

THE CHRISTIAN RACE

AND OTHER SERMONS

BY

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MCM

PREFATORY NOTE

ALTHOUGH the Bishop of Liverpool has published many books—Commentaries, Biographies, and Theological Dissertations—he has never published a volume of sermons.

When his many friends heard that he was about to resign the See of Liverpool, they urged him to publish a volume of his sermons as a “memorial” of his *sixty years*’ ministry. The Bishop kindly consented to do so, and invited me to make a selection from his MSS. and to prepare the sermons for the press. I need hardly say that I willingly undertook the task as a “labour of love” for my aged Bishop. The selection I have made for publication sets forth the great doctrines of our Faith—Sin, Redemption, Regeneration, and Sanctification. I have also added sermons which call attention to the *Practical* side of Christianity, and which especially emphasise the “DUTIES” of the Christian life. The closing sermons proclaim the coming of our Lord; the Reward of His Saints; and the Rest of Heaven.

Friends, who knew of the preparation of these sermons for the press, have been praying that the “message of God” which they contain may bring blessing to many thousands. In the sure and certain hope that His Word will not return unto Him void I have prepared this volume of sermons by the first Bishop of Liverpool—and in this hope it is sent forth.

T. J. MADDEN,

Archdeacon of Warrington,

LIVERPOOL, *March 1st, 1900.*

The Bishopric of Liverpool was declared vacant on March 3rd, 1900. [Bishop Ryle died 10th June 1900. (ET editor)]

THE GRACE OF GOD IN VAIN.

“We then, as workers together with him, beseech you also that ye receive not the grace of God in vain.”—2 COR. vi. 1.

ALTHOUGH the Church of Corinth, to which these words were written, was certainly not a body without spot and blemish; although we learn by Paul’s first Epistle that in many things its members were to be blamed; still, with all its faults, it is plain this Church was very different from the churches of our own day; there was less profession without practice, more fruit in proportion to the branches, a stronger leaven of faith and holiness and love, a more abundant crop of wheat in proportion to the tares. And yet you see by the text how solemnly the apostle warns them of danger, how earnestly he entreats them not to hear the gospel only to their condemnation; he would not have them rest upon their outward privileges and opportunities, he would not have them soothe their consciences with the idea that all was safe because they were baptised in the name of Jesus, but as a faithful labourer in God’s vineyard he calls on them to examine themselves, and beware lest they receive the grace of God in vain. And are we better than they? Can we produce a greater list of evidences that God is in us of a truth? I speak as unto wise men, judge ye what I say. Verily, beloved, we are guilty in this matter. Let us rather confess that we have nothing whereof to glory, and as a shortcoming generation let us humbly consider what this text contains for our particular instruction. It is an easy matter to say, “one minister is too sharp, we do not like him, and another is too high, we cannot understand him, and another makes the way so narrow that no one can be saved, and another is so dull that we do not care to hear him”; but consider, O ye men and women who are so difficult to please, consider, O ye who are so backward to search the Scriptures for yourselves, ye have a great work to do, the time is short, the fashion of this world passeth away, and tremble lest ye go on doubting and trifling and fault-finding till the end, and so be found among that wretched company who have received the grace of God in vain.

Now, there are three points to be considered in our text.

- I. What you are to understand by the grace of God.
- II. What it is to receive it in vain.
- III. The reasons why we beseech you so earnestly not to receive it in vain.

I. First, then, what is this grace of God, which the apostle here speaks of? It is an expression which has different meanings in Scripture; sometimes it signifies the free favour of God, as when we read, “By grace are ye saved, not of works”; sometimes it means the operation of the Holy

