

Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit

CHRIST'S GREAT MISSION

A Sermon

delivered by the
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“Even as the Son of man came not to be ministered unto, but to minister, and to give his life a ransom for many.” — Matthew 20:28.

THE mission of Christ to our world was distinct and definite. The ministry of the gospel should be alike clear and transparent. It was but the other day I read a letter from the deacon of a church in which, speaking of his minister, he said, “We ought to understand geology thoroughly, for we usually hear something of it, at least, once every Sunday; there is one thing, however, we shall never be likely to understand under our present friend’s ministry; the doctrine of the atonement he seems utterly to ignore; I have not heard him allude to it for the past three months; nor do I know, for certain, whether he believes it or not. Though he sometimes alludes to Jesus Christ as an example, I have neither heard of Christ dying, nor Christ buried, of Christ risen, or Christ pleading in heaven at all. In fact, it seems to me I might as well attend a Socinian chapel.” Well, God forbid that such a reflection should ever be cast on me. Is it not my constant

endeavour to bring you back, Sabbath after Sabbath, to the same old, old story of the Cross, and of the redemption by blood which was there and then wrought? This bell has but one note. It may be repeated, I sometimes fear, with too much monotony. Still, the tone is clear. I know that Jesus Christ came into the world to save sinners. There is salvation in none other name under heaven. The propitiation which God has set forth for human sin is alone efficacious. There is no remission without blood. Full salvation is to be procured only through the wounds of Jesus slain. There is no salvation in heaven or earth beside. We are coming to that self-same story again. It never wearies the believer's ear; nor does it ever fail to be the power of God unto salvation to every one that believeth. I want this evening my text to speak. Let me, then, begin by expounding it word by word; and after that let me explain the doctrine to which it gives most distinct prominence.

I. THE PLAIN DECLARATION.

“The Son of man!” So doth our Lord Jesus Christ speak of himself. In relation to our fallen humanity, it sounds humble; but in the light of prophecy, it is full of dignity. “*The Son of man.*” This is none other than the true Messiah—the Son of God, infinite, eternal, co-equal with the Father, and yet he chooses to call himself full often “the Son of man,” perhaps because as it was man that committed sin, it is man who must make an atonement for sin to the injured law of God. Man was the offender, man must suffer the penalty. As in one man the whole family died, in another man they must be made alive, if made alive at all. Jesus tells us that he is a man; thoroughly a man; one like to ourselves. The *Son* of man, a man among men, bone of our bone, and flesh of our flesh; not wearing a fictitious manhood, but a real humanity like our own. This we must always bear in mind; for without it there could be no atonement at all. Jesus is not merely *a* Son of man, but he is pre-eminently *the* Son of man foretold in the prophecy of Daniel, and predicted on the threshold of Paradise in the language of the first promise, “The seed of the women shall bruise the serpent's head.” He is the Man, the second Adam in whom men are made alive. Being thus found in fashion as a man, and having taken upon himself the federal headship of man, he was qualified to become

man's substitute and to make an atonement for human guilt. Dwell on this blessed truth, my dear hearers; dwell upon it, those of you who are not saved; look wistfully at it for the encouragement it offers you. The Person in whom you are admonished to trust is not only God—or his unclouded glory might strike you with awe, and his terrors might justly make you afraid—but he is also man, and this ought to attract you to him, for he is akin to yourselves in nature and sympathy. Sin excepted, he is in no wise different from you. Oh! may you not well draw near to him without appalling dread, and with inspiring confidence, since he calls himself the Son of man, and bids the sons of men come and put their trust under the shadow of his wings?

He "*came*"; that is the next word in our text. "The Son of man came." Strange the errand, and unique as the blessed Person who undertook it. Thus to come he stooped from the highest throne in glory down to the manger of Bethlehem; and on his part it was voluntary. We are, as it were, thrust upon the stage of action; it is not of our will that we have come to live on this earth. But Jesus had no need to have been born of the virgin. It was his own consent, his choice, his strong desire, that made him take upon himself our nature, of the seed of Abraham. He came voluntarily on an errand of mercy to the sons of men. Dwell upon this thought for a moment; let it sink into your mind; he who was King of kings and Lord of lords, the Mighty God, the Everlasting Father, the Prince of Peace, voluntarily, cheerfully descended that he might dwell among the sons of men, share their sorrows, and bear their sins, and yield himself up a sacrifice for them, the innocent victim of their intolerable guilt. If the angels burst out in song on that first Christmas night, if they made heaven and earth ring with their sweet harmonies, much more may we who have a share in the redemptive work of the incarnate God burst out into song as the news greets us that heaven descends to earth, that God comes down to man, that the Infinite becomes an infant, that the Eternal, who hath life in himself, deigns to dwell amongst the dying sons of men. Surely a way from earth to heaven will now be opened up, since there is a way from heaven to earth, so sacred, yet so simple. The same golden ladder that brings the blessed Visitant down to our humanity will take us up also to the divinity of God, to see him as our reconciled Father. "The Son of man came."

