

Saints Saved With Difficulty; and the Certain Perdition of the Wicked

by Samuel Davies

The sermon emphasizes the difficulties of salvation and the certain perdition of the wicked, highlighting the importance of living a righteous life to avoid eternal judgment.

Scripture: Psalm 73:25, Matthew 5:20, Luke 13:3, Luke 19:42, John 3:3, 2 Corinthians 5:17, 1 Peter 4:17, Revelation 21:8

Topics: "Salvation Struggles", "Divine Judgment"

Description

Samuel Davies preaches about the challenges and difficulties faced by the righteous in their journey to salvation, emphasizing the need for sincere repentance, faith in Christ, and love for God. He contrasts the struggles of the righteous with the certain perdition awaiting the ungodly and sinners who neglect their spiritual duties and remain impenitent. Davies urges self-examination to determine one's spiritual state and warns of the dangers of a lukewarm, indifferent attitude towards religion. He highlights the importance of earnestly seeking salvation and relying on divine grace to overcome obstacles on the path to eternal life.

Transcript

Saints Saved with Difficulty; and

the Certain Perdition of the Wicked

A funeral sermon by Samuel Davies, August 21, 1756

"For it is time for judgment to begin with the family of God; and if it begins with us--what will the outcome be for those who do not obey the gospel of God? And if it is hard for the righteous to be saved--what will become of the ungodly and the sinner?" 1 Peter 4:17-18

This text may sound in your ears like a message from the dead; for it is at the request of our deceased friend that I now insist upon it. He knew so much from the trials he made in life, that if he would be saved at all--it would be with great difficulty; and if he should escape destruction at all--it would be a very narrow escape! And he also knew so much of this stupid, careless world--that they stood in need of a solemn warning on this head; and he therefore desired that his death should give occasion to a sermon on this alarming subject.

And now--the unknown wonders of the invisible world lie open to his eyes; and now also he can take a full review of his passage through this mortal life; now he sees the many unsuspected dangers he narrowly escaped, and the many fiery darts of the devil which the shield of faith repelled. Now, like a ship arrived in port, he reviews the rocks and shoals he passed through, many of which lay under water and out of sight; and therefore now he is more fully acquainted with the difficulty of salvation than ever! And should he now rise from the dead--and make his appearance in this assembly in the solemn and dread attire of an inhabitant of the world of spirits, and again direct me to a more proper subject, methinks he would still stand to his choice, and propose it to your serious thoughts, that "if it is hard for the righteous to be saved--what will become of the ungodly and the sinner?"

The apostle's principal design in the context seems to be to prepare the Christians for those sufferings which he saw coming upon them, on account of their religion. "Beloved," says he, "think it not strange concerning the fiery trial which is to try you, as though some strange thing happened unto you:" verse 12, "but rejoice inasmuch as you are partakers of Christ's sufferings." It is no strange thing that you should suffer on account of your religion, in such a wicked world as this, for Christ the founder of your religion met with the same treatment; and it is enough that the servant be as his master, verse 13. Only, he advises them, that if they must suffer, that they did not suffer as malefactors--but only for the name of Christ, verse 14, 15. "Yet," says he, "if any man suffers as a Christian, let him not be ashamed;" verse 16, "For it is time for judgment to begin with the family of God".

He seems to have a particular view to the cruel persecutions that a little after this was raised against the Christians by the tyrant Nero, and more directly to that which was raised against them everywhere by the seditious Jews, who were the most inveterate enemies of Christianity. The dreadful destruction of Jerusalem, which was plainly foretold by Christ in the hearing of Peter was now at hand. And from the sufferings which Christians, the favorites of heaven, endured--he infers how much more dreadful the vengeance would be which should fall upon their enemies, the infidel Jews. If judgment begins at the house of God, his church--then what shall be the doom of the camp of rebels? If it begins at us Christians who obey the gospel--what shall be the end of those who do not obey the gospel of God? Alas! what shall become of them?

"Those who do not obey the gospel of God", is a description of the unbelieving Jews, to whom it was peculiarly applicable; and the apostle may have a primary reference to the dreadful destruction of their city and nation which was much more severe than all the sufferings the persecuted Christians had then endured. But I see no reason for confining the apostle's view entirely to this temporal destruction of the Jews; he seems to refer farther to that still more terrible destruction that awaits all who do not obey the gospel in the eternal world.