Spirit in a man's conversion, as when St. Paul tells the Galatians, it was "God who called me by His grace"; but in our text I conceive it has a wider, broader signification. I take it to mean that gracious offer of free salvation for the worst of sinners which is commonly called the gospel, and so called because it is in every way good tidings, that free gift of righteousness, peace and pardon, which is provided for all who will believe in the Lord Jesus. Now, what is it that makes this offer so important and so precious? It is simply this, that we are all by nature sinful and corrupt. We are born into the world with a disposition inclined to evil and not to good; we show it in our infancy by angry tempers, by jealousy, by selfishness; we show it in our youth by deceit, by idleness, by unwillingness to learn, by disobedience to parents, by unthankfulness, by self-conceit; and when we come to man's estate we show it in a hundred fashions,—by giving way to our lusts and passions whenever we dare, by loving pleasure more than God, by Sabbath-breaking, and swearing, and drinking and fornication, by uncharitable conduct to our neighbours, by pride and vanity, by neglecting God's Bible, by staying away from His church, by despising His sacraments, by dishonouring His ministers, by worldly-mindedness, by living on from year to year without a spark of love to Him who gave us life and breath and all things that we enjoy. This is the manner in which we naturally like to pass our time; and thus it is that one way or another we prove our hearts to be "deceitful above all things and desperately wicked." No doubt it was not so in the beginning: man was created upright, and his Maker pronounced him, like His other works, to be very good in the day when everything was finished; but Adam did not keep his first estate, he ate the forbidden fruit and fell; and in that hour there came an awful change over his nature: he lost the holy image and likeness of God, and from that time the imagination of man has had a continual bent towards evil. And yet the God with whom we have to do is holy: He is of purer eyes than to behold iniquity, the least speck of sin is an abomination in His sight; the heaven that He dwells in is a holy place, and the general judgment which he hath appointed as the end of all things will be a judgment of holiness and a judgment of righteousness. And how can we expect to face this fiery trial? wherewith can we come into our Maker's presence? The laws we have insulted, and the mercies we have lightly esteemed, would all rise up against us; by nature we are all shut up unto condemnation, there remains nothing for us to look forward to, but the worm that never dies and the fire that shall not be quenched.

But here, in this deplorable case, the grace of God has come in: the Lord of all, out of pure love and mercy for we deserve nothing but wrath and condemnation—out of pure love and mercy, for He was not obliged to redeem us—the Lord of all has sent His beloved Son Jesus Christ to take our

nature upon Him, and suffer death upon the cross, “that whosoever believeth in Him should not perish, but have everlasting life.” It is the grace of God that, when we were all without hope, Christ came into the world, to do the things we never could have done, to fulfil that holy and just and good law which brings us all in guilty, and He did fulfil it to the last jot and tittle; to suffer the punishment which we deserved, and He did suffer it upon the cross, and drank the bitter cup to the very dregs; and by the things He did and the things He suffered He provided a perfect righteousness for every one that is willing to believe.

It is the grace of God that He came to do His Father’s will, and to satisfy His Father’s justice, by standing in our place and taking upon Himself the sins of the whole world; and though the burden was so heavy that He sweat great drops of blood, yet He proved “mighty to save,” and won a victory over our great enemies upon the cross—here is the grace of God, of which the apostle spake; here is the message we are charged to deliver. We offer to you Christ and a free pardon, Christ and everlasting life; you may have been fornicators and adulterers, and thieves and covetous and drunkards, and revilers and extortioners, and yet you are not shut out from this salvation; only believe—all things are possible to him that believeth. You tell me you have been a sinner before God exceedingly—I answer the blood of Christ cleanseth from all sin; you tell me you have broken God’s laws a million times—I answer Christ is the end of the law for righteousness to everyone that believeth; you tell me you have no righteousness, you will never be fit for heaven—I offer you the perfect righteousness of the Lord Jesus Himself, all that He hath done shall be accounted yours. I repeat, the complete righteousness of the Lord Jesus shall be placed upon you as a pure white garment, which shall cover all your iniquities, and who shall dare to raise his voice against you? But you tell me you have such a cold, dead, wicked heart,—I answer, if you come at once unto the Lord Jesus He shall pour the Holy Ghost upon you and give you a new one, and you shall become a new creature.

This very day I set before the worst among you pardon and peace and immortality, without money and without price: I do not tell you to go and become saints, to go and live a new life before you can receive these blessings; I call upon you to return at once, with all your sins upon you, and lay them at your Saviour’s feet, and they shall be forgiven. I know nothing of conditions; I am not sent to one and not to another. I am commissioned to invite you all to my Master’s banquet, and whatever your character may have been in time past, however thoughtless and profane you may have been, I am charged to offer you the gospel of the grace of God, to tell you all shall be pardoned and forgotten if you trust in Jesus’ name. Here is bread for the hungry and water for the thirsty—healing balm for the

wounded and rest for the weary—light for those that are in darkness and life for those that are dead—riches for those that are poor, and joy for those that mourn; Christ's precious blood shall wash away every single sin, Christ's everlasting righteousness shall be all your own. Return unto Jesus all ye that are far off in this congregation, old or young, high or low, rich or poor—whether ye be now sleeping in utter carelessness, whether ye be godless blasphemers of the truth, whether ye be talking, self-deceiving hypocrites, whether ye be self-righteous, formal Pharisees, whether ye be cold, heartless listeners to truth, whether ye be wretched backsliders from the narrow way—return unto Jesus, I beseech you, for He hath redeemed you.

