiles. God has divided the world into Jews, Greeks, and the church of God (1 Cor. 10:32). The church has nothing to do with the Gentiles anymore. The judgment of the goats and the sheep refers to the judgment of the Gentile nations at the coming of the Lord Jesus with His saints. We the believers will not be judged there.

Those who have believed in the Lord Jesus will not be judged with respect to salvation and perdition. The Lord Jesus' crucifixion on the cross has borne the judgment of their sins for them. He has taken the punishment of their sins. He has solved the problem of sin for them. Those who have believed in Him have accepted Him as their substitute. He has been judged and has died for them. Of course, they do not need to be judged or to die anymore. "There is now then no condemnation to those who are in Christ Jesus" (Rom. 8:1). Please read again the words of John 5:24. "Truly, truly, I say to you, he who hears My word and believes Him who sent Me has eternal life, and does not come into judgment but has passed out of death into life."

How sweet are the Lord's words! No one can speak like Him! These clear words are like music to a sinner's ears. Since He said "truly, truly," can they be untrue? Surely they cannot be. The Lord Jesus says that the one who hears and believes "has eternal life." This is a "truly, truly" saying. He says that such a one "does not come into judgment." This, of course, must be "truly, truly" also. He also says that such a one "has passed out of death into life." This also must be "truly, truly." When He says that such a one "has passed," it surely means that it "has passed." When do we use the words "has passed" in our

daily life? Does not "has passed" mean that something has already been accomplished and is over? The Lord says that a person who has believed in Him "has passed out of death into life." Why do we say that we have to wait until we die before we can know that we are saved? Brothers, those who have believed in Him have already passed from death into life even in this age. This is truly the gospel! Truly, truly I say unto you, a person who has believed "has passed out of death into life." He who does not believe "has been condemned already" (John 3:18). Both times that the word "has" is used in John 5:24 and 3:18, it refers to something that is decided now.

Perhaps when you read up to this point, you will think like many other believers, "Would it not be too proud of me to say that I am already saved? I am not better in any way in my conduct than others. How can I say this?"

Dear readers, for us to know that we are saved is not to be proud. The words "to be saved" are in the passive voice; they show that we are being acted upon. What is there for us to be proud of? To say that we do not need to be saved or that we have no need of salvation is indeed proud; it is indeed to consider ourselves better than others. But to say that we are saved indicates that we were sinners and were to perish, but that we are now saved by Him through trusting in Him. This shows how deep the Lord's grace is to us and how great is the saving work of the Lord. It shows how great the Lord's power is. It is not an exaltation of ourselves. If we know that we have received grace and are saved, of course, we will all the more praise the Lord. To sing of the Lord Jesus in our songs all the time is an exaltation of the Lord; it is not a self-boasting. The more we see the depth of our sins and the immensity of the Lord's forgiveness, the more we will love the Lord. We should say as Paul said: "By the grace of God I am what I am" (1 Cor. 15:10).

God says that we have eternal life already—that we are saved. Therefore, for me to say that I am saved is not boasting; it is to believe and to acknowledge that God is right. God is pleased when we believe in His Word. We must believe in God's Word.

It is true that our works are no better than others. But we are not saved because of our good works. The Lord Jesus did not come to save the righteous but the sinners. "For the Son of Man has come to seek and to save that which is lost" (Luke 19:10). "Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners" (1 Tim. 1:15). Paul said that he was the foremost of all sinners, but that he had

obtained mercy. If it is up to us, we will not be able to say that we are saved. Even the world cannot find one who can say that he is saved. If salvation is due to our merits and excellence, there will be no possibility for us to be saved. Those who trust in their works are shaky all the time. Sometimes their conduct is better, and they will hope that they can be saved. Sometimes their conduct is not as good, and they think that they will perish. These ones have never fully trusted in Christ. Dear readers, we are not saved because of our good works. We are saved because Christ has saved us. How great is His grace!

Many say: "I know that if one trusts in the accomplishment of the Lord Jesus on the cross, he is saved. But I do not feel anything. Am I saved just like this?"

Brothers! The Bible does not say: "I give these happy feelings to you that you may know that you have eternal life, to you who believe in the name of the Son of God." If the Bible were written in this way, one would not be saved if he did not feel anything. But the Bible says, "I have written these things to you that you may know that you have eternal life" (1 John 5:13).

