

CHRIST AS SAVIOUR.

BY THE REV. W. DODGSON SYKES, M.A., Principal of
B.C.M. and T. College, Bristol.

" I HAVE listened," wrote Dr. Stanley Baker in *The Times* (Nov. 30, 1934), " to countless sermons on the League of Nations, social and economic problems, and various current events of the day. In perhaps half a dozen sermons during the last thirty years I have heard Jesus Christ set forth plainly as the Divine Saviour. . . ." While this may be the statement of an extreme case, it is indicative of a growing feeling.

In this respect I quote the words of a Diocesan Bishop who very recently gave a frank and sincere personal word to his clergy :

" They (the clergy) " he wrote in his Diocesan Letter, " can do more by ' Preaching Christ ' in place of the moral platitudes or ecclesiastical disquisitions with which we are too often content to feed a hungry people. (I speak as one who probably preaches more sermons than any clergyman in the Diocese and who is very conscious of failure in this respect.) "

In this matter we have a message that is God-given. It is His message, not ours. We are His ambassadors. Our trust and privilege is to give His message faithfully. He is responsible for the message, and He will justify it.

A century ago, when Islington slept spiritually, Daniel Wilson became Vicar (1824-32). He was received with doubts, and people spoke of leaving ; but he said that he wanted to preach one thing— " the unsearchable riches of Christ " (Eph. iii. 8) and that he would not cease his efforts " until Christ was formed in them " (Gal. iv. 19). In eight years he had done a remarkable work, the effects of which have lasted beyond a century. He said :

" We must seize the main, commanding truths of Scripture as the Apostles have summed them up. . . . In the Bible the inspired penmen have not left it in doubt, but have told us that Christ, the power of God and the wisdom of God, is the centre and cornerstone of Revelation. . . . If the minister does not seize this commanding discovery, in vain will he languish about other matters. . . . *A revived Christianity is a revived exhibition of the glorious Person of Christ.*"

May I add that the Lord Jesus Christ is to be presented as Saviour in three aspects :

- (1) He saves from the Penalty of sin ;
- (2) He saves from the Power of sin ;
- (3) He ultimately saves from the Presence of sin.

As we speak of God's " wonderful redemption for sin," I pray that He by His Spirit will guide our thoughts and affections. It is a solemn message :

" I thirst, but not as once I did,
The vain delights of earth to share ;
Thy wounds, Immanuel, all forbid
That I should seek my pleasure there.

It was the sight of Thy dear Cross
 First weaned my soul from earthly things
 And taught me to esteem as dross
 The mirth of fools and pomp of kings.

WILLIAM COWPER, 1779.

We are to deal with sin in the sight of a Holy God. We are to see how it cost the death of God's own Son to deal with our sins. In such a matter we desire no hardness—Calvary is not a school for theologians ; it is a refuge for sinners.

As I look at the early messages concerning Christ as Saviour, I find that the early preachers *gave objective facts about Jesus and His Death*. As they told the facts about Jesus, the Holy Spirit fell. It was not so much subjective experience that formed their message. It was a Risen, Living Lord and Saviour, to Whom all authority in heaven and on earth was given. He was now exalted, glorified, made both Lord and Christ, ordained to be Judge of living and dead. In every speech they proclaimed the Living Lord and Saviour. In His Name they spoke of repentance and remission of sins, of personal faith towards the Lord Jesus Christ. There was no other Saviour (Acts iv. 12). His Salvation brought Justification by faith, Power through the gift of the Holy Spirit, and Inheritance among those that were sanctified.

CHRIST A PROPITIATION.

"Christ a propitiation," said Dr. Denney, "is the inmost soul of the Gospel for sinful men."

1. Take the message of St. Paul. "By the deeds of the law there shall no flesh be justified in God's sight" (Rom. iii. 20). Every mouth is stopped. The whole world is guilty before God. But now, he declared, there is "a righteousness of God through faith in Jesus Christ." It is "apart from the law"—that is, statutory obedience cannot justify. It is "for nothing"—that is, justification costs the sinner nothing. It is "by His grace"—that is, the whole is given freely by God in undeserved mercy. The Apostle made two inferences from this : (1) Any self-glorying in man's part is wholly excluded ; (2) The Gospel is for all nations. All this comes about, says the Apostle, "through the redemption which is in Christ Jesus, Whom God set forth in propitiatory power in His blood through faith." It was all to demonstrate God's righteousness. With Christ set forth in His blood, as a propitiation, it was impossible thenceforward to think that God regarded sin with indifference. In this way He was righteous Himself and He could justify the ungodly. In another passage (2 Cor. v. 21) St. Paul wrote : "God made Him to be sin for us, Who knew no sin, that we might be made the righteousness of God in Him."

