

GOOD TIDINGS

A SERMON

Preached on Sunday Morning December 25th, 1859

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“For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, which is Christ the Lord.” Luke 2:11

IT is supposed the Savior was thirty-three years and a half old when he was crucified; and as he was crucified in the spring, his birthday must have been six months preceding his crucifixion; and consequently, September is very much more likely to be the month in which he was born than December. But then the ancient fathers fixed December, and we have followed them; and it would be well for us if we had followed, and for the churches generally if they had followed the ancient fathers in nothing else but this; for this error does not happen to be a matter of any vital importance. But there are many errors which men in our day advocate simply because the ancient fathers and the Puritans walked in those errors. The closer we keep to the word of God the more free we shall be from the accumulating errors of men, and the more pure will be that stream of truth out of which we shall drink, and the more clear will be that light concerning our state, and concerning God, and concerning Christ, and concerning eternity, and concerning the counsels of God, into which we shall be brought; and we cannot be brought too clearly into the light of the blessed God; for, said the Savior, “if your eye be evil,” imagining that to be light which is not light, “and the light which is in you be darkness,” or false knowledge, “how great is that darkness!” it is a darkness that is fatal to the soul. Happy, then, that people who are brought out of darkness into the light of what the Lord Jesus Christ is! And you will perceive in the very order and form of our text that here is something discriminating; “for unto you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, which is Christ the Lord.” I could, only I must not, make rather a long introduction upon the expression which our text at once presents of the wonderful love of God in thus taking our nature, in becoming one of us, flesh and blood with us, bone of our bone; and not only so, but in order that he might hereby by death, taking up a nature that should be able to die, that he might by death destroy him that had the power of death, and deliver them who all their life time, through the fear of death, were subject to bondage; and not only so, but that we may be taken up out of mortality, out of corruption, out of sin, out of death, out of hell, and out of the grave, out of the curse, into the likeness of this wondrous Person, and to dwell with him to all eternity; to have as endless an abode with him as he is endless in his own personal duration; and he is the same yesterday, today, and forever. This great theme of God manifest in the flesh so surpasses anything and everything that the most sublime views we can have of it fall infinitely short of what it really is; and the greatest depths into which we may be led of the love of God are as nothing in comparison of what it is; and

however intense our feelings may be sometimes in supreme affection towards the blessed God in this wondrous opening up of his eternal love to our souls, yet that intensity which we have sometimes some of us felt is as a mere nothing in comparison both of what that love is to us in its intensity, and what the intensity of our love will be by and bye to God when we shall appear before him perfected in love. Can we have, then, this morning a sweeter subject, if the Lord be pleased to make it sweet to our souls, than that which our text brings before us? “unto you is born this day in the city of David a Savior.” Ah, this is the first thing we need, a Savior. It is by sin we are lost; but here is a Savior; “and whosoever shall call upon the name of the Lord shall be saved.” And “which is Christ the Lord.” Here is the Anointed; this Person is anointed for a specific work. This meets us in another of our necessities, for we are altogether of an ill savor, altogether loathsome and repulsive in the sight of God, and to infinite purity. But there is a fragrance in the blessed Redeemer that takes all this away and makes us accepted of God. And also, he is not only the Anointed, the word Christ signifying Anointed; but he is also “the Lord;” he is Lord of all. This meets us in another of our necessities; for so far from all things being under our feet, we through the fall are under the feet of sin, of Satan, of death, of the curse, and of every threatening in the Bible. But Jesus is Lord of all; he has overcome all; he has acquired that dominion which Adam lost; or when I say that my meaning is he has acquired a dominion of which Adam’s dominion was a type, and only a type; for the dominion which Christ has acquired by what he has done is a dominion that surpasses the original dominion of the first Adam as far as the person of Christ as God-man in excellency surpasses the mere creature-ship of Adam. So that our subject before us is so great that you must not be at all surprised this morning if you see a very little sermon running along by the side of a very great text. But I do not see, why we should object to a little pure water of life, though it may come out of a very deep well; indeed, the deeper the better; and I am sure our text is a very deep well, and the deeper the better; for it is our very rejoicing that here it is that the springs of salvation can never, no, never run dry.

