

Hebrews - Commentaries by T.W.P. Wolston, Editor

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SCRIPTURE says, "By faith Moses, when he was come to years, refused to be called the son of Pharaoh's daughter." And what was this wonderful energy that wrought in his soul this change? It was faith. Faith is the principle that links the soul with God. It is that mighty principle that sees beyond the things of time, and looks right into eternity. The fact was this, —in some way or other—for the producing circumstances are not told us, —the Spirit of God had wrought in that man's heart, and he looked through time into eternity.

Oh! would to God that you too would take a deep long look right into eternity; for although you are here today, you cannot tell how soon you will be in it. It lies before you, just as Moses knew it lay before him; and he looked right into eternity, and he measured in the balances of the sanctuary what he had for time, and what lay before him in eternity. By grace he was able to do this remarkable act, —he gave up the present, in view of the future. "By faith Moses, when he was come to years, refused to be called the son of Pharaoh's daughter, choosing rather to suffer affliction with the people of God, than to enjoy the pleasures of sin for a season." Refusing and choosing! Every man must do the same. Every one of you must refuse, and you must choose. Either you refuse the world and choose Christ, or you refuse Christ and choose the world. I quite admit that at that moment the present realities of the Gospel, in all their sweetness and fullness, had not come out as they have to us now; but Moses saw enough to make him see and say this: "There is something infinitely better than what I have just now; I will go in for it." But what about your position, Moses? What about your place in the court and the palace? "These things are hindrances in my road, and I will cede them," is his reply.

I have no doubt that the devil suggested to him, Why don't you keep the place that providence has placed you in? Undoubtedly providence had placed him in that position. But remember providence is one thing, and faith is another. While no doubt the providence of God had placed him in a lofty position, he was part and parcel with those who were not God's people. He saw that the thing of the utmost importance was to be of, and to be identified with, those who were God's people. There are some people in this world who belong to God. Do you belong to Him? Then distinctly understand this: If a man does not belong to God, Satan claims that man. People do not like that doctrine; they think it very strange. You are not your own, man! Oh! no. "The god of this world" claims you, holds you, and binds you, if you do not belong to God. Moses felt it, and knew it, and he chose "rather to suffer affliction with the people of God, than to enjoy the pleasures of sin for a season." He said: "Let me be among God's people; I had rather have affliction with God's people, than have the favor and fawning of the world, and all that the children of the world can lay at my feet." He was wise.

But possibly you may say to me, What did he give it up for? I grant you he gave up an earthly court and crown, and the company of earthly courtiers, but Scripture tells us "he had respect unto the recompense of the reward." I wonder if you ever thought of the company that Moses got into afterward! I do not know whether you ever thought of it, but it is worthy of notice. In the gospels we read there was a certain occasion when the blessed Lord Jesus Christ was transfigured: — "And, behold, there talked with him two men, which were Moses and Elias, who appeared in glory, and spake of his decease which he should accomplish at Jerusalem" (Luke 9:30, 31). Ah! Moses has his recompense there. He is in the company, not only of the people of God, but of the Son of God! I want you, my friends, to follow his steps. I want everybody here this evening, who has not yet turned to the Lord Jesus, to do, in principle, what Moses did. It comes to this,—a man has to refuse and to choose.

When I was converted to God myself, what did I do? I refused, and I chose. You may say to me, How did it come about? I will tell you. I was going to be a lawyer, not a doctor, and I had gone up from the south of Devon to London to go on with my legal studies, and I got into a meeting where a servant of God was preaching. That is thirty-three years ago. It was on the 16th December 1860. The dear servant of God who was preaching that evening brought out very simply the importance and the blessedness of being a Christian. Every seat in the hall was filled, and I stood in the aisle the whole of that evening. As the preacher—who has now gone to glory—went on, I said to myself, That man is right; he is right, and I am wrong. But there was more than that, I got the sense that that man knew God, and I did not—that man was saved, and I was not—that he was going to glory, while I was going to hell—that he was going to be the companion of Christ, and I knew I was going to be the companion of the devil perfectly well.

You ask, Were you a terribly gross sinner? I was exactly like you, an unconverted young man—a man full of the world. I admit that at that time there was not a pleasure of the world that I had not dipped into. I tasted of "the pleasures of sin," but they never satisfied me, and that night I was a convicted man—an awakened man. I found that I was on the wrong road altogether—that I was all wrong. I was pulled up. God pull you up, my young friend. God arrested me. God arrest you!

The preacher at the end invited anybody who would like to have a conversation with him to wait behind, and I waited. Ten years before I had seen the preacher. Curious are the links in the chain of God's grace to an unconverted soul. This servant of His had come down to Devonshire to preach, and stopped in my father's house. He wanted to go to a place five miles away to see a friend, and my father let me drive him. When we got home he said to me, "This has been a beautiful drive, and here is a little remembrance of it," and he handed me a mother-of-pearl handled knife with four blades. Now a four-bladed knife is usually thought a great deal of by a lad of ten, and I prized it accordingly.

