

A GOSPEL WORTH DYING FOR

A SERMON¹

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“For whosoever will save his life shall lose it; but whosoever shall lose his life for my sake and the gospel's, the same shall save it.” Mark 8:35

How solemnly decisive are the testimonies of the word of God! If we would be saved, we must not halt between two opinions. We cannot serve, acceptably to God, two masters. We must be either cold or hot.

We have in our text, first, *a wrong spirit*, “Whosoever will save his shall lose it;” here, then, is the wrong spirit. Second, here is *a right spirit*, “Whosoever shall lose his life for my sake and the gospel's;” here is the right spirit. Third, *the happy consequence* of this right spirit, “The same shall save it.”

We have in this wrong spirit, first, the love of the world. This love of the world, through the Satanized state of our nature, is natural to us all, and this friendship of the world is enmity with God. What fearful havoc has this love of the world made upon professors of religion! See to what it brought Judas, Ananias and Sapphira, and Demas, and thousands of others, who have been, through the love of the world, drowned in perdition! How many have run well until worldly prosperity has overtaken them! Oh, then how has the fine gold become dim, and the finest gold changed! The minister dares not be faithful with such. No, they are puffed up; and as they themselves are worshippers of Mammon, they expect the poor minister and the poor of the flock to worship them, which an honest minister and an honest people will disdain to do. These professors who prosper, not in soul nor in the church generally, when dealt faithfully with, take offence, and fly off like chaff before the wind, and seek some soft, pliant minister, who will sew pillows under their armholes; and these lordly professors will, in their new position, do a few acts of benevolence, and seem wonderfully interested in their new, their soft and downy home; and well it will be for such if a dying hour does not prove their religion to be, after all, a thing of nothing. I rejoice, I greatly rejoice, that there are happy exceptions, that there are some, the more the Lord gives to them the more they give to the poor and to the cause of God; and blessed is he that considers the poor. But if one minister deal faithfully with these mammon-worshippers, there are plenty of ministers hypocritical enough to lay their highest honors down submissive at the feet of these men of the world. Such wily ministers know the kind of doctrine these like, and so these

¹ No date was given for this sermon.

ministers take care to hide some of their own doctrines, and conform so exactly to what they know will do, that there shall not be, if possible, a “jarring note.” Thus, these men of the world can sit and see themselves worshipped. But thus “spoke the Lord unto me with a *strong hand*, and instructed me that I should not walk in the way of this people: say not, A confederacy; nor fear I you their fear, neither be afraid.” How often do we see the solemn words fulfilled, that the *deceitfulness* of riches, and the lusts, that is, the *desires*, of other things choke the word, and they bring no fruit to perfection.

Others, again, love to their own infinite injury, the pleasures of the world, and get into such a spirit that the house of God becomes of very little value to such, only as it can be made and turned into an *entertainment*, a morbid craving for a kind of sight-seeing and entertainment, so as to bear as near as possible a resemblance to the theatre or the concert-room. Such are dead while they live, and have, if they ever had it, lost the simplicity of the gospel: their strength is firm; no doubting, no trembling, no fearing; they are not plagued, as are the afflicted and poor people whom the Lord leaves in the midst of Zion. The name of these pleasure lovers is Legion; for they are many, and remaining in that state will die in tranquil delusion, there will be no bands in their death; *but* the upright will, in the resurrection morning, have dominion over them.

