

The Gate Wide Open.

BY PETER, D. D. SPENCER.

And shall come to pass, that whosoever shall call upon the name of the Lord shall be saved. In the worst times that can ever happen, there is still salvation for men. When day turns to night, and life becomes death, and the staff of life is broken, and the hope of man has fled, there is still salvation in God, in the person of His dear Son, deliverance to all those who will call upon the name of the Lord. We do not know what is to happen, reading the roll of the future, we prophesy dark things; but still the light shall always shine between the feet of the cloud wreck; "Whosoever shall call on the name of the Lord shall be delivered."

The passage was selected by the apostle at Pentecost to be set in its place as a sort of morning star of gospel. When the Spirit was poured out upon the servants and the handmaids, and the sons and daughters began to prophesy, it was clear that the wondrous time had come, which had been foretold so long before. Then Peter, as we remember has the remarkable sermon, told the people, "Whosoever shall call on the name of the Lord shall be saved; thus giving a fair and yet more evangelical meaning to the word 'delivered.'"

"Whosoever shall call on the name of the Lord shall be delivered" from sin, death, and hell, in fact, he is delivered as to be, in divine language, "saved"—saved from the guilt, the penalty, the power, of sin, saved from the wrath to come. These Gospel times are still the happy days in which "whosoever shall call on the name of the Lord shall be saved."

I have nothing to do but to tell you over again the old, old story of infinite mercy come to meet infinite sin—a free grace come to lead free will to a better life of things—of God himself appearing to undo man's sin wrought by man, and to lift him up by a great deliverance. May the Holy Spirit graciously aid me while I shall talk to you, very simply, thus.

I. First, there is something always wanted. That something is deliverance, of salvation. It is always wanted. It is the requisite of man, where ever man is found. As long as there are men on the face of the earth, there will always be a need of salvation.

Dear friends, while we mingle only with those who are saved, we forget how much need there is still of a divine salvation. If we could go through London, into its dens and slums, we should think very differently of human need from what we do when we simply come from our own quiet domestic circle, and step into our pew and hear a sermon. How much need there is still of a divine salvation. If we could go through London, into its dens and slums, we should think very differently of human need from what we do when we simply come from our own quiet domestic circle, and step into our pew and hear a sermon.

Some want deliverance from present trouble. If you are in this need now through very sore distress, I invite you to take my text as your guide, and believe that "whosoever shall call on the name of the Lord shall be delivered." Depend upon it, in any form of distress, physical, mental, or whatever it may be, prayer is wonderfully available. "Call upon me," says God, "in the day of trouble; I will deliver thee, and thou shalt glorify Me." If you are so down at the heels that your feet are on the bare pavement; if you have come to this place in bodily sickness, and feel as if you should die on the seat in which you sit; if there be no physician to help you, and no friend to stretch out a generous hand, call upon God, I promise you, so far as come to the end of man's power, you are now at the beginning of God. See whether your Maker will forget you. See whether the great, generous heart of God does not still beat tenderly towards the sorrowful and the afflicted.

There is no one who ever came into a position of deep personal distress, even though it should not be of a physical kind. When you do not know how to act, but are bewildered and at your wits' end, when wave of trouble has followed wave of trouble till you are like the sailor in the storm, who reels and is fro, and staggers like a drunken man; now if you can not help yourself, call upon God, call upon God.

The text holds good concerning deliverance from future troubles. What is to happen in the coming future, we do not know. Whatever it is to happen according to the Word of God—the sun shall be turned into darkness and the moon into blood—if God shall show great wonders in the heavens and in the earth, blood and fire, and pillars of smoke, yet remember that though you will then assuredly "want deliverance," deliverance will still be near at hand. The star Wormwood may fall, but we shall be saved if we call upon the name of the Lord. Plagues may be poured out, trumpets may sound, and judgments may follow one another as quickly as the plagues of Egypt, but "Whosoever shall call on the name of the Lord shall be saved." When the need of deliverance shall apparently increase, the abundance of salvation shall increase with it.

Yes, and when you come to die, when to you the sun has turned into darkness and the moon into blood, this text insures deliverance in the last dread hour. Call upon the name of the Lord, and you shall be saved. Amid the pangs of death, and the gloom of departure, you shall enjoy a glorious visitation, which shall turn darkness into light, and sorrow into joy. When you wake up amid the realities of the eternal future, there will be nothing for you to dread in resurrection, or judgment, or in the yawning mouth of hell.