"These things." What are these things? They are the words of the Bible, the Word of the Father. We know that we have eternal life and are saved, not by the way we feel, but by what the Word of God says. The Bible says that we who have believed in the Lord are saved. We are, therefore, saved. When God says that we are saved, surely we are saved, whether we feel that we are saved or not. We have believed in the Lord Jesus and have been washed of our sins by His blood. Therefore, we are saved because God's Word says so.

For example, a poor man may be very poor and cannot make ends meet; he may be living in extreme sufferings. He decides to write a letter to one of his friends, who is quite well off, to ask for help. After a few days, he does not receive any reply. He may think that his friend despises him and is not willing to help him, and his heart is in distress. The more he thinks about it, the more it seems unlikely that his friend will help him. He decides then to tell this matter to his neighbors. Some say that a friend should always help one in financial difficulties and has no reason to refuse to help. Others say that this may not necessarily be true because it is a compassionless age. When the man hears the hopeful words, he rejoices, and when he hears the discouraging words, he is in distress. The next day his friend sends someone to give him a

reply. When he opens the letter, his heart jumps within him; he does not know if a promise is within. After he opens the letter, he shouts to his family, "The matter is now settled. He has written a letter to me saying that, from now on, he will take up all my expenses. All right. The matter is decided. I do not care if others think that it is hopeful or hopeless any longer. He has said himself that he will bear all the responsibilities. I can live now in peace."

Are not many believers like this poor man? What a pity that many children of God listen to others' talk and to their own feeling; they are drifting back and forth. The poor man was assured once he had a word from his friend. The children of God are likewise assured when they have the Word of God. God says that if we believe in Jesus Christ, we shall be saved. He has said it Himself, and everything is settled. What more is there to worry about? What are our feelings worth? What are man's ideas worth? If God says that we are saved, it is enough. His Word is the final verdict. Since God has graciously declared His faithfulness, we should accept His Word without doubt.

Some may say, "What was said may be true. But I am afraid that my faith is not perfect, and therefore, I cannot be saved."

The Bible only makes a distinction between "believing" and "not believing." The Bible does not know what an incomplete faith means. We should know that there is no merit in our believing in the Lord Jesus. God does not save us because we have attained the merit of believing. This cannot be farther from the truth! To believe is to receive (John 1:12). John 3:16 says that God "gave" us His Son. When we "receive" Him, everything is done. One gives and the other receives. There is no merit of the sinner involved. Salvation is fully accomplished by the Lord Jesus.

Who among us is not a sinner? We were dead in trespasses and sins. How pitiful we were! The Holy Spirit came and caused us to realize our sins. How terrible is the punishment for sin! One cannot help but tremble at the thought of the future. It is all the more pitiful when we realize that there is no way for us to save ourselves. We were wallowing in the mud and yet had no way to rescue ourselves! What an unspeakable deprivation! Thank and praise the slaughtered Lamb! He came and died for us on the cross. He stood on the ground of us the sinners. He loved us and gave Himself for us. While we were yet sinners, He died for us. He accomplished the salvation. When He died, He proclaimed, "It is finished!" (John 19:30). How precious is this word! O Lord!

I can never thank You enough for Your great grace! To believe in the Lord Jesus means nothing other than a willingness on the part of us, the helpless and destitute sinners, to be saved by Him. He came to save, and when we are willing to be saved, the matter is settled. There is no question of complete or incomplete faith.

He says Himself, "Him who comes to Me I shall by no means cast out" (John 6:37). Since we have come, there is now only one question: "Has He cast me out?" Praise God, for Christ is faithful and trustworthy. There is no guile found in His mouth! He will never cast out those who come to Him. He will save all those who realize their sins and who will accept Him as their Savior. "Come to Me all who toil and are burdened, and I will give you rest" (Matt. 11:28). "If anyone thirsts, let him come to Me and drink" (John 7:37). This is the Lord's invitation.

Brothers, it is not just our faith that is saving us. Rather, it is His grace and faithfulness. God desires to save us. He will bestow grace on us. Will we not believe? What else is there to doubt? The Lord's love should fill our hearts and should drive out all drifting thoughts!

After some have understood this teaching, they may have a doubt in them: "If a man already knows that he is saved and has eternal life and is guaranteed heaven, will he not then sin at will? Will he not think that he is saved anyway and that he can, therefore, unbridle his lusts and sin at will? Will he not think that he is saved now, and that it does not matter anymore if he sins again?"

