

J. C. Ryle Tracts

Some of these rare, short "Helmingham Series" tracts, not published since the 19th Century, have come into my possession, and I offer you these three exactly word for word as they were first published about the middle of the last century, while J. C. Ryle was a Rector at Helmingham, Suffolk.

FREE SALVATION.

READER,

Of all the doctrines of the Bible there is none so important as that of free salvation by faith in Jesus Christ. "He that believeth on Jesus is not condemned." "By Him all that believe are justified from all things."

This is the cornerstone of all Christianity. A mistake here is fatal: it is a worm at the root: it is a defect in the foundation. Let a man get wrong on this point, and his whole religion will get into confusion; let a man be right on this point, and he will never wander very far from the path of truth.

This is the doctrine for which we should contend to the very death. We should cling to it for our own soul's peace; we should seek it in the public means of grace we use. Better a thousand times take away the sun from heaven than take out of Christianity *free forgiveness by faith in Jesus Christ*.

This is the glorious doctrine that was the strength of the Apostles when they went forth to the Gentiles to preach a new religion. They began, a few poor fishermen, in a despised corner of the earth; they turned the world upside down; they changed the face of the Roman empire; they emptied the heathen temples of their worshippers, and made the whole system of idolatry crumble away. And what was the weapon by which they did it all? *It was free forgiveness through faith in Jesus Christ*.

This is the doctrine which brought light into Europe 300 years ago, at the time of the blessed Reformation, and enabled one solitary monk, Martin Luther, to shake the whole Church of Rome. Through his preaching and writing, the scales fell from men's eyes, and the chains of their souls were loosed. And what was the lever that gave him his power? *It was free forgiveness through faith in Jesus Christ*.

This is the doctrine that revived our own Church in the middle of last century, when Whitefield, and the Wesleys, and Berridge, and Venn broke the wretched spirit of slumber that had come over the land, and roused men to think. They began a mighty work, with little seeming likelihood of success; they began, few in number, with small encouragement from the rich and great: but they prospered. And why? Because they preached *free forgiveness through faith in Christ*.

This is the doctrine which is the true strength of any Church on earth at this day. It is not orders, or endowments, or liturgies, or learning, that will keep a Church alive. Let free forgiveness through Christ be faithfully proclaimed in her pulpits, and the gates of hell shall not prevail against her: let it be buried or kept back, and her candlestick shall soon be taken away. When the Saracens invaded the lands where Jerome and Athanasius, Cyprian and Augustine once wrote and preached, they found bishops and liturgies, I make no question; but I fear they found no

preaching of free forgiveness of sins: and so they swept the Churches of those lands clean away. They were a body without a vital principle, and therefore they fell. Let us never forget the brightest days of a Church are those when Christ crucified is most exalted. The dens and caves of the earth, where the early Christians met to hear of the love of Jesus, were more full of glory and beauty in God's sight than ever was St. Peter's at Rome; the meanest barn, at this day, where the true way of pardon is offered to sinners, is a far more honourable place than the Cathedral of Cologne or Milan. A Church is only useful so far as she exalts *free forgiveness through Christ*.

This is the doctrine which of all others is the mightiest engine for pulling down the kingdom of Satan. The Greenlanders were unmoved so long as the Moravians told them of the creation and the fall of man; but when they heard of redeeming love, their frozen hearts melted like snow in spring. Preach salvation by the sacraments, exalt the Church above Christ, and keep back the doctrine of the atonement, and the devil cares little: his goods are at peace. But preach a full Christ and a free pardon, and then Satan will have great wrath, for he knows he has but a short time. John Berridge said he went on preaching morality, and nothing else, till he found there was not a moral man in his parish; but when he changed his plan, and began to preach the love of Christ to sinners, then there was a stirring of the dry bones, and a mighty turning to God. This is the only doctrine which will ever bring peace to an uneasy conscience, and rest to a troubled soul. A man may get on pretty well without it, so long as he is asleep about his spiritual condition; but once let him awake from his slumber, and nothing will ever calm him but the blood of atonement, and the peace of Christ. How any one can undertake to be a minister of religion without a firm grasp of this doctrine, I never can understand; for myself, I can only say, I should think my office a most painful one if I had not the message of free forgiveness to convey. It would be miserable work indeed to visit the sick and dying, if I could not say, "Behold the Lamb of God, —believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved." The right hand of a Christian minister is the doctrine of free forgiveness through faith in Christ. Give us this doctrine and we have power: we will never despair of doing good to men's souls. Take away this doctrine, and we are weak as water. We may read the prayers, and go through a round of forms, but we are like Samson with his head shorn; our strength is gone. Souls will not be benefited by us, and good will not be done.