I shall notice the text, then, under the three-fold form, which is, I think, fairly suggested. The first is, *the persons*, for we must not give up this part; *the persons to whom Christ was born*; “unto you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, which is Christ the Lord.” And the second is, *the relations in which the Savior is here presented*; “a Savior, Christ the Lord.” And the third is, *the practical effects which this revelation had upon the shepherds*; thereby expressing the practical effects which it will have upon all those for whom Christ died, when they are brought under the government of that wondrous death, under the government of that wondrous Person.

First. I notice then, first, THE PERSONS. There are features by which they are well distinguished. It is said of them that “The angel of the Lord came upon them;” that “The glory of the Lord shone round about them;” and “They were sore afraid;” and this prepared them for the message of the angel, which was, “Fear not, for behold I bring you good tidings of great joy, which shall be to all people. For unto you is born this day in the city of David, a Savior, which is Christ the Lord.” The first thing is, “The angel of the Lord came upon them.” Now this angel, of course, means a messenger, a message came unto them. But the first feature I chiefly notice is “The glory of the Lord shone round about them, and they were sore afraid.” The glory of the Lord will mean the presence of the Lord in his holiness and his righteousness. Herein it is that he begins the work of grace in the heart, convincing the sinner of the solemn and the terrible contrast that exists between God and the sinner. The glory of the Lord appears; the sinner sees he is a sinner in a way he never did before; in a word, in a way, that prepares him for every item of the language of our text. He

sees he is lost; he sees and feels that he is in a lost condition; he sees that God's holiness is no hearsay matter; he sees that God's righteousness is no mere trifling matter; he at once begins to see and to feel that "without holiness no man can see the Lord;" not anything that is unholy, or that defiles, or that works abomination, or that makes a lie, can enter heaven. "The unrighteous shall not inherit the kingdom of heaven." Here then, the sinfulness of the sinner is made manifest to him; the holiness of God appears in its terrible majesty; the righteousness of God appears in its certainty; that not one jot or tittle of his eternal law can ever fall to the ground; and yet we are all by nature under that law. And this will also give that sinner a view of death, a view of judgment, that he never had before; he will see that death to him, if he die where he now is, will be a terrible event; it will close his eyes to everything, and his very existence to every particle of comfort; he sees that he must be, the very moment after his eyes are closed in death where the rich man was; he must be lifting up his eyes in hell; and mercy so completely excluded from that lower world that not a drop of water shall be granted to cool his tongue. When the sinner is brought here, and sees a vast eternity before him; and remembers, and sees, and feels, how fast days, and weeks, and months, and years roll away, and that his life is but a vapor that appears for a little while, these things will make that man sore afraid; there is a fear and trembling; he feels now that there is something that concerns him more than anything that exists in this world; and that something is the eternal salvation of his soul. Here then is the glory of the Lord; here the sinner's eyes are opened. Let us ask ourselves, have we come by our religion in this way? I have often said, and I repeat it this morning, that unless we have this experience at the basis, and hence it is that those of the people of God that are not brought exactly in the way I am now describing, but many of them brought, in the way that the wise men in the 2nd of Matthew, were brought simply by attraction, yet after they are brought somewhat into the light, and drawn along into the love of Jesus; then after this will come those convictions of the wickedness of their hearts, those convictions of the awfulness of sin, those deeper convictions of the holiness and justice of God; so that if they do not all come *through* the north gate, they shall all come *to* the north gate; they shall all know enough of themselves to make them apart from Christ considered, sore afraid. These shepherds had no idea as yet of the glory of Christ; here, it appeared to them, was the presence and glory of the great Judge of all, through the instrumentality of his angel; and it appeared to them as though the judgment day was come, and as though all their sins were about to be set in battle array against them, and as though the threatening's of God's law were about to let fall their heaviest curse upon them; and as though hell was about to open its mouth to swallow them up. Here was no apprehension of Christ; they knew not what the Savior was; they knew not what this revelation meant. So, with the sinner now; when he is first convinced of his state, he does not know that it is the Lord; he hardly knows what it is; the effect here described is sure to be produced; "they were sore afraid." Let us then, solemnly ask ourselves, have we this conviction of the solemn truth that we cannot meet our Maker, that we dare not bring anything of our own before our Maker; that there is a gulf which sin has made, to that we cannot ford that gulf; that we are shut out in everlasting despair? If so, then we are prepared for the tidings, "Fear not; for behold, I bring you good tidings of great joy, which shall be to all people;" bless the Lord for that, that it was not confined to the shepherds, but manifested to them only as a sample of the way in which it should be manifested; it is "to all people," to all classes and orders of people to all nations; as John has in a way of explanation, "out of all kindreds, nations, peoples, and tongues." Still all people that shall be saved shall be brought sooner or later, more or less, under this conviction which shall prepare them for what is here said, namely, "unto you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, which is Christ the Lord."