If you have called upon the name of the Lord, you shall still be delivered. Stand by the promise firm, whatever may be hid in the great roll of the future; God cannot deny himself; He will deliver those who call upon His name. What is wanted, then, is salvation; and I do think, my brethren, that you and I who preach the Word, and you to save souls, must very often go over this grand old truth about salvation to the guilty, deliverance to all who call upon the name of the Lord. Sometimes we talk to friends about a nobler life, about attaining to very high degrees of sanctity; and all this is very proper and good; but still the great fundamental truth is, "Whosoever shall call on the name of the Lord shall be saved." Get where you may, however high your ex-

perience, be what you may, however great your usefulness, you will always want to come back to the ground upon which the poorest and weakest of hearts stand, and claim to be saved by almighty grace, through simply calling upon the name of the Lord.

II. Now, secondly, let us attentively observe the way in which this deliverance is to be had. "Is not the most obvious sense of this language prayer? Are we not brought to the Lord by a prayer which trusts in God? By a prayer which asks God to give the deliverance which is needed, and expects to have it from the Lord, as a gift of grace? It amounts to much the same thing as that other word, 'Believe and live'; for how shall they call on Him of whom they have not heard? And if they have heard, yet vain is their calling unless they are believed as well as heard. But to call on the name of the Lord is bodily to pray a believing prayer, to cry to God for His help, and to leave yourself in His hands. This is very simple, is it not?"

What a simple way of salvation it is to those who feel that they can do nothing! "Ah! dear hearts! if we had to preach to them a very difficult and elaborate salvation, they would perish. They have not the mind, some of them, to follow our directions if they were at all intelligent; and they have not enough hope to venture upon anything that looks at all difficult. But if it be true that "Whosoever shall call on the name of the Lord shall be saved," this method is simple and available, and they catch at it. He can pray to God who can do nothing else. He need not want to do anything else; for if he can call for help, he gets deliverance, he gets all that he will ever want between this place and heaven.

The text, however, contains within it a measure of specific instruction. We read, "Whosoever shall call on the name of the Lord." Now, by the word "name" we understand the person, the character, of the Lord. The more, then, you know about the Lord, and the better you know His name, the more intelligently will you call upon that name. If you know His power, you will call upon that power to help you. If you know His mercy, you will call upon Him in His grace to save you. But, little as you may know, call on Him according to the little you do know. Cast yourself upon Him, whether your trouble be external or internal; but especially if it be internal, if it be the trouble of sin, if it be the burden of guilt, if it be a load of horror and fear because of wrath to come, call upon the name of the Lord, for you shall be delivered.

Dear friends, I speak to some whom I know to be now present, who are under severe trial, you dare not look up. You seem to be given up; at any rate you have given yourself up; and yet, I pray you, call upon the name of the Lord. You can not persist praying; no one has ever done so. If you quit persist praying, you would be a new wonder in the universe. A man calling upon God, and rejected of God—the supposition is not to be endured. There will come a day—but that is not now—there will come a day in the next state when He will say, "I called, but ye refused; but it is not so now. While there is life there is hope."

I recollect a time when, if I had heard a sermon on this subject, putting it plainly to me, I should have leaped into the air and sung a hymn of praise. Is it not such a time with you? I thought I must do something, I must be something, I must in some way prepare myself for the mercy of God. I did not know that a calling upon God, a trusting myself in His hand, an invocation of His sacred name, would bring me to Christ, the Saviour. But so it stands, and happy indeed was I when I found it out. Heaven is given away. Salvation may be had for the asking.

III. Now I come to notice, in the third place, the people to whom this promise and this deliverance will be given. "Whosoever shall call upon the name of the Lord shall be delivered." According to the connection, the people had been greatly afflicted—afflicted beyond all precedent, afflicted to the very brink of despair; but the Lord said, "Whosoever shall call on the name of the Lord shall be delivered." Go down to the hospital. You may select, if you please, the hospital which deals with the effects of vice. In that house of misery you may stand at each bed and say, "Whosoever shall call on the name of the Lord shall be saved." You may then listen to the jail. You may stand at every door of every cell, yes, even at the grating of the condemned cell, if there lie men and women there given up to death, and you may with safety say to each one, "Whosoever shall call on the name of the Lord shall be delivered." Will you not say, "Whosoever shall call on the name of the Lord shall be saved." Still he cries, "turn and live." "Let the wicked forsake his way, and the unrighteous man his thoughts; and let him return unto the Lord, and he will have mercy upon him; and to our God, for he will abundantly pardon."

