

Place: Lurgan Baptist 28:12:2003

Reading: James 2:1-13

PRACTICAL CHRISTIANITY

13. THE WHOLE STORY OF OUR SALVATION

On a dangerous sea coast where ship wrecks often occur there was once a crude little lifesaving station. The building was just a hut, and there was only one boat, but the devoted members kept a constant watch over the sea, and with no thought for themselves they went out day or night tirelessly searching for the lost. *Many lives were saved by this little station so that it became famous.* Some of those who were saved, and various others in the locality, wanted to become associated with the station and give of their time and money for the support of its work. New boats were bought and new crews trained and the little lifesaving station grew. Some of the new members of the station were unhappy that the building was so crude and poorly equipped. They felt that a more comfortable place should be provided as the first refuge of those saved from sea. So they refurbished the place. Now the lifesaving station became a popular gathering for its members. It was now beautiful decorated and furnished, indeed it became used as a sort of club. Less of the members were interested in going to sea to rescue others so they hired crews to do this work. About this time, a large ship was wrecked off the coast and the hired crews brought in boats loaded with cold, wet, and half-drowned people.

They were dirty, sick, and some were a different colour. The beautiful new club was messed up. So the property committee had a shower house built outside where the victims of shipwreck could be cleaned up before coming inside. At the next meeting there was a split in the membership. *Most wanted to stop the club's lifesaving activities as they were thought to be unpleasant.* Others insisted on lifesaving as their primary purpose, but they were voted down and told if they wanted to save the lives of all kinds of people who were shipwrecked in those waters they could begin their own lifesaving station down the coast. They did. But as the years went by, the new station experienced the same change that had occurred in the old. It evolved into a club, and yet another lifesaving station was formed.

History continued to repeat itself, and if you visit that coast today, you will find a number of exclusive clubs along that shore. *Shipwrecks are still frequent in those waters, but most of the people drown.* Do you know what happens when the church becomes a Christian Country Club ? Do you know what happens when the church becomes a bastion of snobbery ? ***It loses its effectiveness !*** Barna reports that the slide in church membership in the U.S.A. continued throughout last year. *I wonder is one of the reasons Spiritual Snobbery in the church ?* The Lord Jesus spoke of the church snobs in His day when He denounced them in (Matt 23:13) and here James is tackling the same problem. He's been saying, " *Your profession is that you are trusting and following the Lord Jesus Christ of Glory, but He treated all men alike regardless of their rank, resources and reputation. This is the One in whom you profess to have faith. But I'm afraid when I look at your lives I see an inconsistency.*" You see, here were folk

who were professing Christians, yet partiality, and spiritual snobbery was written all over their lives. And such favouritism and partiality was inconsistent with their profession of faith. That was bad enough but now in (2:5) James says that such partiality is contrary to the purpose of God. My if we think and act in a partial way within the church we not only fail to practice what we profess but we fail to reflect the mind of God as revealed in our salvation.

You see, if God chooses the “ *poor of this world,*” to be “ *heirs of the kingdom,*” then by what line of reasoning do we reject them ? What a despicable and disgraceful thing it is to look down on those whom God has been pleased to lift up ? Now this is the whole thrust of James teaching here in (2:5) *where he sets before us the whole story of our salvation, past, present and future.*

(1) OUR PAST ELECTED

The Amplified Bible, “ *Listen, my beloved brethren. Has God not chosen those who are poor in the eyes of the world to be rich in faith and in their position as believers.*” My if we look in Scripture for the Past of our salvation we find it written. God chose ! My God’s choice:

(a) IS UNDENIABLE:

“ *Hath not God chosen,*” James asks. There is no doubt about the answer to that question if you come to the Scripture with an open mind. Do you recall what Moses told the children of Israel ? “ *the Lord thy God hath chosen thee to be a special people unto Himself.*”

(Deut 7:6) *Israel were a Chosen Nation.* Do you recall what was said of the tribe of Levi ? “ *the Lord thy God hath chosen him of thy tribes to stand to minister.*”

(Deut 18:5) *Levi were a Chosen Tribe.* When David was testifying before all the people of Israel he said,

“ *the Lord God of Israel chose me.*” (1 Chron 28:4) *David was a Chosen King.* A chosen nation, tribe, and king. Do you remember what the Lord Jesus said to His disciples, “ *Ye have not chosen Me, but I have chosen you.*” (Jn 15:16) Paul assured the Thessalonian believers that “ *God hath from the beginning chosen you to salvation.*” (2 Thes 2:13) Now in saying all of this James did not mean to deny, or deride that “ *happy day that fixed our choice,*” but he is saying that the whole truth is that although our new birth happened in a moment of time it was actually set in motion by God before time began. God’s choice is undeniable. But it

(b) IS UNUSUAL:

“ *Hath not God chosen the poor of this world ?*” that is those who are poor in the eyes of the world. Abraham Lincoln said, “ *God must love the common people because He made so many of them.*” You see, human choices are the good, the rich, the famous, and the influential. Was that not the whole point of (2:2-3) ?