I will now notice, in the next place, that for which they were prepared, after just looking at the preparation; for the preparation of the heart, and the answer of the tongue, are of the Lord. Not that I am passing, or would I pass lightly, away from the part I have been dwelling upon, for where I asked wherein I think that Satan deludes more souls than by any other means, my answer would be this, by setting people down for Christians when they are not Christians; and by setting forth wrong signs, and wrong evidences, wrong proofs of persons being Christians; and if you have thus been setting up false signs and false evidences, alas, alas, what an awful scene will break in upon you at the last, while you have been dreaming and boasting all the way to hell; thought you were going to heaven, and were a Christian, and at the same time knew nothing of the matter. I believe that in this way thousands upon thousands are in our day deceived; not among the high doctrine people, I do not think that is the case among them, because those men that are called high doctrine men are discriminating, they are honest; others, the duty-faith men, they place religion and its evidence chiefly in the flesh, and in the excellencies of the creature. And I have never seen, in all the sermons and works I have ever read, of all the duty-faith men that exist at the present day, I have never yet, with all the good things in the letter they have advanced, I have never yet seen one description of a Christian that I could feel was a true description of what a Christian is; I have never yet seen, in all their works, one description that constitutes the description of the real Christian from those that are not Christians; they are morally and mentally converted; they profess their religion and they are like Roman-Catholics, they are not allowed to doubt or fear after that; there must be no searching, no self-examination; the minister forbids them to doubt, and they are glad to be forbidden to doubt, where the conversion is not real; and the consequence is, they sit themselves down in false assurance that they belong to God, and the people of God, and I believe, as in the sight of my Maker this morning, that such men are deceived; I believe that such men are deceiving thousands I read that the devil shall deceive the whole world; and, therefore, my hearers may the living God search us, and ever keep us from resting in a fleshly religion, but strip us altogether of the flesh, and bring us down, deeply down, into the dust of self-abasement and nothingness, and prepare our hearts not for a mere creature profession of his name, but prepare them for a living reception of his own living truth in its own living order. Nothing short of this can prove a man to be a Christian.