Others, again, love the praise of men more than the praise of God; these cannot endure the least reproach; no, rather than walk in the rough, despised, reproached, hated way of vital gospel truth, rather than walk in this way, they will walk in a path which in the world’s eyes is *respectable*, though it lead to hell; and so, what of the love of the world and the *fear of man*, what numbers seek to enter in that shall not be able! How hard it is for a rich man to enter the kingdom of heaven! and he who, through the fear of man, is ashamed of Christ and of *his gospel*, shall have shame eternal for his portion. But in contrast to this worldly spirit of the present day, let us take one sample, not of a false but of a *true* gospel spirit, from one who, when he had great riches, and great honors, and great worldly pleasures before him, did, by the illumination of that Holy Spirit of God who never fails to guide into all truth, he, by the Holy Ghost, balanced the two; he saw clearly that one was temporal, the other eternal; the one sin and vanity, the other salvation and everlasting truth. He saw that the *worst* part of the one was better than the best part of the other; and so, while he chose rather to suffer affliction with the people of God than to enjoy the pleasures of enmity against God for a season, such a sinful course he shrank from, and esteemed *reproach* for Christ *greater* riches than the treasures of Egypt, for he saw that in this choice he should have Abraham’s portion, “Fear not, said the Lord, I am your shield, and your exceeding great reward.” And thus, did Moses, as shall every truth-loving Christian, have respect unto the recompence of the reward. Thus, his faith overcame the World. But he also goes on to overcome the fear of man by faith in Christ, by confidence in the promise of God, and in the God of the promise; He forsook Egypt, not fearing the wrath of the king. Here was the deadly wrath of a great king; but Moses did not compare or contrast himself with Pharaoh, but contrasted the king with God, and then Moses saw how little Pharaoh was in comparison of God, so that, as Moses feared God, he needed not to fear the wrath of the king. “I, even. I, am he that comforts you, says the Lord: who are you that you should be afraid of man that shall die (for your sake, if need be), and the son of man that shall be as grass?” And was not the confidence great as the king and his wrath were? Was not Moses justified in his confidence in God? Yes, truly; and Moses saw the God of his father Abraham in covenant, in his sworn covenant to Abraham, and Moses loved and had chosen the same God to be his God. And God in *covenant* is indeed invisible; he is, to the world, *more* invisible in this sworn covenant in

Christ than in anything else. Here the carnal mind cannot perceive him, or if it does get a transient glimpse of him, it is only to hate him the more but Moses endured, that is, continued to look upon him in the order in which the carnal eye has not seen him; but he is herein revealed by his Spirit unto his own, and if God in this sworn covenant in Christ Jesus be for us, who then can be against us? Jesus Christ is the visibility of God in covenant, and so, by Christ Jesus, Moses continued to look unto the God in covenant of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. Moses thus having overcome both the world and the fear of man, goes on, as every true believer will, until he reached the land of liberty, and so he knew that the pass-over and the sprinkling of blood were the way of escape from death; and so now, he that joins in his sacrificial perfection, and owns him, and supremely loves him, such has everlasting life, and shall not come into condemnation, but is passed from death unto life; and now he passes through the sea of wrath which shall destroy Pharaoh and his host, and this he went safely through by the interposing presence of the Lord; and that as by dry land, to show that there is no wrath to the Israelite indeed; and now liberty is complete; the Egyptians whom you have seen today you shall see no more forever; and thus, then, so to hate the world as to practically and testimonially condemn it, and so to hate our mortal lives as to think them not for one moment worth preserving at the risk of being lost. Alas! what would it profit us to build greater houses, if this night our souls be required of us? What avails the fine purple, and linen, and sumptuous fare, if tomorrow we are to lift up our eyes in hell, where the worm dies not, and the fire is not quenched? Worldly men and worldly professors have *their* good things in this life; yet, after all, their good is but evil, their riches are but poverty, their lordly importance the puff of a moment, and all sink to nothing before the solemnities of eternal truth. Happy for us when we can so recognize Eternity as to be moved with fear, and so avoid making light of the marriage supper of the Lamb, nor lightly esteem the Rock of salvation. Eternity! who can describe it? None. Erskine has, in the following, given an impressive representation of eternity:

“Ah! must I live in torturing despair,
As many years as atoms in the air?
When, these are spent, as many thousand more,
As grains of sand which crowd the ebbing shore?
When these are done, as many yet behind,
As leaves of forest shaken with the wind?
When these are done, as many to ensue,
As stems of grass on hills and dales that grew?
When these run out, as many on the march.
As starry lamps that gild the spangled arch?
When these expire, as many millions more,
As moments in the millions past before?
When all these doleful years are spent in pain,
And multiplied by myriads again,
Till numbers drown the thought, could I suppose
That then my wretched years were at a close,
This would afford some ease; but ah, I shiver
To think upon the dreadful sound *forever!*”

He, then, who will save his life shall thus be forever lost. Life is gone; no hope in God, and no return from the second death.