Reader, I commend the things I have been saying to your notice. I am not ashamed of free pardon through faith in Christ, whatever some may say against the doctrine: I am not ashamed of it, for its fruits speak for themselves. It has done things that no other doctrine can do; it has effected moral changes which laws and punishments have failed to work,—which magistrates and policemen have laboured after in vain,—which mechanics' institutes and secular knowledge have proved utterly powerless to produce. Just as the fiercest lunatics in Bethlehem Hospital became suddenly gentle when kindly treated, even so the worst and most hardened sinners have often become as little children when told of Jesus loving them, and willing to forgive. I can well understand Paul ending his Epistle to the erring Galatians with that solemn burst of feeling: "God forbid that I should glory save in

the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ" (Gal. vi. 14). The crown has indeed fallen from a Christian's head when he leaves the doctrine of justification by faith.

See now how you should ask yourself whether you have really received the truth which I have been dwelling on, and know it by experience. Jesus, and faith in Him, is the only way to the Father. He that thinks to climb into paradise by some other road, will find himself fearfully mistaken: other foundation can no man lay for an immortal soul than that of which I have been feebly speaking. He that ventures himself here is safe: he that is off this rock has got no standing ground at all.

See too how you should seriously consider what kind of a ministry you are in the habit of attending, supposing you have a choice. You have reason indeed to be careful: it is not *all the same* where you go, whatever people may say. There are many places of worship, I fear, where you might look long for Christ crucified, and never find Him; He is buried under outward ceremonies,—thrust behind the baptismal font,—lost sight of under the shadow of the Church. "They have taken away my Lord, and I know not where they have laid Him." Take heed where you settle yourself. Try all by this single test: "Is Jesus and free forgiveness proclaimed here?" There may be comfortable pews,—there may be good singing, there may be learned sermons; but if Christ's Gospel is not the sun and centre of the whole place, do not pitch your tent there; say rather with Isaac, "Here is the wood and the fire, but where is the lamb?" Be very sure this is not the place for your soul.

Reader, remember these things, and you will be wise. I have set before you the way of life; I have told you where pardon is to be found. Oh, beware, lest having been told of free forgiveness you should come short of it, and never embrace it yourself! Settle it down in your mind, that if you are willing to partake of this free salvation *the Lord Jesus Christ is willing to receive you, and save you.*

Does any man suppose that Jesus is not willing to see heaven filled? Do you think He does not desire to bring many sons to glory? Oh, but you little know the depth of His mercy and compassion, if you can think such a thought! He wept over unbelieving Jerusalem; He mourns over the impenitent and the thoughtless in the present day. He sends you invitations by my mouth this hour. He invites you to hear and live, to forsake the way of the foolish, and go in the paths of understanding: "As I live," He says, "I have no pleasure in the death of him that dieth. Turn ye, turn ye, why will ye die?"

Oh, reader, if you never came to Christ for life before, come to Him this very day. Come to Him with the penitent's prayer for mercy and grace; come to Him without delay. Come and drink of the water of life; come and be freely saved.

If you are determined to have the world and the things of the world,—its pleasures and its rewards, its follies and its sins; if you must have your own way, and cannot give up anything for Christ and your soul; if this be your case, there is but one end before you. I fairly warn you,—I plainly tell you,—you will sooner or later come to the unquenchable fire of hell.

But if any man is willing to be saved, the Lord Jesus Christ stands ready to save him. "Come unto Me," He says, "weary soul, and I will give you rest. Come, guilty and sinful soul, and I will give you free pardon. Come, lost and ruined soul, and I will give you eternal life. Come and be freely saved."

Oh, reader, let this message be a word in season! Arise and call upon the Lord. Let the angels of God rejoice over one more saved soul; let the courts of heaven hear the good tidings that one more lost sheep is found. Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved.