The next words are startling, for they reveal a singular intention, far different from the usual aim and end of messages and errands. "The Son of man came not to be ministered unto, but to minister." Let me give you the exact translation, "Not to be served, but to serve." That is the nearest approach to a literal rendering I can supply. He came not to be served, but to serve. He had not a selfish thought in his soul. Though he had set his heart upon being the incarnate God, he had nothing whatever to gain by it. Gain! What could the Infinite God gain? Splendour? Behold the stars; far away they glitter beyond all mortal count. Servants! does he want servants? Behold angels in their squadrons; twenty thousand, even thousands of angels are the chariots of the Almighty. Honour? Nay; the trump of fame for ever proclaims him King of kings and Lord of lords. Who can add to the splendour of that diadem that makes sun and moon grow pale by comparison? Who can add to the riches or the wealth of him who hath all things at his disposal? He comes, then, not to be ministered unto, but to minister. And you see him in the workshop serving his reputed parent. You see him in his home honouring his blessed mother with all filial obedience. You see him at the noontide of his wonderful career in the midst of his disciples, much more their servant than their Master; though he always maintained precedence by his own sovereign counsel, and by their weak apprehensions. As he takes the basin, and the ewer [*water jug*], and the towel, and washes his disciples' feet, you can see the meekness of his disposition. And soon after this you see him giving up himself, his body, his soul, and his Spirit, in order that he might serve us. And what if I say that, even at this very moment, as the Son of man in heaven, he continues a kind of service of his people! For Zion's sake he doth not hold his peace, and for Jerusalem's sake he doth not rest, but continues still to intercede for those whose names he bears upon his heart. Hear it, then, all ye people, and let every one that heareth hail the gracious fact. Be ye saints or sinners, be ye saved already, or athirst for the knowledge of salvation, the thought that Christ's errand was not to aggrandise himself, but to benefit us, must be welcome. He does not come to be served, but to serve. Does not this suit you, poor sinner—you who never did serve him, you who could not, as you are, minister to him? Well, he did not come to get your service; he came to give you his

services; not that you might first do him honour, but that he might show you mercy. Oh! you need him so very much. And since he has come not to look for treasures, but to bestow unsearchable riches, not to find specimens of health, but instances of sickness upon which the healing art of his grace may operate, surely there is hope for you. Methinks were I just now seeking Christ, and sorely cast down in spirit, it would make my heart beat for joy to think that Jesus came to serve, and not to be served. Peradventure I would say, he knows my case, and he has come to serve me, poor me. Do I not want washing? Why should he not wash me? The dying thief rejoiced to see in his day the fountain which Jesus had opened; why should not I see it too, and have a washing from that precious One who comes to serve the vilest and the meanest of the sons of men? Behold! Behold and wonder! Behold and love! Behold and trust! Jesus comes from the right hand of God to the manger, to the cross, to the sepulchre, not to be served, but that he might serve the sons of men.

Pass on to the next words, "*And to give his life,*" or, more correctly, "and to give his soul." We have no lives to give. Our lives are forfeited; they are due to divine justice. Christ had a life of his own, which was by no means due to God on account of any obligations. He had not sinned, but he gave his life. The death of Christ was perfectly voluntary. As he was free to come, or not, so he was not under any constraint to give his life, but he did so, and that of his own accord. The grand object of his coming to this earth was to give his life. Read the text again. "The Son of man came not to be ministered unto, but to minister, and to give his life." Our Lord Jesus Christ did not come into this world merely to be an example, or merely to reveal the Godhead to the sons of men. He came to make a substitutionary sacrifice. He came to give his soul as a ransom. If you do not believe this doctrine, you do not believe Christianity. The very pith and marrow, the very sum and substance of the mission of Jesus Christ is his coming to give his life that he might stand in the place of those for whom he died. He came on purpose to give his life. Now to give the soul is something more than to give the life. He died, 'tis true; yet he did more than die; he died by an outpouring of all his life-floods, by the endurance of an anguish such as no ordinary mortal could ever have borne. Of old 'twas the blood that made atonement.

