

Bethel Pulpit

Sermon 285

Salvation by Grace

**Sermon preached at Bethel Chapel, Luton,
by Mr. B. A. Ramsbottom,
on Lord's day evening, 22nd March, 2009**

Text: *“Who hath saved us, and called us with an holy calling, not according to our works, but according to His own purpose and grace, which was given us in Christ Jesus before the world began, but is now made manifest by the appearing of our Saviour Jesus Christ, who hath abolished death, and hath brought life and immortality to light through the gospel” (2 Timothy 1. 9, 10).*

Paul here gives a short but beautiful summary of all the glorious doctrines of the gospel. He sets forth salvation from everlasting to everlasting. He sets it on a solid basis. He exalts the grace of God. He centres it all in Christ. He brings it down to the sinner personally. It is a wonderful summary of the glorious truths of the gospel of the grace of God. May some of us this evening sweetly feel that we are bound up here, bound up in the bundle of life with the Lord our God, that despite our sins and faults and failures and unbelief, that word is true of us:

“I’ve bound thee up secure,
’Midst all the rage of hell;
The curse thou never shalt endure,
For I’m unchangeable.”

He “hath saved us, and called us with an holy calling.” So as I often say, there is a very dark background to these beautiful truths, a dark, black background of sin and shame and ruin, the Fall, a lost condition. Why do I say that? Because if the point here is salvation, if this is where the apostle begins: He “hath saved us,” well, salvation is always *from* something. It is from a lost condition. Gadsby says, “He saves from death, destruction, and despair.” We need saving from all those things. We need saving from our sin, from the guilt of sin, from the power of sin, from sin’s dreadful penalty. Ours is a lost condition. We cannot save ourselves. Our greatest need is to be saved, and here you have this beautiful revelation of the Lord’s beloved people, “saved in the Lord with an everlasting salvation,” saved and saved eternally. O may you and I this evening have that witness within that we are bound up here, bound up in the bundle of life with the Lord our God!

He “hath saved us, and called us.” There are two things here God has joined together – we can never separate them – salvation and calling. And this is vital. You say, Who are these who are saved? Who are these who know these wonderful blessings? Who are these who are securely bound up here? Because they are sinners like others. By nature they are lost and ruined. Who are they? Now they are those who are called. *All* the saved ones in time will be called ones, and *all* the called ones are saved ones.

Now what is this calling? Of course, there is an outward call of the gospel when the gospel is preached, an outward call to repentance and faith. There is the outward call so often when affliction comes. There is the outward call when there is bereavement. God calls in many ways. But the old divines used to speak of a second calling, and they used to speak of it as an effectual call. Of course, those of you who are interested in theology, the fourth of the five points of Calvinism fixed on at the Synod of Dordrecht: *effectual calling*, which means that God in dealing sovereignly with a sinner does not just propose salvation to him; He calls him effectually. And that call must result. It is a call from death to life. It is a call from sin to God. It is a call to repentance. It is a call to faith. It is a call to prayer.

He “hath saved us, and called us *with an holy calling*.” You have that emphasis; you have it through the New Testament, that when God in His love and mercy calls a sinner by grace, then it is a holy calling. In another place it is spoken of as a “high calling,” and in another place it is spoken of as a “heavenly calling.” He “hath saved us, and called us with an holy calling.” Which means that we have to deal with a holy God, and it means we have to come out of an unholy world and its unholy profession and its unholy sins and its unholy pleasures. There is a clear work, there is a separation here. We will not feel to be holy, but we shall long to be made holy.

He “hath saved us, and called us with an holy calling.” “Whom He did foreknow, He also did predestinate ... whom He did predestinate, them He also called.” You see, “All that the Father giveth Me” – that is salvation from everlasting – “shall come to Me” – called by grace as a sinner to the feet of Jesus. “And him that cometh to Me I will in no wise cast out.” If you are concerned, beloved friends, whether you have an interest in these glorious truths of salvation, the point personally is this:

have you a little sweet hope that the Lord has personally called you from death to life? People today speak a lot about conversion. We do not object to the expression, it is scriptural, but usually the expression in the New Testament is *to be called*, to be called by God's grace. "Who hath saved us, and called us with an holy calling." What about this:

"My soul obeys the almighty call,
And runs to this relief;
I would believe Thy promise, Lord;
O help my unbelief."

That is calling. This is calling:

"A guilty, weak, and helpless worm,
On Thy kind arms I fall."

This is calling:

"To the dear fountain of Thy blood,
Incarnate God, I fly."

Now this is calling, because you may try to look at it this way and that, but this calling always terminates at the feet of the Saviour. O that is vital! It terminates at the feet of the Saviour. If you have been brought there in all your helplessness and need, seeking mercy, praying to be right, asking to be prepared, if you are there waiting at the feet of Jesus, then you know this calling; then you have been called.