That is to say, if the children are so severely chastised in this world, what shall become of rebels in the world to come, the proper state of retribution? How much more tremendous must be their fate! In the text he carries on the same reflection. "If it is hard for the righteous to be saved, what will become of the ungodly and the sinner?" The righteous is the common character of all godly men or true Christians; and the ungodly and sinner are characters which may include the wicked of all nations and ages.

Now, says he, if the righteous are but scarcely saved, saved with great difficulty, just saved, and no more--then what will become of the idolaters and wicked sinners, whose characters are so opposite? The abrupt and pungent form of expression is very emphatic. "What will become of the ungodly and the sinner?" I need not tell you, your own reason will inform you! I appeal to you yourselves for an answer, for

you are all capable of determining upon so plain a case.

"What will become of the ungodly and the sinner?" Alas! it strikes me dumb with horror to think of it! It is so shocking and terrible that I cannot bear to describe it. Now they are mirthful, merry, and rich; but when I look a little forward, I see them appear in very different circumstances, and the horror of the prospect is hardly supportable!

Peter here supposes that there is something in the condition and character of a righteous man, which renders his salvation comparatively easy; something from whence we might expect that he will certainly be saved, and that without much difficulty: and on the other hand, that there is something in the opposite character and condition of the ungodly and the sinner, which gives us reason to conclude that there is no probability at all of their salvation while they continue as such.

But he asserts that even the righteous, whose salvation seems so likely and comparatively easy, is not saved without great difficulty; he is just saved, and that is all. What then shall we conclude of the ungodly and the sinner, whose character gives no ground for favorable expectations at all? If our hopes are but just accomplished, with regard to the most promising, what shall become of those whose case is evidently hopeless? Alas! What will become of the ungodly and the sinner?

The method in which I intend to prosecute our subject is this:

1. I shall point out the principal difficulties, which even the righteous meet with in the way to salvation.
 2. I shall mention those things in the condition and character of the righteous, which render his salvation so promising and seemingly easy; and then show you that, if with all these favorable and hopeful circumstances, he is not saved but with great difficulty and danger; then those who are of an opposite character, and whose condition is so evidently and apparently desperate, cannot be saved at all.
1. I am to point out the principal DIFFICULTIES which even the righteous meet with in the way to salvation.

Here I would premise, that such who have become truly pious, and persevered in the way of holiness and virtue to the last, will meet with no difficulty at all to be admitted into the kingdom of heaven. The difficulty does not lie here, for the same apostle Peter assures us, that if we give all diligence to make our calling and election sure--then we shall never fall. "And you will receive a rich welcome into the eternal kingdom of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ!" 2 Peter 1:10, 11.

But the difficulty lies in this, that, all things considered, it is a very difficult thing to obtain, and persevere in real religion in the present corrupt state of things, where we meet with so many temptations and such powerful opposition. Or in other words, it is difficult in such a world as this--to prepare for salvation; and this renders it difficult to be saved, because we cannot be saved without preparation.

It must also be observed, that a pious life is attended with the most pure and solid pleasures even in this world; and those who choose it, act the wisest part with respect to the present state: they are really the happiest people upon our globe. Yet, were it otherwise, the blessed consequences of a pious life in the eternal world would make amends for all, and recommend such a course, notwithstanding the greatest difficulties and the severest sufferings that might attend it.

But notwithstanding this concession, the Christian course is full of hardships, oppositions, trials, and discouragements. This we may learn from the metaphoric representations of it in the sacred writings, which strongly imply that it is attended with difficulties which require the utmost exertion of all our powers to surmount! It is called a warfare, 1 Timothy 1:18; and fighting, 2 Timothy 4:7. The graces of the Christian, and the means of begetting and nourishing them, are called weapons of war. There is the shield of faith; the hope of salvation, which is the helmet; the sword of the Spirit, which is the Word of God, etc. 2 Corinthians 10:4; Ephesians 6:13, 17. The end of the Christian's course is victory after conflict, Revelation 2:7. And Christians are soldiers; and such as must endure hardships, 2 Timothy 2:3. Now a military life, you know, is a scene of labor, hardships and dangers; and therefore so is the Christian life.

