

# THE DIFFICULTY OF SALVATION.

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## SERMON III.

*If the righteous scarcely be saved, where shall the wicked and ungodly appear?*  
—1 PET. IV. 18.

*What is meant here by righteousness, to wit, a man endued with evangelical righteousness.* By 'righteous' here, is meant that evangelical righteousness which we have in the state of the gospel, namely, the righteousness of Christ imputed to us; for Christ himself being ours, his obedience and all that he hath becomes ours also; and whosoever partaketh of this righteousness which is by faith, hath also a righteousness of sanctification accompanying the same, wrought in his soul by the Spirit of God, whereby his sinful nature is changed and made holy; for 'if any man be in Christ, he is a new creature,' 2 Cor. v. 17. The same Spirit that assures us of our interest in Christ, purifies and cleanseth our hearts, and worketh a new life in us, opposite to our life in the first Adam; from whence flows new works of holiness and obedience throughout our whole conversation. There must be an inward inherent righteousness, before there can be any works of righteousness. An instrument must be set in tune before it will make music; so the Spirit of God must first work a holy frame and disposition of heart in us, before we can bring forth any fruits of holiness in our lives. For we commend not the works of grace as we do the works of art, but refer them to the worker. All that flows from the Spirit of righteousness are works of righteousness. When the soul submits itself to the spirit, and the body to the soul, then things come off kindly. Take a man that is righteous by the Spirit of God: he is righteous in all relations; he gives every one his due; he gives God his due; spiritual worship is set up in his heart above all; he gives Christ his due by affiance in him; he gives the holy angels their due, by considering he is always in their presence, that their eye is upon him in every action he doth, and every duty he performs; the poor have their due from him; those that are in authority have their due. If he be under any, he gives them reverence and obedience, &c.; 'he will owe nothing to any man but love,' Rom. xiii. 8; he is righteous in all his conversation; he is a vessel prepared for every good work. I deny not but he may err in some particular; that is nothing to the purpose. I speak of a man as he is in the disposition and bent of his heart to God and good-

ness, and so there is a thread of a righteous course, that runs along through his whole conversation. The constant tenure of his life is righteous. He hungers and thirsts after righteousness, and labours to be more and more righteous still, every way, both in justification, that he may have a clearer evidence of that, as also in sanctification, that he may have more of the 'new creature' formed in him, that so he may serve God better and better all his days. Now, if this man shall *scarcely be saved*, where shall the sinner and ungodly appear? Where you have two branches.

1. *The righteous shall scarcely be saved.*

2. *The terrible end of sinners and ungodly*, where shall they appear? &c.

Now in that the righteous man thus described by me shall *scarcely be saved*, consider two things.

1. *That the righteous shall be saved.*

2. *That they shall scarcely be saved.*

*The righteous are saved.* What do I say? the righteous shall be saved? He is saved already. 'This day is salvation come to thine house,' saith Christ to Zaccheus, Luke xix. 9. 'We are saved by faith, and are now set in heavenly places together with him,' Eph. ii. 6. We have a title and interest to happiness already. There remains only a passage to the crown by good works. We do not, as the papists do, work to merit that we have not, but we do that we do in thankfulness for what we have. Because we know we are in the state of salvation; therefore we will shew our thankfulness to God in the course of our lives.

How can we miss of salvation when we are saved already? Christ our head being in heaven, will draw his body after him. What should hinder us? The world? Alas! \* we have that *faith* in us, 'which overcometh the world,' 1 John v. 4. As for the flesh, you know what the apostle saith, 'We are not under the law, but under grace,' Rom. vi. 14. The spirit in us always lusteth against the flesh, and subdues it by little and little; neither can Satan nor the gates of hell prevail against us; for the grace we have is stronger than all enemies against us.

God the Father is our Father in Christ, and his love and gifts are without repentance, Rom. xi. 29. When once we are in the state of salvation, 'he will preserve us by faith to salvation,' 1 Pet. i. 5; and we are knit to God the Son, who will lose none of his members. The marriage with Christ is an everlasting union; whom he loves, 'he loves to the end,' John xiii. 1. As for God the Holy Ghost, saith Christ, 'I will send the Comforter, and he shall be with you to the end,' John vi. 14, 16. The blessed Spirit of God never departs where he once takes up his lodging. There is no question, therefore, of the salvation of the righteous; they are, as it were, saved already.

