

SALVATION AS LIFE.

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SALVATION is one of the greatest words and ideas in our religion, imperishably associated with the work and Person of Jesus Christ, its Founder and our Saviour. But no word or idea has been interpreted in so many different ways ; no word or idea has been so much abused and strained far from the Master's own idea. By some it is regarded as a plan of escape. By others it is considered something that is given to us without any effort of our own ; and by many it is held to be "the making of one's soul" by good deeds. But if we desire to know what is implied by salvation we should search the Scriptures in the originals. To begin with the Gospels : in the Gospel of St. John (x. 9) we find our Lord's luminous utterance, "Through Me if any one shall enter in, he shall be saved, and shall go in and out, and find pasture." Our Lord thus speaks of salvation as a process begun in this present and to be fulfilled in the future. It is a significant fact that the Syriac word corresponding to salvation is life. Where the Greek has "he shall be saved" (*sōthēsetai*) the Syriac reads "he shall live" (*nikhe*) ; where the Greek has "salvation (*sōtēria*) is of the Jews" the Syriac has "life (*khaye*) is of the Jews" (John iv. 23). In the language, then, most akin to that which our Lord used, the word for salvation is life. In Acts v. 20, the apostles were bidden by an angel to go and speak to the people "all the words of this *life*." This fact throws light on this mysterious subject—the salvation of the human soul. It is now no longer obscure, for it is life, the higher life, the spiritual life. Thus we may see why our Lord never said "I am the salvation," but "I am the Life." Life is a more significant, a more picturesque word to describe the gift of God. It is the Saviour's word. On one occasion His words to Zacchæus, as reported in Greek, are : "This day is salvation come to this house." But the Syriac expression here also is "life." Salvation is the Jewish term enshrined in the songs of the Psalms and immortalized in the names Joshua and Jesus. But life—not *bios* the span of life on earth, but *Zōē* the eternal principle of spirit life—is the Master's term. How many pitfalls had Christian theology been saved if it had adhered to that simple word which is capable of so lofty and extended an application ! But it can extricate itself from the conflicting theories of the past if it returns to the Master's word and mentally reads "spiritual life" wherever the term "salvation" confronts it. For we shall see that as life is a process with a past, a present, and a future ; salvation is also a process within the soul of man, begun, continued and ended in God. And as spiritual life is salvation, salvation is spiritual life ; a life that is given by Christ, but a life that is lived by man ; a life that commences with the new birth and leads us on to the resurrection glory.

Let us see if this explanation fits in with the New Testament use of the word salvation. It speaks of many who have been brought into the way of salvation, of many who are being saved, but never speaks of any man's salvation as a thing completed and perfected on earth. For no one would say of his spiritual life (*Zōē*) that it had been fully rounded off and consummated in this sphere of existence. In the Acts (ii. 47) we read that "the Lord added to the Church daily those who were being saved," not "who should be saved," for there is no thought of predestination in the Greek word (*sozomenous*). "By hope," wrote St. Paul, "we have been brought into a state of salvation" (*esōthemen*, Rom. viii. 24), the emphasis being upon the act of bringing. In his first epistle to the Corinthians he refers to his message as "the Gospel which I preached unto you, which also ye received, in which ye also stand, and through which ye are being saved" (*sōzesthe*). In his second epistle to the same people he says, "For we are a sweet savour of Christ, God-ward in them that are being saved (*sozomenois*) and in them that are perishing." In his first pastoral epistle to Timothy (ii. 4) the same Apostle writes of God our Saviour, "Who willeth that all men should come into the state of salvation (*sōthenai*) and the knowledge of the truth"; and in his letter to the Ephesians (ii. 5, 8) he says, "By grace have ye been saved" (R.V., *sēsomenoi*). The perfect is used here by the Apostle, but not in the sense that the salvation of the Ephesians was in any way perfected or completed, for he proceeds to pray the Father for them, "that He would grant them, according to the riches of His mercy, to be strengthened with might by His Spirit in the inner man; that Christ may dwell in their hearts by faith; that they, being rooted and grounded in love, may be able to comprehend with all saints, what is the breadth, and length, and depth, and height; and to know the love of Christ which passeth knowledge, that they may be filled with all the fulness of God."

