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Chapter III

GOD'S GIFT AND THE OBJECT OF IT

Comrades and Friends, — My Message to you today is founded upon one of the most popular texts in the whole Bible. You will find it in John iii. 16. It reads: 'God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in Him should not perish, but have everlasting life.'

No passage in the Word of God is more frequently quoted or more loudly extolled by Christian people than this, and it certainly deserves all the attention it receives. Indeed, it is worthy of world-wide proclamation, and of being made the burden and glory of the songs of every saint on earth, of every angel in Heaven, and of every inhabitant of God Almighty's universe, today, tomorrow, and forever.

I. — Now, why is this? What was it that God did for the world to justify this universal admiration? What is actually meant by the words 'He gave His only begotten Son'?

Notwithstanding all the explanations that have been given, the facts the words are intended to proclaim are very often misapprehended, and the lessons they are intended to teach are frequently overlooked. Let me try to find out the true interpretation of this passage, and commend it to your attention.

1. Some people make this Scripture represent God as a Being full of wrath with men on account of their sins, and teach that the sacrifice of Jesus Christ was necessary to appease that wrath, and make God willing to save those who had sinned against Him; whereas the truth, which can be read on the face of the text, is that it was the love existing in the heart of God that prompted Him to give His Son to endure the suffering necessary to honour the law man had broken, and to show the terrible evil of sin.
2. Others regard sin as a debt owing to God's broken law, and looking on the suffering of Jesus Christ as the payment of that debt in full. Consequently, they think there is nothing more for them to do than believe that their debts are all paid; and they often express this by the words: 'Only believe, and you shall be saved.' This notion makes our Salvation depend wholly upon

the simple belief in a doctrine, without the necessity for heart repentance for the past, believing reception of forgiveness for the present, and a life of faith and obedience for the future.

II. — In view of these difficulties, let us inquire what is the real Bible meaning of the passage. It is important that we should do so, and I do not think we shall find it very hard to discover. To begin with:

1. I remark that God, looking down on the world, saw how ignorant men were about sin, righteousness, and judgement. In order to remove this ignorance, He sent His Son Jesus Christ to live upon the earth and instruct men more fully on this important question. He knew exactly what was necessary for men to know, and the most effective manner of imparting that knowledge.

So Jesus Christ came to be our teacher. As John says: 'In the beginning was the Word' – that is, the Son of God – 'and the Word was made flesh' – that is, became a man – 'and dwelt among us.' This was like saying that as words reveal the thoughts and feelings of men to each other, so Jesus Christ came to be the Word of God, in order that He might reveal the thoughts and feelings of God to us, so far as those thoughts and feelings concern our everlasting welfare.

2. Then God, knowing how much easier it would be for man to learn the truth if he could see some one actually living out this truth before his eyes, sent Jesus, not only to be a Teacher, but to present by Example the truth He wished men to learn.
3. And, thirdly, God saw that before men could live the beautiful, holy lives presented to them by the example of Jesus Christ, their past evil doings must be forgiven, and they must become the friends of God. But this could not be done while men thought that breaking the laws of God was a matter of small moment, and imagined that all they had to do in order to cover their transgressions was to weep and pray a little. Therefore, God said, 'I Myself will make a sacrifice that shall show the world how serious a matter sin is, and what terrible consequences follow it; and then I will pardon all who repent and truly seek My forgiveness, and cast their souls on the sacrifice made for them. So the Lord freely gave His Son to die for our sins; and that gift shows the wonderful love of the Great Father.

That seems to me to be the plain and unmistakable meaning of this text.



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Now, in view of this great doctrine of Sacrifice and Salvation, let me come a little nearer to your hearts, and ask:

III. What has been the practical bearing of this love on your lives? How have you been affected by it?

You Salvationists say you are followers of Jesus Christ, and that the Spirit of God dwells in you. You say that you love the world as the Father did; which means, that you love the ignorant, unkind, and bad people around you. Now is this so in reality, or is it only so much talk? God gave unmistakable proof of His love for you. What proof have you given to the world of your love to Him? What proof are you giving today? For example:

1. How much of your thought does the world's sad condition really receive?

Do you ponder over the sins and miseries, and dangers and coming doom of those around you? Do you ever meditate on these things?

I have no doubt you have many other important matters that claim your attention; but, surely, the honour of God and the needs of the perishing souls around you demand a little of your time and thoughts. Suppose you were to set apart a few minutes every night and morning to think about the sins and sorrows of men, and of the great sacrifice God has made on their account. A quarter of an hour every day would not be thrown away, I think, in considering how far your responsibility extends with respect to them, and what additional efforts you can make on their behalf. Then, let me ask:

2. How much of your sympathy and compassion do you give?

Does your heart ever ache, and do your eyes ever weep, when you see men and women forgetting the love of the Father and trampling on the Blood of His Son? Does your soul ever groan as you watch them giving themselves up to wickedness, and running down the broad, dark road that leads to destruction? How many compassionate tears does this perishing world get from you? Then, further:

3. How much real labor do you devote to the business of the world's Salvation?



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I daresay that many of you work very hard at your daily calling. But if you were to come home some evening, and find your neighbour's house on fire, you would forget the toils and fatigues of the day, and rush to the rescue of those in danger. That being the case, no matter how hard you may have to toil in other ways, you ought to spend a little strength on the work of pulling the poor sinners out of the fire. Really pulling them out of the fires of sin, devilry, and ruin, I say. Pulling them out in the Open-Airs – in the Hall – in the drinking dens – in their homes. Whether young or old, in season or out of season, pulling them out of the fire. The Father gave His Son for this.

4. Have you given any of your sons and daughters to help Him in the task?

If God counted it a joy to give His Son, what about your children? Perhaps you say you have no big boys or girls to send to the Training Garrison. Well, what about the little ones, or what about some other dear one you could give? Have you consecrated them for the Salvation of the world, and are you training them with that object in view?

Then, there is another equally practical question:

5. How much money do you give to help to carry out soul-saving work?

If it were all added together, what would it amount to? If you were called up to Heaven today, and the account of your actual giving to God read out before the angels, would the record make you blush for shame, or would the offerings of your generous heart make you rejoice with true joy?

Oh, my Comrades, God gave His Son – His only begotten Son – to live and toil and die to save a perishing world. What have you given? What are you giving today?

Perhaps you are inwardly replying to my questions, 'I possess but small talents, and very few precious things, and very little money – what can I do?' Well, that may be quite true; and yet, if you are making the best use of that you do possess, that is all God asks, and it is the royal road to acquire more. For to him that hath – that is, who profitably uses what he has – more shall be



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given; and a man is accepted and pleasing to God according to that he hath, and not according to that he hath not.

So come along, my Comrades, let us begin the giving business once again this very moment. Once more giving ourselves and our loved ones to God, and resolving more than ever to spend and be spent according to our different abilities for the Salvation of the world.

Your affectionate General,
William Booth.