The Christian life is also compared:

to a race, Hebrews 12:1, 2,

to wrestling and the other vigorous exercises of the Olympic games, Ephesians 6:12; Luke 13:24,

to walking in a narrow way, Matthew 7:14,

and entering at the strait gate, Luke 13:24.

This, my friends, and this alone--is the way to salvation. And is this the way in which you are walking? Or is it the smooth, easy downward road to destruction? You may slide along that without exertion or difficulty, like a dead fish floating with the stream; but oh! look before you, and see where it leads!

The enemies that oppose our Christian progress are the devil, the world, and the flesh. These form a powerful alliance against our salvation, and leave no artifice untried to obstruct it.

The things of the WORLD, though good in themselves, are temptations to such depraved hearts as ours. Riches, honors, pleasure, spread their charms, and tempt us to the pursuit of flying shadows--to the neglect of the one thing needful. These engross the thoughts and concerns, the affections and labors of multitudes. They engage with such eagerness in an excessive hurry of business and anxious care; or so debauch and stupefy themselves with sensual pleasures--that the voice of God is not heard; the clamors of conscience are drowned; the state of their souls is not inquired into; the interests of eternity are forgotten; the eternal God, the joys of heaven, and the pains of hell, are cast out of the mind, and disregarded! And they care not for any or all of these important realities, if they can but gratify the lust of avarice, ambition, and sensuality.

And are such likely to perform the arduous work of salvation? No! They do not so much as seriously attempt it! Now these things which are fatal to multitudes, throw great difficulties in the way even of the righteous man! He finds it hard to keep his mind intent upon his great concern in the midst of such labors and cares as he is obliged to engage in. And frequently he feels his heart estranged from God and ensnared into the ways of sin, his devotion cooled, and his whole soul disordered by these allurements. In short, he finds it one of the hardest things in the world--to maintain a heavenly mind in such an earthly region, a spiritual temper, among so many carnal objects.

The people of this world also increase his difficulties. Their vain, trifling, or wicked conversation, their ensnaring examples, their persuasions, false reasonings, reproaches, threats, and all their arts of flattery and terror--have sometimes a very sensible effect upon him. These would draw him into some guilty compliances, dampen his courage, and tempt him to apostatize--were he not always upon his guard! And

sometimes in an inadvertent hour--he feels their fatal influence upon him.

As for the generality of people--they yield themselves up to these temptations, and make little or no resistance; and thus are carried down the stream into the infernal pit! Alas! how many ruin themselves through a base, unmanly complaisance, and servile conformity to the world! Believe it, sirs, to be fashionably religious and no more, is to be really irreligious in the sight of God. The way of the multitude may seem easy, pleasant, and sociable; but, alas, my brethren! see where it ends! It leads down into destruction! Matthew 7:14.

But in the next place, the greatest difficulty in our way arises from the FLESH--the corruption and wickedness of our own hearts. This is an enemy within; and it is this which betrays us into the hands of our enemies without. When we turn our eyes to this quarter--what vast difficulties rise in our way! Difficulties which are impossible to us, unless the almighty Power enables us to surmount them.

Such are a blind mind, ignorant of divine things, or that speculates only upon them--but does not see their reality and dread importance; a mind empty of God and full of the lumber and vanities of this world.

Such are a hard heart, insensible of sin, insensible of the glory of God, and the beauties of holiness, and the infinite importance of eternal realities. Such are a heart disaffected to God and his service, bent upon sin, and impatient of restraint. Such are wild, unruly passions thrown into a ferment by every trifle, raised by vanities, erroneous in the choice of objects, irregular in their motions, and extravagant in the degree of attachment. Such difficulties are strong, ungovernable lusts and appetites in physical nature, eager for gratification, and turbulent under restraint.

And how strangely does this inward corruption indispose men for religion! Hence their ignorance, their carnal security, carelessness, presumptuous hopes, and impenitence. Hence their unwillingness to admit conviction, their resistance to the Holy Spirit, and their contempt of the gospel, their disregard to all pious instructions, their neglect of the means of grace; or their careless, formal, lukewarm attendance upon them. Hence comes their earthly-mindedness, their sensuality, and excessive love of physical pleasures. Hence it is so difficult to awaken them to a just sense of their spiritual condition, and to suitable earnestness in their pious endeavors; and hence their fickleness and inconstancy, their relapses and backslidings, when they have been a little alarmed. Hence it is so difficult to bring their religious impressions to a right outcome, and to lead them to Jesus Christ as the Savior.