Two men came into church and the rich man was received and made off, while the poor was rejected out of hand. And why was the rich man chosen ? Because of hi riches. That is the

conventional, human choice. But God's choice is unusual and unconventional. I tell you the Lord has chosen many people the world would pass by. Paul says, "*For ye see your calling brethren,*" (1 Cor 1:26-29) Paul is suggesting that his readers can see the truth with the naked eye. I mean we have only to look around to see that God has chosen some notable people but not many. The people that God has chosen are in the main foolish and weak, base and despised, and "*things which are not.*" Did you ever think about that ragtag bunch the twelve apostles whom the Lord Jesus chose ? Yet they ended up, "*turning the world upside down.*" God chooses the weak and they become witnesses, God chooses the foolish and they become faithful, God chooses the base and they become believers. God chooses the world's nobodies and they become the Lord's nobilities. God's choice is (a) (b)

(c) IS UNCONDITIONAL:

For while the Bible teaches that God does choose, it also teaches that "*there is no respect of persons with God.*"

(Rom 2:11) You see, God chooses without respecting a persons gift, goodness or anything else. Paul tells us that we were "*chosen in Him before the foundation of the world.*" (Eph 1:4) Now let me ask you as a Christian,

Why has God chosen you ? My there is no reason given except one that leaves us in adoring wonder at the feet of the Lord Jesus. Do you recall when Moses was speaking to the Children of Israel he said, "*The Lord did not set His love upon you, nor choose you, because ye were more in number than any people, for ye were the fewest of all people. But because the Lord loved you.*" (Deut 7:7-8) Even Moses spiritual giant that he was could get no further than that. My the Lord set His love upon you because the Lord loved you. And all that you and I can do is say with the hymn writer,

"*I stand amazed in the presence unclean,*" (1)

(2) OUR PRESENT ENRICHED

For James speaks of those who are "*rich in faith,*"

(2:5) Or as the Amplified puts it, "*Has not God chosen those who are poor in the eyes of the world to be rich in faith.*" You see, we are chosen to be rich in or through faith. Now its important to notice this. These believers were not chosen because they were rich in faith, they were chosen to become rich through faith. For faith brings the Christians riches into conscious possession. In other words faith brings these riches into sight and focus. We can see what our riches are in Christ when we exercise faith. Now think about these riches and:

(a) WHAT THEY COST:

Paul says, "*For ye know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though He was rich, yet for your sakes He became poor, that ye through His poverty might be rich.*" (2 Cor 8:9) Grace as been helpfully explained as meaning, "*Great Riches at Christ's Expense.*" My every blessing that we possess is given to us at Christ's expense. Our plenty at the cost of His poverty is the teaching of Scripture. (a)

(b) WHAT THEY COVER:

The Bible says, “ *In every thing ye are enriched by Him.* ” (1 Cor 1:5) In every part of life we should look for the enrichment that is ours because we are in Christ. Do you know what the tragedy is ? We fail so often to see our riches because we do put on the spectacles of faith. You see, its only when we exercise faith that we are able to see the riches that are ours in Christ, in the ordinary, moment by moment matters of every day life.

In other words, the greater our faith, the more our riches come into focus. Now what kind of faith do you have ?

Did you know that the N.T. talks about different levels of faith. For example,

1. WE CAN HAVE A GRAIN OF FAITH:

In the sermon on the mount the Lord Jesus spoke of his disciples like this, “ *O ye of little faith.* ” (Matt 6:30) Is that the level you are on this ? Just enough to see that Christ died for sins, in your place. Now we may go through life with no more faith than that and that faith will get us to heaven. You see, its does not take great faith to be a Christian, rather it takes faith in a great Saviour. My you can be a Christian with no more than a grain of faith, provided it is faith in the Lord Jesus. Do you have that grain of faith in Christ ? Oh, you may know about the Lord, but do you have that grain of faith which has thrown you on the Lord ? Have you come to Him and trusted Him as your saviour ? (a)

2. WE CAN HAVE GROWING FAITH:

We see a bit more now. We see Christ not only as our Saviour but as our Guide, and Helper, and Friend.

We see not only what Christ did for us in His death and resurrection, but what He can do for us now in all of life’s difficulties and problems. Someone has said, “ *an incident is only a problem when I have no resources.* ”

But growing faith sees growing resources. For we see Christ not only as the One who died for our sins, but who daily and dynamically lives within us, and is able to help us in all of the problems and pressures of life.