But, second, he who is made willing to risk all for Christ's sake and for his gospel shall be saved. Here we see Christ and the gospel are put together; We must attend carefully to this, because it meets a fearful delusion common among men. Hence, say they, never mind about doctrine if we love Christ, and believe in Christ, and follow Christ. Never mind anything else; if you love Christ; and he is your only hope, you are safe; do not trouble yourself about election, nor any other doctrine. You make Christ all in all, fall flat on the promise, believe at once, and you are safe.

“For forms and modes of faith let fools and bigots fight,
His can't be wrong whose life is in the right;

and all this sounds very feasible. But we must come to the law and to the testimony; and if they speak not according to this word, it is because there is no light in them. And also, we are to hold fast the *form* of sound words, and we are to *take heed* to the *doctrine*, and to continue therein, for our own salvation and that of others. Would it have been enough for Noah to believe in God, and pay no attention to the doctrine which described to him how the ark was to be built. What, think you, would Noah have said to anyone who should have insisted upon it that it did not matter whether he had one door or two, one window or two windows, to the ark? that it did not matter whether it was two hundred or three hundred cubits long, or whether the ark was made with two stories? Here we see the delusion, here we see that deviation in doctrine would have been certain destruction to Noah and to his house; and so with the tabernacle in the wilderness, it was not enough that Moses should make a tabernacle; but again and again did the Lord say unto him, “See that you make it according to the pattern showed to you in the mount.” And so with the temple of Solomon; and so with the *plan* of coming out of Egypt; and so with the *plan* of entering Canaan; and so here, “He that shall lose his life for my sake and the gospel's:” and so in Mark 10th, and verse 29, we have the same form of words, “He that has left houses or lands for my sake and the gospel's;” and in Luke 18th, and verse 29, “He that has left house or parents for the kingdom of God's sake, shall receive manifold more in this present time, and in the world it come, life everlasting.” And why this careful uniting of Christ and the gospel of Christ? One end to be answered is, that our faith should not stand in the wisdom or doctrines of men, but in the word and power of God; besides, what is the gospel but a revelation of what God in his mercy is? Take any part of the gospel away, we then have no sure word whereunto to take heed, as unto a light that shines in a dark place. What, then, is the gospel? Let us here have a few samples thereof. The gospel is a revelation and description of the way in which the Lord overcomes evil with good; the way in which peace prevails over trouble; the way in which salvation swallows up condemnation. And so, “How beautiful are the feet of him that brings good tidings,” tidings which show the end of all evil tidings, “and publishes peace!” This peace is a peace with God by Jesus Christ, “Being justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ.” “That publishes salvation; that says unto Zion, Your God reigns.” Here, then, is the blessed God reigning by the good that is in Christ, and by the peace that is in Christ, and by the salvation that is in Christ. This is gospel. The gospel is effectual sympathy with the spiritually poor. “The Spirit of the Lord is upon me,” said the Savior, “because he has anointed me to preach the gospel to the poor,” to the poor sinner, as one that has fallen among thieves, stripped, wounded, helpless, and wretched. The gospel comes to him to the place, and state where he is, binds up his wounds, takes care of him, takes him up, carries him into the faith of the gospel as a place of safety, and still takes care of

him. Whatever is needed for him the gospel will be responsible for. The good Samaritan does all this without one word of reproach or unkindness. This is gospel. The gospel is that which finds out the poor wandering sheep, lays it upon the shoulders of its power, and throws it into the fold of salvation; and the good shepherd herein rejoiced, and said, "I have found the sheep that was lost." There is more joy over this one *real* sheep than over all the mere nominal sheep in the world. The gospel is that which finds the piece of *real* silver, and rejoices more over it than over all the counterfeit silver in existence. The gospel is that which freely receives every returning prodigal, puts upon him the best robe, a ring on his hand, shoes on his feet; the fatted calf brought, they began to eat and be merry, and so came on the music and dancing. All this ado the elder brother did not understand. He got, Pharisee like, just information enough to make him angry; yet this elder brother *professed*, to be a son; but he was a son after the flesh, an old, but not a new covenant son, and therefore not a new creature. Yet, on the ground of the profession he made, he was entreated to come in. And if he had been a *real* son, one born of the Spirit, then all the father had would have been his; and all that the father has is in Christ. But this acceptance in Christ, this joy of a free-grace salvation, this gospel music and gospel dancing, and that because a sinner who was dead is alive, was lost and is found, is something quite out of the way of the dead-letter religion of the flesh. But the gospel heals the broken-hearted, he who feels that he is without Christ, and without hope, and without God in the world. Solitary, unhappy, fearing he shall be lost, sees the suitability of a yea and amen gospel, gladly receives the tidings thereof, he shall even be healed, and made happy in the Lord, and shall say, This God is mine, and is a soul in captivity afar off; its harp hung upon the willow. Such shall be delivered. In a word, *the* great preacher Christ Jesus preached *the* gospel to the poor, healed the broken-hearted, sets at liberty them that are bruised, and proclaims the acceptable year of the Lord; that is, the year of Jubilee, as shown in the 25th of Leviticus.