*Use.* Let this teach us thus much, that in all the changes and alterations which the faith of man is subject unto, he is sure of one thing: all the troubles, and all the enemies of the world shall not hinder his salvation. 'If it be possible the elect should be deceived,' Mat. xxiv. 24; but it is not possible. O what a comfort is this, that in the midst of all the oppositions and plottings of men and devils, yet notwithstanding, somewhat we have, that is not in the power of any enemy to take from us, nor in our own power to lose, namely, *our salvation*. Set this against any evil whatsoever, and it swallows up all. Put case a man were subject to an hundred deaths, one after another, what are all these to salvation? Put case a man were in such grief, that he wept tears of blood; alas! in the day of salvation all tears shall

\* This is one of many instances, in Sibbes, of a peculiar use of the interjection 'Alas!' See also last line of this page.—G.



be wiped from his eyes. Set this, *I shall be saved*, against any misery you can imagine, and it will unspeakably comfort and revive the soul beyond all.

*Obj.* But it is here said, he *shall scarcely be saved*.

*Ans.* This is not a word of doubt, but of difficulty. It is not a word of doubt of the event, whether he shall be saved or no—there is no doubt at all of that—but it is a word of difficulty in regard of the way and passage thither. So it is here taken, which leads me to a second point, that *the way to come to salvation is full of difficulties*.

1. Because there is much ado to get Lot out of Sodom, to get Israel out of Egypt. It is no easy matter to get a man out of the state of corruption. O the sweetness of sin to an unregenerate man! O how it cuts his very heart to think what pleasures and what profits, and what friends, and what esteem amongst men he must part withal! What ado is there to pull him out of the kingdom of Satan, wherein the *strong man*, Luke xi. 21, held him before!

2. Again, it is hard in regard of the sin that continually cleaves to them in this world, which doth, as it were, shackle them, and compass them about in all their performances. 'They would do well, but sin is at hand,' Rom. vii. 21, ready to hinder and stop them in good courses; so that they cannot serve God with such cheerfulness and readiness as they desire to do. Every good work they do, it is, as it were, pulled out of the fire; they cannot pray, but the flesh resists; they cannot suffer, but the flesh draws back. In all their doing and suffering they carry an enemy in their own bosoms that hinders them. Beloved, this [is] no small affliction to God's people. How did this humble Paul, when no other affliction lay upon him! 'O wretched man that I am, who shall deliver me from this body of death?' Rom. vii. 24. It was more troublesome to him than all his irons and pressures whatsoever.

3. Besides, it is a hard matter in regard of Satan; for he is a great enemy to the peace of God's children. When they are once pulled out of his kingdom, he sends floods of reproaches and persecutions after them, and presently sends hue and cry, as Pharaoh after the Israelites. Oh, how it spites him! What! shall a piece of dust and clay be so near God, when I am tumbled out of heaven myself! Though I cannot hinder him from salvation, I will hinder his peace and joy; he shall not have heaven upon earth.\* I will make him walk as uncomfortably as I can. Thus the devil, as he is a malignant creature, full of envy against God's poor saints, so he is a bitter enemy of the peace and comfort which they enjoy; and therefore troubles them with many temptations from himself and his instruments, to interrupt their peace, and make the hearts of God's people sad all he can.

4. Then, by reason of great discouragements and ill-usage which they find in the world from wicked men, who are the devil's pipes, led with his spirit to vex and trouble the meek of the earth; for, though they think not of it, Satan is in their devilish natures; he joins and goes along with their spirits in hating and opposing the saints of God; for, indeed, what hurt could they do but by his instigation? How are good men despised in the world! How are they made the only butt† to shoot at! Alas! beloved, we should rather encourage men in the ways of holiness. We see the number of such as truly fear God is but small, soon reckoned up. They are but as grapes after the vintage, or a few berries after the shaking; one of a city, two of a tribe, Micah vii. 1, Jer. iii. 14. They have little encouragements from any, but discouragements on all sides.

\* 'Heaven upon earth' is the title of one of Thomas Brooks's most Sibbes-like works.—G

† That is, 'a mark.'—G.

5. Besides this, scandal makes it a hard matter to be saved; to see evil courses and evil persons flourish and countenanced in the world. Oh, it goes to the heart of God's people, and makes them stagger at God's providence. It is a bitter temptation, and shakes the faith of holy men, as we see, Ps. lxxiii., Jer. xii. 1, 2. Again, it makes the heart of a good Christian bleed within him, to see scandals arise from professors of the gospel, when they are not so watchful as they should be, but bring a reproach upon religion by their licentious lives.

