

# The True Gospel

By Robert Hawker

THE Gospel is a glorious display of mercy to a lost world; originating in the sovereign, free, and unmerited grace of God; and proclaimed to mankind as a finished salvation through the sole merits, righteousness, and death of the Lord Jesus Christ. In which rich plan of redemption, there are these striking particularities eminently distinguished. As first, the Gospel considers all men, universally speaking, as lost; and all equally incapable of putting forth a helping hand toward the attainment of their own salvation. For it is the unalterable sense of Scripture, that it was “when we were without strength, and in due time, that Christ died for the ungodly.” Observe the expression; not simply when we were maimed or crippled in our faculties by reason of sin; not when some strength remained, however small, which, when co-operating with other aid, might have procured our recovery; but when all possible resources in ourselves were lost; “without strength”; or (as elsewhere more strongly expressed) when we were altogether “dead in trespasses and sins”; as if some mighty mountain had fallen upon our nature, and crushed all our powers.

And this view of mankind, in which the Gospel considers our nature as universally lost, represents it also as universally lost, represents it also as universally undeserving, in every instance, of divine favour. This forms a second striking feature in the Gospel of Christ. The Gospel of the Lord Jesus makes no distinction in the objects of its clemency, as if one man became more worthy of grace than another: for the positive language of Scripture on this point is, that “all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God.” And however gratifying it may be to the unmortified pride of nature, when at any time making comparative views of man with man, to fancy one more excellent than his neighbor; the Gospel knows of no distinction but what grace hath made among creatures of universal depravity and corruption. Such notions may float on the imagination of the vain and unawakened, who are strangers to the plague of their own hearts; but they lose their very existence before God. The debtor of five hundred, or the debtor of fifty pence, being both alike insolvent and unable to pay, are both alike equally exposed to the prison; and must continue so forever, unless the goodness of the Almighty Creditor should pass an act of grace, and frankly forgive them their respective debts. Indeed, the dear Lord of His people, as if to encourage the most timid mind, when overpowered with the sense of multiplied transgressions, and to prevent all despondency, mercifully taught in this view of nature's insolvency, in this very parable of the debtors, that as the greatness or littleness of the debt is the same, both as it respects the state of the sinner's mind in violating the Divine precept, and as it concerns the Divine mind in the exercise of mercy; the difference is wholly on the part of man, and not on the part of God. “To whom little is forgiven, the same loveth little.” Our gratitude for pardoning love will be in proportion to the sense we have of its extent. For, though it may well be supposed that all ransomed debtors, when their fetters are broken off and the prison-doors thrown open, will sing “to the praise and glory of His grace,” by whom their salvation is procured; yet his will be the loudest note, whose recovery hath been the most gracious, the most undeserved, and unexpected.

And what sums up and completes this finished view of the Gospel, is the third prominent character of it, in superadding to both of these gracious properties, this striking particularity, that it is altogether unconditional on the part of God, and requires no previous qualification or worth on the part of man. Indeed the highly favoured objects of such bounty, as is shown in the Gospel, being all along considered as “without strength, and dead in trespasses and sins; and having the sentence of death in themselves, that they should not trust in themselves, but in him who raiseth the dead”; it would be a contradiction in terms to suppose, that characters so described should be capable of anything to help, or bring anything to recommend them to the Divine favour. For even “repentance and faith,” those most essential qualifications of the mind, for the participation and enjoyment of the blessings of the Gospel (and which all real disciples of the Lord Jesus cannot but possess) are never supposed as a *condition* which the sinner performs to entitle him to mercy, but merely as *evidences* that he is brought, and hath obtained mercy. They cannot be the conditions of obtaining salvation; for, like the Gospel itself, both faith and repentance are the immediate result of Divine operation, and are the gift of God.

The same hand which bestows the Gospel, bestows also faith and repentance, or the sinner would never obtain them. The blessed Redeemer of mankind is called both the author and finisher of faith; and is said to be exalted to give repentance and remission of sins. And when His servant, the apostle, declares that believers are saved by grace though faith, he as positively declares also, that this is the gift of God. "Unto you [he says], it is given to believe" (Phil 1:29). I could as easily create a world, as create either faith or repentance in my own heart. Both are of Divine origin; and, like the light, and the rain, and the dew of heaven, "which tarrieth not for man, neither waiteth for the sons of men," are from above, and "come down from the Father of lights, from whom alone cometh every good and every perfect gift."

This view of the Gospel (and which certainly is the only true view of it) serves to place it in that light, which corresponds with our purest and most exalted notions of the beneficence of God, and answers to all the necessities of man. For it consists of nothing but invitations, promises, assurances, and the strongest declarations of mercy, followed up by innumerable instances of those who have been made the happy partakers of it, from one end of the Bible to the other. It seems to court the observation, to solicit the attention, and to invite the acceptance of the miserable and the wretched to its warmest embraces. And, that no broken-hearted sinner might despair in fancying himself placed beyond the reach of this rich tide of mercy, which flows continually without ebbing; it is not enough to say, that it washes on the shore of the undeserving, but it reaches to the ground of the ill-deserving; not barely to those who have done nothing to merit mercy, but even to those who have done everything to merit punishment. It arises therefore above high water-mark, overflows all bounds, overtops even the tallest mountains of corruption, and demonstrates what one of the apostles declared, and thousands of sinners have found to be true, that "where sin abounded, grace hath much more abounded."