This is only a hypothesis. Many people think that if they know that they are saved, they will still want to sin. But this is only a hypothesis. In reality, something exactly opposite happens. If a man knows that he is saved, he will not want to sin anymore, and he will also bear heavenly characteristics in his thought and conduct. I can give you an illustration here. Today in China we are sending a few hundred people to study abroad every year. Most of them go to the United States. Suppose there is a father who wants to send his son to America. How should the son be dressed? Should he pay attention to the Chinese gowns and consider the latest fashion? Does he need to study Chinese etiquette and manners? Does he need to know all the things associated with the Chinese culture? Surely he does not. He is about to go to America. He does not need to know more about China, but he needs to learn the customs and fashions of the other country. He should learn to eat with a fork and knife,

to shake hands, and to doff his hat. He should study in detail the tastes, likes and dislikes, and individual habits of the Americans. He should study the mind and characteristics of the Americans. When he speaks in English, he should have an American accent with it. When he walks, he should walk like the Americans walk. He should pursue after American fashion in his dress and attire. In other words, all those who are about to go to America have a natural tendency to act and move like an American. If a believer realizes that he has eternal life already, and is a citizen of heaven, he will surely learn the heavenly pattern in everything, in word, conduct, and walk. Those who do not know that they are saved will imitate the world and try to be conformed to it. Brothers, there is no danger of sinning carelessly for those who know that they are saved. On the contrary, those who know this will set their minds daily on the things which are above. This can be fully confirmed by the spiritual experiences of the believers. Just like those who are going to America try to be Americans, those who are going heavenward will surely learn to be heavenly persons.

Dear brothers! You have believed in the Lord Jesus Christ already. This is the most important thing on earth. This is also the greatest blessing in eternity for man! You should know that the Lord has saved you. What a comfort and joy it is for us to know that we are persons with eternal life in us. "Rejoice that your names are recorded in the heavens" (Luke 10:20). What a precious message! This is indeed the glad tidings. We can know that we are saved in this age! Formerly we were the sinners. Now we have received grace. Should we not rejoice? What gratitude and affection we have to realize that the Lord has saved us from perdition and has given us eternal life. If we know this, we will praise God all the more. We know that we cannot save ourselves. As a result, all the authority, riches, wisdom, power, honor, glory, and praise be unto the slain Lamb for now and evermore!

Now you can see how much God loves us! Since He has loved us and saved us, we should love Him out of a sense of gratitude and should live as saved persons on earth. Since He has begun the good work in our heart, He will surely complete this work until the day of Christ Jesus (Phil. 1:6). We cannot please Him by ourselves, because "those who are in the flesh cannot please God" (Rom. 8:8). We can only allow His Spirit to work in us to effect a holy living. Although sometimes we may unfortunately fail, this does not mean that we will perish again. What the Lord has given us is an eternal life. When

we fail, we should not be discouraged. We should rise up and ask for the Lord's forgiveness. He will surely lead us on.

Once I was preaching in a place. After a brother there understood this truth, he said to me, "I did not know before that I was saved. As a result, I lived carelessly in the world. I was afraid that if I gave up everything in this life for the Lord, and then the Lord apportioned me perdition at the time of the judgment, I would as the saying goes, ‘lose one's case before both the magistrate and the mandarin.’ I was afraid that I would have neither the joy of this world, nor the blessing of heaven! But now that I know this truth, heaven is guaranteed. Since I am a citizen of heaven already, I do not want to live foolishly in this world anymore." Indeed, if we know that our life is hid with Christ in God, we will surely set our mind on the things above. How wonderful this is! We have a wonderful Savior, and we have received a wonderful salvation. Is this not a cause for joy? Let us sing Hallelujah!

CHAPTER EIGHT

THE TIME OF THE CROSS— THE TIMELESSNESS OF THE CROSS

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Every time we consider the cross, it invokes wonder in us! Every time we remember the redemption of the Lord Jesus, our hearts are filled both with sorrow and with joy. To us the Lord's cross is not just a wooden cross, but a symbol of His full redemptive work and of the full salvation accomplished through this redemptive work.

When I first received the Lord, I often wondered how the men in the Old Testament, who came before the time of the Lord's crucifixion, could be saved. At that time I was a babe in the Lord and was quite perplexed by this question.

In recent years I have not seen much of the fresh power of the cross manifested in the believers. It seems that to them the Lord's death is something that happened long ago, over nineteen centuries earlier. As such, it does not seem to have any power.

I thank the Father that He has recently shown me the timelessness of the cross. Because of the above-mentioned two concepts, I consider it necessary that God's saints be acquainted with the teaching of the "timelessness" of the cross. If we realize that the cross is still extremely fresh, how much we will be touched by it!