Yea, God's children suffer much for their friends, whose wicked courses are laid to their charge, and sometimes even by their friends; for whilst they live here, the best of all are subject to some weakness or other, which causeth even those that are our encouragers, through jealousy or corruption, one way or another, to dishearten and trouble us in the way to heaven.

6. This, likewise, makes the way difficult; we are too apt to offend God daily, giving him just cause to withdraw his Spirit of comfort from us, which makes us go mourning all the day long; wanting those sweet refreshments of spiritual joy and peace we had before. The more comfort God's child hath in communion with God, the more he is grieved when he wants it. When Christ wanted the sweet solace of his Father upon the cross, how did it trouble him! 'My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?' Mat. xxvii. 46. How did he sweat water and blood in the garden, Luke xxii. 44, when he felt but a little while his Father's displeasure for sin! Thus is it with all God's children; they are of Christ's mind in their spiritual desertions.

And when they have gotten a little grace, how difficult is it to keep it! to keep ourselves in the sense of God's love! to manage our Christian state aright! to walk worthy of the gospel, that God may still do us good, and delight to be present with us! What a great difficulty is it to be always striving against the stream, and when we are cast back to get forward still, and not be discouraged till we come to the haven! None comes to heaven but they know how they come there.

*Why God will have the righteous with such difficulty saved.* Now, God will have it thus to sweeten heaven unto us. After a conflicting life peace is welcome; heaven is heaven indeed after trouble. We can relish it then. Because God will discard hypocrites in this life, who take up so much of religion as stands with their ease and credit in the world, avoiding every difficulty which accompanies godliness, but, so they may swim two ways at once, go on in their lusts still and be religious withal. This they approve of. Therefore, God will have it a hard matter to be saved, to frustrate the vain hopes of such wretches. Alas! it is an easy matter to be an hypocrite, but not to live godly.

*Use.* If the righteous be saved with much ado, then never enter upon the profession of religion with vain hopes of ease and pleasure, that it shall be thus and thus with thee, &c. Herein thou dost but delude thy own soul, for it will prove otherwise. Forecast, therefore, what will fall, and get provision of grace beforehand to sustain thee. As, if a man were to go a dangerous journey, he provides himself of weapons and cordials, and all the encouragements he can, lest he should faint in the way; whereas he that walks for his pleasure provides nothing. He cares not for his weapon or his cloak, because if a storm comes he can run under shelter or into a house, &c. He that makes religion a recreation can walk a turn or two for his pleasure, and when any difficulty arises can retire and draw in his horns again. An hypocrite hath his reservations and politic ends, and therefore what needs he any great provision to support him, when he knows how to wind out of trouble well enough, rather than to stand courageously to any-



thing. But a true Christian, that makes it the main work of his life to please God, arms himself for the worst that can befall him, and will be saved through thick or thin, smooth or rough, whatsoever comes on it. So God will save his soul, he cares not, but rejoiceth, with Paul, if by any means he can attain the resurrection of the dead, Phil. iii. 11, by any means, it is no matter what. Let fire and fagot meet with him, yet he is resolved not to retire for any trouble or persecution whatsoever that stands between him and happiness. He is purposely armed to break through every opposition to the best things, and whatever may separate his soul from the favour of God. I beseech you, beloved, think of these things, and let it be your wisdom to make the way to heaven as easy as you can. To this end,

1. *Beg the Spirit of Christ.* You know the Holy Spirit is full of life and strength; it is a Spirit of light and comfort and whatsoever is good. The Spirit of God is like the wind; as it is subtle in operation and invisible, so it is strong and mighty, it bears all before it. Oh! therefore, get this blessed Spirit to enlighten thee, to quicken thee, to support thee, &c., and it will carry thy soul courageously along, above all oppositions and discouragements whatsoever in the way to happiness.

2. *Get likewise the particular graces of the Spirit,* which will much cheer thee in thy Christian course. Above all, labour for a spirit of humility. An humble man is fit to do or suffer anything. A proud man is like a gouty hand, or a swelled arm, unfit for any Christian performance; he is not in a state to do good; but an humble man is thankful that God will honour him so far as to let him suffer for the cause of Christ. He is wondrous empty and vile in his own eyes, and admires\* why God should reserve such infinite matters for so base a worm as he is.

When Christ would have us take his yoke upon us, he advises us 'to learn of him to be meek and lowly,' &c., Mat. xi. 29. Some might say, This yoke is heavy, it will pinch me and gall me. No, saith our Saviour, it shall be very light and easy. But how shall I get it to be so? Why! get but an humble and meek spirit, and that will bring rest to your souls.

