

THE SIMPLICITY AND SUBLIMITY OF SALVATION

“He came unto His own, and His own received Him not. But as many as received Him, to them gave He power to become the sons of God, even to them that believe on His name: Which were born, not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God.”

John 1:11-13

EVERYTHING here is simple. Everything is sublime. Here is that simple Gospel by which the most ignorant may be saved! Here are profundities in which the best-instructed may find themselves beyond their depth. Here are those everlasting hills of Divine Truth which man cannot climb! Yet here is that plain path in which the wayfaring man, though a fool, need nor err, nor lose his way. I always feel that I have no time to spare for critical and captious persons. If they will not believe, neither shall they be established. They must take the consequences of their unbelief. But I can spare all day and all night for an anxious enquirer—for one who is blinded by the very blaze of the heavenly Light of God that shines on him and who seems to lose his way by reason of the very plainness of the road that lies before him! In this most simple text are some of the deep things of God and there are souls here that are puzzled by what are simplicities to some of us. And therefore my one aim shall be to handle this text as to help and encourage and cheer some who would gladly touch the hem of the Master’s garment, but cannot for the press of many difficulties and grave questions which rise before their minds! Let us go to the text at once and notice, first, a matter which is very simple—“As many as received Him...even to them that believe on His name.” Secondly, a matter which is very delightful—“to them gave He power to become the sons of God.” And thirdly, a matter which is very mysterious—“Which were born, not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God.”

1. Here is, first, A MATTER WHICH IS VERY SIMPLE—receiving Christ and believing on His name. Oh, that many here may be able to say, “Yes, I understand that simple matter. That is the way in which I found eternal life!”

The simple matter of which John here speaks is receiving Christ, or, in other words, believing on His name.

Receiving Christ is a distinctive act. “He came unto His own, and His own received Him not.” The very people you would have thought would have eagerly welcomed Christ did not do so! But here and there a man stood apart from the rest, or a woman came out from her surroundings, and each of these said, “I receive Christ as the Messiah.” You will never go to Heaven in a crowd! The crowd goes down the broad road to destruction, but the way which leads to life eternal is a narrow way, “and few there are that find it.” They that go to Heaven must come out one by one and say to Him that sits at the wicket-gate, “Set my name down, Sir, as a pilgrim to the Celestial City.” They who would enter into life must fight as well as run, for it is an uphill fight all the way—and few there are that fight it out to the end and win the crown of the victors.

Those who received Christ were different from those who did not receive Him—they were as different as white is from black, or light from darkness. They took a distinctive step, separated themselves from others and came out and received Him whom others would not receive. Have you taken such a step, dear Friend? Can you say, “Yes, let others do as they will, but as for me, Christ is all my salvation and all my desire—and at all hazards I am quite content to be counted

singular and to stand alone. I have lifted my hands to Heaven and I cannot draw back. Whatever others may do, I say, 'Christ for me'?"

As it was a distinctive act, so it was a personal one—"To as many as received Him." They had to receive Christ, each one, by his own act and deed. "Even to them that believe on His name." Believing is the distinct act of a person. I cannot believe for you any more than you can believe for me! That is clearly impossible. There can be no such thing as sponsorship in receiving Christ, or in faith. If you are an unbeliever, your father and mother may be the most eminent saints, but their faith does not overlap and cover your unbelief. You must believe for yourself. I have had to even remind some that the Holy Spirit, Himself, cannot believe for them. He works faith in you, but you have to believe! The faith must be your own distinct mental act. Faith is the gift of God, but God does not believe for us—how could He? It is for you distinctly to believe. Come, dear Hearer, have you been trying to put up with a national faith? A national faith is a mere sham! Or have you tried to think that you possess the family faith? "Oh, we are all Christians, you know!" Yes, you are all hypocrites—that is what that comes to! Unless each one is a Christian for himself, he is a Christian only in name—and that is to be a hypocrite. Oh, that we might have the certainty that we have each one laid our sins on Jesus, the spotless Lamb of God! God grant that if we have never done so before, we may do so this very moment!

