

The Salvation of God in Christ

by T. Austin-Sparks

Reading: Rom.5:8-19; 6.1-7; 8:1-2, 5-9; Heb. 8:1-6; 9:24-28.

The Scriptures which we have just read bring before us the whole range of salvation, and salvation, the salvation of God in Christ, is set forth in five parts, and the five parts are clearly indicated in these passages at which we have just looked. I am going to set out very briefly, and, of course, very incompletely, these five parts of salvation, and the object is twofold. Firstly and primarily, that if anyone should read this who does not know the salvation of God in Christ as a personal experience, they might know now what that salvation is, and, secondly, for the sake of those who do know Christ, that there might be put into a nutshell the factors and parts of that salvation and that they might be able to grasp it in a new way. You will realise that this is quite an elementary word.

The Grace of God

Before we begin with the Scriptures or with these five parts, let me remind you that God has written His word of grace unto salvation in His very creation, and that, if only we were alive to it, we carry it about in our very bodies through our whole lives. You know that the Bible is full of symbols, types and figures of heavenly and divine things, and among these things, numbers have a very interesting and living place. God has invested numbers with spiritual meaning. If we were to pick out different numbers from the Scriptures as they occur in many places, we should find that they always bear the same significance and meaning. Many of you know the meaning of many of these numbers. You know that the number One is the symbol of unity. You know that number Two is the symbol of testimony. You know that number Three is divine completeness. You know that number Four is the creation. The creation is always presented by number Four. You get direction or dimension; you have North, South, East and West; you have height, depth, length and breadth, and so on. Four is everywhere suggestive of the creation. I am not going on with the numbers, only to the next one, number Five.

Number Five in the Bible is always the symbol for grace, and grace is the great revelation of God in redemption or in salvation. It is the grace of God unto salvation, and you carry its symbol on hands and feet and in all your senses there is the symbol of divine grace. Both sides of your body, on both hands, on both your feet, your five senses, are the symbol of grace and that symbol is written right into your very being, and there is a sermon in your body to be preached to you every instant of your life, that God made you to be His own and through His grace to bring you to glory, to save you and to glorify you ultimately with Himself. That is the grace of God, and so salvation is presented to us in the Scriptures with five different parts.

Christ's Propitiatory Work Towards God

We will just look at these very briefly, and you go back to those early chapters in the letter to the Romans culminating in chapter 5, and you have the first part, that is Christ's propitiatory work towards God through His Blood, bearing our guilt and condemnation for our sins. God has been robbed through sin of that which is His right in creation — Man. God has been deeply and terribly wronged in man by man's sin. God made man to possess him for Himself. Sin has separated man from God. God made man to be after His own likeness and image, holy; and sin has wronged God in that it has made man other than God intended him to be. God in His universe has been sinned against, wronged and robbed, and that has got to be made good. We must always remember that salvation begins with God, that is with God being satisfied. It is always God-ward before it is man-ward. It is always a matter of God being satisfied, His rights being met, the wrong done to God being adjusted, that which has been taken away from God being brought back.

Salvation always begins God-ward, and there is no true conversion, no true salvation, no genuine being born again which has not got that at its very heart and foundation. I mean that salvation is not first of all what we get. A lot of people come to God for what they can get or what they do get. They turn to God because it means something for them. They are after peace, joy, rest, a clear conscience, salvation from hell, entitlement to heaven, and the many blessings which come by salvation and being right with God, but it is towards themselves that the thought is first of all, and any coming to God firstly on that basis is inadequate. That is why the Lord Jesus, who was always so perfect and accurate in His embodiment of truth, when He gave that wonderful story which is known to us as "The Prodigal Son", when He causes the prodigal to turn round and repent, He makes him say, "*Father, I have sinned against heaven and in thy sight*" — the Father there representing God, of course, and the prodigal sinner returning to God. "*I have sinned against heaven and in thy sight.*" Many preachers who fail to recognise the essential basis of salvation as being firstly God-ward, miss that point, and, if they do not say so, they imply it — Father, I have done myself untold harm and I have got myself into a lot of trouble and made a miserable situation for myself by my sin — please get me out of it! That is not the first emphasis in salvation. No, it is God-ward, it is God's rights. God has got to be satisfied, things have got to be put right with God. Sin in the first place is not sin against ourselves, it is against God. Sin always strikes at God more than at anyone else. God is holy and God meant His universe to be holy, His creation to be holy, and He has a right that it should be, and sin is something against God in His very nature, His very thought, His will, His intention, and all that God is. Sin is against God.