2. Take the message of St. John (1 John i. 5 ff.). St. John dealt with the false pleas of man concerning sin, but he also gave the Divine provision. "If we confess our sins, God is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness." Upon that assurance we should rest. But with the assurance he

gave the ground of forgiveness—" We have an Advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous, and He (*ἀντὶς*) is the propitiation for our sins, and not for ours only, but also for the whole world " (1 John ii. 2). The unfortunate chapter division tends to obscure the connection in the thought. That there should be no light view of sin, St. John stressed the fact that propitiation was needed, that the Lord is the Propitiation, and that our sins are the subject matter of His propitiation.

DOCTRINE OF THE ATONEMENT

We are sometimes told that Jesus never taught a doctrine of Atonement. The late Dr. Rashdall¹ endeavoured to show that the doctrine was no part of the Master's teaching ; it resulted from later reflection. This is a vital matter. I believe that Jesus spoke often and definitely concerning His death. In a context (St. Mark x. 32-45) which has full reference to His death He spoke of giving His life a ransom for many. At the last Supper, He spoke of His blood as Covenant blood shed unto remission of sins. Rashdall lightly dismissed the former words : if the words are genuine, they cannot, he said, bear any reference to atonement—" if it is insisted that they can only bear the meaning which later dogmatic theology put upon them, they cannot be genuine " (p. 56).

The weakness to-day is that we do not realise the holiness of God. Dr. Forsyth has stated that when he spoke of the love of God people listened ; but, as soon as he turned to speak of the Holiness of God, he saw a perceptible change come over the audience. We have to recover the note of supreme reference to a Holy God. Without a Holy God no atonement would be needed. It is the Holiness of God that makes us realise sin as guilt. One of our Lord's first concerns was the supreme holiness of God's love, and until this holiness is divinely satisfied, man's reconciliation is impossible.

It is often urged that God's forgiveness is free ; that, as the father received the prodigal son, so God receives the sinner quite freely. There is no need of atonement or propitiatory sacrifice, it is suggested ; we ourselves forgive without atonement.

But it is not in keeping with the New Testament to ignore the other side. The parable of the Prodigal Son was not intended to illustrate the Atonement : it illustrates, as the other parables in Luke xv, repentance. Parables usually have one main thought, and are not intended to be used as full doctrinal statements. There are numerous passages which assert a causative connection between Christ's Death and man's reconciliation. God has taken upon Himself to remove the guilt as well as to show forgiveness. *I suggest that we should take care in our use of language that we do not seem to make the representation that Christ came to pacify an unwilling God. This would be to set the Son against the Father and to break up the persons of the Trinity. The representation of the New Testament is different. " God was in Christ reconciling the world to Himself " (2 Cor. v. 19). " God so loved the world, that He gave*

¹ *The Origin and Growth of the Atonement Doctrine*, pp. 75, 435.

His only begotten Son." It was all the outcome of God's love. "God commendeth His love towards us in that while we were yet sinners Christ died for us" (Rom. v. 8). Our Lord came not to pacify an unwilling Father but to satisfy a broken law.

Nor should we be tempted to think an Atonement by Christ is immoral, that God punished an innocent Man. On the contrary, it was the resolve of God Himself to satisfy the law and to endure in Himself the suffering. Far from being immoral, the Atonement is the greatest moral force in the world.

"The love which can literally go out of itself and make the burden of others its own, is the radical principle of all the genuine and victorious morality in the world. And to say that love cannot do any such thing, that the whole formula of morality is, every man shall bear his own burden, is to deny the plainest facts of the moral life."¹

Similarly Dale² says that instead of an indignant cry of shame there arises a cry of thanksgiving and worship for the act of Christ in enduring the suffering which He must otherwise have inflicted. It is a cry of appreciation of the resolve of God Himself in the person of Christ to endure the suffering. To avoid the terrible necessity of condemning man, the Moral Ruler of man assumed our nature and died. "It is," says Dale, "the most wonderful proof of God's infinite love, the supreme manifestation of God's moral perfection." The self-sacrifice which is the flower and crown of human excellence is not impossible with God. It has kindled the most passionate love in man.