As I entered the door of the hall that night in London, and heard who was to preach, I felt I had a certain link with the speaker—beloved C. S. I listened with real interest to his solemn, searching address on Solomon building the temple, —since published under the title of "Great Stones and Costly,"—and I thought I would like to resume my friendship with himself.

After a few words with him, he introduced me to a young man of about my own age, who simply asked me, "Are you a Christian?" "No, sir," I answered, "I am not a Christian." "Oh, you are not a Christian! How is that?" I said, "I don't know, but I am not one." "Don't you want to be one?" "Yes, I should like to be one." "Well, what have you to do to become one?" "I suppose I have only to believe on the Lord Jesus Christ." "Yes, and do you believe in Him?" "I do; we all believe in England." "Yes, but tell me, what do you believe?" Well, I confess I was struck with that question when he put it. I had been brought up in a Christian family. I had a Christian father and mother, a converted brother, and several Christian sisters, but I was not a Christian myself. I never was more puzzled than when he put that question, "What do you believe?" After a pause, I said, "I believe that the Lord Jesus Christ came into the world to save sinners." "And to save you?" "Well, I hope so, among the rest." "Do you believe in Him?" "I do." "And are you saved?" "Oh, no, I don't feel saved; and I can't expect to be saved until I feel I am saved." My young friend said, "Stop, you think you really need saving? You know you are a sinner?" I know it, and, what is more, I'd give the world to be a Christian." "But you have nothing to give, you have only to receive;" and then he put the Gospel very simply to me.

I was on the verge of believing the Gospel, and accepting God's way of salvation, when an old acquaintance stepped up, and whispered in my ear, "Remember you have to sing at a concert in Devonshire (I used to sing at concerts, chiefly comic songs) in Christmas week, and you have many other similar engagements that week. Now no man can serve two masters. You could not be a Christian and fulfill all your worldly engagements. You had better put off being a Christian for a fortnight, and then when you come back to London you can believe the Gospel and be a Christian." On went this subtle yet damnable temptation, for it was the devil who whispered, "No man can serve two masters;" and I recollect I said at the time, "That is true, I have served you too long. You are a bad master, and I will serve you no more." And, thank God I made up my mind then and there. The scripture which the devil quoted to hinder me really helped me to decide for Christ.

"And you do believe in Jesus?" said the young man who was conversing with me. "I do believe." "And what do you believe?" he asked again. "I believe that Christ died to save me." "And do you think the Lord is willing to save you?" "Yes, I think He is." "And has He saved you?" "Ah no! I am not saved yet; I don't feel saved." I was waiting for experience. All of a sudden he said: "I see where you are; you are just in the position of the man of whom the apostle James says, 'Thou believest that there is one God; thou doest well: the devils also believe, and tremble'" (James 2:19). Who does not believe that there is a God? Every young man in this hall does so. "Thou doest well: the devils also believe, and tremble."

That verse pierced me through. I saw in a moment the ground I was on, and the company I was in; and I am not ashamed to confess, in the face of you all tonight, that when I saw my company I fled. Fled! To whom? To the Saviour! I saw where I was. I saw I was practically the companion of those who, while they believe there is one God, tremble under the sense of His judgment, knowing that they are eternally lost. "The devils also believe, and tremble," pierced my conscience to the uttermost. They and I were on common ground. The young Scotchman who was speaking with me said, "There is this difference between you and them; there is no mercy for them; they are beyond it. There is mercy for you, and God grant that you may taste it." "What must I do to be saved?" burst from my lips. "You have only to believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved." I thought, Can I believe that Jesus died for me? Yes, I do believe, and, thank God! I made up my mind for the Lord on that spot, —found Him as my Saviour, received pardon and peace on the spot, was filled with joy, and have never for one moment repented my choice.

You do the same tonight, I implore you. I chose Christ, and I refused the world, with the same breath. "By faith Moses, when he was come to years, refused to be called the son of Pharaoh's daughter; choosing rather,"—and you must choose. Make your choice tonight. Would you not rather choose Jesus Christ, and "suffer affliction with the people of God, than enjoy the pleasures of sin for a season," and then suffer their penalty forever? Moses saw where he was. He saw he was going down with the tide. Are you going down with the tide, or are you not? Can you tell me the difference between a dead fish and a living one, in the water? I think most of you could. A dead fish is easily enough known. It goes with the stream, but you generally find the living fish with its nose up the stream. Moses knew he was going with the stream, and every unconverted man is going on with the stream, —going on with "the pleasures of sin." They are only for a season, however. I do not deny that there is pleasure in sin, for God says there is pleasure in sin; but, stop! there are penalties connected with sin, which all who go in for the pleasures of sin are exposed to. The pleasures of sin are only for a season; they do not really satisfy. No young man in this hall who is unconverted is really satisfied.