Such being undeniably the state of the case in reference to the Gospel; and which, on account of the boundless extent of its mercy, is very properly termed "the unsearchable riches of Christ"; it next follows, that to preach the Gospel under any limitations, restrictions, or reserve whatever, in proposing *conditions* to the sinner as *constituting his title* to a participation of its blessings, is to invert the very order of the Gospel; and, instead of holding forth salvation to the *lost*, is only to propose strength to the *whole*. Just as absurd would it be in a physician to send away his patient, when labouring under some desperate disease, with a recommendation to do *his utmost* towards his own cure, and then come to him to finish it; as it is in the minister of the Gospel to propose to the sinner to *do his best*, by way of healing the disease of the soul, and then come to the Lord Jesus to perform his recovery. The only previous qualification is to know our misery, and the remedy is prepared. And as the Lord Jesus Himself, when upon earth, in opening His commission in the synagogue of Nazareth, declared that "He was anointed to preach the Gospel to the poor, to heal the broken-hearted, to give deliverance to the captives, to give sight to the blind, to set at liberty them that are bruised, and to preach the acceptable year of the Lord": it must follow by an undeniable inference, that the office to which he hath appointed His servants who minister in His name, is to preach freely and fully the same Gospel of salvation.

I consider, therefore, the several churches of Christ on earth as so many market-places of public resort, established for this express purpose, where *proclamation* is continually supposed to be made to the poor, and to the wretched, the weary, and heavy-laden, to come with their several wants unto Him, who alone can supply them, and give rest unto their souls, without money and without price. And it is very certain, that the various ordinances of worship, which the Lord Jesus hath appointed in his church, are for this purpose, and this only—that they may become so many channels of communication, between Christ and His people, by which, empty, needy, distressed and burdened sinners may bring their wants, and their cares, their sorrows and their sins, before the Lord, and receive a suitable supply out of his abundant fulness, and "grace for grace." And were I to drop into a church of Christians, professing the eternal truths of the Gospel, and found not evidences of these things, but discovered that moral essays were supplying the place of evangelical truths: that the person of the Lord Jesus, and His precious offices to lost souls, were not made the great topic of discourse; I should be led to conclude that I had mistaken my path, and had fallen into a synagogue of the Jews, and not the church of the Lord Jesus Christ.

My brother in the ministry (if peradventure one of the sacred order should condescend to be among my readers), shall I intreat you not to be offended with this statement of the case, neither hastily turn away from

the serious consideration of a subject which involves, in its final consequences, the everlasting welfare both of ourselves and our people? Do not fancy that this doctrine leads to licentiousness, or that any poor *self-condemned* and heart-broken sinner, can possibly adopt the horrible maxim of “continuing in sin that grace may abound.” And for characters of a different description, with whom both the awful threats of the law, and the sweet allurements of the Gospel have lost all their influence, there can be no apprehension. They wrest *whatever* is preached, as they do also the “scriptures themselves, unto their own destruction.” And, would any man, in compliment to such persons, hold forth a restrained, mutilated, half-preached Gospel?

For my part I am not afraid to imitate Him in whose service I minister, by preaching a full, free, and finished salvation, through the sole merits, death, and righteousness of the Lord Jesus Christ. And while I trace the footsteps of mercy in His history when upon earth, in going about the streets of Jerusalem, constantly inviting sinners to come to Him for life and salvation; while I see Him now with the eye of faith on His throne of glory, calling unto such persons in all the ends of the earth, to “look unto Him and be saved”; while every ordinance of worship is uniformly directed to follow up the Saviour's declaration of mercy, that “if any man thirst and come to Him, out of his belly shall flow rivers of living water; and while the Spirit and the bride say come; and let him that heareth say come; and let him that is athirst, come; and whosoever will let him take of the water of life freely”; I am not afraid to echo these glorious proclamations of grace, nor fear I to exceed my commission in declaring, that “He can and will save to the uttermost them that come to God by Him; and that all that do come He will in no wise cast out.” Nay, in the market-days of His church, were I to perceive a case of more than ordinary wretchedness, in some poor *self-loathing* sinner, who like the publican Christ describes, dared not so much as lift up his eyes unto heaven, I should particularly direct my message to *him*, and say, “to *you* is the word of this salvation *sent* .” For the only difference known in the Church of the Lord Jesus, is that which arises from a penitential sense of wretchedness, and faith in Divine mercy. And where these qualities have the precedence, the most famished and the most hungry after the person and righteousness of the Redeemer, are first to be supplied. But while I feel a growing confidence in thus publishing salvation according to the directions of the Saviour; forgive me if I add, I cannot but be awfully concerned for those who restrain the truths of redemption, and preach Gospel-mercies as if they were the *sale*, and not the *free gift* of God.

My poor brother, for whom I write, whose heart the Lord hath touched with a sense of sin, and desire of salvation, and whose self-condemnation every action subscribes to, hear the call of grace; and while the heavenly voice sweetly sounds. “Return, thou backslider, and I will heal your backsliding,” let your whole soul echo back to the gracious invitation, “Behold I come unto Thee, for Thou art the Lord my God.” But from man I turn to the Lord, I know that everything is alike ineffectual unless directed to the heart from above. Will the Lord be graciously pleased to commission my feeble call with His Divine power, and send it to the heart of some poor self-condemned and despairing sinner! And if the success of my embassy be never known upon earth, it will open a new source of thanksgiving and joy, when the writer and reader shall meet before the throne of glory, mutually striving which hath most cause to sing the loudest note to the praise of redeeming grace, in ascribing “salvation to God and the Lamb.”