The trumpet was to begin to sound on the great day of *atonement*, and whatever was wrong the year of jubilee set right; by what the dear Savior has done, everything that is wrong is made right. He has made the crooked things straight. That is an acceptable year to the Lord, for he loves to have things straight and right, for and with his people. See in the first of the Romans how beautifully the apostle follows out this feature of the gospel, a gospel which does not return void, but prospers whereunto the Son with *power* sends it, and accomplishes just what he pleases. Of any other gospel the apostle would have been ashamed, because he knew from his own personal conversion, and from after experience, and from divine revelation, that it was by the grace of God that he was what he was. He would have been ashamed to have been such an awful traitor to God and to his own soul, as to admit any other gospel. Well did the apostle know that the gospel of the blessed God had taken away all his sin and shame; and he knew that those who have partaken of grace at all were partakers of the same effectual grace; hence said the apostle to the Philippians, "You are all partakers of my grace." And he well knew that God had thrown his eternal power especially into the gospel of Christ, that whatever else may break down, the gospel cannot break down. The heavens and the earth may pass away, but the gospel word of our God endures forever. The apostle may, therefore, well glory in the certainty of the gospel, and rejoice that no unbelief of men shall make the faith of God of none effect. No, the gospel of Christ is the power of God unto salvation unto every one that believes; and who is he that believes but he who sees and feels his need of this gospel of certainty? Unto such, then, it is sure and eternal salvation. This was preached first to the Jews, to gather out of the twelve tribes as many as were ordained to eternal life; and then to the Greeks, that is, to the Gentiles, to gather out of Gentile nations a number that

no man can number. And now, just see how this gospel-standing is maintained, for therein is the righteousness of God, that is, the righteousness of Immanuel, God with us, revealed from faith to faith, as it is written, "The just shall live by faith." From faith to faith, of course, means from one degree of faith to another. So that while we have, both within and without, so many things to pull us down, this faith in the Lord our righteousness is to build us up; and thus, from day to day, we are to live by the faith of the Son of God. The just, that is, the justified by faith, shall live by faith in that righteousness which shall ever plead their cause. For me he pleads the atoning blood; for me the righteousness of God, that is the gospel. I say nothing here of the ordinances of the gospel, or of the precepts of the gospel, all which arise from the promises of the gospel. In a word, the gospel of Christ is that which is like the New Jerusalem, compact together; beginning in divine foreknowledge, then predestination, to be conformed to the image of his Son; and he is the brightness of the Father's glory and the express image of his person. Christ becomes unto them all in all; is the way in which they are conformed to his image, and become of one mind with him. The Father and the Savior are one in the eternal safety of the sheep, and the sheep hear the voice of this gospel, which is nothing else but the Shepherd's voice, and they fall on him, and are thus one with him; and also they are to be conformed to him in glory; his joy will be their joy; and where that decree points; such are called to the knowledge of this gospel, and are justified, and then glorified; and in them the Lord will not behold iniquity, nor in them will he see perverseness, nor will he be angry with them, nor can anything be laid before God to their charge; for it is God who justifies. Thus, then, if we would have the Christ of God; if we would have the Spirit of God, and the salvation of God, and the grace of God, and the blessing of God, and the presence of God, so that it may be well with us, then, we must receive the gospel of God. To oppose his truth is to oppose him. And thus, what God has joined together let no man put asunder.