"Who hath saved us, and called us with an holy calling, not according to our works, but according to His own purpose and grace." Now this emphasis is vital and this is the emphasis we have right through the New Testament, that a sinner cannot merit salvation. He cannot do anything to earn it, anything to deserve it. It is not according to works, either done before or afterwards. It is on the grounds of grace and grace alone, that grace which is absolutely free, that grace which forgives, which pardons, which saves, without merit, without price.

He "hath saved us, and called us with an holy calling, not according to our works, but according to His own purpose and grace." In one of our chapel graveyards there is this on one of the tombstones:

"'Tis not by works of righteousness
Which our own hands have done,

But we are saved by sovereign grace,
Abounding in the Son.”

Now that is it. “Not by works of righteousness”; “not according to our works, but according to His own purpose and grace.”

Well, the enemies of the truth have said, then a sinner can live as he wants, go on in his sin, enjoy himself; the more he sins, the more grace abounds. O how contrary to the whole spirit of the gospel! The very thought of it was anathema to the Apostle Paul. He said, “Shall we continue in sin, that grace may abound? God forbid.” The grace that saves always sanctifies. The grace that saves freely is the grace that calls with this holy calling. And though the sinner is saved entirely through the merits of free grace, called with this holy calling, his delight is to walk in the ways of righteousness, to live to the honour and glory of God – not to merit salvation, not to earn it, but from a principle of love, from a principle of gratitude. We sang of it this morning:

“Immortal principles forbid
The sons of God to sin.”

“Who hath saved us, and called us with an holy calling, not according to our works, but according to His own purpose and grace.” So the apostle here traces salvation back to its eternal origin. He traces grace right back to the source, that fountain of the “water of life, clear as crystal, proceeding out of the throne of God and of the Lamb.” That is grace in its eternal origin, grace in all its fulness, grace bringing salvation.

“According to His own purpose and grace, which was given us in Christ Jesus before the world began.” So grace in the everlasting purposes of God, grace in God’s eternal choice, grace in the covenant, grace in the plan of salvation, grace as sinners were loved with an everlasting love. Believer,

“He gave you grace in Christ His Son,
Before He spread the starry sky.”

If only you can trace the streams of love back to their fountain, if you can see eternal thoughts of love and mercy to you, if you can see your safety, your security there before time had any being.

He “hath saved us, and called us with an holy calling, not according to our works, but according to His own purpose and grace,

which was given us in Christ Jesus before the world began.” Now that is the grace of God in the plan of salvation from everlasting. But then secondly, He brings this grace in its outflowing in the Person and work of the Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. He says this grace from everlasting “is now made manifest by the appearing of our Saviour Jesus Christ.” Some people say we should not make much of the birth of Jesus, we should not make much of His coming. Well, the apostle does here. This grace is “made manifest by the appearing.” I suppose you young ones at school at Christmas have heard people talk about *epiphany*. Well, this word “appearing,” in the original is “epiphany.” That is what epiphany is: the appearing of our Lord Jesus Christ, the sun rising, if you will. “The dayspring from on high hath visited us, to give light to them that sit in darkness and in the shadow of death, to guide our feet into the way of peace.” His appearing; “the appearing of our Saviour Jesus Christ.”

“Jesus the Lord appears at last,
And makes His Father’s counsels known;
Declares the great transactions past,
And brings immortal blessings down.”

Bless God for the appearing of His dear Son at Bethlehem. Bless the Saviour that He came, that He appeared. And some of you this evening long that the Saviour might appear to you personally.

“But is now made manifest by the appearing of our Saviour Jesus Christ.” Now this appearing is not just to be limited to the birth of the Saviour. It is the whole of His life and death and resurrection, His saving work. And you notice the apostle does not just say, the appearing of Jesus Christ. He says, “*Our Saviour*.” O the grace of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ! If we see nothing else tonight, may we by faith see this: the appearing of the Saviour. May we be able to say, “The appearing of *our* Saviour,” and if not with the sweet assurance of faith, with the longing of faith in this sense: He is my only hope of salvation.

“Given us in Christ Jesus before the world began, but is now made manifest by the appearing of our Saviour Jesus Christ.” There is so much about His appearing, and there are some wonderful promises to those who love His appearing. There are some of those here tonight, aren’t there, those of you who love His appearing? “But now once in the end of the world hath He appeared to put away sin by the sacrifice of Himself.” Do you love that appearing?

He “is now made manifest by the appearing of our Saviour Jesus Christ.” When I was a little boy, the old men used to use that expression a lot, the preachers and the people at the prayer meeting, this word *made manifest*. I could never make much sense of it, but really what it means: to make something clear, to make it plain. Paul is talking about the secret counsels of God in eternity from everlasting. But now these things are made plain. They are made clear in the Person and in the work of Jesus. “For ye know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that, though He was rich, yet for your sakes He became poor, that ye through His poverty might be rich.”