THE LORD'S DEATH IN RELATION TO THE OLD AND THE NEW COVENANTS

We should first read Hebrews 9:15-17: "And because of this He is the Mediator of a new covenant, so that, death having taken place for redemption of the transgressions under the first covenant, those who have been called might receive the promise of the eternal inheritance. For where there is a testament [the same word as covenant in the original], the death of him who made the testament must of necessity be established. For a testament

[covenant] is confirmed in the case of the dead, since it never has force when he who made the testament is living." These few verses show us the relationship between the death of Christ on the cross and the old and new covenants. Under the old covenant men sinned the same way that they now do. Since there was sin, there was the need for the Savior. If a man has sinned and has not received God's forgiveness, he will have to bear his own judgment of sin. God cannot forgive man's sin simply by His mercy. To do so would put Him in unrighteousness. For this reason, in God's way of redemption He established the way of substitution. Under the old covenant He used many sacrifices and offerings to make atonement for man's sins. Since many animals died on man's behalf, man received God's righteous forgiveness. The word "atonement" in Hebrew means to "cover up." Under the old covenant the atonement was but a covering up of man's sins with animals' blood, because the Bible clearly says, "It is impossible for the blood of bulls and goats to take away sins" (Heb. 10:4). For this reason, at the fullness of time God sent His Son into the world to die for men. Through His one offering up of Himself, the eternal salvation of redemption was accomplished. The sins which were not removed by the blood of bulls and goats in the Old Testament are now removed through His death, for He is "the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world" (John 1:29). The death of Christ marked a great change in history. His death divided the old testament age from the new testament age. Before His death, it was the Old Testament age; after His death, it is the New Testament age. The above-mentioned Scripture readings cover this point.

These three verses speak of two kinds of relationships the Lord's death has with the old and the new covenants. Hebrews 9:15 shows how He is the Mediator. Verses 16 and 17 show how He became the One who made the testament.

We have seen that everyone in the first covenant was a sinner. Although they offered to God animals as atonement for their sins, their sins were only covered; their sins were not removed. At that time God did forgive their sins because through the blood of many sacrifices God saw from a distance the blood of His Son and its effectiveness. However, unless the Lord Jesus were to die, God still could not put an end to the problem of sin in the first covenant. Sin must be removed. When Christ died, the sin under the first covenant was removed. We can see the relationship between the Lord's death and the first covenant from another angle. Every covenant has its conditions. The old

covenant also had its demands. When man came short of these requirements, he sinned. The punishment of sin is death. This is why the Lord Jesus had to die on behalf of those in the first covenant and redeem them from their sins. He fulfilled all the requirements of the first covenant, terminated it, and initiated the new covenant.

Through His death He redeemed man from the sins he committed in the first covenant and became the Mediator of the new covenant. His being the Mediator of the new covenant is based on His redemption of the sins of those in the first covenant. Originally, man was to receive the promise of the eternal inheritance. However, because of his sin, man was kept from inheriting it. Now the Lord Jesus has died. Man is redeemed from sin, and the called ones are qualified to receive the eternal inheritance. Hence, the Lord Jesus became the Mediator through the death on the cross. On the one hand, He brought an end to the sins of the old covenant. On the other hand, He brought in the blessing of the new covenant. All these matters are related to His being the Mediator.

Next we should consider Him as the One who made the testament. The word "testament" is "covenant" in the original language. In the above discussion, we had the law of the covenant. All those who transgressed the law died. Christ died in order to redeem us from sin. After this we may consider the testament of the covenant. A testament means an arrangement made by a testator for the passing of his possessions to his heir at the testator's death. The Lord Jesus is the Testator, the One who made the testament. All the blessings of this age and the next belong to Him. Since He was willing to bear the sins of those in the first covenant, He is also willing to pass on all that is promised in this covenant (testament). In order to redeem man from his sins, He had to die. In order for man to inherit the testament, He also had to die. If a man is alive, the testament he makes will not come into effect. He must die before the heir can inherit the inheritance. Here we see the profound relationship between Christ's death and the old and new covenants. In short, without His death there would not be the old and the new covenants. Without His death, the Old Testament could not be complete, for the requirement of its law would not have been met. Without His death there could not be the New Testament, because there would be no way for the blessing of its testament to be passed on to the called ones. But the Lord has died. He has terminated the first covenant and has enacted the second covenant. Indeed, the New Testament was enacted by His blood.

HOW WERE MEN SAVED IN THE OLD TESTAMENT?