Just settle down for five minutes and think, in the midst of your folly, and giddiness, and godlessness, —think for five minutes, and you will become unhappy. Your conscience will act. Three months before I was converted I was in a ballroom, and in the middle of a waltz with a young lady we paused before a chiffonier where there were some lovely flowers. "Are not these flowers lovely?" she said. "Yes, they are beautiful," I replied, "but they are very like us." "What do you mean?" she asked. "They are cut, they will be withered and dead tomorrow." I had a conscience, you see. "Oh! what do you mean?" said she, perfectly alarmed. "Never mind," I answered, and we got into the whirl of the waltz once more. But the remark stuck to her conscience; she saw death was ahead of her. Death and damnation were before me, and I knew it full well. I knew that death and judgment and hell lay before me. I am thankful to say that my remark was used by the Spirit of God, and was like seed dropped into good ground. It rankled so in her conscience, that she had no soul-rest till she came to Jesus: When God brought me to Himself, and I was preaching a few months afterward in the town where she lived, she came to hear me preach, found Christ as her Saviour, and then told me how she was awakened in the ballroom. W. T. P. W.

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"How shall we escape if we neglect so great salvation?" —Heb. 2:3.

(Notes of an Open-Air Address.)

THERE is no neglect so terrible as a neglected salvation! It is fatal.

If you neglect to take your daily food you will probably starve—if you neglect to take the medicine prescribed for your malady you will, in all likelihood, die; but, if you neglect God’s salvation, you must certainly be damned.

Now, it is a wonderful and blessed fact that salvation is made possible. God has graciously made it known, and has placed it within the reach of all. “The word is nigh thee!” Like your daily food, “it is in thy mouth and in thy heart, the word of faith which we preach” (Rom. 10). It could not be nearer or more accessible; so much so, that woe to the man who fails to make it his own. To neglect it is to place yourself beyond escape from judgment.

It is not a thing to be sought for in heaven or in the depths, it is not the result of tears or prayers or contrition. It is to be received by faith, here and now, in God’s free and kindly gift. It is for present enjoyment and experience. If repentance is necessary, as it surely is, yet it is not a purchase price, nor a reason why the soul should be saved.

I am not saved because I repent, though I could never be saved without it; but the same faith that leads me to accept God’s great gift causes me, at the same time, to judge myself, and hate the sins from whose condemnation God’s salvation delivers me.

No, my friends, salvation is full and free. It claims no particle of merit on our part. It views us as we are, sinners, lost and undone! It meets us while on that ground, and in that condition! It comes there to save us. It is like food for the starving; medicine for the sick; a Saviour for the lost!

“While we were yet sinners, Christ died for us” (Rom. 5). Think of that! We never asked Him to die; never dreamed of such a way of salvation, and certainly never gave Him a reason why He should thus die for us!

No, no! that reason lay in the full, flowing fountain of His own infinite love. There we find the spring and glorious secret of all His salvation. “God is love.” He has “commended His love toward us, in that, while we were yet sinners (mark the truth), yet sinners, Christ died for us.” Yes, “He first loved us.” His love takes the initiative and the priority. And, if we Christians love Him in return, it is but the response, the reflection of His first love to us.

Oh! but it is grand, glorious, divine. It is just like God—the God of all grace—to act as He has done!

Salvation is great, because it springs from the heart of God. It is great because it was accomplished by His Son in the darkness and agony of Calvary. It is great because it is communicated in the power of God’s Spirit. It is great because it saves great, very great sinners; and it is great because it saves them forever. It is God’s salvation.

It is a gift, and therefore free! To neglect it is to be damned! Alas, there are myriads of souls in hell today whose greatest torment is the recollection that they might have been saved while on earth, but that, whatever other sins they committed, this was their most condemnatory they just neglected salvation!

Ah! my friends, take solemn warning today. Heaven’s greatest boon is, thank God, within your reach; make it yours at once.

“I would give £40,000,” said a wealthy man, who died recently in the South of England, “if I could only be young again.” But money can neither redeem your time nor your soul. Time is sweeping us on to eternity! To heaven or to hell! Which, my friends, which? The redemption-price is paid in the blood of the Lamb. It can cleanse from all sin. It alone! Let’ me plead with you to be wise in time. “Now is the accepted time.”

You are thrice-welcome! Love constrains, conscience pleads, Scripture warns. How, yes, how shall we escape if we neglect so great salvation? May God draw souls to Himself for their blessing and His glory.

J. W. S.

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