Second: Let us look then at **THE CHARACTERS IN WHICH THE SAVIOR IS HERE PRESENTED**. First, a Savior. He came to seek and to save that which was lost, I must, therefore, in order to prove that I am prepared to receive him in what he really is as a Savior, I must be convinced that I am utterly, (for aught I can do,) and eternally lost; and so far from its being my duty to make myself one of God's elect, to make myself interested in Christ's death, to make the Holy Ghost regenerate my soul, what makes it a man's duty to do this? Has electing grace any partnership with it? Is not election of grace? Was there any creature with the Savior when his own omnipotent arm wrought salvation? Is there any creature power put forth in connection with the Holy Ghost, when he comes and quickens the soul dead in trespasses and sins, and raises that soul up into oneness with Christ, and with the eternal Father? No. To hell, from whence it came, let this duty-faith doctrine be drove, let it be preached by whom it may. Christ came to save that which was lost; and those he intends to save he will convince of the solemn fact that they are, even independent of their own personal sins, utterly and eternally lost; they are lost by Adam's transgression, by Adam's fall, they are lost there fatally, finally; and if they had never committed a personal sin, yet by that one sin, that one fall of Adam, they are under death, and under wrath,

under the law, and under the curse, and eternally lost. But alas, alas, not only are we lost in this original sin, but we have committed ten thousand sins personally, by which our condemnation is augmented, by which our hell is deepened, by which wrath is increased, by which our state is made ten thousand-fold worse. Man, born bad, grows worse and worse. The Savior, then, came to seek and to save that which was lost; and no man can prize the Savior in what he has really done, as Mr. Hart has expressed it, until he is brought to feel he is utterly lost. What kind of a Savior is he, then? First, he is a Savior by taking the people into his own hands, "Yours they were, and you gave them me." They were given in eternal counsel and covenant into the hands of Christ, and he has kept them, and lost none. Secondly, he is a Savior by being the end of the law for righteousness. Third, he is a Savior by having perfected forever them that are sanctified. And fourth, he is a Savior by being the Author of their faith. Their faith is his gift; "By his own spirit he," Christ Jesus, said the Apostle Peter, "has shed forth this which ye now see and hear." He sends his Spirit into the heart; and he is, by sending the Spirit, the Author of our conviction of our need, the Author of our faith, the Author of our believing in him. And fifth, he is also a Savior by being the finisher of our faith. He will not let sin finish it, nor Satan, nor the world, nor delusion, finish it; but he is the finisher of our faith. And thus, by getting the people into his own hands, by being the end of the law, by putting away their sins by the sacrifice of himself, and by ministering faith effectually to their souls, by becoming the finisher of their faith, and by raising, them up at the last great day himself and by presenting them before the eyes of infinite purity in his own purity, and righteousness, and likeness, and conquest, and glory, in the order of that covenant of which he is the Surety; here he is the Savior. Therefore, my hearer, is your heart prepared to receive such a Savior? Can you say you see and feel your need of a Savior who has you in his hands by the grace of God the Father; that you see your need of a Savior that has gone to the end of the law, magnified that law, and brought in everlasting righteousness; a Savior that has finished transgressions, made an end of sin; a Savior that kept you while in a state of nature, and wrought the conviction of sin by his Spirit which you have, and wrought the faith in you by his Spirit which you have; and still keeps you, and stands in this solemn position; and he has said it publicly, and I say it with reverence, if his wondrous word should fail, public shame must follow, he has said it publicly, that none shall pluck his sheep out of his hands; that he gives to them eternal life; and has them in his almighty grasp; where is the power can reach them there, or what shall force them hence? Can we feel our need of such a Savior as this; that we receive him, love him, seek him, glory in him; and that we are determined to have no other? Trace out these circumstances from beginning to end; is there a creature act in one of them? Not in giving us to Christ, that was before the world was. Not in obeying the law, for Christ did that by himself; not in atoning for sin, for Christ did that by himself; not in believing, for he is the author of believing, true believing, not in preservation, for he keeps us in his hands; not in resurrection, for he does that himself; not in presentation at the last day, for he does that. It is all of grace; hence, says the apostle, "By grace are you saved, through faith, and that not of yourselves." Behold, then, "I bring you good tidings of great joy, which shall be unto all people." "Unto you is born this day a Savior, which is Christ the Lord." What a glorious gospel this is, that every one of these aspects of the Savior suits a sinner. If grace gave you to the Lamb, does not that suit a sinner? His obeying the law for you, does not that suit a sinner? His dying for you and perfecting you forever, does not that suit a sinner? His overcoming your blindness and hardness of heart, and causing his glory to shine in upon your benighted soul, and to make you sore afraid as to prepare you to receive him; does not that suit a sinner? And his keeping you in the faith, does not that suit a sinner? And your resurrection, left with him, does not that suit a sinner? Your presentation at the last great day by him, does not that