So that here, in these verses in this part of the letter to the Romans, we have sin as universal and sin as against God, and then the Lord Jesus, God's Son, is brought into view as bearing our sin, our condemnation and our judgment as sinners in order that God might be satisfied. And you will remember that whenever the Lord Jesus is set forth as bearing our sin and our guilt, condemnation and judgment, the immediate afterward is an acknowledgment from heaven of God's good pleasure. So it was when the Lord Jesus in type died and was buried and rose again in His baptism in Jordan. Immediately the heavens were opened, and a voice from heaven was heard saying, "*This is My beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased!*" God has looked upon One who has borne the sin of man, the judgment of man's sin, and that being put right and put away, God is able to say, I am well pleased, I am satisfied! *Everything comes out of that for us.* If God can look upon us in Christ and says, I am satisfied, we may be well assured that the reflex of that, the echo of that, will be found in our hearts.

What is the first consciousness of one who really does come to God in confession that they are a sinner and accepts the propitiatory work of the Lord Jesus by His cross? Well, it is a consciousness of great joy. Many of us remember that marvellous joy that sprang up in us spontaneously. Great relief, great release, and a great joy. We hardly knew whether we were walking on solid ground or on air. It is a true experience — not something that we had brought about. It was spontaneous. What did it mean? Yes, we were forgiven, pardoned, accepted. But there is something behind that. God was well-pleased for His Son's sake who had borne our sins and we had accepted His atonement for our sin, who had borne our judgment and God had accepted the judgment which fell upon His Son as our judgment, and the way was clear for us to be acquitted. God was well-pleased, and the echo of God's good pleasure was found at once in our hearts. God's satisfaction. That is the first thing in salvation — a work done in and by the Lord Jesus by which our guilt, our sin, is atoned for, and God is satisfied. That is very simple Gospel, but let us remember it always. Those who have not recognised it before, recognise it now. Those who have to deal with people in the matter of salvation, always keep that first. Beware of first of all bringing to people the benefits which will accrue to them if only they will accept Christ. Remember sin is a terrible and awful thing in God's universe against God Himself, and God must meet that sin in terrible judgment. He has met it in His Son for those who will accept Christ's propitiatory work as for them.

Christ's Identification with us

Then we passed into chapter 6 of the Romans letter and we found the next part of salvation. Here it is Christ's identification with us as connected with Adam, and our identification with Adam, releasing us from Adam who was our federal or governmental head, our old man being crucified with Christ. All that just means this. By nature as we are born into this world we are children of Adam and Adam has sinned. Adam is our federal head by natural birth and we are related to him in his fallen state. The Lord Jesus comes, God's Son, and through His birth, His incarnation, that is His becoming man, taking man form, He identifies Himself with us, a part of this human race, and then voluntarily He steps not only into the place of humanity but into the place of fallen humanity. At a given point in His life here, as He came to the cross, He was made sin for us, He who knew no sin. He was not born in sin, sin was not in Him naturally, but at that point in His cross He accepted identification with us in our sinful state and our sin was transferred to Him, laid upon Him by God, and so He identified Himself with us as children of Adam's fallen race and, as representative of us, He died. He died, and in His dying, in the eyes of God, we died. He was buried. From God's standpoint, we were buried with Him, and that is the end of our natural relationship with Adam. He rose again, but now not as representative of Adam, but as the firstborn of a new creation, as another Adam, a new Adam, a last Adam without sin. We, through faith in Him, are in God's eyes raised together with Him.