Mark, next, that as it was a distinctive and personal act, so it related to a Person. I find that the text runs thus, "He came unto His own, and His own received Him not. But as many as received Him, to them gave He power to become the Sons of God, even to them that believe on His name." That religion which leaves out the Person of Christ has left out the essential point. You are not saved by believing a doctrine, though it is well for you to believe it if it is true. You are not saved by practicing an ordinance, though you should practice it if you are one of those to whom it belongs. You are not saved by any belief except this—believing on Christ's name and receiving Him. "I take in a body of divinity," says one. Do you? There is no body of divinity that I know of but Christ, the Son of God in human flesh, living, bleeding, dying, risen, ascended, soon to come—you must lean on Him—for the promise is only to as many as receive Him.

This reception of Christ consisted in faith in Him—"As many as received Him...even to them that believe on His name." He was a stranger and they took Him in. He was food and they took Him in and fed on Him. He was living water and they received Him, drank Him up, took Him into themselves. He was light and they received the light. He was life and they received the life, and they lived by what they received. As the empty cup receives from the flowing fountain, so do we receive Christ into our emptiness. We, being poor, naked and miserable, come to Him, and we receive riches, clothing, and happiness in Him! Salvation comes by receiving Christ!

I know what you have been trying to do—you have been trying to give Christ something. Let me caution you against a very common expression. I hear converts continually told to give their hearts to Jesus. It is quite correct and I hope they will do so. But your first concern must be not what you give to Jesus, but what Jesus gives to you! You must take Him from Himself as a gift to you—then will you truly give your heart to Him. The first act and, indeed, the underlying act all along the way, is to receive, to imbibe, to take in Christ—and that is called believing on His name. Note that, "name." It is not believing a fanciful Christ, for there are many christs, nowadays—as many christs as there are books, nearly—for every writer seems to make a christ of his own. But the christ that men make up will not save you! The only Christ who can save you is the Christ of God, that Christ who, in the synagogue at Nazareth, found the place where it was written, "The Spirit of the Lord is upon Me, because He has anointed Me to preach the Gospel to the poor; He has sent Me to heal the broken-hearted, to preach deliverance to the captives, and recovering of sight to the blind, to set at liberty them that are bruised, to preach the acceptable year of the Lord."

You are to believe on the Christ as He is revealed in the Scriptures. You are to take Him as you find Him here—not as Renan, not as Strauss, or anybody else pictures of Him—but as you find Him here. As God reveals Him you are to believe on His name—"The Wonderful, Counsellor, The Mighty God, The Everlasting Father, The Prince of Peace." Emmanuel, God With Us; Jesus, saving from sin; Christ anointed of the Father. You are to believe on His name, not on the Christ

of Rome, nor the Christ of Canterbury, but the Christ of Jerusalem, the Christ of the eternal Glory! Not a christ of a dreamy prophecy with which some are defaming the true prophetic spirit of the Word, no christ of idealism, no manmade christ, but the eternal God, Incarnate in human flesh, as He is here pictured by Psalmist, Prophet, Evangelist, Apostle, very God of very God, yet truly Man, suffering in your place, bearing the sin of men in His own body on the Cross. It is believing in this Christ that will effectually save your soul! To believe is to trust. Prove that you believe in Christ by risking everything upon Him—

*“Upon a life I did not live,
Upon a death I did not die,
I risk my whole eternity.”*

On Him who lived for me and died for me, and rose again for me, and has gone into Heaven for me—on Him I throw the whole weight of past, present, future and every interest that belongs to my soul, for time and for eternity!