In short, hence it is that so many thousands perish amidst the means of salvation! These difficulties prove eventually insuperable to the generality of people--and they never do surmount them.

But even the righteous, who is daily conquering them by the aid of divine grace, and will at last be more than a conqueror; he still finds many hindrances and discouragements from this quarter. The remains of these innate corruptions still cleave to him in the present state, and these render his progress heavenward so slow and heavy. These render his life a constant warfare, and he is obliged to fight his way through! These frequently check the aspirations of his soul to God, cool his devotion, dampen his courage, ensnare his thoughts and affections to things below, and expose him to the successful attacks of temptation.

Alas! it is his innate corruption, which involves him in darkness and jealousies, in tears and terrors; after hours of spiritual light, joy, and confidence. It is this which banishes him from the comfortable presence of his God, and causes him to go mourning without the light of his countenance. Were it not for his innate corruptions, he would glide along through life easy and unmolested; he would find the ways of piety to be

ways of pleasantness, and all her paths peace. In short, it is this which lies upon his heart as the heaviest burden, and renders his course so difficult and dangerous. And such of you as do not know this by experience, know nothing at all of true experimental Christianity.

Finally, the DEVIL and his angels are invisible, active, powerful, and artful enemies to our salvation! Their agency is often unperceived--but it is insinuating, unsuspected, and therefore the more dangerous and successful. These malignant spirits present ensnaring images to the imagination, and no doubt, blow the flame of passion and appetite. They labor to banish serious thoughts from the mind, and entertain it with trifles. They give force to the attacks of temptations from the world, and raise and foment insurrections of sin within. And if they cannot hinder the righteous man from entering upon a pious course, or divert him from it--they will at least render it as difficult, laborious, and uncomfortable to him as possible!

See, my brethren, see the way in which you must walk--if you would enter into the kingdom of heaven. In this rugged road they have all walked--who are now safely arrived at their journey's end, the land of rest. They were saved--but it was with great difficulty! They escaped the fatal rocks and shoals--but it was a very narrow escape! And methinks it is with a kind of pleasing horror that they now review the numerous dangers through which they passed, many of which they did not perhaps suspect until they were over!

And is this the way in which you are walking? Is your religion a course of watchfulness, labor, conflict, and vigorous exertions? Are you indeed in earnest in it--above all things in this world? Or are not many of you lukewarm Laodiceans and indifferent Gallios about these things? If your religion (if it may be so called) is a course of carnal security, carelessness, sloth, and formality--alas! if all the vigor and exertion of the righteous man be but just sufficient for his salvation; then what will become of the ungodly and the sinner?

Which leads me,

2. To mention those things in the CHARACTER and CONDITION of the righteous, which render his salvation so promising and seemingly easy; and then show, that if with all those hopeful circumstances he shall not be saved but with great difficulty, that they, whose character is directly opposite, and has nothing encouraging in it--cannot possibly be saved at all. And this head I shall cast into such a form as to exemplify the text.

1. If those who abstain from immorality and vice are but scarcely saved--then what will become of the ungodly and the sinner? It is the habitual character of a righteous man to be temperate and sober, chaste, just, and charitable; to revere the name of God, and everything sacred, and religiously observe the holy hours devoted to the service of God. This is always an essential part of his character, though not the whole of it. Now such a man looks promising; he evidently appears so far prepared for the heavenly state, because he is so far conformed to the law of God, and free from those enormities which are never found in the region of happiness.

And if such shall scarcely be saved--then what will become of those of the opposite character? The brute drunkard, the audacious swearer, the scoffer at religion, the unclean, lecherous wretch, the liar, the defrauder, the thief, the extortioner, the reveler--what shall become of them? Are these likely to stand in the congregation of the righteous, or to appear in the presence of God with joy? Is there the least likelihood that such shall be saved? If you will regard the authority of an inspired apostle in the case, I can direct you to those places where you may find his express determination:

"Do you not know that the wicked will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived: Neither the sexually immoral nor idolaters nor adulterers nor male prostitutes nor homosexual offenders nor thieves nor the greedy nor drunkards nor slanderers nor swindlers will inherit the kingdom of God!" 1 Corinthians 6:9-10

"The acts of the sinful nature are obvious: sexual immorality, impurity and debauchery; idolatry and witchcraft; hatred, discord, jealousy, fits of rage, selfish ambition, dissensions, factions and envy; drunkenness, orgies, and the like. I warn you, as I did before, that those who live like this will not inherit the kingdom of God!" Galatians 5:19-21.