suit a poor sinner? Therefore, again, I repeat the words, “by grace are you saved through faith, and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God.” Error is the poison of the soul; and all of us shudder at poison literally; and why should we not shrink from poison spiritually? Is it a lighter thing to poison the soul than to poison the body? I read of the wholesome words of our Lord Jesus Christ; and if his words or doctrines be wholesome, it implies that others are unwholesome. And, therefore, ask what you know of being sore afraid, from a conviction of what you are, and of what God is; ask what you know of being prepared to receive the Lord Jesus Christ. He came to his own, his own in the old covenant, his own nationally, his own after the flesh, and they received him not; but some did receive him; and how came it to pass they received him? Why, they were born not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh; so that it was not of their natural descent, nor of themselves, nor of the will of man, but of God; there is the great secret of it. You call this dangerous doctrine, do you? I have lived by it a great many years: and I am quite prepared to die by it. This very doctrine of salvation by Jesus Christ, in the way I have described this morning, though very feebly, is the doctrine that keeps my head above water. He is a Savior everywhere, the same yesterday, today, and forever. But he is presented here not only as a Savior, but also as the Anointed; “which is Christ;” the word Christ meaning Anointed, as you are aware. The three-fold anointing. Elisha the prophet was anointed; and Christ is an anointed teacher. And is there not a savor, a fragrance, in the Savior’s teaching that can be found nowhere else; who speaks like him? Look at his wondrous prophetic work, or his work as a teacher described prophetically. I am afraid we do not always see into the beauty of those scriptures; namely, “The Spirit of the Lord God is upon me; because the Lord has anointed me to preach good tidings unto the meek; he has sent me to bind up the broken hearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives, and the opening of the prison to them that are bound, to proclaim the acceptable year of the Lord;” the year of jubilee, of liberty. Ah, says the sinner, I am full of wounds, and bruises, and putrefying sores. “the whole need not a physician, but they that are sick.” Every physician knows and feels, and even the patient understands that, that the more difficult the case, the more interesting it is to the physician, and the greater honor redounds to him if he can bring the patient safely through this difficult case. So, the Lord will make his people everyone to know his own plague, and grief, and sore; and the more difficult the case is, the more honor will redound to the Great Physician in saving his own in spite of all. Then Christ is the anointed Priest, there is a savor in his teaching; such savor; his teaching brings such health, such sweetness. There is a savor in the knowledge of Christ; the apostle says, “making known the savor of his knowledge.” I have read in years gone by hundreds of duty faith sermons and books, but never met with any savor in them, never; as to go to hear such men, I would not go across the threshold to hear them. As John Newton expressed it, when the Socinian told him that he could not find the doctrine of the Atonement in the whole Bible; and John Newton said, “I don’t wonder, because I have tried to light my candle with the extinguisher on and could not. And so, when I see the duty-faith extinguisher clapped on, I may try to get a little light, but no, there is the extinguisher. Not so with the truth of God. I mentioned some time ago that I had gone through a few pages of the duty faith stamp, and it nearly dried up all the savor, and hallowedness, and good feeling I had. But I laid it down, and thought to myself, well, this is very poor living; I am worse off than I was before reading it. Open went the Bible, 2nd of Ephesians, “now in Christ Jesus you who sometimes were far off are made near by the blood of Christ.” I shall never forget it; that text was a complete Aaron’s rod, and swallowed up all I had been reading; and made me see that what I had been reading was nothing but the rod of the magician, when the rod of the true high priest came and swallowed it up; and I really think I could have sat down and written a large book upon this text, because I felt that there was in it such a savor, such a sweetness,