Yes, but there were some, according to Joel, who had the Spirit of God poured out upon them. What about them? "Where they saved by that? Oh, no! Those who had the Spirit of God so that they dreamed dreams and saw visions, yet had to come to the palace of mercy by this same gate of believing prayer—"Whosoever shall call on the name of the Lord shall be saved." Ah, poor souls, you try to justify, if we were deacons of churches, if we were pastors, oh, then we should be saved! "You do not know anything about it; church officers are no more saved by their office than you are by being without office. We owe nothing to our official position in the matter of salvation; in fact, we may owe our damnation to our official standing unless we look well to our ways. We have no preference over you plain folks. I do assure you I am quite happy to take your hand, whoever you may be,

and come to Christ on the same footing as yourself. "Also, there were some upon whom the Spirit of God did not fall. They did not speak with tongues, nor prophesy the future, nor work miracles; but though they did none of these marvels, yet it stood true of them—"Whosoever shall call on the name of the Lord shall be saved." What though no supernatural gift was bestowed, though they saw no vision, and could not speak with tongues, they called upon the name of the Lord and they were saved. There is no measure of the gift, as well as for the great, for the poorest and most obscure as well as for those that are strong in faith, and lead the hosts of God to the battle.

"Ah," says another, "but I have no good feeling, and that is what I wish I could ever feel despair, but I am hard as a stone." I have been told that sorrowful story many times, and it almost always happens that those who most mourn their want of feeling, those who feel most acutely, "The heart is like hell-hardened steel, so they say; but it is not true. If it were true, 'Whosoever shall call on the name of the Lord shall be saved.' Do you think that the Lord wants you to give yourself a new heart first, and then you are saved when you have a new heart, and you do not want Him to save you then, since you are saved. Come without any good feeling. Come just as you are. Come, you that are like a frozen iceberg, that have nothing about you, but that you want to melt like ice and melt; come, and call upon the name of the Lord, and you shall be saved."

IV. I want you to dwell for a minute upon the blessing itself. "Whosoever shall call on the name of the Lord shall be delivered." It need not say much about it, because I have already expounded it. It is a very good rule, when a man makes you a promise, to understand it, in the narrowest sense. It is fair to him that you should do so. Let him interpret it literally, if he please, but as it is actually bound to give you no more than the bare terms His promise will imply. Now it is a rule which all God's people may well practice, always to understand God's promises in the "largest possible sense." If the words will bear a bigger meaning than the first signification, they naturally suggest to you, you may put the larger construction upon them. "He is able to do exceeding abundantly above all that we ask or even think." Come, then, if you are the subject of the judgments of God; if you believe the God's hand has visited you on account of sin, call upon Him, and He will deliver you both from the judgment, and from the guilt that brought the judgment—the sin, and from that which follows the sin.

And if your case should be different, if you are a child of God, and you are in trouble, and that trouble eats into your spirit, and causes you daily wear of spirit and tear of heart—call upon the Lord. He can take away from you the fret and the trouble too. "Whosoever shall call on the name of the Lord shall be delivered." If you may have a burden of sin, that shall be so transformed as to be rather a blessing than an evil; and you shall fall in love with your cross, since the nature of it has been changed.

If sin be the great cause of your present trouble, as I have said just now, if you are in bondage to evil habits, if you have been a drunkard, and do not know now, to learn sobriety, if you have been unchaste, and have become entangled in vicious connections, call upon God, and He can free you from your sin, and set you free from all its entanglements. He can cut you loose to-night with the great word of His grace, and make you a free man. Only call upon the name of the Lord! Call upon the name of the Lord, and you shall be delivered. Yes, and I repeat, if you are in any way, if you have come under the power of disease, if you are near to death, if already death has written his name legibly upon your body, and you are afraid of death and hell, yet call upon the name of the Lord, and you shall be delivered at this last moment.

V. In conclusion, I must remind you of one beautiful thought. I do not want you of the sadly common neglect of this blessing. You would think that everybody would call upon the name of the Lord; but read the text, "For in Mount Zion and in Jerusalem shall be deliverance, as the Lord hath said. It shall be there as the Lord hath said. Will they not have it then? Notice! "And in the remnant whom the Lord shall call." It seems to shrivel me up altogether, that word "remnant." What! they are not come? Are they madmen? Will they not have it? No, only a remnant, and even that remnant will be called upon the name of the Lord until first God calls them by His grace. This is almost a great wonder as the love which so graciously invites them. Could even devils believe worse? If they were invited to call upon God, and be saved, would they refuse?