"But the cowardly, the unbelieving, the vile, the murderers, the sexually immoral, those who practice magic arts, the idolaters and all liars--their place will be in the fiery lake of burning sulfur!" Revelation 21:8

You see, my brethren, the declarations of the Scripture are express enough and repeated on this point. And are there not some of you here who indulge yourselves in one or another of these vices--and yet hope to be saved in that course? That is--you hope your Bible and your religion too are false; for it is only on that supposition that your hope of salvation can be accomplished! Alas! will you venture your eternal all upon the truth of such a blasphemous supposition as this? But,

2. If those who conscientiously perform the duties of religion be scarcely saved--then what will become of the ungodly and the sinner--who neglect these holy duties?

The righteous are characterized as people that honestly endeavor to perform all the duties they owe to God. They devoutly read and hear his Word, and make divine things their study; they are no strangers to the throne of of grace; they live a life of prayer in their retirements, and in a social capacity. They make their families little churches, in which divine worship is solemnly performed. Let others do as they will; as for them and their houses, like Joshua, they will serve the Lord! Joshua 24:15. They gratefully commemorate the sufferings of Christ, and give themselves up to him at his table; and seriously improve all the ordinances of the gospel. In short, like Zacharias and Elizabeth, they walk in all the commandments and ordinances of God, blameless. Luke 1:6. This is their prevailing and habitual character. And there is something in this character that gives reason to presume they will be saved; for they have now a relish for the service of God, in which the happiness of heaven consists; they are training up in the humble forms of devotion in the church below--for the more exalted employments of the church triumphant on high.

Now if people of this character are but scarcely saved--what will become of the ungodly and the sinner, who persist in the willful neglect of these known duties of religion? Can they be saved--who do not so much as use the means of salvation? Can those who do not study their Bible, the only directory to eternal life, expect to find the way there? Can prayerless souls receive answers to prayer? Will all the bliss of heaven be thrown away upon such as do not think it worth their while importunately to ask it? Are they likely to be admitted into the general assembly and church of the Firstborn in heaven, who do not endeavor to make their families little circles of religion here upon earth?

In a word, are they likely to join forever in the devotions of the heavenly state, who do not accustom themselves to these sacred exercises in this preparatory earthly state? Will you venture your souls upon it that you shall be saved, notwithstanding these improbabilities, or rather impossibilities? Alas! are there any of you who have no better hopes of heaven than these? And if it is hard for the righteous to be saved--what will become of you?

3. If those who are more than externally moral and religious in their conduct, who have been born again, created in Christ Jesus to good works, as every man who is truly righteous has been; if such, I say, be but scarcely saved--then what will become of the ungodly and the sinner--who rest in their mere outward morality, their proud self-righteous virtue, and their religious formalities, and have never been made new creatures, never had the inward principles of action changed by the power of God, and the inbred disorders of the heart rectified? What will become of those who have nothing but a self-sprung religion, the genuine offspring of degenerate nature, and never had a supernatural principle of grace implanted in their souls?

Has that solemn asseveration of the Amen, the faithful and true witness, lost all its force, and become falsehood in our age and country? "Truly, truly, I say unto you, unless a man is born again--he cannot see the kingdom of God!" John 3:3. Is there no weight in such apostolic declarations as these? "If any man be in Christ he is a new creature; old things are passed away; behold all things are become new." 2 Corinthians 5:17. "Neither circumcision avails anything nor uncircumcision," that is to say, a conformity to the rituals of the Jewish or Christian religion avails nothing--"but the new creature." Galatians 6:15.

Can men flatter themselves they shall be saved by the Christian religion, in opposition to these plain, strong, and repeated declarations of the Christian revelation? And yet, are there not many here who are entirely ignorant of this renovation of the temper of their mind, of this inward, heaven-born religion?