But what has happened representatively in that cross is that, through Christ's identification with us in our relationship to Adam, we have been released from Adam, that is "the old man" as we are called here, the sinful body of the flesh, released from our old federal head. Our old man was crucified with Him.

"For if we have become united with Him in the likeness of his death, we shall be also in the likeness of His resurrection; knowing this, that our old man was crucified with Him, that the body of sin might be done away, that so we should no longer be in bondage to sin; for he that has died is justified from sin" (Rom. 6:5-7).

The second part of salvation is our release through Christ's death as our representative, from our union with a sinful, condemned, judged, accursed race in Adam, and our union with a holy, risen, glorified Christ as a new Adam, the First of a new creation. Well, that is a big transition. It is the transition from death to life, from judgment to justification. It is the transition from all that Adam is to all that Christ is, but of course it has to be an experience, and what is here given to us is that it is the experience of those who accept this, not only Christ's propitiatory work to God, but Christ's representative work for us, as us — accepted by faith, and God by His Spirit makes it good.

The Holy Spirit's Work in us

Part Three — chapter 8 of the Roman letter. This brings us on to this new creation ground, on to this life side of the cross, and shows us the Holy Spirit's work in us. The third part of salvation is the Holy Spirit's work in us.

"There is therefore now no condemnation to them that are in Christ Jesus."

You are not in Adam any longer, you are now in Christ; condemnation past. Now then —

"The law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus made me free from the law of sin and of death."

We are represented here as having the Spirit, because the final word is, *"If any man hath not the Spirit of Christ, he is none of His"* (v.9). So that is something outside of chapter

8. chapter 8 is — we are in Christ and therefore His Spirit is in us through what has gone before, that to which we have referred. The Spirit is in us and He takes up the work of God in us as the Spirit of life first, the Spirit of life. A new life; to walk, as the word is in chapter 6, in newness of life by the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus. A new life in us, a different life. This is God's life, that life to which the apostle has referred just a little earlier —

"The wages of sin is death; but the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord" (Rom. 6:23).

A new life which means a new nature, a divine nature, to be within us, to work in us — the Spirit of life.

And this Spirit of life is then indicated as the Spirit of holiness.

"They that are after the flesh mind the things of the flesh; but they that are after the Spirit the things of the Spirit ... the mind of the flesh is enmity against God" (v.5-7).

That has been done with in the cross of Christ.

"The mind of the Spirit is life and peace" (v.6).

This is the Spirit of holiness, the Holy Spirit working in us unto increasing holiness to transform us, to change us from the nature of the flesh. I am not talking about the body. The 'flesh' as there used is a symbolical term for an evil nature, a sinful nature, the self life. To change us from that into the Christ life, the un sinning life, the life of holiness.

The Spirit of life, the Spirit of holiness, the Spirit of power, the very energy of God Himself by His Spirit coming in to do God's work in us. The Spirit of revelation, to reveal in our hearts God's mind, God's thoughts. The Spirit of wisdom to give us understanding in the things of God, which understanding it is impossible to possess apart from the indwelling of the Holy Spirit, who does not come within to reside and to work until we have by faith accepted the propitiatory work of Christ through His blood and the identification or representative work of the cross of the Lord Jesus by His death and burial and resurrection. But then what follows is the indwelling, the residence of the Holy Spirit within us to carry out the work of God.

Christ's High Priestly Work for us

Next the Fourth. That took us over to the letter to the Hebrews. It was only a part of the statement. It is summarised in this way.

"Now in the things which we are saying the chief point is this. We have such a high priest, who sat down at the right hand of the throne of the Majesty in the heavens" (Heb. 8:1).

