

God's Unspeakable Gift

by H. A. Ironside

"Thanks be unto God for His unspeakable Gift." 2 Cor. 9:15

MANY of us have thought a great deal about gifts during the last few weeks. Some of us have experienced much joy in giving, others have found a measure of delight, but not nearly so much as we possibly expected, through receiving gifts. It is still true that "It is more blessed to give than to receive," and I dare say the happiest people are not those who have received the most, but those who have given the most. Particularly is this true if your gifts have been largely to those in less comfortable circumstances than yourself, and if you have sought to minister to the needs, to brighten the homes of those in poverty, to bring a happy smile to the children's faces, and to cheer weary and distressed mothers and fathers. It is a very blessed and beautiful thing to make gifts in this way.

This is one of the by-products of Christianity. It is because our Lord Jesus Christ has Himself taught us the lesson that "It is more blessed to give than to receive," that we delight to make gifts in His name. Even the world itself has caught the blessed infection, and unconverted people find a great deal of joy in sharing with others. And so as we think of gifts, our minds naturally go to the Supreme Gift which God in His marvellous grace has lavished upon a guilty world. "Thanks be unto God for His unspeakable gift."

There are four things about which I would like to speak. First, I want to occupy you with the Giver; second, with the excellency of the gift; third, with the reception of the gift; and then a word of warning against refusing the gift.

I. The Giver

"Who is the GIVER?" You remember when addressing the poor woman at the well, our Lord Jesus Christ said, "If thou knewest the gift of God, and who it is that saith to thee, give me to drink; thou wouldst have asked of Him, and He would have given thee living water" (John 4:10). God is the Giver. I wish we could get that clearly in our minds.

A great many people think of God as a merchantman; they think that He has something to sell; that He is going about offering His salvation to people if they are rich enough to purchase it. Thank God, He is too

rich to sell His salvation. But if He were to put it up for sale; if He were to set a price on it in any sense commensurate with its value, neither you nor I could ever purchase it.

The parable in the thirteenth chapter of Matthew is one that is generally turned upside down. A merchantman came seeking goodly pearls, and "when he found one pearl of great price, he went and sold all he had and bought it." Almost invariably people make the merchantman the poor sinner, and the pearl God's salvation. But God's salvation is a free gift, and the pearl had to be purchased, so that interpretation is contrary to fact. We have nothing with which to buy God's salvation.

The real meaning of that parable surely is that our Lord Jesus Christ came from Heaven as the Merchantman with infinite riches at His disposal, and here in this poor dark world He found one pearl of great price, that vast company of men and women who were sunk in sin and iniquity, but who are to be made into the Body and Bride of the Lamb; and having fixed His love upon that pearl, He went and sold all that He had and bought it. Where did He make that great exchange? At Calvary's Cross. There on the Cross He sold all that He had and He shed His own most precious Blood, laid down His life in order that He might purchase the pearl which is to adorn His crown for eternity.

God is a GIVER; He is not selling to people. Take all the great blessings that we enjoy. We get them freely from God; we cannot buy them. You cannot buy the fresh air that you breathe; you cannot buy the water from the rippling brook. Yes, men can bottle and sell it, but God gives it freely. All the blessings that He lavishes upon men are "without money and without price," and the great gift spoken of here is the expression of His infinite love.

The Minister's Story

My wife's father was a minister of the Gospel. Singularly enough, though I learned to know him fairly well in the days I was pestering him in order to get his daughter, I had the privilege of hearing him preach only three times, but I remember those occasions quite clearly. I have never forgotten an illustration he used of a poor woman who had a very sick daughter. This poor mother went out to work as a char-woman. She had to earn a living for herself, and this child. By and by her daughter became convalescent, and was crying continually for some grapes, though it was winter. The poor mother could not think of purchasing them, for they could be gotten only at an exorbitant price, and yet always when she came home, the child would say, "Did you

get me any grapes to-day?" She offered her other things that were within her means, but nothing satisfied. One day she had been called to work in a different district, a place where she had not been before, and passing a magnificent garden, she saw a great hothouse. Looking over the wall she could see luscious clusters of grapes hanging and ripening. She tried the gate, and finding it open, went in. Hurrying along the pathway she met the gardener who said, "What are you doing here? you have no business here. Don't you know that these are the king's gardens?"

"Oh, sir," she said, "my daughter is sick at home, and she has been crying for grapes, and as I passed I saw the grapes in the hot-house. I have worked hard day after day and have just a shilling, but I will give it all for one bunch of those grapes."

"Get out of here, you have no business in here. I may lose my job for letting you in," and so he drove her out.

She thought, "I suppose he was angry with me because I offered only a shilling for a bunch of grapes. I will try and earn more money, and maybe he will respect my wishes then."

And so she toiled on, and was able to save another shilling, and then forced her way again inside the gate, and once more met the gardener who said, "Didn't I tell you you must not come in here?"

"But look," she said, "I had only a shilling then; I have two now, and I want a bunch of those grapes for my poor sick daughter. Won't you sell me a bunch?"

He started to tell her to get out, when a beautiful young lady came up, and said, "What is it, my good woman?"

"O Ma'am, if you can do anything for me, won't you, please? My daughter is sick, and is crying continually for grapes, and I saw the beautiful clusters in the hot-house, and wanted to purchase some, but he won't sell them to me. Look, I have two shillings, may I have just one bunch?"

"Oh," said the young lady, "come with me," and she led the woman into the beautiful conservatory, and said, "Hold your apron." She snipped off one bunch and another and another, until the poor woman cried, "No more! I have only two shillings, don't give me any more."