4. If those who are striving to enter in at the strait gate and pressing into the kingdom of heaven, do but just obtain admission; if those who forget the things that are behind, and reach after those that are before them, and press with all their might towards the goal, do scarcely obtain the prize--then what shall become of those lukewarm, careless, formal, presumptuous professors of Christianity, who are so numerous among us? What will become of those who have but a form of godliness without the power, 2 Timothy 3:5; and have no spiritual life in their religion--but only a name to live? Revelation 3:1.

If those whose hearts are habitually solicitous about their eternal state, who labor in earnest for the immortal bread, who pray with unutterable groans, Romans 8:26; who, in short, make the care of their souls the principal business of their life, and in some measure proportion their industry and earnestness to the importance and difficulty of the work; if such are but scarcely saved, with all their labor and pains--then what will become of those who are at ease in Zion, Amos 6:1, whose religion is but a mere indifference, a thing by-and-by with them? If we cannot enter into the kingdom of heaven unless our righteousness exceeds that of the Scribes and Pharisees, Matthew 5:20--then what will become of those whose righteousness is far short of theirs? And are there not many such in this assembly? Alas! my friends--what will become of you?

5. If those who have believed in Jesus Christ, which is the grand condition of salvation, are but scarcely saved--then what will become of the unbeliever? Faith in Christ is an essential ingredient in the character of a righteous man; and faith cannot be implanted in our hearts until we have been made deeply sensible of our sins, of our condemnation by the law of God, and our utter inability to procure pardon and salvation by the merit of our repentance, reformation, or anything we can do. And when we are reduced to this extremity, then we shall listen with eager ears to the proposal of a Savior. And when we see his glory and sufficiency, and cast our guilty souls upon him; when we submit to his commands, depend entirely upon his atonement, and give up ourselves to God through him--then we believe.

Now, if those who thus believe, to whom salvation is so often ensured, are not saved but with great difficulty--then what shall become of those who have never have experienced those exercises which are the antecedents or constituents of saving faith? who have never seen their own guilt and helplessness in an affecting light; who have never seen the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ; who have never submitted to him as their Prophet, Priest, and King, and who not live by faith in the Son of God? Alas! are they likely to be saved who are destitute of the grand pre-requisite of salvation?

And yet, is not this the melancholy case of some of you? You may not be avowed atheists; you may believe there is one God, and that Jesus is the true Messiah: in this you do well--but still it is no mighty attainment, for the devils also believe and tremble! And you may have this speculative faith--and yet be wholly destitute of the faith of the operation of God, the precious faith of God's elect; that faith which purifies the heart, produces good works, and unites the soul to Jesus Christ! Certainly the having or not having of such a faith, must make a great difference in a man's character, and must be followed by a proportionally different doom. And if those who have it are but scarcely saved; I appeal to yourselves, can those be saved--who have no saving faith at all?

6. If true penitents are scarcely saved--then what shall become of the wholly impenitent? It is the character of the righteous man--that he is deeply affected with sorrow for his sins in heart and practice; that he hates them without exception with an implacable enmity; that he strives against them, and would resist them even unto blood; that his repentance is attended with reformation, and that he forsakes those things for the commission of which, his heart is broken with sorrows. Now, repentance appears evidently to the common reason of mankind a hopeful preparative for acceptance with God and eternal happiness; and therefore if those who repent are saved with great difficulty--then what shall become of those who persist impenitent in sin; who have hard, unbroken hearts in their breasts, who are insensible of the evil of sin, who indulge themselves in it, and cannot be persuaded to forsake it?

Can you be at any loss to know the doom of such, after Christ has told us with his own lips, which never pronounced a harsh censure? "Unless you repent--you shall all likewise perish!" Luke 13:3, 5. And are there not some of this character in this assembly? Alas! there is not the least likelihood, or even possibility of your salvation in such a condition!

7. The righteous man has the love of God shed abroad in his heart, and it produces the usual sentiments and conduct of love towards him. God is dearer to him than all other things in heaven and earth: God is the strength of his heart, and his portion forever. Psalm 73:25, 26. His affectionate thoughts fix upon him, Psalm 63:6; he rejoices in the light of his countenance, Psalm 4:7; and longs and languishes for him in his absence, Psalm 42:1, 2, and 83:1; Canticles 3:1.

His love to God is a powerful principle of willing obedience, and carries him to keep his commandments. 1 John 5:3. He delights in the law and service of God, and in communion with him in his ordinances.