What fruit have ye in the life ye now live? Ye are not really happy; ye tremble at the thought of judgment: return unto Jesus and ye shall be welcome; all things shall be yours, the world or life or death, or things present or things to come, all shall be yours, for ye shall be Christ's and Christ is God's. Come to your Father's house; the price of your redemption has been paid, and He prays you to enter in; He tells the very guiltiest of you all that if you will only come to Him through the appointed Mediator, He will blot out as with a thick cloud your transgressions, and as if carried into a land that is not inhabited He will make mention of them no more.

Such, then, beloved, is the mighty doctrine which Paul had in view when he spoke of "the grace of God" in our text. He did not merely mean that spiritual help is promised to those who want to set up a righteousness of their own; he had before his mind that grand offer of full reconciliation which is made by our Heavenly Father to His rebellious children through Christ's atonement; he meant that new and living way which Jesus hath opened for disobedient man to draw near his holy Maker; that mystery of undeserved love and mercy which angels desire to look into; and so deeply does he dread the corruption of man's heart, that he seems to tremble lest the Corinthians should hear of this grace of God and go no further, should listen to the report of the gospel and yet perish in their sins.

II. Let us, then, next inquire how and when it may be said that a man receives the grace of God in vain. Now, I have nothing to do in this matter with the open unbeliever, the man who deliberately forsakes the house of God, and turns his back upon the simplest elements, the first principles of Scriptural religion. Of such a one I can only say that he is not receiving the grace of God at all; he will not even listen to our message; he has not even an outward form of Christianity, and to all intents and purposes he is living without God in the world. The persons whom I wish to deal with are those who profess and call themselves Christians, the men and women who generally make up our congregations. You must know well that a vast proportion of them hear the gospel and yet are never the better for it; they receive

the grace of God into their ears and their mouths and their heads, aye, sometimes even into their houses, and yet they do not receive it into their own hearts, and therefore they are said to receive it in vain, unprofitably, to no purpose; and the point I want to establish in your minds at present is how and why and when these things are so. And be ye very sure there never was a time when such inquiry was so necessary: you live in days which prophets and kings of old did wish to see and never saw, days when many run to and fro, and light and knowledge is marvellously increased, days when there are opportunities for getting spiritual wisdom which your grandfathers never enjoyed, but days, alas! when there is much profession without practice, and there is need for much self-examination, lest perchance we deceive ourselves.

Now, I say that all are receiving the grace of God in vain who have never been convinced of the guilt and corruption of their own hearts, who have never found out that they are sinners and must be born again of the Holy Ghost, who are altogether at ease about their own souls, and cannot see the need for such anxiety as Christ's people show, and wonder at people who think much about religion; who cannot believe themselves to be so desperately wicked, and cannot think that God will be so particular. These are the men who in their own opinion are rich and increased with goods and have need of nothing, and to this hour know not that they are wretched and miserable and poor and blind and naked; all such have hitherto received the grace of God in vain. I say in vain, for how can a man know the value of a remedy until he has felt his disease? how can you love the light if you never discovered yourself to be in darkness? how can you see the excellence of the gospel if you never found yourself condemned by the law? how can you understand your need of a Saviour if you never groaned under the burden of sin? Oh no! beloved, if your spirit has never witnessed within you that you have really erred and strayed from God's ways like a lost sheep, that you have really followed too much the devices and desires of your own hearts, that you have really offended against God's holy laws, that there really is no health in you,—if you have never mourned over your transgressions with a true godly sorrow, and hated them with a true godly hatred,—if you are hitherto a stranger to these feelings, it is impossible you can regard Christ crucified as the one thing needful; you may have heard of the grace of God, but you know nothing of it as you ought to know.