"How condescending and how kind
Was God's eternal Son!
Our misery reached His heavenly mind,
And pity brought Him down.

This was compassion like a God,
That when the Saviour knew
The price of pardon was His blood,
His pity ne'er withdrew."

DR. WATTS (1709).

CHRIST AND HIS SALVATION.

I add some brief remarks on Christ and His Salvation.

(1) *Salvation in Christ is one of Absolute Freeness.* The fact that we are "made nigh by the blood of Christ" is the groundwork of pardon, peace, and power. It is on this ground that we can give the message of the *absolute freeness* of Christ's salvation to a sinner. This freeness is the essence of the good news concerning Christ as Saviour.

The sinner is to come to Christ with all his needs. He is not to stay, no not for one moment, to make himself in a better condition. He is to come *just as he is* to the Saviour who saves from the penalty and the power of sins. The wise sick man does not wait till he feels somewhat better before going to a physician, and the sin-sick soul should similarly not wait one moment before applying to the Saviour.

¹ Denney, *The Atonement and the Modern Mind*, 1910, pp. 102-3.

² *The Atonement*, pp. 394-7.

“ Just as I am—Thy love unknown
Has broken every barrier down,
Now to be Thine, yea Thine alone—
O Lamb of God, I come.

Just as I am—and waiting not
To rid my soul of one dark blot,
To Thee Whose blood can cleanse each spot—
O Lamb of God, I come.

Just as I am—Thou wilt receive,
Wilt welcome, pardon, cleanse, relieve,
Because Thy promise I believe,
O Lamb of God, I come.”

CHARLOTTE ELLIOTT.

“ I thought that I was to bring repentance,” says one.

Spurgeon answered: “ Do not attempt to do so, but look to Jesus for it—Christ is exalted to give repentance.”

“ I haven't enough faith,” says another. Come to Him for it!

“ I am too bad,” says a third. “ This is a faithful saying and worthy of all acceptance that Christ Jesus came into the world to save *sinners*.”

“ None are so bad,” said John Newton, “ but the Gospel affords them a ground of hope; none are so good as to have any just ground of hope without it.”

(2) *Salvation in Christ has Great Privilege and Power.* What happens as we find Christ as Saviour? We realise our sin and our need, our guiltiness and sinfulness. We seek in the Saviour mercy and acceptance, new life and new power. We read the Saviour's words and hear them in our soul:

“ All that the Father giveth Me shall come to Me,
And him that cometh I will in no wise cast out.”

(John vi. 37.)

We come to Him. We trust Him and His word.

Our assurance rests upon His word and promise, not upon our feelings. We find by the Spirit's teaching through the Word and in our own experience the wonderful blessings given to us in God's Son, our Saviour.

(a) *Forgiveness of Sins.* “ Through this Man is preached unto you the forgiveness of sins ” (Acts xiii. 38). The sins are blotted out—they are cast behind God's back. The Saviour has blotted out the handwriting of ordinances that was against us; He has taken it out of the way, nailing it to His Cross (Col. ii. 14).

(b) *Justification.* Though sinners we are accounted righteous before God in Christ. This is entirely of God's grace, undeserved mercy. Justification by faith is to us not a shibboleth; it is a Divine reality in Christ. We learn our standing in Christ, and we seek to live accordingly. “ The crown,” said Bishop Ryle, “ has indeed fallen from a Christian's head when he leaves the doctrine of justification by faith.”

(c) *Indwelling.* Our body becomes the temple—the sanctuary of

the Holy Ghost (1 Cor. vi. 19). The Christian is "sealed with the Holy Spirit of promise." He walks and lives in the Spirit. He knows that Christ indwells him by His Spirit.

(d) *New Strength in Union with Christ.* Thus united to a living Saviour, he finds a new power pulsating through his life. He estimates all things not according to his own strength, but according to the power of Him Who does abundantly above all that we ask or think.

(3) *The Gospel is an individual matter.* In the 1926 Conference it was stated: "Individual salvation is the first and indispensable aim of all Christian work."

The Gospel accomplishes the new birth of the soul. It will have wide results, but it is essentially and necessarily *individual in its beginning*. The Evangelical Revival brought individuals into personal touch with a Living Saviour; there were wider results—according to Lecky, it breathed into the people of the land generally a resolute moral and religious character; it led to much amelioration of social conditions—but *in its work it was essentially individual*. This, I believe, is the Gospel order. It is a personal, individual matter.