3. WE HAVE GREAT FAITH:

Is this not what Christ said to that Greek lady ? He said,

“ *O woman great is thy faith.* ” (Matt 15:28) Now a believer with great faith sees much more. He sees that every circumstance of life is allowed and ordained by God for his own particular and blessing. Is this not the whole thrust of the Book of Job ? One of the key names for God in the Book of Job is “ The Almighty, ” its used 31 times. You see, no matter what matter happens in this world and in our lives, God is on the throne and has everything under control. But it takes great faith to see that when your back is against the wall, and when your world is crumbling, and when you are in the midst of the pain, the pressure, the problems ! Now it is easy to speak about it, but

its quite another thing to exercise it.

But this is what great faith sees. It sees riches not only in prosperity but in poverty, not only in health but in sickness, not only in progress but in pressure.

This is the faith that sees that the Lord does not allow a single circumstance or event, or problem, or pressure to come into your life without His intention that you should be enriched, and blessed, and strengthened, and matured and refined and conformed unto the image of His Son. My spiritual riches are seen through the eye of faith, and its only great faith that can go through the darkest days with Paul's unshakeable conviction that

" I am persuaded, that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor powers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor height, nor depth, nor any other creature shall be able to separate us from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus our Lord. "

(Rom 8:38)

(3) OUR FUTURE ENRAPTURED

For do you see what James says, God's people are

" heirs of the kingdom which He hath promised to them that love Him, " (Jn 3:5 Lk 12:32 Rev

1:6) In 1952 King George the sixth died suddenly, and the moment he died his daughter Elizabeth became Queen. Indeed the newspaper headlines the next day put it like this, *" The Queen flies home. "* Now the King had died just a few hours previous, and the coronation had not been held, and Elizabeth was in one of the African countries at the time, but she was truly and factually the Queen the moment her father died. My if we belong to Christ this we are already *" kings and priests unto God. "*

(Rev 1:6) The coronation has not yet been held.

That will come later. After all we are *" joint heirs with Christ, "* and though we may be rejected in this world, we shall reign in the next. (Rom 8:17 Jn 18:36) And

" Oh, that will be Glory for me, " now do you notice what James says about this eternal glory ?

He speaks of

(a) THE CERTAIN FACT OF IT:

It is the kingdom, *" which he hath promised, "* (2:5)

Do you know something ? Its very easy to prove the wisdom of Paul's words today that we are not to trust

in *" uncertain riches, "* (1 Tim 6:17) The O.T. pictures a man seeking to revel in his wealth and it warns him,

" Wilt thou set thine eyes upon that which is not ? For riches certainly make themselves wings, they fly away as an eagle toward heaven. " (Prov 23:5) The Bible is so wise in its approach to materialism. Its say to put trust in things is silly. For riches can disappear as swiftly as an eagle soars into the sky. But the Bible also teaches that the riches of the Christian are not flying away toward heaven they are already there. Peter speaks of the believer as having *" an inheritance, incorruptible, and undefiled, and that fadeth not away, reserved in heaven for you. "* (1 Pet 1:4)

Not a possibility, not a speculation but a certainty. My we are the joint-heirs of a God

promised kingdom. Soon after Adoniram Judson went to Burma to give himself to winning the lost to Christ, he was captured. His enemies strung him up by the thumbs to torture him. Then he was cut down and thrown into a filthy prison. After a while his tormentors came into him and said, “ *And what now of your plans to win the heathen to Christ ?* ” Do you know what he said ? “ *My future is as bright as the promises of God.* ” My we can say the same because there is the certain fact of this kingdom, but there’s also:

(b) THE CENTRAL FIGURE OF IT:

“ *To them that love Him,* ” incidentally on this last Sunday of an old year, do you love the Saviour ? You see, God has promised it to them that love Him. But why do we love Him ? John tells us, “ *We love Him because He first loved us,* ” (1 Jn 4:19) And heaven for the child of God is to be forever with the One He loves most of all, and with the One who loved him before the world was. Someone has said that heaven is “ *going to be the absence of all that is evil and the presence of all that is good,* ” does that not satisfy you ? Well, heaven “ *is going to be all that the loving heart of God can conceive and all that omnipotent hand of God can prepare.* ” Perhaps one of the most satisfying definitions of heaven is in (Jn 14:3) where Christ said, “ *Where I am.* ” An all-consuming view of the Lord Jesus in all of His glory. Is that not what we’ll be caught with when we reach heaven ? Enraptured with Christ ! “ ***The bride eyes not her garment Of Immanuel’s land.*** ”