But again, there are many who are convinced of sin, and yet will not come to Christ and the hope set before them in the gospel. Some are so melted under the word that rivers of tears run down their eyes, they cannot speak bad enough of their past lives, they will have nothing more to do with the accursed thing; and yet the first temptation carries all before it,

and their goodness proves no better than the morning dew and the cloud which passeth away—and all because they made resolutions in their own strength, they did not build upon the sure corner-stone, even the Lord Jesus Christ, without whom nothing is strong, nothing is holy. Others, perhaps, appear to make surer work: they put away the evil of their doings; they give up outward vices, they put on a whitewashed garment, and are beautiful in the eyes of men, and they are regular and decent in the formal duties of religion—but there they stop. They flatter themselves that all is safe; that they have whereof to boast before God; and that persons so sober, so honest, so just, so reformed, cannot miss of attaining everlasting life. But if the word of God be true, their hopes are false; they are looking to themselves while Scripture says, “By the deeds of the law shall no flesh living be justified “; they are building on the sand.

“I am the way, the truth, and the life,” saith Jesus; “no man cometh unto the Father but by me.” A simple faith in the blood of Christ is the very alphabet in the school of Christianity; and if your conviction never bring you to it, it is plain you have something at the bottom which you have not given up—and that is pride.

There can be no true repentance without faith. You may cast away your old habits, as the serpent casts his skin; but if you are not resting all upon the Lamb of God which taketh away the sins of the world, and looking to be saved by simple faith in Him, you may be wise in your own eyes, but you are just ignorant of the root and fountain, the Alpha and the Omega, the beginning and the end, the first and the last, in all true gospel religion. You may tell us you have repented; but if you have not at the same time laid hold on Christ, you have hitherto received the grace of God in vain.

Lastly, there can be no doubt that they who do not follow after holiness, who do not strive to glorify their Lord with their bodies and spirits, have received the grace of God in vain. About all other men we may not be able to decide with certainty; but about them the rule is laid down clearly.

“By their fruits ye shall know them.” The fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, long-suffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness, temperance. “And they that are Christ’s have crucified the flesh with the affections and lusts.” They that are true believers in the Lord Jesus do love to tread in their Master’s steps and learn of Him, and endeavour to be as like Him as possible in all their habits and tempers. I never can believe that men and women who name the name of Christ and yet neglect His will, and speak of the Holy Spirit while they resist Him, and talk of faith while they plainly do not believe, and of repentance while they continue impenitent, and of a heavenly life while they continue carnal—I never can believe that such, for all their fine words, have any portion or lot in the kingdom of God. These are like sign-posts: they point the way towards Zion, but they never

get one yard nearer to it themselves. Such people build with their lips, but pull down with their lives; they warn others of hell, and yet are on the high road to it. I read that Christ redeems His flock from all iniquity, that He may purify unto Himself a peculiar people, zealous of good works; and therefore, when I see men or women walking in the counsel of the ungodly and standing in the way of sinners and sitting in the seat of the scornful, making provision for the flesh to fulfil the lusts thereof, conforming to the world in its vain and idle customs—I am at no loss about their character. They may often look like saints and talk like angels—they may be acquainted with all mysteries and all knowledge; but if sin reign in their mortal bodies that they can obey it in the lusts thereof without a struggle to be free, I hesitate not to tell them to their face—whoever they may be—“You have, so far, received the grace of God in vain.”

But I may not go further on this point. Indeed, I tremble to think how many of you may come under the three classes that I have named. All who have never been truly penitent for sin,—all who have never rightly closed with Christ,—and all who do not strive to walk worthy of their high calling,—all those have received the grace of God in vain. And if He whose fan is in His hand were now to come amongst you, and thoroughly purge His floor and cast out all the unprofitable hearers, oh, what a poor little handful might possibly be left!

III. I promised in the third place to say a few words about the reasons why ministers are so anxious that you should not receive the grace of God in vain. Oh! it is a strange thing we should have to beseech at all; you would not need it if we every Sunday had a purse of gold to divide amongst a congregation, but when we have to set before you the kingdom of God, righteousness, peace and everlasting life, alas! it is a great matter if we can get you to give your attention to our invitations, it is a great matter if you can be brought to listen patiently to the messengers and ambassadors of your Maker, your Redeemer, and your Judge.

