

A SERMON PREACHED IN SELSEY CHURCH, GLOUCESTERSHIRE,  
On SUNDAY, OCTOBER 28th, 1883,

BY THE REV. A. SHAW PAGE, B.A.,

On the occasion of the Funeral of Sir Samuel S. Marling, Bart.

"For the grace of God hath appeared, bringing salvation to all men, instructing us to the intent that, denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, we should live soberly and righteously and godly in this present world, looking for the blessed hope and appearing of the glory of our great God and Saviour Jesus Christ, who gave himself for us that he might redeem us from all iniquity, and purify unto himself a people for his own possession, zealous of good works." — Titus II., verses 11, 12, 13, and 14.

THE GOSPEL is here in its duties, its hopes and its privileges. Would we know in short what God gives, what He promises, and what He asks, we can find all clearly stated in these few verses. He gives His Son—"God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in Him should not perish, but have everlasting life." "Christ gave himself for us," for everyone, for each one—gave himself to poverty, suffering and death; gave himself to the Cross and the grave for you and for me. And why? "That he might redeem us from all iniquity—that he might save his people from their sins"; that he might deliver us from guilt and death, yea and from sin itself, the cause of all our misery. Not only to pardon, to forgive, to remove the guilt and the punishment, but to take away sin and the love of it, "and purify unto himself a people for his own possession." It is an elevating thought that "the Lord taketh pleasure in them that fear Him, in those that hope in His mercy." The Lord asks that the children whom He has made, the people whom He has redeemed, should be "a people for His own possession" — a sanctified, purified people, made meet and fit for His service. It is not only that salvation is a selfish process of being made safe, but that the salvation of men tends to the honour and glory of God—that He thus prepares a people to serve, bless and praise Him, that "He sees of the travail of His soul and is satisfied." And then, when men are His in loving and willing service, He makes them "zealous of good works." Their love and service will not only be upwards, to God, but will be diffusive, shown towards men in "love, peace, long-suffering, kindness, faithfulness, meekness," the blessed fruit of the Holy Spirit's indwelling. Loving words, good works, kind deeds, must come forth from one who is "washed, sanctified and justified in the name of the Lord Jesus, and by the spirit of our God."

These are the precious privileges that the God of all grace freely bestows on all humble souls that are hungering and thirsting after righteousness. In spiritual things God always gives us all we really want and ask for. Do you really want these gifts of pardon of sin, freedom from evil, purity of heart and life, the will and the power to be good and to do good? Then ask and ye shall receive, seek and ye shall find, for the grace of God has appeared, shining forth in the life and love and goodness of the Lord Jesus Christ. "The grace of God hath appeared, bringing salvation to all men." God has acceptance in blessings and help which He offers to one and all—offering pardon, purity and goodness to every child of man who knows sin, who longs for holiness, who desires to do good. Take home this truth, dear brethren, as a little child of three did. Some one hoped that he would grow up a good man, and he said "Yes I can, for Jesus came down to show me how."

Jesus who lived above the sky Came down to be a man and die.

So in childlike faith realise that Jesus came down to redeem, purify, and save you. Let Him do so, and then He will enable you to enter into and enjoy in anticipation the glorious future of the children of God. Such gifts so freely bestowed will produce love—love being absent from the being loved will produce longing, the longing and "looking for the blessed hope and appearing of the glory of our great God and Saviour Jesus Christ." This is the Christian's hope, "the blessed hope of eternal life, which God, who cannot lie, promised before times eternal." The hope of the coming of Christ is to raise His people from their graves, to give them "the image of the heavenly," to make them like Himself, and to grant them a glorious "entrance into the eternal kingdom of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ." These are the Christian hopes. Are they yours? All are offered to you. Are you realising and enjoying these blessed promises? If you are, your hopes will have a purifying effect. St. John describes this so beautifully in a passage in which he also unites our privileges, our holy hopes, and our holiness of life (1 John 3:1-3)—

"Behold what manner of love the Father hath bestowed upon us, that we should be called children of God, and such we are... Beloved, now are we children of God, and it is not yet made manifest what we shall be. We know that if He shall be manifested we shall be like Him, for we shall see Him even as He is. And everyone that hath this hope set on Him purifieth himself, even as He is pure."

And so it is in our text—"The grace of God hath appeared, bringing salvation to all men, instructing us to the intent that denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, we should live soberly, righteously, and godly in this present world." The grace of God saves not only by conferring spiritual privileges and arousing heavenly hopes, but by instructing us, "disciplining us," as Dean Alford worded it; chastening us so as to lead us to "deny ungodliness and worldly lusts"—renouncing all the sinful lusts and pleasures that war against the soul, and "perfecting holiness in the fear of God"; "living soberly, righteously, and godly in this present world."

Not looking on religion only as a thing for a death-bed, or a good life as only needed in another world, but now in this present life—living soberly as regards ourselves, righteously as regards our neighbour, and godly as regards our God and Father in heaven; and so showing that the grace of God has weaned from sin and imparted goodness, and that the holy hopes of the future dwelling with the Lord have stirred up the heart to seek likeness to Him now.

