

PAUL ... and the greatness of God's salvation
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(ROMANS 5: 1 0)

"For if, when we were enemies, we were reconciled to God by the death of his Son, much more, being reconciled, we shall be saved by his life." This wonderful verse occupies an important place in the structure of the epistle. The first eight chapters of the letter expound the Gospel of God. Four chapters are devoted to the Gospel for the sinner ; four chapters are likewise used to expound the Gospel for the saint. It will be recognized therefore that this expository gem comes at the end of the first section, and at the beginning of the second. It sums up the former teaching, and anticipates the latter. It seems like a mountain lodge, from which we view the shadows of the valley, and at the same time obtain glimpses of the sunlit heights whither we journey.

The Vision of the Valley

Paul uses three outstanding words to describe the position of sinful man-sinner, slave, and enemy. A sinner is a man who has violated the laws of God ; one who has thereby incurred the wrath of God. A slave is one in whose heart evil has gained supremacy. The sinner has become a helpless sinner. An enemy is one who loves his sin, and who takes up arms in its defense. Open warfare exists between man and his Creator. This final state represents the lowest depths to which humans can sink. Against the darkness of this sombre setting, three facts shine forth as stars. (i) God's great mercy, ". . . when we were enemies (ii) God's great miracle, " we were reconciled to God " ; (iii) God's great means, " by the death of his Son." God sent His Son to reconcile a sinful world, and this was accomplished through the sacrifice consummated at the cross of Calvary. There He died, the just for the unjust, that He might bring us to God ; and this happened when we were yet in our sins, enemies, fighting against God. Yet, the reconciliation gained through the death of Christ had to be made real in the experiences of guilty men. Peace had been obtained, but only personal faith could end the state of warfare. Paul began the second section of the epistle with the words, "Therefore being justified by faith, we have peace with God." Thus the upward climb was commenced, and when Paul paused at his mountain lodge he was able to obtain a comprehensive view of the valley from which God's grace had rescued him. Then he turned to look upwards. Ahead lay the beckoning peaks of holiness, and swayed by the inspiration of that thrilling moment, the apostle wrote much more, being reconciled, we shall be saved by his life."

The Challenge of the Summit

Unless we realize at the outset that God's salvation is infinitely more than the forgiveness of sin, the words " we shall be saved " may be misleading. There are many Christians who hold that God's children may be lost when they fall back into sin. This belief is contrary to the teaching of the Scriptures. When God saves a man, He saves him for ever. Eternal life is eternal life ; and Christ said, " No man can pluck them out of my Father's hand." The purposes of God are not limited to man's regeneration ; it is predestined that he should be "conformed to the image of God's dear Son." Christ has already lifted His people from the uttermost ; He is determined to continue the work in lifting them to the uttermost. Once again the identical facts already

PAUL ... and the greatness of God's salvation recognized become apparent. (i) God's great mercy. This is " from everlasting to everlasting upon them that fear him." The mercy manifest in man's conversion, is seen again in man's continuance. Paul's irrefutable argument is expressed in two great words-much more. If God thought it worth while to reconcile us when we were yet sinners, enemies against God, it naturally follows that He will continue the work ; for bad as we might be, we are not as bad as we were! We are no longer enemies, but sons and daughters of the Most High ; we are no longer afar off, but have been made nigh by the blood of Jesus. (ii) God's great miracle. John wrote, " Beloved, now are we the sons of God, and it doth not yet appear what we shall be: but we know that, when he shall appear, we shall be like him, for we shall see him as he is" (I John 3: 2). Inherent evil will be completely overcome, and freed from the presence of sin, we shall appear before God " without blemish ; without spot or wrinkle." (iii) God's great means. A fair translation of the final sentence would be, "We shall be saved by sharing in His life." The life of the risen Lord can be made real in the experience of the believer as the Holy Spirit comes to indwell the human temple. Indeed, He is the eternal guide who would lead us up the mountain of God.

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