

and Silvanus and Timotheus, was not yea and nay, but in Him was yea. The Gospel was not a balance of probabilities, it was not a speculation about God, but a well-attested message from God to the soul of man. "We are ambassadors for Christ, as though God did beseech you by us, we pray you, in Christ's stead, be ye reconciled to God." "That which was from the beginning... which we have seen with our eyes, which we have looked upon, and our hands have handled of the Word of Life... that which we have seen and heard declare we unto you." The proof that this new and effective communication between earth and Heaven, between God and man, was not a freak of imagination, but was hard fact, rested on the Resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead—an event in which the realm of Spirit laid the world of matter under obligation to subserve its purpose by proving even to the very senses of man, the truth of Christ's claims and mission. And, therefore, St. Peter at the Day of Pentecost, and afterwards, and, therefore, St. Paul at Antioch in Pisidia, at Athens, and elsewhere, preached before all things the Resurrection. All else depended on it. It was the warrant without which, as the Apostles said, "our preaching is vain and your faith is also vain." But resting thus on solid evidence, planting its feet thus firmly on the soil of earth and in the full daylight of human history, the Christian creed raised its head to Heaven, unveiled to the believer the inner being of God, displayed the manner in which, when God the Son took our nature upon Him, a bridge was really constructed between earth and Heaven, and even discovered to us the inmost heart of the All Merciful in the true meaning and value of the Sacrifice which was offered on Calvary for the sins of the whole world. From that Fountain, opened for sin and for uncleanness, flow all the hopes of pardon, all the reinforcements of grace, all the power of sacraments, by which the work of the Redeemer is carried forward in the sphere of sense and time, in preparation for the momentous, the endless future.

This was what the Apostles preached to the world. This was the preaching by which God was pleased to save them that believed. How was it regarded by cultivated people at the time who were as yet outside the Christian creed and Church? St. Paul answers that question by the phrase, "The foolishness of preaching." It is not, I need hardly say, his own phrase. He did not himself think the preaching foolishness, but he adopts for the moment the current phrase of the day, the phrase current in certain quarters of Corinth. Many highly cultivated Corinthians did think the Christian preaching foolishness. It was unlike all they understood by wisdom or, as they put it, philosophy. Philosophy, as understood in the old Greek world, was an attempt to furnish a tentative theory or account of the universe, of man, of human thought, of the relations between man's thought and the external world, more or less complete as the case might be, but based in any case in the last resort upon the average resources of the human mind. Philosophy, from the nature of the case, did not attain to permanence or certainty. It was always shifting its conclusions, always shifting even its grounds, always reflecting in its changes the successive activities and moods of thought which created it, and so always contrasting vitally with the preaching that centered in Jesus Christ, "the same yesterday, to-day, and for ever." It was at best a reaching after rather than a possession of truth, and to claim to possess truth absolutely seemed to it a baseless and foolish pretension. And yet this claim the Gospel did and does undoubtedly make, and it also claims that the truth, of which it is so certain, belongs, in the main, not to the region of nature and experience, but to a higher world that can only be explored by faith. Besides this, the

Gospel placed before mankind a new ideal of life, in which the passive virtues, long-suffering, forgiveness of injuries, and the like, were to count for much more than they had ever counted yet, and all of this in Greek eyes was folly only to be accounted for by hallucination, which Eastern ways and lack of Greek culture might possibly explain. That was the Corinthian estimate of the Apostle's message from God. The Jews had formed another estimate not less unfavorable, and each form of error with which the Gospel came into collision soon formed and formulated its own criticism. But the Apostolic work went on: "We preach Christ crucified—to the Jews a stumbling-block, and to the Greeks folly; but to them which are called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God."

Of this preaching what was the purpose or object? St. Paul answers "To save them that believe." We must beware, brethren, of degrading that great, great word "saved," by reading into it anything else or less than it meant for St. Paul. When he speaks of salvation he has in the background of his thought the unending ruin from which salvation is a rescue. He is not thinking of anything that is limited by time or by this earthly scene; he is not thinking of physical, or social, or national disaster. Incidentally, no doubt, the Gospel does save mankind from these forms of ruin; it promotes, within limits, and as a very secondary object of its activity, the temporal well-being of man in his individual and social capacity, the well-being of his body as well as of his mind; and, provided that it is understood that we are using the word in an adapted sense, there is no harm in speaking of salvation from mental ignorance, of salvation from social peril, or salvation from any form of mischief limited strictly to this transitory life. But when the Apostle speaks of salvation, without explaining its sphere of operation, he means, beyond all question, a salvation of the individual human soul from ruin, ruin begun here and rendered beyond the grave permanent and irretrievable, salvation from eternal death. From this ruin He alone could save men, Who died for them on the cross, and Who has the keys of hell and of death. And the preaching of the Apostles presented Him to the souls of men, in St. Paul's phrase, as "evidently set forth crucified among them," as their Saviour, as their only, their all-sufficient Saviour, able to save to the uttermost those that come unto God by Him.