Thus in short, we have the faith, the life, and the future of the Christian brought before us. Are these yours, dear brother? Are you believing the word of God and trusting the grace of God? Are you repenting from dead works and abounding in good works? Are you living for God and being made meet to be partaker of the inheritance of the saints in light? These are questions that come home to us with peculiar solemnity when we have just been so vividly reminded of the uncertainty of life, and the certainty of death. And at the same time, the invitation I have given you in God's name to receive the privileges of God's household—to enjoy its hopes and to fulfil its duties—comes with peculiar power when we have been permitted to see how the grace of God can enable a man to “live soberly, righteously, and godly in this present world” during a long life.

Sir Samuel Marling's life was based on the word of God. From a child, he had known the Holy Scriptures, which had made him wise unto salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus. And he always valued the word of God as the true rule of life and practice, and accordingly, he always took a deep interest in the work of the British and Foreign Bible Society in its endeavours to send the word of God to all the nations of the earth, taking part in its meetings and subscribing to its funds. And that respect to God's word which he publicly taught, he privately practiced. On his dressing-table was to be seen the well-worn book of daily texts, which he habitually used. Twice daily did he read the word of God most impressively and intelligently with his household, and lead their common prayers to the throne of grace. As regularly as the Lord's day came round was he in his place in the house of God, and, till growing infirmities had come upon him, at both services. I might almost say that he was never absent from the table of the Lord, declaring...

“So in childlike faith realise that Jesus came down to redeem, purify and save you. Let him do so, and then he will enable you to enter into and enjoy in anticipation the glorious future of the children of God. Such gifts as they bestow will produce love to God, holiness, and "looking for the blessed hope and appearing of the glory of our great God and Saviour Jesus Christ."

This is the Christian's hope, "the blessed hope," the "hope of eternal life." The hope of the coming of Christ to raise us from the dead, the great promise of the life to come, the hope that makes us to be like Him, that gives them a glorious entrance into the eternal kingdom of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. Sir Samuel Marling knew and loved the Holy Scriptures, which made him wise unto salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus.

Thereby his habitual trust and confidence in the death of the Lord Jesus Christ. And those who have heard his earnest prayers in private, or in our prayer meetings at the school at the end of the year, will know how humbly and yet how boldly he drew near to the throne of grace—how really genuine was the religious life within him. Two clergymen, who had only lately had intercourse with him, have spoken to me this week of his true Christian feeling, of the devout tone of his mind and conversation.

In a cottage home this last week I heard this simple testimony from a poor woman. Speaking of Sir Samuel Marling, she said, “Whenever I have read any speeches of his they seemed so tinctured with Christianity that I am sure he was a godly man.” “Tinctured with Christianity”: it was almost his own ideal of what life should be—pervaded and influenced by the spirit of Christ.

We here have good reason to know how he valued the public services of religion and the preaching of the Gospel of Christ in all the pains he took to promote the building of this beautiful house of prayer—very largely at his own cost—just 21 years ago; in all the care he took in the selection of the two ministers he had to appoint, and in his endowing the living and in building a vicarage house, that the minister of the parish might live among his people. The school, too, was his gift, and has been very largely supported by his family.

In fact, he has spent more than £10,000 on these objects in Selsley alone, only this last year having doubled the size of the classroom at the school, and having added a porch, and other improvements. I do not mention these things to praise or glorify him, but rather to show you what was the true support of a life that all admired; and to say to you in the spirit of this morning’s Epistle—Brethren, be ye imitators together of him, and mark them which so walk even as ye have him for an example.

For it is to this point of view that I would ask your attention this night—that there has been living among you for two and thirty years a man whose life has during that time been powerful for good—a man who was beloved at home, respected by his neighbours, entrusted with great powers by his fellow-citizens, and, lastly, honoured by his Sovereign. His influence has been felt, his name has been known and honoured by thousands.

And I have been asked by one who knew him best of all, and who has respected and loved him for fifty years, to bring before you some of the points in his character which are most to be honoured and imitated. At the basis of his character was this foundation of a true faith in the Lord Jesus Christ, and of a real life in God, of which I have spoken. The life we saw was the outcome of this.

God had given him great powers of mind and body, and so great success in the business of his life. He had thus obtained an influence in his neighbourhood, which he habitually used for what he knew and believed to be good and useful.

He did habitually “deny ungodliness and worldly lusts.” He lived to the last a simple, frugal life, a life of great industry and at the same time a life of great charity: charitable in his judgments, never passing hasty or severe judgments on those who did wrong; pitying the sinner, while hating the sin.

Nor would he ever allow evil-speaking of others in his presence. Charitable in his gifts—numbers not known to many—and most charitable in that greatest kindness, the willingness to listen to tales of trial and difficulty, and to give all the powers of his mind, and to employ the varied stores of his experience, in counselling and assisting those who asked his advice.

The amount of time and trouble he gave to this kind of work was very great, I know. I can personally say of him who has gone, “he hath been a succourer of many, and of myself also.” And how was all this work and success and influence possible in the case of one man? Because he never forgot to apply the rule, “gather up the fragments that remain that nothing be lost.”