Now, such a principle of love is a very hopeful preparative for heaven--that region of love, and for the enjoyment of God. Such a one would take pleasure in him and in his service, and therefore he certainly shall never be excluded. But if even such are but scarcely saved--then what shall become of those who are wholly destitute of love to God?

There are a few who pretend to be lovers of God--but their love has not the inseparable properties of that sacred passion. Their pretense to it is an absurdity, and if put into language, would be such jargon as this, "Lord, I love you above all things, though I hardly ever affectionately think of you! I love you above all,

though I am not careful to please you! I love you above all, though my conduct towards you is quite the reverse of what it is towards one I love." Will such an inconsistency as this--pass for genuine supreme love to God, when it will not pass for common friendship among men? No! such have not the least spark of that heavenly fire in their breasts, for their carnal mind is enmity against God.

And are these likely to be saved? Are these likely to be admitted into the region of love, where there is not one cold or disloyal heart? Are these likely to be happy in the presence and service of that God to whom they are disaffected? Alas! no! What will become of the ungodly and the sinner--who have no sincere love for God?

I shall now conclude with a few PRACTICAL REFLECTIONS:

1. You may hence see, that the work of salvation is not that easy trifling thing which many take it to be. They seem mighty cautious of laying out too much pains upon it; and they cannot bear that people should make so much ado, and keep such a stir and noise about it. For their part, they hope to go to heaven as well as the best of them, without all this preciseness and upon these principles they act! They think they can never be too much in earnest, or too laborious in the pursuit of earthly things; but piety is an insignificant matter with them; only the business of an hour once a week. But have these learned their religion from Christ the founder of it, or from his apostles whom he appointed teachers of it? No! they have formed some easy system from their own vain imaginations suited to their depraved taste, indulgent to their sloth and carnality, and favorable to their lusts--and this they call 'Christianity'! But you have seen this is not the religion of the Bible; this is not the way to life laid out by God--but it is the smooth downward road to destruction! Therefore,

2. Examine yourselves, to which class you belong, whether to that of the righteous, who shall be saved, though with difficulty; or to that of the ungodly and the sinner. To determine this important inquiry, recollect the sundry parts of the righteous man's character which I have briefly described, and see whether they belong to you. Do you carefully abstain from vice and immorality? Do you make conscience of every duty of religion. Have you ever been born again of God, and made more than externally religious? Are you sensible of the difficulties in your way from Satan, the world, and the flesh? And do you exert yourselves, as in a field of battle or in a race? Do you work out your salvation with fear and trembling, and press into the kingdom of God? Are you true believers, penitents, and lovers of God? Are these or the contrary the constituents of your habitual character? I beg you, make an impartial trial, for much depends upon it.

3. If this is your habitual character, be of good cheer--for you shall be saved, though with difficulty. Be not discouraged when you fall into fiery trials, for they are no strange things in the present state. All that have walked in the same narrow road before you, have met with them--but now they are safe arrived in their eternal home. Let your dependence be upon the aids of divine grace to bear you through--and you will overcome at last. But,

4. If your character is that of the ungodly and the sinner, pause and think--what shall become of you at last? When, like our deceased friend, you leave this mortal state, and launch into regions unknown, where will you then appear? Must it not be in the region of sin--which is your element now? Must it not be in the society of the devils--whom you resemble in temper, and imitate in conduct? Must it not be among the trembling criminals at the left hand of the Judge, where the ungodly and sinners shall all be crowded? If you continue such as you now are, have you any reason at all to hope for a more favorable doom?

I shall conclude with a reflection to exemplify the context in another view, that is, If judgment begins with the family of God--then what will the outcome be for those who do not obey the gospel of God? If the righteous, the favorites of heaven, suffer so much in this world--then what shall sinners, with whom God is angry every day, and who are vessels of wrath fitted for destruction, what shall they suffer in the eternal world, the proper place for rewards and punishments, and where an equitable Providence deals with every man according to his works?

If the children are chastised with various calamities, and even die in common with the rest of mankind--then what shall be the doom of enemies and rebels! If believers meet with so many difficulties in the pursuit of salvation--then what shall the ungodly suffer in enduring damnation! If the diabolical demons are permitted to worry Christ's sheep--how will they rend and tear the wicked as their proper prey! Oh that you may in this your day know the things that belong to your peace, before they are forever hidden from your eyes! Luke 19:42.

Source:

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