3. Again, *labour for a spirit of love.* 'Love is strong as death,' Cant. viii. 6; it will carry us through all. The love of Christ in the martyrs, when the fire was kindled about them, made them despise all torments whatsoever. This will warm our hearts and make us go cheerfully to work. Let but a spirit of love be kindled in God's child, and it is no matter what he suffers; cast him into the fire, cast him into the dungeon, into prison, whatsoever it be, he hath that kindled in his heart, which will make him digest anything. We see the disciples, when they had the Spirit of Christ within them to warm their hearts, what cared they for whipping, or stocks, &c.? You see even base, carnal love will make a man endure poverty, disgrace, what not! and shall not this fire that comes from heaven, when it is once kindled in our hearts, prevail much more? What will make our passage to heaven sweet if this will not? Nothing is grievous to a person that loves.

4. *Exercise your hope likewise.* Set before your eyes the crown and kingdom of heaven; those admirable things contained in the word of God, which no tongue can express. Let hope feed upon these delicacies; cast anchor in heaven, and see if it will not make thee go on cheerfully in a Christian course.

Faith will *overcome the world*; all the snares of prosperity that would hinder us on the right hand. Faith, it presents things of a higher nature to the soul; better than they. Faith likewise overcomes temptations on the

\* That is, 'wonders.'—G.

left hand ; all terrors and discomforts whatsoever. It considers these are nothing to ' the terror of the Lord,' 2 Cor. v. 11. Therefore ' faith is called the evidence of things not seen,' Heb. xi. 1, because it presents things that are absent as present to the soul. If life and happiness be once truly presented to our hearts, what can all the world do to hinder our passage thither ?

5. Lastly, we should much endeavour *the mortification of our lusts*; for what is it that makes the way to heaven irksome unto us ? Is it not this corrupt and proud flesh of ours, which will endure nothing, no, not the weight of a straw, but is all for ease and quiet, &c. ? It is not duty which makes our way difficult, ' for it was meat and drink to Christ, to do the will of his Father,' John iv. 34.

*Quest.* Why is it not so with us ?

*Ans.* Because he was born without sin. When Satan came he found nothing of his own in him ; but when he solicits us, he finds a correspondence betwixt our corrupt hearts and himself, whereby having intelligence what we haunt, and what we love, he will be sure to molest us. The less we have of the works of Satan in us, the less will be our trouble ; and the more we do the will of God, and strive against our corruptions, the more will be our comfort. This will make holy duties delightful to us ; but if we favour and cherish corruption, it will make religion harsh. For the ways of wisdom are ways of pleasure in themselves, and to the regenerate, &c. I come now to the second clause.

' *Where shall the sinner and ungodly appear ?*'

*What he means by sinner.* By sinner he means him that makes a trade of sin. As we say, a man is of such a trade, because he is daily at work of it, and lives by it, so a man is a trader in sin, that lives in corrupt courses. For it is not one act that denominates a sinner, but the constant practice of his life.

Now this question, *Where shall the ungodly appear ?* implies a strong denial, He shall be able to appear nowhere ; especially in these three times.

1. *In the day of public calamity*, when God's judgments are abroad in the world. The wicked are as chaff before the wind, as wax before the sun, as stubble before the fire. When God comes to deal with a company of graceless wretches, how will he consume and scatter them, and sweep them away as dung from the face of the earth ! he will universally make a riddance of them at once. Where shall a Nabal stand when judgment comes upon him ? 1 Sam. xxv. 37. Alas ! his heart is become a stone. Where shall Belshazzar appear when he sees the handwriting upon the wall ? Dan. v. Oh how the wicked tremble and quake when God comes to judge them in this world, though they were a terror to others before !

2. But where shall they stand *in the hour of death* ? when the world can hold them no longer ; when friends shall forsake them ; when God will not receive them ; when hell is ready to devour them, &c.

3. And lastly, where shall the sinner appear *at the day of judgment*, that great and terrible day of account, when they shall see all the world in a combustion round about them, and the Lord Jesus coming in flaming fire, ' with his mighty angels, to take vengeance on such as obey not the gospel ?' 2 Thess. i. 8. How will they then call for ' the mountains to cover them, and the hills to fall upon them, to hide them from the face of him that sitteth on the throne, and from the wrath of the Lamb,' &c., Rev. vi. 16. Beloved, I beseech you, let the meditation of these things sink deep into your hearts, dwell upon them, remember that they are matters which nearly concern your soul, and no vain words, touching you and your welfare.