“Grace, which was given us in Christ Jesus before the world began, but is now made manifest by the appearing of our Saviour Jesus Christ.” Now what has He done in salvation? You have a negative and a positive. The negative: He “hath abolished death”; and the positive: He “hath brought life and immortality to light.” He “hath abolished death.” What does that mean, because we all must die unless the Lord first comes? “It is appointed unto men once to die, but after this the judgment.” When the Lord Jesus died and made atonement for sin, for His beloved people He abolished death. And He confirmed it in His resurrection. Now in two or three ways. Eternal death in hell, the Lord Jesus dying and rising again, He abolished that for His people. He said, “I am He that liveth, and was dead; and, behold, I am alive for evermore, Amen; and have the keys of hell and of death.” Now He has abolished death. And then for the believer, though he must die, yet there is no sting in death for the believer. There is no sting; there is no bitterness. Death for the believer has lost its sting. “O death, where is thy sting? O grave, where is thy victory?” For the believer, to die is to sleep in Jesus. Now He has abolished death.

I do not know whether you have noticed it, but we read of the *death* of Christ, that solemn death, that awful death.

“Thine was a bitter death indeed,
Thou harmless, suffering Lamb of God!”

But then afterwards you do not read of believers dying. Well, soon after, Stephen. It was a cruel death. But we read, “He fell asleep” in Jesus. And then we have that beautiful passage that we read at our funerals: “We believe that Jesus *died* ... even so them also which *sleep in Jesus*” – not those that die. “We believe that Jesus *died*” and they “which *sleep in Jesus* will God bring with Him.”

“Asleep in Jesus! Blessed sleep!
From which none ever wakes to weep.”

He “hath abolished death.” And then you see there is spiritual death, and the effect of the Saviour’s death and resurrection is to give spiritual life to His people, and to abolish their state of spiritual death. “I am the resurrection, and the life: he that believeth in Me, though he were dead, yet shall he live: and whosoever liveth and believeth in Me shall never die. Believest thou this?”

“But is now made manifest by the appearing of our Saviour Jesus Christ, who hath abolished death, and hath brought life and immortality to light.” I take this expression, “life and immortality,” to be another way of saying *immortal life*. He hath brought *immortal life* to light. So first of all we have the glorious resurrection of the Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. Triumphant over sin, death, hell and the grave, He “brought life and immortality to light.” Then we have it in the giving of eternal life to His beloved people, these who are saved and called with this holy calling. He gives them eternal life. “I give unto them eternal life; and they shall never perish.” He “hath brought life and immortality to light.” And then in the last great day, that glorious resurrection. “Christ the firstfruits; afterward they that are Christ’s at His coming.” We have the sin-atoning death and glorious resurrection of the Saviour here, He who is according to Hosea’s prophecy the plagues of death and the victory over the grave (Hos. 13. 14).

“But is now made manifest by the appearing of our Saviour Jesus Christ, who hath abolished death, and hath brought life and immortality to light through the gospel.” These last three words: “Through the gospel.” The Lord and Saviour brought life and immortality to light when He died and when He rose again triumphant. “Vain the stone, the watch, the seal!” But the apostle says, “Through the gospel.” So really you have a third and final thing here. You have the grace first of all in the everlasting purposes of God, “given us in Christ Jesus before the world began.” And then secondly, you have this grace made known in the Saviour’s coming, in all His glorious work of salvation, especially in His death and resurrection. But then finally, this grace revealed, made known in the gospel. What a blessed gospel we have! In all its fulness,

“The vilest sinner out of hell,
Who lives to feel his need,

Is welcome to a throne of grace,
The Saviour's blood to plead."

"The glorious gospel of the blessed God." And these sacred truths here are all brought to light through the gospel. God's eternal purpose, the coming of the Saviour, that salvation, that holy calling, it is all made known to sinners in the gospel, preached in the gospel, revealed in the gospel of the grace of God. And the vital point is this: for the gospel to come right where you are and right where I am, to come right into our hearts, to be made known personally to us, for us to know this blessed life, this everlasting life in the knowledge of Christ and Him crucified; for us to know this heavenly light shining into our hearts.

Well you see, it all ends in heaven. Here you have salvation; here you have grace; here you have every blessing of the gospel; here you have it all bound up together, and the people of God bound up secure in it. O it is my desire that the Holy Spirit might sweetly lead some of you right inside this text, that you might feel you are bound up in it, you are embraced in it, despite all your unworthiness and sin, because the glory of the glorious gospel is this: that is it *all for sinners*.

"The gospel according to the power of God" [the verse before the text]. What divine power made known here! It is this that leads the apostle in sweet, sacred meditation to open up the ways in which divine power is made known in salvation. "The gospel according to the power of God; who hath saved us, and called us with an holy calling, not according to our works, but according to His own purpose and grace, which was given us in Christ Jesus before the world began, but is now made manifest by the appearing of our Saviour Jesus Christ, who hath abolished death, and hath brought life and immortality to light through the gospel."