The animal was presented in sacrifice, but the animal was no sacrifice till it was slain, and then when the purple stream smoked down the altar's side, and the bowels of it were cast upon the altar, then it was that the sacrifice was truly presented. Jesus Christ gave up the very essence of his humanity to be a substitutionary sacrifice for us. His spirit was tortured with pangs that are past conception, much more past description. He said, "My soul is exceeding sorrowful, even unto death." He was like a splendid cluster put into the wine-press, and the feet of eternal vengeance trod upon him till the sacred wine of his atoning blood streamed forth to save the sons of men. He gave his very self, his entire self, his soul, his life, his essential being, to be a ransom for the sons of Adam. Oh! that I could turn your eyes to that great sight! Behold how he gave his life! Would to God that for a moment your thoughts were fixed on those five streaming wounds, those sacred fountains of life, and health, of pardon and peace, to dying souls! Oh! that your eyes could but gaze within the wounds, into that heart boiling like a cauldron with the wrath of God, tossed to and fro, heaving within itself, oppressed, burdened, tormented, and filled with very anguish. Oh! that you could see it; Oh! that you could understand that he came from heaven to suffer all this, to give himself up thus, that he might be, instead of us, the victim of a vengeance we deserved; that his griefs might avert our ruin, that his pangs might rescue us from destruction. He drank the cup of condemnation dry; not a dreg was left; and, in so doing, he poured out his soul unto death.

Moreover, his death is our ransom. So it is written, he came to give his life "*a ransom.*" No one here, I suppose, needs to have explained to him what a ransom means. It may be fairly illustrated by the old Jewish ceremony of the redemption money. Every male person among the Jews belonged to God, and he must be redeemed. There was a settled price. The rich were not to give more; the poor should not give less. The same amount was fixed for all. The tithe drachma was paid by every Jew. Then he was enrolled as one of the Lord's redeemed, of whom you so often read. Failing that, he would have been cut off from the congregation of Israel. That piece of money stood instead of the man—it was his ransom. He was not to die—he was to live as a redeemed person. That is just what Jesus has

done for his people. He has put himself, his soul, his life devoted, his death accomplished, before God in, the stead of our soul, of our death, of us; and every man who has Christ to be his substitute is a redeemed man; he is one of the Lord's ransomed people, and shall go to Zion with songs of everlasting joy upon his head. But every man who has not accepted Christ remains an unredeemed man, under the curse, and subject to the divine wrath, under the slavery of Satan, and awaiting the sentence of an utter destruction. Jesus Christ came to give his life a ransom. As a slave is redeemed by the payment of a price, so Jesus redeems us from the curse of the law under which we were by nature, having himself come under the law. He redeems us from the death which was due to us by himself enduring a death which was a full equivalent in the estimation of God. He gave his life a ransom.

Our text says "*for many.*" We might with greater force and stricter accuracy translate it, "He gave his life a ransom in the room of many." The word "for" there has a substitutionary meaning, "He gave his life instead of many." Indeed, this is the point of the sentence—One stood for many. Jesus suffered for many; he put himself into the place of many. Mark the word "many." With this we finish the exposition. It does not say "all." There are passages which speak of all. They have their meaning. None of them, however, refer to the substitutionary work of Christ. Jesus Christ did not give his life a ransom in the stead of all mankind, but a ransom in the stead of many men. Who are those many men? Bless God, they are many; for they are not a few. But who are they? God knows. "The Lord knoweth them that are his." You may ascertain as much as you need to know by answering a plain question. Dost thou trust Jesus Christ with thine eternal destinies? Dost thou come, all guilty as thou art, and rely upon his blood to take that guilt away? Dost thou confide in Jesus, and in him alone? If so, he died for thee, and in thy stead; and thou shalt never die. This is thy comfort, that thou canst not die. How canst thou perish if Jesus was put into thy place? If thy debt was paid of old by Christ, can it ever be demanded of thee again? Once paid, it is fully discharged; the receipt we have gladly accepted; and now we can cry, with the Apostle, "Who shall lay anything to the charge of God's elect? It is God that justifieth. Who is he that condemneth? It is Christ that died; yea, rather that hath risen again, who is even at the

right hand of God, who also maketh intercession for us.” See here the mainstay of every believer's confidence. He knows that Christ died for him because he hath put his trust in his blessed mediation. If Jesus died for me, then I cannot be condemned for the sins which he expiated. God cannot punish twice for the one offence. He cannot demand two payments for one debt. The believer, therefore finds sweet solace in, the song which Toplady composed: —