If the blood of bulls and goats was not able to remove sin, as we mentioned earlier, how then were those in the Old Testament saved? It was by the cross. Man had sinned. Hence, only a man could accomplish the redemption of sin. Although the animals were innocent, and although they were without blemish, they could not redeem man from his sins. Why then did God promise in Leviticus 17 that the blood of creatures was able to redeem one from sin? There must be some very profound meaning here. The things of the law "are a shadow of the things to come, but the body is of Christ" (Col. 2:17). Hence, the sacrifices and the offerings in the Old Testament all refer to Christ. Although Christ had not yet died at the time of the first covenant, God intended that all the sacrifices offered at that time be a type of Christ. Their death was taken as the death of Christ. Through the blood of many animals, God saw the blood of His beloved Son. Through many bulls and goats, He saw "the Lamb of God." Through the many sacrifices, He saw the substitutional death of Christ. When He accepted those offerings, it was as if He was accepting the merit of the death of His Son. Because of this, man was redeemed from his sins. God reckoned the innocent bulls and goats as His dear Son. Hence, He could forgive the sinners based upon the sacrifices they offered. Every time the offerings were slaughtered, they spoke of the coming sacrifice of the Son of God as the sin offering on Golgotha and of His accomplishment of the eternal work of salvation. Because the Lord is a man, He is able to redeem man from sin. Because He is God, He is able to redeem all men, past and present, from their sins.

Those who offered the sacrifices in the Old Testament, consciously or unconsciously, believed in a coming crucified Savior. All their sacrifices were to turn them to the coming Savior. Although the Lord Jesus was not yet born at that time, faith did not look at what could be seen. Rather, it looked at what could not be seen. Faith saw a vicarious Savior from afar and trusted in Him. When the time came, the Son of God came and died for men. What had only been a matter of faith then became a fact.

HOW ARE MEN SAVED IN THE NEW TESTAMENT?

We know that we are in the New Testament age. How are we saved in this age? Christ has died and salvation is accomplished. If we believe in the Lord Jesus, which means that by faith we receive Him as the Savior, we will be saved. Some have a hard time understanding how Christ could have died for

them before they were even born. Indeed this presents a problem to the physical senses. Yet to faith, this is a glorious truth.

First, we must realize that time cannot restrict God. To us mortals, a few decades is a long time. But our God is an eternal God. To Him, even a thousand years do not mean much. Although time can restrict us, it cannot restrict Him. Hence, even though we believe in a Lord who died once for us many years ago, we are saved.

The Bible says that the Lord Jesus offered up Himself once and accomplished the work of redemption (Heb. 7:27). He is God. This is why He can transcend time to redeem those who were thousands of years before Him as well as those who are thousands of years after Him. Not only can He redeem those thousands of years after Him; if, unfortunately, the world goes on for millions of years more, His redemption will still be effective. Once He finished His work, it was accomplished forever. If a sinner desires to be saved now, the Lord does not need to die for him again. This one only needs to accept the merit of the Lord's one offering, and he will be saved. Our faith is not restricted by time either. Faith can lead one into the reality of eternity. As men in the Old Testament looked to a coming Savior and were saved, in the same way we look to a past Savior and are saved. The fact that the matter is past does not mean that it is over. Rather, it means that it is done. The men in the Old Testament looked forward. We at the present time look backward. Faith caused those in the Old Testament to accept a coming Savior. Will not our faith cause us to accept a past Savior?

In reading Hebrews 9:12-15 it would be very meaningful if we link together the three "eternals" in these verses. The Lord accomplished an eternal redemption. By offering up Himself to God through the eternal Spirit, we have obtained an eternal inheritance. Hence, whenever men believe in Him, they receive this redemption. We ought to realize that the worth of the cross is not determined by man. Rather, it is determined by God. God considers the redemption of the cross as eternal. Therefore, we sinners who have no righteousness of our own should acknowledge God's word as true and should act according to His word and believe in the cross of His Son and be saved.

THE TIMELESSNESS OF THE CROSS

This is the most crucial point. Although the Bible says that the Lord Jesus offered up the sacrifice for sins once, it points out that "having offered one

sacrifice for sins, [He] sat down forever..." (Heb. 10:12). The word "one" means that the Lord's sacrifice for sins was perfect; He only needed to redeem man from sins once. However, this sacrifice for sins is forever. It is an eternal sacrifice for sins! This means that not only is the effect of this sacrifice for sins eternal, but the sacrifice itself is eternal. Although Christ has resurrected and is living forever, it seems that His cross continues to exist! May we realize the timelessness of the cross! It is not a past event of nineteen hundred years ago. It remains fresh today.