that I realized a little of what John calls the anointing; “the anointing which you have received of him abides in you.” Then Christ also is the anointed King. And all these three characters correspond. His teaching as a prophet; His putting an end to sin as a priest, and His government as a king, all correspond! What a paradisiacal government, what a peaceful and a fruitful reign. Here is the Savior to save us; here is the Prophet kindly to teach us; and here is the Priest that so loved us that He put away sin by the sacrifice of Himself; here is an anointed King, that reigns over us not in tyranny, but in kindness, in sympathy. There is not a subject in His kingdom that He does not love with all His heart, not one subject of His kingdom is reckoned even faulty.

Then again notice last character represented; “Christ the *Lord*” This last term, *Lord*, is expressive of the greatness of his character; his defending the people. “The Lord is our defense; the Holy One of Israel is our King. “Let them rejoice exceedingly,” said the Psalmist, “because you defend them.” I must pass by a great many things suggested in our text. Born in the city of David; a little town as you are aware, about six miles to the south of Jerusalem; Bethlehem, “the house of bread;” In entire accordance with the prediction, which had fixed his birth there therefore it must take place. And yet Mary and Joseph just upon the time were 50 or 60 miles from the place, perhaps rather move than that. But Herod showed some inclinations to usurp more of power to himself than the Roman Emperor was disposed to let him have; therefore the Roman Emperor renewed the decree which had been put into operation some years before, for the taxing of the people; not taxing in the sense we understand the word now; but it means an enrolment of the people to show their loyalty to the Emperor; and therefore, each must go to his own city so that that which threw the whole land into confusion, and no doubt put a great many to inconvenience, even many of the Lord’s people perhaps, brought about the fulfilment of the prediction, “you, Bethlehem, though you are little among the thousands of Judah, yet out of you shall come forth unto me he who is to be Ruler in Israel.” True it is, then friends, that the Lord has his way in the whirlwind and in the storm, and the clouds are the dust of his feet. “Great joy;” it is the joy of salvation, of heavenly anointing, of eternal dominion, for Christ is Lord of all, and his people shall reign forever with him.

What was the effect, then, upon these shepherds? “Let us go to Bethlehem and see this thing which is come to pass.” The man that is born of God wants to be in the house of bread; he is hungry for the first time in his life spiritually. Jesus Christ was the attraction; let us go and see him, let us be confirmed. Just so with you, you will want confirmation after confirmation. “Every one that has heard and learned of the Father comes unto me.” The next effect was that they could not keep this thing to themselves; they told it abroad. And so, with you; when you know it, you will be sure to tell it abroad, even if you say nothing about it. We live in a day when it is very fashionable for people to talk more of another people’s business than of their own. Do you think you can go to a place where the truth is preached without being pretty soon found out? They will find out where you go somehow or another; and they will speak against you; but never mind, you are not ashamed to be one of that sect everywhere spoken against. It is better to be envied than to be pitied. We must abide by the truth and despise the shame. “Blessed is he shall endure unto the end, the same shall be saved;” Sure to tell it abroad; yes. Well, I think you ought to send our sermons all over the country; we have got pretty well a hundred thousand about the country now; I should like you to send out as many as you can. They have exceedingly provoked some people; and others have been greatly blessed; I have had excellent testimonies from all quarters, east, west, north, and south, of these little simple, plain humble sermons being greatly blessed. May the Lord still enable us to tell

abroad in every way that unto us is born a Savior, which is Christ the Lord. Then the next effect it had upon those shepherds was that they glorified and praised God. So it will be with us: we have nothing else to glory; we can have no confidence in the flesh; and the Lord has chosen such poor things as those that he does choose in order that no flesh should glory in his presence; but he that glories, should glory in him, that he exercise loving-kindness, and righteousness, and judgment, and mercy; for in these things I delight, says the Lord.