*“Turn, then, my soul unto thy rest,
The merits of thy great High Priest
Speak peace and liberty;
Trust in his efficacious blood,
Nor fear thy banishment from God
Since Jesus died for thee.”*

Thus did the Son of man give his life a ransom in the stead of many. And such do I believe to be a fair and honest exposition of the words.

II. SOME POSITIVE IMPLICATIONS.

The main drift of the text is the doctrine of a vicarious or substitutionary atonement whereby Christ's ransom sufficeth in the stead of many. On this let me give to each thought but a sentence or two. It would *seem that man is not delivered from the bondage of his sins without a price*. No one goes free by the naked mercy of God. Every captive exposed to God's vengeance must be redeemed before he is delivered, otherwise he must continue a captive. Broad as the statement may appear, I venture to assert by divine warrant that there never was beneath the cope of heaven a sin forgiven without satisfaction being rendered. No sin against God is pardoned without a propitiation. It is only forgiven through the sufferings of the Lord Jesus Christ. It never can be remitted without the penalty having been exacted. The divine law knows of no exception or exemption. The statute is absolute, “The soul that sinneth, it shall die.” Every soul that ever sinned, or ever shall sin, must die, die eternally, too, either in itself or in its substitute. The justice of the law must be vindicated. God waives none of the rights of justice in order to give liberty to mercy. Oh! my hearers, if you are trusting in the unconditional mercy

of God, you are trusting in a myth. Has someone buoyed you up with the thought of the infinite goodness of God, I would remind you of his infinite holiness. Hath he not declared that he will by no means spare the guilty? No debt due to God is remitted unless it be paid. It must either be paid by the transgressor in the infinite, miseries of hell, or else it must be paid for him by a substitute. There must be a price for the ransom, and evidently, according to the text, *that price* must be a soul, a life. Christ did not give his body merely, nor his stainless character, nor merely his labours and sufferings, but he gave his soul, his life, a ransom. Oh! sinner, Almighty God will never be satisfied with anything less than thy soul. Canst thou bear the piercing thought that thy soul shall be cast from his presence for ever? Wouldst thou escape the dire penalty, thou must find another soul to stand In thy soul's stead. Thy life is forfeited. The sentence is passed. Thou shalt die. Death is thy doom. Die thou must; for ever die unless thou canst find another life for a sacrifice in lieu of thy life. But know that this is just what Christ has found. He has put a soul, a life, into the place of our souls, our lives. How memorable that text, "Without shedding of blood there is no remission." Why? Because "the blood is the life thereof." Until the blood flows, the soul is not divided from the body. The shedding of the blood indicated that the soul—the essence of the being—had been offered. Oh! blessed, for ever blessed be the crowned head of him who once did bear the cross! He hath offered for his people a soul, a life, a matchless soul, a life unparalleled. No more can justice require; vengeance is satisfied; the price is paid; the redeemed of the Lord are completely free!

The question has been asked, "If we be redeemed by the blood of Christ, who receives the ransom?" Some have talked as if Christ paid a price to the devil. A more absurd imagination could never have crossed human mind. We never belonged to the devil. Satan has no rights in us. Christ never acknowledged that he had any, and would never pay him anything. What then? Surely the ransom price was paid to the Great Judge of all. This is, of course, but a mystical way of speaking. A metaphor is employed to bring out the meaning. The fact is that God had sworn, and would not repent, that sin must be punished. In the very essence of things it was right that transgression should meet with its just recompense. There could be no moral

government kept up, there could be no unimpeachable governor, unless conviction followed crime and retribution was exacted of the guilty. It was not right, nor could it have been righteous, on any ground, for sin to have been passed over without its having been punished, or for iniquity to have escaped without any infliction. But when Jesus Christ comes and puts his own sufferings into the place of our sufferings, the law is fully vindicated, while mercy is fitly displayed. A man dies; a soul is given; a life is offered—the Just for the unjust. What if I say that, instead of justice being less satisfied with the death of Christ than with the deaths of the ten thousand thousands of sinners for whom he died, it is more satisfied and it is most highly honoured! Had all the sinners that ever lived in the world been consigned to hell, they could not have discharged the claims of justice. They must still continue to endure the scourge of crime they could never expiate. But the Son of God, blending the infinite majesty of his Deity with the perfect capacity to suffer as a man, offered an atonement of such inestimable value that he has absolutely paid the entire debt for his people. Well may justice be content since it has received more from the Surety than it could have ever exacted from the assured. Thus the debt was paid to the Eternal Father.