Unhappy business! The way is plain, but few there be that find it. After all the preaching, and all the invitation, and the limitless breadth of the promise, yet all that are saved are contained in "the remnant whom the Lord shall call." Is not our text an invitation; the setting open of the door, yes, the lifting of the door from off its hinges, that it might never be shut? And yet "broad is the gate, and wide is the way, that leadeth to destruction, and many there be that go in thereat. There they come, streams of them, hurrying, impatiently, rushing down to death and hell—yes, eagerly panting, hurrying, dashing against one another to descend to that awful gulf from which there is no return." This is the way of the remnant, the way which alone is their life, their joy, their salvation—a remnant, and that remnant only because the arm of the Lord is revealed, and a miraculous power exerted upon their wills.

This is the misery of it, that the guilty are not willing to be parted from their sin. They are not content with being alone in their life, their joy, their salvation. They prefer hell to heaven, sin to holiness. Never spake the Master a word which observation more clearly proved than when he said, "Ye will not come to me, that ye might have life." Jesus cries, "Ye search the scriptures; for in them ye think ye have eternal life, and they are they which testify of Me; but ye will not come to me that ye might have life." You will do anything rather than come

to Jesus. You stop short of calling upon him. O my dear hearts, do not let it be so with you! Many of you are saved; I beseech you, intercede for those who are not saved. O that the converted among you may be moved to pray. Before you leave this place, I beseech you, pray to God, saying, "God be merciful to me a sinner, Lord, I need to be saved. Save me, I call upon thy name." Join with me in prayer at this moment, I entreat you.

The Evangelistic Power of Christian Character.

Brethren, God requires us to be something as well as to do something. The most energetic activity is no substitute for the spirit of self-denial and goodness. Indeed, what a man determines the quality of what he does. God looks at the motives of our conduct. The influence, too, of our words and deeds upon our fellow-men depends largely on the character which lies behind. A gift may sometimes be more like a blow than like a kiss. The same words, spoken by different men, may produce very different results. Truth, of course, is truth, by whomsoever it may be uttered, and if men believe the truth, and act upon it, they will be benefited. A gift may therefore, does not necessarily depend on the character and conduct of the preacher. "Some, indeed, preach Christ, even of envy and strife, and some also of good-will." "What then? Only that, in every way, whether in pretense or in truth, Christ is proclaimed, and thereon I rejoice, yes, and will rejoice." On the other hand, it is undeniable that the power of truth is often lessened, or even nullified, by the character of the man who utters it.

One of our special dangers lies in overrating the value of religious and philanthropic machinery, and in undervaluing the transcendent importance of the Christian spirit as embodied in Christian character. Charity organization is a good thing; but it may sometimes cramp the spirit of benevolence. It belongs naturally to the "quality of mercy" that "It droppeth as the gentle rain from heaven upon the place beneath." I fear, also, though it may be very desirable to gather some of this rain into reservoirs, yet I fear we sometimes lay ourselves open to the sharp satire of "Aurora Leigh."

"If we give, Our cup of water is not tendered till We lay down pipes, and found a company With Branches."

I fear also that we are sometimes too anxious about religious machinery, whilst we are comparatively careless about motive power. It is possible, moreover, to underrate some of the more subtle kinds of spiritual energy. The kingdom of God has its magnetic and vital forces, which work not by direct effort, but by the power of suggestion. We are constantly appealing for more workers and for more money to carry on these various agencies. Far be it from me to say that such appeals are unnecessary. I do not think that the Christian Church is doing anything like the amount of work which it ought to do, or serving anything like the amount of money which it ought to give. It is most needful that direct and strenuous efforts should be constantly put forth for the extension of the kingdom of God. It is especially needful, in order to the evangelization of a world, that the Christian evangel should be preached, but it is also true, nevertheless, that there are aspects of the kingdom of God, in the light of which its progress resembles, not so much the diligent extension of a business or the aggressive conquest of usurped territory, as the growth of a seed into a tree, or the hidden fermenting of leaven in a mass of dough. Quite as much as we need direct effort, and more than we need money to aid such effort, do we need the subtle and indirect influence of the Christian spirit. This I think, is what we are tempted to overlook amid the eager and somewhat bustling activities of our modern church life.