It was so in his time and his work. Nothing was allowed to be wasted in his house or property, and he often remarked, “If I had wasted and idled in my life as some do, I should now be a poor man.” He was thus “diligent in business,” and yet at the same time he did most fully carry out another apostolic precept, “Look not every man on his own things, but every man also on the things of others.”

His great desire for his people and neighbours was that they should prosper and be in health in body, soul, and spirit. With this in view, I know from his own words that he continued the work at his factories simply for the people’s sake. If he and his had consulted their own ease, they would have closed their mills some time ago, but he knew that would entail much suffering, and so he worked to the last.

Witness his care for those around him in the purchase and improvement of cottage houses, in the pains he took to make them habitable and comfortable. Look at his zeal and liberality in promoting education—himself a Sunday-school teacher for many years—always an active and zealous manager and supporter of schools of all classes.

Witness again his active interest in the promotion of temperance, and in the support he and his gave to the total abstinence movement, knowing as he did that drunkenness was a foe to all godliness and social progress. Witness how anxious he was to promote frugality and thrift, and how much he insisted on good manners as a very important part of a good and respectable life.

I recollect well his saying to me many years ago, “The instruction of the people is in advance of their manners”—and he lamented it. We know how kindly he set an example of kindness, courtesy, and politeness to the whole parish in the happy Whitsuntide treat which yearly was given to some 200 Sunday School children at his own house; and how truly he then carried out another apostolic rule—“By love serve one another”; “Through love be servants one to another”; he himself, as on Whit-Monday last, actually with his own hands ministering to the children as they stood around his door.

We so took it all for granted that we paid him the very great compliment of not thinking it anything remarkable. But now that we know that never again we shall see his active movements, or hear his kind and cheery tones as he asked us to join in the National Anthem, or bade us all good night as we left his door; now we can note how good and kind and loving it was to see the grey-haired baronet ministering to the pleasures of our simple village children. There for the last time we saw him ministering so kindly to our innocent joys and pleasures. And well it was we did not know it was the last time. God in mercy hides the future from our eyes. We can thank him for all his servant has been to us and ours. And you can be thankful that at such a time you were permitted a glimpse of the inner life of his happy home. Of this private life I am only free to say that through much toil, much care and, latterly, much pain, he was the life, the joy, the support and the sunshine of his now sad home. These things are mentioned, not in order to praise our friend—for our friend indeed he was—but that one purpose of his life, your well-doing, may be secured; that you may take him as your example so far as he followed a greater and Divine Master.

And that is just the lesson I would pray that God's Holy Spirit would impress on your minds and hearts,—that there has been living amongst you a man whose high and excellent example may be safely and wisely followed in many most important points; and I would beg you to examine yourselves and see what you have been doing with regard to this example. You know that there is one perfect Saviour, example and friend to whom I often point you. I know our friend took him as his example and his friend. I would only say follow him in as far as he followed Christ. I might apply to him who has gone the words of Hebrews xiii., 7,—“Remember them that had the rule over you, which spake unto you the word of God; and considering the issue of their life, imitate their faith.” Imitate also his outward observance of religious worship—again obeying a word in Hebrews x., 25, “Not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together as the custom of some is, but exhorting one another; but so much the more, as ye see the day approaching.” And it is remarkable that only on Sunday evening last there were reported to him words of mine in which I had been lamenting the absence of many from church who might attend; and he expressed his regret that the men neglected dressing and coming to church of a morning when the wives had home duties to attend to.

Imitate, I say, his zeal for God's house and for the education of the young. You may not be able to build a school or endow a church, but you can attend the church which God has provided for you, and see that your children acquire the education which is pressed upon your acceptance. Imitate again his family religion, his family prayer and Bible-reading, and you will find that God will bless your household with love, unity, and concord. Imitate him in the love, kindness, courtesy and attention which marked all his relations with her whom God had given him for nearly 50 years to be indeed a help meet for him; and you will find that love is the very bond of peace and of all virtues. Imitate his truthfulness, industry, frugality, sobriety, and righteousness; imitate his kindness and helpfulness to all around him; imitate him in his care and love for little children; imitate him in his sympathy for the poor, the sick and the aged. Let thus the power of his good example lead you to a higher, purer, holier and more Christ-like life; do all in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, live and walk in the Spirit, and then I know you will be blessed in life, peaceful in death, and forever happy in the sunshine of your Father's love.

Thus shall the work of your benefactor in the providing of the means of grace be brought to good effect when you all seek that the grace of God that bringeth salvation to all men should save and sanctify you, when you seek to deny ungodliness and worldly lusts, and to live soberly, righteously, and godly in this present world. This in short is personal holiness. That God may make it true of everyone of the people over whom the Lord has made me an under-shepherd is my earnest, longing, and most fervent prayer; and then "when the chief-shepherd shall appear, ye shall receive the crown of glory which fadeth not away" — which God of His mercy grant for Jesus Christ's sake.