And this is that gospel which the Lord, in all ages, has revealed himself to his people by. Was not Abel made to see and feel that if he were truly righteous before God, that it must be by the righteousness of another? Did he not see that it must be by faith in the promised seed? Did he not see that that promised seed would bruise Satan's vital part, but that Satan should not be able to reach the Savior's vital part, but that he should reach to bruise, as it were, only his heel. Did not Abel's faith see where the victory would be? where and how the warfare would be accomplished? how iniquity would be pardoned, and grace and glory would be brought in? Did not Abel, with all his heart and soul, receive this gospel? did he not see that perfection was to be looked for in spotless sacrificial perfection? And as Able had sincere respect unto Christ Jesus the Lord, and to the gospel of Christ, that the gospel guided in his service to God, and that he was from heart glad of gospel tidings, that he abodes by the truth of the gospel decisively and most sincerely. His heart was thus right with the gospel of God and as his heart was right with the gospel, his heart was thereby right with God. And as Abel, through grace, thus had respect to Christ and to the gospel, God had respect unto him but as Cain had not this respect unto the gospel, nor unto the Mediator of the new covenant, God had not respect unto him, nor of course to his offering, but unto Abel, who had respect unto him who has said, "If any man love me, he shall be loved of my father, and we will come and make our abode with him." Abel, having no righteousness of his own looked unto God for righteousness as said one in the Lord, "Have I righteousness and strength?" and so Abel received the blessing, even righteousness from the God of his salvation. And that same sacrifice with which Abel was identified was accepted; and so the soul taught of God, becomes identified with the one accepted sacrifice, Christ Jesus, and thus obtains divine testimony that he is justified freely by the grace of God, in and by the gift of eternal righteousness, and by it Abel still speaks.

It is the testimony which, by being, put upon record, he still bears, and is in entire unison with the testimony we shall bear, when the top stone shall be brought forth, with shootings of grace and grace unto it. Now, considering that our lives are already forfeited by sin; it is not very much, after all, to lose our life for Christ's sake and for the gospel; so that, of all men that ever lived, those certainly were the wisest who, when put to the test, whether they would part with this life or with the words of eternal life, when they preferred any death that Satanic agency could inflict, to that of being moved away from the hope of the gospel. But here comes before us a most solemn consideration, namely, that many have laid down their lives apparently for Christ's sake, but certainly not the gospel's sake. What sect, I mean, professed Christian sect, who cannot show their long list of martyrs? How solemn the thought that many may be sincere unto death, even the death of martyrdom, and yet be sincerely wrong: yes, give their bodies to be burned; yet, if they have not the love of the truth of the gospel in them, it profits them nothing. If Satan were always a prince or as a prince of darkness, he could not be so deceptive. But, alas! what a vast amount of his awful work does he do in the professing world as an angel of light! He studies the tastes and natural and mental tendencies of men; and so, by Popish drapery, Puseyite ceremony, free-will arrogance, duty-faith craft, he manages to hide the true gospel of Christ from the multitude, lest the said gospel should shine into their hearts, and give them to see that immutable counsel, which God wills abundantly to show unto the heirs of promise. Yet look at thousands in these sects, and see how truly sincere they are! See how freely they give their hundreds and thousands to support their system; yes, and to minister to the poor! Too often do they shame those who seem to know the grace of God in truth. Many, no doubt, of these have sincerity enough to lay down their lives for their religion. How deep the mystery that mortal man should thus be deceived! Perhaps Saul of Tarsus would have died for his religion; but, in that case, would he have been saved? He would no doubt have been canonized on earth as a saint and a martyr, as many such have been. But does dying in such a state, and for such a religion, come within the compass of our text, that "he that loses his life for my sake and the gospel's, the same shall save it"? We do, indeed, need to be strong in the grace that is in Christ Jesus, in order to be safe against all the wiles of the enemy.