Once more. *What is the result of this?* The result is that the man is redeemed. He is no longer a slave. Some preachers and professors affect to believe in a redemption which I must candidly confess I do not understand; it is so indistinct and indefinite—a redemption which does not redeem anybody in particular, though it is alleged to redeem everybody in general, a redemption insufficient to exempt thousands of unhappy souls from hell after they have been redeemed by the blood of Jesus; a redemption, indeed, which does not actually save anybody, because it is dependent for its efficacy upon the will of the creature; a redemption that lacks intrinsic virtue and inherent power to redeem anybody, but is entirely dependent upon an extraneous contingency to render it effectual. With such fickle theories I have no fellowship. That every soul for whom Christ shed his blood as a Substitute, he will claim as his own, and have as his right, I firmly hold. I love to hold and I delight to proclaim this precious truth. Not all the powers of earth or hell; not the obstinacy of the human will, nor the deep depravity of the human mind, can

ever prevent Christ seeing of the travail of his soul and being satisfied. To the last jot and tittle of his reward shall he receive it at the Father's hand. A redemption that *does* redeem, a redemption that redeems many, seems to me infinitely better than a redemption that does not actually redeem anybody, but is supposed to have some imaginary influence upon all the sons of men.

Our last question I must leave with yourselves to answer. *Did Jesus Christ redeem you?* Ah! dear hearer, this is a serious matter. Art thou a redeemed soul or not? It is not possible for thee to turn over the books of destiny and read between the folded leaves. Neither needest thou wish to do so. This is the gospel of Jesus Christ which is to be preached to every creature under heaven, "He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved"; therefore, everyone that believeth and is baptized, being saved, must have been redeemed, for he could not have been saved otherwise. If thou believest and art baptized, thou art redeemed, thou art saved. Now for thine answer to the question—Dost thou believe? "I believe," says one, and he begins to repeat what they call the "Apostle's Creed." Hold your tongue, sir! That matters not; the devil believes that, perhaps more intelligently than you do; he believes and trembles. That kind of believing saves no man. You may believe the most orthodox creed in Christendom, and perish. Dost thou trust—for that is the cream of the word "*believe*"—dost thou trust in Jesus? Dost thou lean thy whole weight on him? Hast thou that faith which the Puritans used to call "recumbency" or "leaning"? That is the faith that saves—faith that falls back into the arms of Jesus, a faith that drops from its own hanging-place into those mighty arms, and rests upon the tender breast of the Lord Jesus the Crucified. Oh! my soul, make sure that thou dost trust him, for thou hast made sure of everything else when thou hast made sure of that. Has God the Holy Spirit taught you, my dear hearer, that you cannot safely rely on your own good works? Has he weaned you from resting upon mere ceremonies? Has he brought you to look to the cross—to the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ alone? If so, Christ redeemed you; you can never be a slave again. If he redeemed you, the liberty of the believer is yours now, and after death the glory of Christ shall be your portion too. Remember the words of the dying monk when putting aside the extreme unction and all the paraphernalia of his Church, he

lifted up his eyes and said, "*Tua vulnera, Jesu! tua vulnera Jesu!*" "Thy wounds, oh, Jesu! thy wounds, oh, Jesu!" This must be your refuge, poor broken-winged dove. Fly thither into the clefts of the rock, into the spear-thrust in the Saviour's heart. Fly there. Rest on him; rest on him; rest with all your weight of sin, with all your blackness and your foulness, with all your doubts and your despairs, rest on him Jesus wants to receive you; fly to him—fly away to him now:—

*"Come, guilty souls, and fly away,
And look to Jesu's wounds;
This is the accepted gospel day,
Wherein free grace abounds.
God loved his Church and gave his Son
To drink the cup of wrath;
And Jesus says he'll cast out none
Who come to him in faith."*