What is this fourth part of salvation? It is Christ's present work in heaven for us, and it is a very vital part of our salvation. The apostle Peter knew something of the value of that work on his behalf. He as a disciple of the Lord Jesus and a very intimate inner-circle disciple at that, made such a terrible mistake, when he denied his Lord in the hour of the cross, denied Him thrice and denied Him vehemently. The Lord Jesus had said already to him —

"Simon, Simon, behold, Satan has desired to have you, that he may sift you as wheat; but I have prayed for thee, that thy faith fail not; and when thou art converted, strengthen thy brethren" (Luke 22:31,32).

The Lord Jesus indicated that His prayer would avail and that Peter would turn again, and it is just that work that the Lord Jesus is doing for His own, those who have come by these three steps of salvation. He is now in heaven our High Priest, our Advocate on high with God. He ever lives to make intercession for us, and God only knows what we owe to that. We are stumbling, making mistakes, blundering, slipping, far from perfect. Oh, where might be, even we who are the people of God, were it not for that hidden, silent, secret ministry which Christ is fulfilling on our behalf in the presence of God, making intercession for us, as our Advocate with God. We do not know what we owe to that, but inasmuch as it is a declared fact that that is what He is doing, we may take it that we owe a very great deal, if not everything, to that, and in the end it will not be because we were so wonderful, so strong, so able. No, we shall find we are not very able in this matter of getting through triumphantly to glory, but it will be because He held on for us, He made intercession on our behalf. We shall owe it all to the Lord Jesus from start to finish, from One to Five. The whole range of our salvation will be the grace of God through our Lord Jesus Christ, our Advocate, for remember, there is one called the Accuser, Satan, who is always trying to bring accusation back again to us, to bring us under a sense of condemnation, to cast us down from our hope by making us doubt our salvation and doubt God, but the prevailing intercession of the Lord Jesus is overcoming the Accuser for us and will triumph on our behalf.

The Coming Again of the Lord Jesus

Now the last part of salvation, number Five. That is at the end of chapter 9 of the letter to the Hebrews.

"... so Christ also, having been once offered to bear the sins of many, shall appear a second time, apart from sin, to them that wait for him, unto salvation" (v.28).

The last glorious part of our salvation is that Jesus is coming again, and in His coming our salvation will be consummated. When we see Him, says the apostle, we shall be like Him, for we shall see Him as He is (1 John 3:2). He will appear a second time unto them that wait for Him, unto salvation.

The picture, as you notice in the context, is taken from the Old Testament of the High Priest of Israel who went through the court with the blood of the sacrifice, through the Holy Place right into the Holy of Holies, and there by that precious blood interceded on behalf of the people, and the people stood without waiting to know that all was well, waiting to have the assurance that all was accomplished, waiting to be reassured. Presently they heard the bells, those little golden bells which were sewn to the skirts of the High Priest's garment. They heard them begin to tinkle and grow louder and louder, and he came out to the people to declare that all was well, all was finished, all their salvation was accomplished before God. And are we not listening for the bells? Yes, we are, and are there no indications today that the coming of the Lord draws near? Yes, there are many indications. We would say that everything that is marked in the Word of God seems to be pointing to His near coming. That is a big subject, that in the Word of God which points to the coming again of the Lord, but some of us do see those signs rapidly being fulfilled, so rapidly that we are almost astonished, almost breathless. New wars break out overnight, and those very wars are in their position indicative of what must take place at the time that the Lord is coming again. Are we afraid? Do we say, Not yet — we are not ready! Oh no, those who know One, Two, Three and Four, say, Come, Lord Jesus, come quickly! for it is all the completing of the work of grace unto the consummation of our salvation. The coming of the Lord Jesus is a great blessing for His own. It is a mighty and wonderful part of salvation.

I am not going to say any more. I have only indicated these things. If you will look at them, you will see every one of them is capable of being divided up into many aspects, but there is our salvation, fivefold. Count it off on your hands, but, more than that, the

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Lord write it in your history.