This is a very simple matter and I have noticed a great many sneers at this simple faith—and a great many depreciatory remarks concerning it, but, let me tell you, there is nothing like it under Heaven! Possessing this faith will prove you to be a son of God—nothing short of it ever will. “To as many as received Him, to them gave He power to become sons of God,” and He has given that power to nobody else! This will prove you to be absolved, forgiven. “There is, therefore, now no condemnation to them which are in Christ Jesus.” But if you have no faith in Christ Jesus, the wrath of God abides on you! Because you have not believed on the Son of God, you are condemned already! One grain of this faith is worth more than a diamond the size of the world—yes, though you should thread such jewels together, as many as the stars of Heaven for number, they would be worth nothing compared with the smallest atom of faith in Jesus Christ, the eternal Son of God!

But where does this wonderful power of faith come from? Not from the faith, but from Him on whom it leans! What power Christ has! The power of His Manhood suffering, the power of His Godhead bowing on the Cross, the power of the God-Man, the Mediator, surrendering Himself as the greatest Sacrifice for sin! Therefore, he who touches this has touched the springs of Omnipotence! He who comes, by faith, into contact with Christ, has come into contact with boundless love, power, mercy and Grace. I marvel not at anything that faith brings when it deals with Christ! You have a little key, a little rusty key, and you say, “By use of this key I can get all the gold that I need.” Yes, but where is the box to which you go for the gold? When you show me and I see that it is a great chamber filled full of gold and silver, I can understand how your little key can enrich you when it opens the door into such a treasury. If faith is the key which unlocks the fullness of God, “for it pleased the Father that in Him should all fullness dwell,” then I can understand why faith brings such boundless blessings to him who has it. Salvation is a very simple business. God help us to look at it simply and practically—and to receive Christ and believe on His name!

II. Now, secondly, here is A MATTER WHICH IS VERY DELIGHTFUL—“To them gave He power to become sons of God.”

If I had a week to preach from this text, I think that I should be able to get through the first head, but at this time I can only throw out just a few hints. Look at the great and delightful blessing which comes to us by our faith in Christ. We give Christ our faith and He gives us power to become sons of God! The authority, liberty, privilege, right—something more than mere strength or force—to be sons of God!

When we believe in Jesus, He indicates to us the Great Father’s willingness to let us be His sons. We who were prodigals, far away from Him, perceive that when we receive Christ—the Father, who gave us Christ—is willing to take us to be His sons. He would not have yielded up His Only-Begotten if He had not willed to take us into His family!

When we believe in Jesus, He bestows on us the status of sons. We were slaves before—now we are sons! We were strangers, aliens, enemies and every word that means an evil thing might have been applied to us! But when we laid hold on Christ, we were regarded as the sons of God, as a man in Rome, when he was adopted by some great citizen and publicly acknowledged in the forum as being, from that day forward, that man's son, was regarded as such, so, as soon as we believe in Jesus, we get the status of sons! "Beloved, now we are the sons of God."

Then Christ does something more for us. He gives us Grace to feel our sonship. As we sang just now—

*"My faith shall 'Abba, Father,' cry,
And You the kindred own."*

God acknowledges us as His children and we acknowledge Him as our Father and, therefore, "Our Father, which are in Heaven," is no meaningless expression, but it comes welling up from the depths of our heart!

Having given us Grace to feel sonship, Christ gives us the Nature of our Father. He gives us "power to become the sons of God." We get more and more like God in righteousness and true holiness. By His Divine Spirit, shed abroad in our hearts, we become more and more the children of our Father who is in Heaven, who does good to the undeserving and the unthankful, and whose heart overflows with love even to those who love Him not.

When this Nature of sons shall be fully developed, Christ will bestow His glory upon us. We shall be in Heaven, not in the rear rank, as servants, but nearest to the eternal Throne of God. Unto angels He has never said, "You are My sons," but He has called us sons, poor creatures of the dust who believe in Jesus! And we shall have all the honor, joy, privileges and delight that belong to the princes of the blood royal of Heaven—members of the imperial House of God—in that day when the King shall manifest Himself in His own palace!