Know, then, that we beseech you earnestly that ye receive not the grace of God in vain, because the time is short, and every day that you continue lingering and undecided doth shorten your opportunity for repentance and make your heart more dull and harder to be moved. The time you have is short for praying, short for Bible reading, short for breaking loose from this deceitful world, short for preparing for the world to come; those fevers and diseases, which God doth shake over the heads of many, might easily cut off twenty or thirty of the strongest of you, and where would your souls be? We beseech you because you have a battle to fight; the world, the flesh, the devil have all to be opposed; you have to put on the whole armour of God, to strive, to wrestle manfully against temptation; and if you really love the crown of glory, you cannot too soon come out from

sinful ways and take your stand among the valiant for the truth upon the earth. But if there were no other reason, we beseech you because of death and judgment. I urge upon you that an hour is meeting each of you like an armed man, when this body shall become the food of creeping things and the soul shall be called to its last account; I see in my mind's eye the business of that awful day—the great white throne, the assembled millions, the open books, the heavens departing as a scroll, the earth and the works that are therein melting with fervent heat; I hear the archangel's trump summoning the dead from north and south and east and west, and I tremble to think how those will fare who have received the grace of God in vain. I tremble to think how they will be dealt with, who have a long account of Bibles unread and prayer neglected, churches despised and sacraments dishonoured, ministers disregarded and sermons scorned, all standing in full array against their names. I tremble to find it plainly declared by Christ Himself, Christ the compassionate and tender-hearted, that even Sodom and Gomorrah shall be mercifully treated, compared with those who have been called upon to repent and have not repented, who have been invited to believe in Jesus and have not believed. And for all these causes, and for many more of which we cannot speak particularly, we do beseech you and implore you to beware lest ye receive the grace of God in vain, to beware of hearing without improving, to beware of professing while you are not growing, to beware of giving your ears to God but not your heart.

See, now, most dearly beloved, does not this text divide you all in twain? Does it not separate the good fish from the bad? You know in your own consciences it does. And where are the few among you who humbly trust that they have not altogether heard the gospel in vain? Hearken, O ye that are really followers of Christ. Can you see in yourselves a feeling of hatred towards sin that once you never knew, a dependence on the blood of Jesus only to which ye were once strangers, a thirsting after holiness with which ye were once unacquainted? Then O rejoice with humble fear, and go forward in faith and hope; and though iniquity abounds, let not your love wax cold; but grow in grace and every day bring forth more fruit, and unto the God of gods ye shall every one of you appear in Zion.

But are there not many of you who have all your lives received the grace of God to no purpose, and sided with the world? You know there are. I speak not these things to shame you, but as beloved to warn you, for it is my heart's desire and prayer to God that every soul among you may be saved; and I ask all such to listen to a word of exhortation. Consider, I beseech you, O ye thoughtless ones, consider the madness, the folly of your conduct. Surely you must feel that in the ways of worldly-mindedness and sin there is no real satisfaction, and you must know the end of these things is death. Surely your Father's offer of forgiveness is a gracious and

a loving one. Oh, do not sell your souls for such miserable rewards as this world can give, and let it not be written of you this day that you were asked to turn and refused. You cannot really suppose that God's beloved Son was crucified and put to open shame, while heaven became black and the earth quaked and the veil was rent at the fearful sight, that you might be careless and live as you please, and yet be saved. Oh, but you must have a low view of heaven if you think it can be won so cheaply! Let me plead with you, let me plead the cause of your everlasting souls. I do not want to make you wretched, melancholy beings; the devil, who was a murderer and a liar from the beginning, tries to make you believe this, but it is not so; I want to provide you with a solid peace, such as this perishable world can neither give nor take away. Why will you cleave so closely to the lust of the flesh and the lust of the eye and the pride of life?—they cannot comfort you in the days of trial which you must go through. Why is the everlasting gospel, which alone is good for every season, good for time and good for eternity, good for sorrow and good for joy, good for youth and good for age, good for life and good for death,—why is the gospel to be treated as a thing that will do you harm and poison the springs of your happiness? You cannot answer me; you know that I am speaking the words of soberness and truth. This very day I call upon you to begin a change—to forsake your sins, to care nothing for the opinion of the world, to receive your Father's invitation readily and willingly, meekly and honestly; I beseech you to turn and live, to repent and be converted, to believe and be saved.

Let not another harvest ripen on this earth and find you still among the number of those who are called the tares, still spiritually dark, sleeping and dead, still unprepared and unforgiven; sow to yourselves in righteousness, break up your fallow ground with the plough of repentance, seek your loving Redeemer with the publican's prayer, "Jesus, have mercy on me a sinner,"—and thus, and thus only, when the mighty harvest of the earth is reaped, the angels shall gather you as precious wheat into the treasure-house of God, and you shall not be burned up as worthless chaff with unquenchable fire.