The expression "by grace have ye been saved," therefore, as the context shows, does not mean "by grace your salvation is completed," but "by grace your salvation has been commenced." Now, if in all these passages we read the word life (spiritual life) instead of salvation, we shall find it much easier to arrive at the meaning of the writer, e.g., "the Lord continued to add to the Church those who were spiritually living"; "by hope we have been brought into spiritual life"; "through which Gospel ye are spiritually living"; "we are a sweet savour of Christ, both in those who are living the spiritual life and in those who are not so living"; "God, our Saviour, Who willeth that all men should enter into spiritual life"; "by grace ye have been brought into and ye continue in the spiritual life." The doctrine of the epistles, the teaching of the Apostles, is thus brought into line with the Gospel of the Master Himself, in Whom is Life, "Who is the Way, the Truth, and the Life," "Who is come that men may have life, and may have it abundantly," and Who is well described in the history of the infant Church as "the Prince of life" (Acts iii. 15), for "he who hath the Son hath eternal life" (John iii. 36). Therefore, as by natural birth we are introduced into the natural kingdom; so by a spiritual birth—a birth of water and Spirit—we

enter into the Kingdom of Spirit. There is a natural order in the spiritual world. There is a spiritual life as there is a physical life, and the spiritual life is salvation, the state of those who are being gradually made whole and perfect in Christ.

That life is described in the New Testament as needing constant renewal and regeneration. For as the constant waste in the body must be made good and the used-up tissues must be removed ; so must the life of the spirit, in view of the constant wear and tear of sin and temptation, be kept constantly renewed and restored. St. Jude (24) commends his readers, "unto Him that is able to keep them from falling and to present them faultless in the presence of His glory with great joy." St. Paul commends the Thessalonians to the care of God thus : "The very God of peace sanctify you wholly ; and I pray God your whole spirit and soul and body be preserved blameless unto the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ." And he thus addresses the men of Colossae : "And you that were once estranged and hostile in your mind through evil works, yet now hath He reconciled in the body of His flesh through death to present you holy and without blame and without reproach if ye continue in the faith grounded and steadfast."

Salvation for St. Paul was no mere scheme of escape. In his comprehensive view he regarded human nature in its entirety and in the light of its end. He saw that the *summum bonum* (the supreme good) of our humanity was not merely deliverance from the actual evil that the flesh is heir to, but that it also involves a realization of all that God designed that we should become—a self-realization by self in God. This, the ideal of our human condition, has been realized by one only Man, Who was also God, and is, therefore, realizable only by those who have been "regenerated into Him." It is, in a word, "the likeness of God" which is attained by following Christ. This is the final end of man, that which God intended he should strive after and become.

Regarding the Christian's life in the light of this end, the writer to the Hebrews (vi. 1) says, "let us be carried unto perfection." For the crowning point of the spiritual life is a full development of all our higher powers, a being gradually made whole, body, soul, and spirit, a perfection of our personality and all that it implies, a full realization of all our ideals, an expansion to maturity of all our capacities, a complete attainment of the likeness of Him in Whose image man was made, even the consummation of the promise of human life in the perfection of the heavenly existence. Such a process of life, by which man is to reach the goal of his being and to attain his divinely appointed end, cannot, of necessity, be completed in time, but must be carried forward into another stage of being, where this corruptible shall put on incorruption, and this mortal shall put on immortality ; where the spirit, emancipated and enfranchized from this "cabined and confined" existence and the present limitations of, and impediments to, its growth, shall soar to grander spheres of being and bliss, when it shall be transfigured with the glory of the risen Christ, when it shall respond to the touch of the Divine Spirit, no longer as a lifeless and

iron-bound instrument of wood, but as a living soul freely vibrating with the harmonies of angels and swelling with the rapture of heaven. Such a golden prospect, such a glorious vision that breaks upon the soul, filling it with hope and love, and lifting it above the cares of earth to the glory of God, cheers and encourages us as we toil up the steep ascent to the summit where our Sun shines, and where our salvation shall be completed and consummated.