Some of us could draw parallels about being made sons, from our own lives. You were once a very tiny child, but you were a son, then, as much as you are now. So is it with you who have only just begun to believe in Christ—He has given you authority and right to become sons of God. Very early in our life, our father went down to the registrar's office and wrote our name in the roll as his sons. We do not remember that, it was so long ago, but he did it and he also wrote our name in the Family Bible, even as our Father in Heaven has enrolled our names in the Lamb's Book of Life! You recollect that, as a child, you did not go into the kitchen to dine with the servants, but you took your seat at the table. It was a very little chair in which you first sat at the table, but, as you grew bigger, you always went to the table, because you were a son.

The servants in the house were much bigger than you and they could do a great many things that you could not do, and your father paid them wages. He never paid you any—they were not his sons—but you were. If they had put on your clothes, they would not have been his sons. You had privileges that they had not. I remember that, in the parish where my home was, on a certain day in the year, the Church bell rang and everybody went to receive a penny roll. Every child had one and I remember having mine. I claimed it as a privilege because I was my father's son. I think there were six of us, who all had a roll—every child in the parish had one. So there are a number of privileges that come to us very early in our Christian life, and we mean to have them, first, because our Lord Jesus Christ has given us the right to have them and, next, because if we do not take what He bought for us, it will be robbing Him and wasting His substance! As He has paid for it all and has given us the right to have it, let us take it!

You were put in school because you were a son. You did not like it. I daresay that you would rather have stayed at home at play. And you had a touch of the rod, sometimes, because you were a son. That was one of your privileges, "for what son is he whom the father chastens not?" One day you were in the street with other boys, doing wrong, and your father came along and punished you. He did not touch your companions, for they were not his sons. You smile at those little things, but

you did not, at the time, count your punishments as privileges—but they were. When the chastening of the Lord comes, call it a privilege, for that is what it is! There is no greater mercy that I know of on earth than good health unless it is sickness—and that has often been a greater mercy to me than health!

It is a good thing to be without a trouble, but it is a better thing to have a trouble and know how to get Grace enough to bear it. I am not so much afraid of the devil when he roars, as I am when he pretends to be asleep. I think that, oftentimes, a roaring devil keeps us awake—and the troubles of this life stir us up to go to God in prayer—and that which looks to us as bad turns to our good. “We know that all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are called according to His purpose.”

III. Now I come to my last point, that is, A MATTER WHICH IS MYSTERIOUS. We are not only given the status of children and the privilege of being called sons, but this mysterious matter is one of heavenly birth—“Which were born, not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God.”

This new birth is absolutely necessary. If we are ever to be numbered among God’s children, we must be born again! Born from above. We were born in sin, born children of wrath, even as others—to be God’s children, it is absolutely necessary that we should be born again!

The change worked thereby is wonderfully radical. It is not a mere outside washing, nor any touching up and repairing. It is a total renovation. Born again? I cannot express to you all that the change means, it is so deep, so thorough, so complete.

It is also intensely mysterious. What must it be to be born again? “I cannot understand it.” Says one. Nicodemus was a teacher in Israel and he did not understand it. Does anybody understand it? Does anybody understand his first birth? What do we know of it? And this second birth? Some of us have passed through it and know that we have, and remember well the pangs of that birth, yet we cannot describe the movements of the Spirit of God by which we were formed anew, and made new creatures in Christ Jesus, according to that Word from Him who sits on the Throne, “Behold, I make all things new!” It is a great mystery.

Certainly it is entirely superhuman. We cannot contribute to it. Man cannot make himself to be born again. His first birth is not of himself and his second birth is not one jot more so. It is a work of the Holy Spirit, a work of God! It is a new creation—it is a quickening—it is a miracle from beginning to end!

Here is the point to which I call your special attention, it is assuredly ours. Many of us here have been born again. We know that we have and herein lies the evidence of it, “As many as received Him, to them gave He power to become the sons of God, even to them that believe on His name, which were born, not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God.” If you believe on Christ’s name, you are born of God! If you have received Christ into your soul, you have obtained that birth that comes not of blood, nor of the will of parents, nor of the will of man, but of God! You have passed from death unto life!