Revelation 13:8 says, "The Lamb who was slain from the foundation of the world." Our Lord is the slain Lamb from the foundation of the world until now and forever. To Him, the cross is not merely an event of a certain time, on a certain date of a certain month of a certain year. Rather, it is something that has existed since the foundation of the world until now. When He created man, He foreknew the price of the coming redemption. He created man with His power. In the same way He redeemed man with His blood. It is as if He was crucified from the beginning when He created man. For thousands of years He suffered the prolonged suffering of the cross. The one death on Golgotha merely signified the grief God's Spirit had borne for a long time. What grace this is! What wonder this is! We have no words to express the meaning of this verse. Before the Lord Jesus left heaven, and while He was still in glory, He knew the suffering of the cross already. He knew during the thousands of years before He came. He knew this at the time of creation. Since eternity past, the cross has been in God's heart. When we consider how in eternity past God knew that He was to create man and that man would become fallen, we realize how His heart, humanly speaking, must have grieved over it. Because He so loved men, He ordained before the foundation of the world that Christ would die on our behalf (1 Pet. 1:20). Although Christ only appeared once in the last times for our sins, through His love for the world He has been grieving and aching since the foundation of the world, as if He has been crucified a thousand times already! What a pity that many people are now still grieving Him, as if crucifying Him afresh. When we realize such love of His, we cannot help but marvel and stand in awe before Him! This is God's heart! If we realize this, will we not love God all the more? Hence, humanly speaking, those in the Old Testament believed in a coming cross, while those in the New Testament believe in a past cross. Actually, there is no distinction of time and period. The cross of the Old Testament is a present

one, and the cross of the New Testament is also a present one. May the Lord open our eyes to see that the cross is timeless.

THE ETERNAL FRESHNESS OF THE CROSS

Those in the Old Testament have died. We shall, therefore, pay attention only to those in the present time. Many people push the cross back nineteen hundred years and consider it as old, outdated, and obsolete. Although it is true that world history considers Christ's Golgotha a historical event, in the believers' spiritual experience the cross of Christ is still a fresh event. It is not old, outdated, or obsolete. We can consider a few verses.

Hebrews 10:19 and 20 say, "Having therefore, brothers, boldness for entering the Holy of Holies in the blood of Jesus, which entrance He initiated for us as a new and living way through the veil, that is, His flesh." In order to understand these two verses, we have to understand the things mentioned in the Old Testament. In the ancient times, the tabernacle was divided into two sections. The first section was called the Holy Place, and the second section was called the Holy of Holies. The two sections were divided by a veil. Those entering the Holy of Holies had to pass through the veil. God's glory was manifested within the Holy of Holies. No ordinary person could enter the Holy of Holies. Only the high priest could enter it once a year. Before he entered it, he had to first offer sacrifices and make atonement for himself and the people and had to go in with the blood of bulls and goats. For us now, we enter the Holy of Holies through the blood of the Lord Jesus. This signifies the cross. Formerly the high priest entered the Holy of Holies only once a year. Now, through the cross of the Lord Jesus we can enter the Holy of Holies any time. What is the meaning of entering the Holy of Holies? It means that we can come to God to confess our sins, fellowship with Him, and be in His presence.

Those entering the Holy of Holies had to pass through the veil. The veil signifies the body of the Lord Jesus. When He was crucified, the veil of the temple was rent in half from top to bottom. If the veil had not been rent, men could not have passed through it. If the Lord Jesus had not died and His body not been broken, men could not pass through Him and could not enter the Holy of Holies. At the present time, we come to God through the death of the Lord Jesus. This also signifies the cross.

Our Bible tells us that this way through the veil was opened up for us by the Lord Jesus. Truly, He willingly gave up His life to redeem us.

We need to pay attention to the fact that this way is "new and living." The word "new" in the original language refers to something freshly offered or freshly sacrificed. Here we see the eternal freshness of the cross! The high priest could not rely on the offerings or sacrifices of the previous years. He had to have fresh offerings and fresh sacrifices. He only dared to enter and was able to enter the Holy of Holies through the blood of these animals. What about us now? We come to God by the blood of the Lord and through His body. Every time we come before God, we do not have to offer up sacrifices afresh. Our Sacrifice is forever fresh! The Lord Jesus' cross does not turn old with the years. Its freshness is the same today and forever as it was at the time of crucifixion. Every time we come before God, we can sense the freshness of the Lord's cross. In the ancient times, unless the high priest had fresh blood of newly offered sacrifices, he would die before the Lord. The sacrifice of previous years could not redeem him from his current year's sins. If God did not consider the Lord's redemptive sacrifice as eternally fresh, we would have perished long ago. Thank the Lord that the cross is forever fresh before the Lord. The Lord considers the crucifixion as something freshly accomplished.