It is not by the administration of sacraments, not by outward admission into the Visible Church, but by the Holy Spirit in the exercise of personal faith and touch with a living Saviour that salvation is found.

(4) *The Gospel Order is Salvation first, then response in life.* Henry Venn (1724–97), in his *The Complete Duty of Man*, spoke of the defect of the earlier work, *The Whole Duty of Man*: "It is evident that the great thing that is wanting in that celebrated treatise, towards obtaining the end for which it was written: *since Christ the lawgiver will always speak in vain unless Christ the Saviour be first known.*" He spoke of all treatises written to promote holiness of living as deplorably defective, unless the Cross of Christ was laid as the foundation.

The change in the ministry of Dr. Chalmers has often been related. He thought conscientiously to teach his people the duties of the Christian religion, but the more he preached the duties the less he seemed to achieve in result. Then there came the awakening. He preached the satisfaction of a broken law by the Atonement of our Lord Jesus Christ. It was a new note that had been struck. People heard of the depth of love in the heart of Jesus Christ, and with the knowledge of it there came a breaking down of human souls before the Cross of our Lord Jesus Christ.

(5) *If there is a question where the truth of the Gospel is concerned there has to be loving, faithful witness; there cannot be truce, no not for an hour.* As I read the New Testament, I find controversy, true controversy. If Paul withstood Peter to the face, it was because he was to be blamed in a matter of vital truth and conduct. If anyone proposes the Blessed Virgin Mary or others as Mediators between man and God, it is my duty to Christ and my duty to a sinner to say that there is only one Mediator between man and God, the man

Jesus Christ, Who gave Himself a ransom. The Reformers had no truce on the sacrifice of the Mass, and they did a work in England that has lasted for centuries. In the Mass there is not, and cannot be, a propitiatory sacrifice for the living and the dead : there is no more offering for sins. Truce on this matter, as in the truth of the Divinity of our Lord, in effect denies the truths of the New Testament. The only safeguard, in my judgment, is to maintain in season and out of season the full truth concerning our Lord as sole Mediator between God and man, as the One Sacrifice for sins once offered, as the one Hope of the sinner who comes to Him in personal faith. Our objection to the insistence upon Auricular Confession takes its rise from the truth that Christ is a High Priest Who is able to save the sinner to the uttermost. Any doctrine that sets someone or something between the sinner and the Saviour, that substitutes outward ceremonies for personal trust and self-committal, must for the honour of the Saviour and for safety in the salvation of the sinner, be firmly, yet lovingly, put out of the way, so that the free grace of God in Christ may have its full proclamation.

(6) *Finally, our work is to "preach Christ"—i.e. to preach not a theory or creed, but a Person.* He is a Person Who is a Saviour, able to deliver, able to recreate, able to satisfy, able to inspire. We have to preach Christ according to the Scriptures—to preach Christ crucified. We declare His redemption, the forgiveness of sins in His blood. This is the Gospel : "Christ died for the ungodly." We love the life of Christ in all its beauty ; but we do not propose the "Imitation of Christ" to sinful man as the means of his salvation. The message is : "He hath made Him to be sin for us, Who knew no sin, that we might be made the righteousness of God in Him." He is absolutely necessary—"In none other is salvation." He is absolutely sufficient—we are "complete in Him." He is absolutely accessible—"Him that cometh unto Me I will in no wise cast out." He alone is the Saviour : He saves us here and now from the penalty of sin, He saves us now from the power of sin, and He will finally save us entirely from the presence of sin.

LITERATURE.

R. W. DALE : *The Atonement* (1875).

P. T. FORSYTH : *Cruciality of the Cross* (1909).

JAMES DENNEY : *The Death of Christ* (1903) ; *Atonement and the Modern Mind* (1910) ; *Christian Doctrine of Reconciliation* (1917).

"THIS ABOVE ALL. . . ." By Mary Gamble. *Allenson*. 2s. net.

This is "a Plea for Honesty at all costs" by a young person very much in earnest and very critical of nearly everything that is. We understand and sympathise with much that she advances. She seems, however, to live in a world peopled by prudes, snobs, ogres and hypocrites—people with no common sense and wholly lacking in humour. Further experience will doubtless correct some of her views. There is a Foreword by the Bishop of Malmesbury.