And, once more, who are capable of receiving this salvation? The Apostle answers, "Them that believe." As a matter of fact, then, the recipients of salvation are a limited class. Originally salvation is destined to all mankind by the Universal Father. "Jesus Christ," says the Apostle, "died for all." But man has the great and perilous gift of free will, and God does not put force on him and compel him to accept blessings which in his folly he chooses to cast aside. It is because man can at pleasure accept or reject salvation, that salvation only reaches them that believe. Belief is, in its essence, the act by which the soul accepts salvation. This is what we learn from the accounts of conversions under the influence of Apostolic preaching in the New Testament. For instance, to the gaoler's question at Philippi, "Sirs, what must I do to be saved?" St. Paul and St. Silas, answered, "Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved."

Now, what is this belief? It is not merely the acceptance of truth by the understanding, because the understanding may be active while the heart and the will are untouched. It is not merely an act of moral confidence, because such confidence may be based on mistaken grounds, on some radical misapprehension about the object which is presented to faith. It is a movement of the whole soul, of all its powers going forth to meet the approaching truth; it is thought, it is affection, it is trust, it is self-sur-

render, face to face with the unseen, but clearly apprehended Christ. Thus when St. Paul tells us that "with the heart man believeth unto righteousness," he adds, "with the mouth confession is made unto salvation." The heart here, as so often in both Testaments, means, not only the seat or faculty of love, but the centre of the soul's whole life, and thought, and affection, and resolve. And yet salvation is not named until the act of adhesion to Jesus Christ has taken a practical, an outward, an audible form,— "With the mouth confession is made unto salvation." In like manner, St. Paul tells the Galatians that neither the Jewish ordinance of circumcision, nor the absence of that ordinance, effected salvation in any degree, but "faith that worketh by love." A faith that should not work by love, that should be divorced from love, would not, in St. Paul's eyes, deserve the name of faith; certainly it would not justify it. Faith in Christ and love for Christ are separable in idea; they are in fact, in practice, inseparable in a loving Christian soul. The anatomist distinguishes clearly enough between the nervous and arterial systems of the human body, and physiologists may say that one is more directly concerned with the maintenance of life from moment to moment than is the other, but practically, so far as we know, life cannot subsist without both arteries and nerves. And those who insist most earnestly on saying, with St. Paul, "we are justified by faith," dare not be so false to St. Paul's teaching as to add, "we are justified, even though we have no love of God at all in our hearts." Faith, then, is an act of the whole soul, thinking, loving, resolving, trusting, going forth to meet the truth which approaches it in the Apostolic message.

But then faith—let us mark it well—does not, merely of itself, operate or effect justification or salvation. When we say that we are justified by faith we mean that faith is a title, an indispensable title certainly, but only a title to our justification or salvation. If faith of itself justified or saved, we should be our own justifiers, our own saviours. This every Christian knows is impossible. Our inability to save ourselves is the very truth which St. Paul lays down as fundamental before he proceeds to show how God has saved us through Christ. No, faith does not, cannot of itself, save; but faith is the hand which we hold out to receive the salvation which is wrought for us, and which we must thus receive in this our hand in order to make it our own. Faith is our title, it is our letter of introduction, if you will, to salvation. We must present it, before He, our true and only Saviour, works in us His saving work. This is plain from the case of St. Paul himself. When St. Paul was converted on the road to Damascus, he obeyed by faith the vision from Heaven; he went into Damascus already a believer in our Lord Jesus Christ. He waited for three days, and then Ananias said to him, "Arise and be baptised and wash away thy sins, calling on the name of the Lord." Then at his baptism the full gift of salvation was bestowed on him by his Saviour. But, for the acceptance of this gift, his faith was an indispensable title. Then he became not merely a disciple by conviction, but something more, a member of Christ. And the same truth is apparent on a careful study of the cases of Cornelius and the Ethiopian eunuch. Faith was in either case a condition precedent of salvation which was only secured when the convert was baptised.

Preaching, as a means of propagating the faith and of converting souls to Jesus Christ, is still what it was in the Apostolic age. But for Christians in a state of grace, for believing and loving servants of Christ, listening to a sermon is not the first and greatest of Christian privileges. Those who maintain that it is, sometimes point to the fact that we read in the Acts of the Apostles more of preaching than of assemblies for worship or for reception of the sacraments.