But in conclusion, let us look at the encouragement we here have to serve God. And Jesus has said, "If any man serves me, him will my Father honor;" so true is it that godliness has the promise of the life that now is, as well as of the life to come. "And the Lord appeared to Abraham; and said *unto him*, I am *Almighty* God." Now, Abraham, this is what you are to reckon upon; when you meet with something that is more than almighty, then you may despair. Never, as though the Lord should say, reckon your safety or your welfare by what you are, but by what I, the Lord your God, am for you and to you, and that I am able to do abundantly more than you can ask or think. What, then, does it matter what through our love to the truth we may be called upon to endure? we have God even our own God, with us as our refuge and strength, a present help in trouble! And what said the Savior upon this? Does he not, in order to encourage us, assure us that "there is no man that has left house, or brethren, or sisters, or father, or mother, or wife, or children, of lands, for my sake and the *gospel's*, but he shall receive an hundredfold now in this time, houses, and brethren, and sisters, and mothers, and children, and lands, with persecutions; and in the world to come eternal life." Now, the things and persons here left for the truth's sake must be understood literally; but the things and relations here acquired must be understood not literally, but *spiritually*. It is true we may not exclude the providential meaning that this might have; for in this sense, also, he will take care of them that trust in him. But let us look at these things spiritually, and then the word of God will explain to us the several meanings thereof. "Houses," and so "my people shall

dwell in a peaceful habitation, and in sure dwellings, and in quiet resting-places.” And all these are by faith in Christ. All these mansions of heaven are by him; he is the door to them all. This we know by the gospel, and thus we see how the Messiah and the gospel ever go together. And out of these heavenly dwellings we shall never be sent, but shall abide forever. Brethren and sisters, and, indeed, all the persons here spoken of, are children of God, and these become our companions in the Lord; so that though severed from the world, yet they are not without the best of company; they can commune with holy prophets and apostles in their sorrows and in their joys, in their hopes and in their fears, in their varied experiences, and deliverances, and final victory. Thus do the saints acquire houses, and new and heavenly relations, But also they are to have lands; and are not the promises of the gospel as lands yielding all manner of good things? and by them does not the hill of Zion yield a thousand sacred sweets before we reach the heavenly fields, or walk the golden streets? But Satan will envy those who are blest with these gospel advantages. And so, shows the Savior that these best of favors will bring upon us persecutions, for they that will live godly in Christ Jesus are sure to suffer persecution, but, nevertheless, in the world to come, without one drawback, life eternal. Why, then, should we be ashamed to own that we are strangers and pilgrims on the earth? Why should we be ashamed to belong to that sect which is everywhere spoken against? He that shall thus cleave to the truth, not the truth without the love of Christ, nor the love of Christ without the love of the truth. The two must go together; for it must be not only light, but light and truth. Send out your light, and your truth. It must be not only mercy, but mercy and truth; mercy and truth shall go before your face; it must not only be grace, but grace and truth, grace and truth came by Jesus Christ. Truth describes the light, and shows that it is the light of life, everlasting light, a sun that will never go down. Truth describes the mercy of God, and shows that it is great mercy, eternal mercy, and sure mercy. Truth describes the grace of God, and shows its freeness, richness, and all-sufficiency. Now take doctrine away. Then who is to decide what the Christ of God is, or what the salvation of God is, or what regeneration is, or what is true experience, or what is false, what ordinances we are to follow, or what not to follow, or what true gospel consistency is, or what it is not. As said one, “Your word is a lamp unto my feet, and a light unto my path.” So, shall we cleanse our way by taking heed thereto according to the word of the blessed God.

What more can be said then that such shall be saved, taken care of now, strengthened upon the bed of languishing, guided by counsel divine, and afterward received to glory? and this glory is the joy that was set before Him who endured the cross and despised the shame, and reigns to carry out the counsels of salvation. And now the Lord give us grace to be steadfast and immovable, forasmuch as we know that our labor is not in vain in the Lord. The gospel will always do us good. There are plenty of things to do us harm, but the gospel is always bringing us some good or another. It goes about doing good, and healing all that are oppressed of the devil; and moreover, unto the lovers of the gospel the Lord of the gospel says, And nothing shall by any means hurt you; all must work for good. Let us, then, go on to know the Lord, and he will revive and raise us up, and we shall live in his sight, and he will come unto us as the early and the latter rain unto the earth. Amen