This way is also "living." This word can also be translated as "forever living." This way is a way that is "freshly offered." It is also a way that is "forever living." Christ has died and has resurrected; He has accomplished salvation for us and has led us to God. We should know that Christ has resurrected and that His resurrection remains until today. We should also know that Christ has died and that His substitutional death continues until today. The greatest events in the earthly life of Christ were His death and resurrection. Both are not past, obsolete events. They are still fresh today. Since we have such a fresh, redeeming Savior, we should receive Him and come to God through Him to receive forgiveness and blessing.

Revelation 5 records how John saw the Lord Jesus Christ in heaven. He said, "And I saw in the midst of the throne and of the four living creatures and in the midst of the elders a Lamb standing as having just been slain" (v. 6). This is a picture of the future. When John saw the Lord in heaven, it was many years after Golgotha. Yet the Lord was like One who had just been slain. The words "having just been slain" can also be translated as "having been freshly slain." In heaven at the time of the ushering in of eternity, the Lord

will still be the One who is freshly slain! Oh, the eternal freshness of the cross! Truly the cross passes through all ages and remains fresh! If the cross will be fresh in heaven in that day, how can we consider it as being old today? In the future when the heavenly glory breaks forth, the glory of the cross will prove unfading! When God's redeemed ascend to heaven, they will find the redemption of the cross still as fresh as before!

One point deserves our attention. In the Old Testament Christ is twice called the Lamb (Isa. 53:7; Jer. 11:19). In the Gospels and Acts He is mentioned as the Lamb three times (John 1:29, 36; Acts 8:32). In the Epistles He is mentioned as the Lamb once (1 Pet. 1:19). However, in Revelation He is mentioned as the Lamb twenty-eight times! The glory of the Lord's cross will outshine all ages! God purposely called His Son the Lamb in this book of eternity. The Lamb here is seen as having been freshly slain. The wound is still there! The eternal wound guarantees eternal salvation. The crucifixion of the Lamb becomes our eternal memorial. God can never forget this. The angels can never forget this, and those ascended and saved ones can never forget the redemption of the cross. Who will receive this eternal salvation? The cross is the only unshakable place. All those who have sinned should come.

THE MEMORIAL OF THE CROSS

God Himself knows the eternal worth of His Son's cross. He has manifested to all the eternal freshness of the cross of His Son. Now He desires to gain the redeemed ones so that they would know this fact also. The realization of the eternal freshness of the cross brings power. The realization of the eternal freshness of the cross brings love. The realization of the eternal freshness of the cross brings victory. The realization of the eternal freshness of the cross brings longsuffering. If we truly know the freshness of the cross, what inspiration we will receive from it! What motivation we will derive from it! If the cross is not old in our heart, we will surely have an intimate fellowship with our Lord. If a believer has forgotten the cross, it means that he has forgotten the Lord.

The Lord intends that His cross be forever fresh in our spirit and our mind. This is why He told us, "This do, as often as you drink it, unto the remembrance of Me" (1 Cor. 11:25). The words "as often as" imply "frequently." The reason the Lord established His supper is for His saints to remember Him always in His death. He foreknew that many would consider

His cross as obsolete. This was why He charged His disciples to always remember His death at the Lord's supper. He knew that worldly affairs, distractions, and temptations would come and would secretly rob the freshness of the cross from us. This is why He charged us to take the supper often and to remember Him. How fresh was the cross to us when we first believed! But after many days, the cross seems to have become hazy. When we first realized the victory of the cross, how fresh it was to us! But through frequent mention of its glory, the cross seems to have become common. However, the Lord does not want to see us losing the freshness of the cross. He desires that we remember the cross often and always have the death of the Lord before us.

It is a pity that we have lost the inspiration of the cross of the Lord Jesus. The crucifixion of the Lord Jesus should be openly portrayed before our eyes all the time (Gal. 3:1). We must never consider the Lord's cross as a mere historical monument.

The book of Galatians is an epistle on the cross. When the cross was openly portrayed before the Galatians, how free they were! When they tried to receive the Holy Spirit through the keeping of the law or be perfected through the work of the flesh, they lost the freshness of the cross. One can tell the spiritual condition of a saint just by his attitude toward the cross. If he considers the cross as something old, it shows that he is cut off from the source of his power.