Let no man sit down here and cover his face, and say, “There is no hope for me. I cannot understand about this new birth.” If you will take Christ, to have and to hold, henceforth and forever, as your ONLY trust and confidence, you have received that which no line of ancestors could ever give you, for it is “not of blood.” You possess that which no will of the father and mother could ever give you, for it is, “not of the will of the flesh.” You have that which your own will could not bring you, for it is, “not of the will of man.” You have that which only the Giver of Life can bestow, for it is, “of God!” You are born again, for you have received Christ and believed on His name. I do not urge you to look within, to try and see whether this new birth is there. Instead of looking within yourself, look to Him who hangs on yonder Cross, dying, the Just for the unjust, to bring us to God! Fix your eyes on Him and believe in Him. And when you see in yourself

much that is evil, look to Him. And when doubts prevail, look to Him. And when your conscience tells you of your past sins, look to Him!

I have to go through this story almost every day of the year and sometimes half a dozen times in a day. If there is a despairing soul anywhere within 20 miles, it will find me out, no matter whether I am at home, or at Mentone, or in any other part of the world! It will come from any distance, broken down, despairing, half insane, sometimes, and I have no medicine to prescribe except, "Christ, Christ, Christ—Jesus Christ and Him crucified! Look away from yourselves and trust in Him!" I go over and over and over with this and never get one jot further. Because I find that this medicine cures all soul sicknesses, while human quackery cures none! Christ alone is the one remedy for sin-sick souls! Receive Him! Believe on His name! We keep hammering at this. I can sympathize with Luther when he said, "I have preached justification by faith so often, and I feel, sometimes, that you are so slow to receive it, that I could almost take the Bible and bang it into your heads!" I am afraid that the Truth of God would not have entered their hearts if he had done so. This is what we aim at—to get this one thought into a man, "You are lost and, therefore, such an One as Christ came to save."

One said to me just lately, "Oh, Sir, I am the biggest sinner that ever lived!" I replied, "Jesus Christ came into the world to save sinners." "But I have not any strength." "While we were yet without strength, in due time Christ died." "Oh, but," he said, "I have been utterly ungodly." "Christ died for the ungodly." "But I am lost." "Yes," I said, "this is a faithful saying, and worthy of all acceptation, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners." "The Son of man has come to save that which was lost."

I said to this man, "You have the brush in your hand and at every stroke it looks as if you are quoting Scripture. You seem to be making yourself out to be the very man that Christ came to save! If you were to make yourself out to be good and excellent, I would give you this word—Jesus did not come to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance. He did not die for the good, but for the bad. He gave Himself for our sins—He never gave Himself for our righteousness. He is a Savior. He has not come, yet, as a Rewarder of the righteous—that will be in His Second Advent. Now He comes as the great Forgiver of the guilty and the only Savior of the lost. Will you come to Him in that way?"

"Oh, but," my friend said, "I have nothing to bring to Christ." "No," I said, "I know that you have not—but Christ has everything." "Sir," he said, "you do not know me, otherwise you would not talk to me like this." And I said, "No, and you do not know yourself—for you are worse than you think you are, though you think that you are bad enough in all conscience. But be you as bad as you may, Jesus Christ came on purpose to lift up from the dunghill those whom He sets among princes by His free, rich, Sovereign Grace."

Oh, come and believe in Him, poor Sinner! I feel that if I had all your souls, I would believe in Christ for their salvation! I would trust Him to save a million souls if I had them, for He is mighty to save! There can be no limit to His power to forgive! There can be no limit to the merit of His precious blood! There can be no boundary to the efficacy of His plea before the Throne of God! Only trust Him and you will be saved! May His gracious Spirit lead you to do so now, for Christ's sake! Amen.