

SALVATION

by T. E. Cramblet

TEXT.—"How shall we escape if we neglect so great salvation ?" — Heb. 2:3.

There are passages of Scripture that have been so long and so often misapplied that, for most people, they have lost their original import and meaning. The text chosen for this homily is one of these. The reading of this question causes one to think of the unsaved among his acquaintance and to be anxious for their salvation, and yet if we apply those fundamental rules of interpretation, "Who speaks?" and "To whom?" we must at once see that the writer had in mind only those Jews who had accepted Christ and were fellow-heirs with him in the kingdom. A little further on in the Epistle he designates the persons addressed, in this language: "Wherefore, holy brethren, partakers of an heavenly calling." We may therefore read: "Wherefore, holy brethren, partakers of an heavenly calling, how shall we escape if we neglect so great salvation ?"

I. IMPORTANCE OF THIS THEME: SALVATION

This life is only a drop in the great ocean of existence. True, these threescore and ten years are by no means to be despised. When it is remembered that Christian salvation has to do with the life that now is as well as with that which is to come, the appreciation of the question, "What must I do to be saved?" is much enhanced. How can I become enriched with this world's goods? How may I obtain an education? How may I gain and maintain a place in good society? How may I become free from debt? How may I get on in the world? These are, for the individual, interesting and important questions, but they do not compare in value with the problem of salvation.

Whatever one may be in this life, whatever one may accomplish, if he fails to have part in the true riches, there must come a day when these things that are temporal must rise up to mock him. "What shall it profit a man if he gain the whole world and yet lose his own soul?" How shall we escape if we neglect so great salvation ?

II. WHAT IS SALVATION?

The angel of the Lord, speaking to Joseph in a dream concerning the birth of the Redeemer, said: "And he shall bring forth a son, and thou shalt call his name Jesus, for he shall save his people from their sins." Note that the preposition is "from," not "in." Every rational human being must desire the joys of salvation, but many are unsaved because unwilling to be saved from sin. Christ Jesus came into the world to save from sin here as well as to present us in the end spotless in our Father's presence. "Unto you first, God having raised up his Son Jesus, sent him to bless you, in turning every one of you away from his sins." The unsaved soul is sick unto death. The work of the great Physician is to make the sick soul spiritually well. To be saved is more than to be pardoned. Pardon is only an incident of salvation. A man might be

pardoned and still have a corrupt heart, with all its evil desires. A thief may go out from prison walls with the official pardon in his hand, and at the same time be more confirmed in his desire and purpose to steal than when convicted and sentenced to servitude. Christian salvation is pardon for past offences, and more. It is victory over sin here and now. The more and longer one faithfully resists the tempter, the stronger he becomes. Salvation in this sense is progressive. The further one gets away from indulgence, the less liable is lie to be overcome. No one should be satisfied to spend the years of his life in bondage, since we have the promise of salvation from sin. To be free men in Christ Jesus should be the earnest longing of every heart.

III. THE GOSPEL IS THE INSTRUMENT OF SALVATION

"I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ; for it is the power of God unto salvation to every one that believes, to the Jew first, and also to the Greek." Salvation is not a question of Almightyness. God could reach his arm from the sky and rescue man from the burning; he could send his angels to warn; he could raise the dead to compel us into the narrow way; but he neither makes promises nor does any of these things. To the chosen disciples our Lord said: "Go ye into all the world, and preach the gospel to every creature." The gospel is the power; if they hear not this, neither would they be persuaded though one should rise from the dead.

What is the gospel? It is a great truth: "Jesus is the Christ, the Son of the living God." Upon this rock of truth Jesus is building his church. Where this truth is not proclaimed, the gospel in its power is not preached. Whenever this gospel is faithfully set forth, three great facts, three great commands and three great promises are made known. The three great facts are the death, burial and resurrection of Jesus. The three great commands are believe, repent, be baptized. The three great promises conditioned upon obedience to these three great commands are the forgiveness of sins, the gift of the Holy Spirit, and eternal life. The preaching of the gospel also requires the presentation of its solemn warnings. "These shall go away into everlasting destruction. Be not deceived, God is not mocked; whatsoever man soweth, that shall he also reap."

IV. WHY CALL THIS SALVATION GREAT ?

That was a mighty salvation that rescued Israel from the hand of Pharaoh at the crossing of the Red Sea. That was a great salvation that rescued these chosen people from the arm of the oppressor in the days of Gideon. The return of the captive Jews from Babylon was a salvation that brought joy to the hearts of the faithful, but these salvations were limited in their benefits to a nation. This "so great salvation", is properly named because

1. *Its author is the Son of God.* It "began to be spoken by the Lord," who is superior to angels. Angels were commanded to worship him.

2. *It saves from great depths.* "He is able to save to the uttermost all those who come to God through him." The world had reached its climax of sin. There was no balm in Gilead. Rom. 3: 18 gives us a picture of the depths of sin into which man had fallen. This picture may be confirmed by profane history. Rom. 6: 9II gives us an insight into the former sinful lives of some of the saints in the church in Corinth.

3. *It lifts to great heights.* It makes the ransomed soul a new creature. Old things pass away. "Partaker of the divine nature" is the gracious portion of him whom Christ saves. The saved life can say, "I am an heir of heaven," and, better still, "I am an heir of God." "I am rich, I am not a plebeian, I am the child of . a King." It exalts man to infinite honors and places on his head an eternal crown.

4. *It is great because inaugurated by divine power.*

It was procured by the incarnation and humiliation of the Son of God. It required suffering and self-denial. It was attended with great miracles. The tempests were stilled, the lepers were cleansed, the blind were made to see, the dead were raised, the sun was darkened.

5. It is great because for all people. "God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth on him should not perish." "Preach the gospel to every creature."

"Repentance and remission of sins should be preached in his name among all nations."

"Whosoever shall call upon the name of the Lord shall be saved." "The promise is unto you and to your children, and to all that are afar off."

While it is true, as stated in the beginning of this meditation, that the solemn question of the text was propounded with only Christian disciples in mind, we do no violence to the Scripture when we ask the same thing of those who live in a Christian land, and who were perchance reared in a Christian home, "How shall you escape if you neglect so great salvation?" "For if the righteous scarcely be saved, where shall the ungodly and the sinner appear?"