THE CROSS AND SPIRITUALITY

What are the benefits of knowing the freshness of the cross? The benefits are innumerable. We know that anything new easily touches men. If something happened long ago, it does not have the power to stir men up. If we have the Lord's cross openly portrayed before us every day, how much we will be moved by it! Joseph in the ancient times was only willing to be Christ's disciple in secret. Nicodemus only dared come to see the Lord in the night. But when both saw the crucifixion of the Lord, they were greatly moved. As a result, they risked offending the crowd and asked for the body of the Lord for burial. The cross can make the most fearful men the most courageous ones. When they beheld Jesus on the cross and the way He suffered and was rebuked by men, the love of the cross inspired them and moved them. Hence, if we have the death of Christ before us all the time, we will be moved in the same way that they were moved. The cross will then become our strength.

"Should we continue in sin that grace may abound?" (Rom. 6:1). We should be able to answer this question. If we truly see the Lord's cross all the time, if we truly see how He suffered there, if we see the wounds on His hands and feet and the crown of thorns on His head, if we see how His love and blood mingled, and if we see His sufferings and sorrow, will we not be deeply moved, and will we not cease from doing things that do not please Him or cause Him sorrow? It is because we lack the eternal fresh revelation of the cross before us that we despise the love of the Lord.

If the cross on which the Lord died for us is forever fresh, our crucifixion with Him will also become unchanging. If we have a fresh revelation of the cross day by day, we will add to ourselves many fresh experiences of faith in our dying together with Him. It is because we do not see a daily cross that we have many experiences of sin resurrecting in us. If we see the eternal freshness of the cross and its ever unchanging nature, our death to sin will also be unchanging. Many children of God fail because they do not realize that the death of the cross is not just something that happened a long time ago, but something that is with us continually all the time.

We know that many times we fall unconsciously. Thank God the Father, who does not reject us because of this. The Bible says that "the blood of Jesus His Son cleanses us from every sin" (1 John 1:7). He did not cleanse us just once. The blood of His Son is still continually cleansing us. The word "cleanses" in the original has the sense of a continual action. This is the perpetual work of the cross. How wonderful it is that God has prepared for us such a salvation! If we stumble by accident, and we come to Him and confess our sins, He will forgive us, and the blood of His Son will cleanse us from all sin. What eternal freshness there is in the cross!

ETERNAL SALVATION

If we realize this, we will break forth in loud praises to God the Father. Unfortunately, many people do not know that they are saved forever. We are either not saved or saved forever. If we have once truly accepted the Lord's sacrifice for sin, and if we have once truly trusted in the merit of His cross, His cross will forever speak for us. "This is the law of the burnt offering: the burnt offering itself shall be upon the hearth on the altar all night until the morning, and the fire of the altar shall be kept burning on it" (Lev. 6:9). The burnt offering is a type of Christ, and the altar is a type of the cross. The night is a type of the present Christless age. It is the same night as the one in

Romans 13:12. Since the Sun of righteousness (the Lord Jesus) departed from this world, this world has become the night. It will remain the night until He comes again. The burnt offering shall be burning until daybreak! In the present age, the merit of the Lord's redemption is continually pleading for us! In the night, the Israelites may have been in the camp still murmuring, but the burnt offering on the altar continually interceded for them! We should realize that in the same way the blood is interceding for us. Once we have accepted the cross, it speaks for us forever! This is the eternal salvation.

In the future, when we see the cross in heaven, it will not have become old through the ages. For this reason, the salvation we have received will not become a mere monument through time. Eternity will not be a monotonous and tasteless life. Eternity may be long, but it will not take away the glory of the cross. In eternity we will see God unfolding the glory of the cross for us bit by bit. Lord, teach us the eternal freshness of the cross!

For what reason do the heavenly hosts praise the Lord? "Worthy is the Lamb who has been slain to receive the power and riches and wisdom and strength and honor and glory and blessing" (Rev. 5:12). At that time we will also praise the Lord forever because of His cross. The cross is the subject of the Bible on earth today. It will be the cause of praise in glory in the future.

Brothers, how fresh is the cross! The cross does not know what time is. The cross does not know what oldness is. May we be constantly moved by it! Oh, may we be lost in the cross all the days of our life! Oh, may the cross not lose its power on us for a day! Oh, may we allow the cross to do a deeper work in us every day! May the Father open our eyes to see the mystery hidden in the cross of His Son. "But far be it from me to boast except in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ" (Gal. 6:14).