In the meantime, we are drawn away from our vision by the stern realities of this life, which we must face and master ; otherwise there will be little growth and little advance. Our development in the way of the divine likeness is retarded by the conflict that is incessantly waged by the spirit with the flesh¹ ; and by the higher nature with a lower medium and organism. In this conflict the Divine Spirit alone can make us conquerors.² Of this conflict conscience is the recording angel : and from this conflict death alone can free us, for we can never wholly and completely overcome the evil, just as we can never wholly and completely reach the good in this mortal life. But we have a blessed encouragement in the words of St. John, "if we walk in the light as He is in the light, we have communion one with another, and the blood of Jesus continues to cleanse³ us from every sin." This process, which we have found to be a spiritual one, for its sphere is the spirit of man, is also eternal, an æonian life begun, continued and ended in God. Life is defined by Aristotle as the activity or energy proper to man as man. As the life of the body is an activity, and the secret of a healthy life is activity, the existence of the spirit is a divine activity, and is, therefore, well described by the Apostle as "God energizing in us both to will and to energize,"⁴ that is, producing in us both the power to will and the power to perform. The end of life is not, therefore, "simple existence," but right activity. To a larger view life is God, as He gives unity, purpose, energy and stability to things created. But in particular, Christ is the life of the believer, He is the spiritual life in Himself, and He gives what He is ; He imparts Himself, His spiritual life, to the true disciple ; He brings to completion his yet imperfect being, drawing him out of tribulation into triumph, bringing him from faith to faith, leading him by the way of failure to the goal of success, and crowning his cross with the garland of victory. He helps us to work out our salvation, to realize all our powers for good, because He worketh in us. In such a way He, the Christ in us, the *Christus Immanens*, is the source and principle of life, through the Holy Ghost, the Lord and Giver of life, Who is our support and Inspirator in this struggle for existence. Thus we have in salvation "a new sphere of service, a new motive of action, a new pledge of immortality."

Salvation is, therefore, a spiritual process, with a beginning, a middle and an ending ; it is the life of the spirit as it is begun, continued and ended in God. It is not, therefore, to be described as an escape from punishment, although it is a grand deliverance from sin. It is not, therefore, to be regarded as a being let off something, for it

¹ Romans vii. 15-25.

² i. 1, 7 : καθαρῶς.

³ Gal. v. 17.

⁴ Phil. ii. 13.

is a being made someone, a becoming pure and child-like, sweet and Christ-like, strong and God-like. It is not, therefore, to be viewed merely as a gift, although it is the gift of God. For such a gift, when not appropriated, assimilated and utilized by the whole mind and soul and will, would hardly touch the outer verge of human existence. Nor, again, may it be merely considered as something which is made by our works, although without our efforts it is not to be achieved. For it is only attained in union with God, the human will working harmoniously with the Divine, the human love responding to the Divine love, and the human spirit receiving the Spirit of God.

No one may, therefore, boldly declare that he is a saved man, except in the sense that he has been brought into the state of salvation. For God alone can judge of the state of men's minds, life and spiritual existence. While life lasts there must be a continual conflict with sin, as well as a constant growth in righteousness. In its negative aspect salvation means redemption from the penalty and the power of sin, but does not imply freedom from its presence. That haunting and hindering presence constitutes the tragedy of life, the never-ceasing troubles and trials of the flesh. While life lasts salvation is progressing. For salvation is spiritual life. And the conditions of progress are "that we walk in the light as He is in the light" (1 John i. 7); and "that we continue in the faith grounded and steadfast" (Col. i. 23). For if faith be the source of good works, obedience is the test of faith, and salvation is the life of faith. And is therefore continually advancing unto the likeness of the Son who is "perfected for evermore" (Heb. vii. 28). Salvation is, accordingly, the grand result of the grace of the Atonement imparted to man by the Spirit of God in the Life of Him Who made the Atonement, and bearing fruit by energizing in His life through the same Spirit.

HIS LIFE IN PRAYER. By Paul B. Bull, M.A., C.R. *S.P.C.K.* 2s.

Much material will be found in this study of the prayers of our Lord which is published at the modest price of 2s. It is divided into three parts: (1) The Nature of Prayer; (2) The Recorded Prayings of our Lord; (3) Devotions for the Week. The point of view from which the writer approaches the subject naturally colours his exposition, and Evangelicals will not endorse all they find in these pages.

H. D.

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It would be impossible for anyone to read this devotional book without being helped by it. Shrewd analysis, apt illustrations, and the personal experience of the writer enhance its value. Yet it will not be likely wholly to please everyone. The authoress, an ex-Presbyterian, makes much of the "Blessed Sacrament" and seems to have a penchant for Priests, Monks and Nuns.