As it is with the preachers, so it is with all Christian "workers," so-called. The spiritual influence of their work is likely to be either helped or hindered by the spirit which they themselves manifest, both in their Christian labors and in their ordinary life. If they are consumed by selfish rivalry and jealousy—if, like "King Bramble," they are "niggardly anxious to be prominent than to be useful"—they are too self-willed and touchy to cooperate with their brethren, they must not be surprised that such "dead flies" spoil the fragrance of their "ointment"; or if their daily life is grossly in consistency with their evangelistic zeal, they may do more harm in the world than if they had never preached. They are themselves in the ranks of Christian workers. Who can calculate the amount of evil that has been wrought by self-seeking philanthropists; by immoral Sunday school teachers; by religious orators who have elected the path of expediency in their union, and electrified their acquaintances in private with their temper; by tract-distributors who have distributed slanders as well as tracts, and by praying Pharisees who have "devooured widows' houses?" There are not a few instances to which I could refer, present infidelity to the shock received by them when some prominent member of the church, whom they had honored, was proved to have been living a life of hypocrisy. To lose confidence in some trusted man, or woman may be the first step toward losing faith in the Christian Gospel; and this, again, may be the first step toward losing faith in the Gospel who by his immorality begets

opinion is likely thereby to beget unbelievers also. On the other hand, the man whose own life betokens a Christian spirit does thereby commend the Gospel which he is seeking to promulge. Thus the evangelistic power of a Christian character is shown by the manner in which it gives greater efficacy to evangelistic work.

But this is not all; it is not nearly all. Christian character, even apart from its connection with distinctive Christian work, is a Christianizing force. It is, in and of itself, one of the mightiest agencies used by the Spirit of God; and it is mighty in proportion to its simplicity and purity. Christ Himself is "the light of the world," not only in virtue of what He taught, but also, and even more, in virtue of what He was and did. The light which comes from Christ is pre-eminently "the light of life."

"And so the Word had breath, and wrought With human hands the creed of creeds, In loveliness of perfect deeds, More strong than all poetic thought."

So, too, when our Lord said to His disciples, "Ye are the light of the world," He does not seem to have been referring specially to the truth which they might preach. "Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father which is in heaven." Such words point rather to the light which shines from character. And again, when He said to them, "Ye are the salt of the earth," He must have been referring chiefly to the influence of their spirit and life; for He added, by way of warning, that the salt is "good for nothing" if it loses "its savor." It is surely also a significant fact that in those epistles of the New Testament which are addressed to the churches there are comparatively few exhortations to special effort for the spread of the truth and the conversion of souls, whilst there are many exhortations to a holy character and conduct. The apostles seem to have been chiefly anxious that all Christian converts should beware of relapsing into the heathenish or worldly life, and should carry the Christian spirit into their ordinary duties and relationships throughout the New Testament clearly shows what transcendent importance was attached by the first preachers of the Cross to the virtues and graces of the Christian character as a practical testimony to the power of the Gospel, and as an evangelizing force in human society. (See Thomas H. Hildes, before the Lancashire (Eng.) Congregational Union.)

The Preacher and the Robbers.

A Methodist preacher many years ago was journeying to a village where he was to dispense the Word of life, according to the usual routine of his duty, and was stopped on his way by three robbers. One of them seized his bridle reins, another presented a pistol and demanded his money; the third was a mere looker on.

The grave and devout man looked each and all of them in the face, and with great gravity and seriousness said: "Friends, did you pray to God before you left home? Did you ask God to bless you in your undertakings to-day?" The question startled them for a moment. Recovering themselves, one said, "We have no time to answer such questions, we want your money."

"I am a poor preacher of the gospel," was the reply; "but what little money I have I have put in your hands to-day. A few shillings was all he had to give. 'Have you a watch?' 'Yes.' 'Well, then, give it to us.' In taking the watch from his pocket, his sabbie bags were displayed. 'What have you here?' was the question again.

"I cannot say I have nothing in them but religious books, because I have a pair of shoes and a change of linen also." "We must have them." The preacher dismounted. The saddle-bags were taken possession of and no further demand made. Instantly the preacher began to unbutton his great coat, and to throw it off his shoulders, at the same time asking, "Will you have my great coat?"

"No," was the reply; "you are a generous man and we will not take it." He then addressed them as follows: "I have given you everything you asked for, and would have given you more than you asked for, if I have one favor to ask of you." "What is that?" "That you kneel down and allow me to pray to Almighty God in your behalf; to ask him to turn your hearts and put you in the right way."

"I will have nothing to do with the man's things," said the ringleader of them. "Nor I either," said another of them. "Here, take your watch, take your money, take your saddle-bags; if we have any to do with you, the judgment of God will overtake us."

No such article was returned. That, however, did not satisfy the sainted man. He urged prayer upon them. He knelt down; one of the robbers knelt with him; one prayed, the other wept, confessed his sin, said it was the first time in his life that he had done such a thing, and should be the last. How far he kept his word is known only to Him to whom the darkness and light are equally alike to Him whose words try the children of men.—Saturday Evening Post, 1852.

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