"But I want your daughter to have all she needs; there is life and health in these grapes," and she snipped off more.

The woman finally said, "I am so grateful to you, here are the two shillings."

"Keep your money; my father is not a merchantman, he is the king, and he does not want your money. Take the grapes and tell your daughter they are sent by the princess herself, and are a gift from the king's conservatory."

"But I will be so glad to give you the two shillings. You are welcome to them."

"Oh, no! *A king does not sell; a king delights to give.*"

I have never forgotten that simple illustration for it tells how the heart of God goes out to needy sinners. That was in the apostle's mind when he wrote, "Thanks be unto God for His unspeakable gift." God has nothing to sell to lost men; and again I repeat, if He were selling His salvation, you would be too poor to buy it, but because it is a gift you may have it for nothing, and may have it now.

II. The Excellency of the Gift

I do not know whether you have ever noticed it, but three times in the New Testament in our Authorised Version you have this adjective, "unspeakable." Here we read, "Thanks be unto God for His *unspeakable gift.*" In the twelfth chapter of this book, the apostle tells us how he was caught up into Paradise, into the third Heaven, and he says he "heard *unspeakable words*, which it is not lawful for a man to utter." And over in the Epistle of Peter, we read of "*joy unspeakable and full of glory.*" The word is the same in each instance in our English Translation, but different in every case in the Greek where each term has a very distinct meaning.

Unspeakable Joy

When we read of "joy unspeakable and full of glory," the original word literally means, "unutterable," joy unutterable. When you are very very happy, can you find language to tell what it is like? Here is a young bride; she has just come down the aisle from the marriage altar, and her face is radiant. At her side is her proud young bridegroom. I won't ask the bride, but will ask the groom, "How do you feel now?"

He looks at me and says, "Bully!" "What do you mean by that? That doesn't tell me anything. "

"Well," he says, "I feel *great.*"

"Great? You mean that you think you are a wonderful personage?"

"Oh, no."

"Well, what do you mean?"

"I feel swell."

"I don't get you yet."

He uses many different words; some are good English, and some are slang, to try to express the joy that he feels to think that she didn't get away from him before she said, "I will." His heart is filled with joy unutterable. It is impossible to tell out your feeling when you are filled with joy. That is the word the apostle uses. And when you have received God's gift, you have a joy that is unspeakable.

Somebody said to an old Scotch woman, "Well, you are converted now."

"Aye, I am."

"How does it feel?"

"Oh, it is better felt than telt."

She was glad, she was happy, and rejoicing; and did not know what words to use to express her joy.

Inexpressible Words

Then in 2 Corinthians 12, where the apostle says he was caught up into Paradise and "heard *unspeakable words*, which it is not lawful for a man to utter," that word is really "inexpressible." That is, having listened to the music of Heaven, having heard the vocabulary of angels and redeemed sinners in the Glory, he could not find any words in the Hebrew or Greek languages with which he was familiar, that would properly express the joys of the saints around the throne of God and of the Lamb.

But the word here is still a different one, "Thanks be unto God for His unspeakable gift." This word literally means, "Not yet *fully expounded*." "Thanks be unto God for His not yet fully expounded gift." That is very suggestive; it tells me that some day I will understand this gift, though as yet I cannot do so. It tells me that God has wonderful things in reserve, which I am going to find out when I get Home to Heaven, but as long as I am down here in the world it will never be fully expounded. We read when the Queen of Sheba came to

Solomon to question him concerning the name of the Lord, Solomon answered all her questions, and there was nothing in her heart that he did not explain. And when she saw his glory and all his servants, and the wealth that was His, she said, "It was a true report that I heard in mine own land of thy acts and thy wisdom. Howbeit I believed not the words until I came, and mine eyes had seen it; and, behold, the half was not told me: thy wisdom and prosperity exceedeth the fame which I heard" (1 Kings 10:6,7). She would have to stay on day after day, and month after month, and year after year, to get anything like a real understanding of Solomon's wisdom and glory. And so, as long as you and I are down here, the gift of God will never be *fully expounded*. It will take all eternity to get to the depth of it.

"There are depths of love that I cannot know
Till I cross the narrow sea;
There are heights of joy that I may not reach.
Till I rest in peace with Thee."

But I may learn more and more of this gift as I go along the way. It is God's wondrous manifestation of Christ to sinners.

What is the GIFT? It has never been fully expounded, but just what is it? In the first place, the Lord Jesus Himself is the Gift of God. "God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in Him should not perish, but have everlasting life" (John 3. 16). "In this was manifested the love of God toward us, because that God sent His only begotten Son into the world, that we might live through Him. Herein is love, not that we loved God, but that He loved us, and sent His Son to be the propitiation for our sins" (1 John 4:9, 10).

The Lord Jesus Himself is the Gift of God, and let me say it worshipfully, He in all His beauty and glory has never been fully expounded. Millions of sermons have been preached about Him; hundreds of thousands of hymns have been written to celebrate His blessedness and preciousness, but no one yet has told the story in full. "No man knoweth the Son, but the Father, neither knoweth any man the Father, save the Son, and he to whomsoever the Son will reveal Him" (Matt. 11:27). We talk about the incarnation, the union of God and man in one person, that glorious event which took place so long ago at Bethlehem, but how little we understand about it. It is God's unspeakable gift.

The Holy Spirit is God's gift. Our blessed Lord is no longer here on earth, but the Holy Spirit is. Who is there who understands the Spirit of

God? Who can explain the Holy Spirit? I myself, one of the weakest and poorest of all God's servants, have preached hundreds of sermons on the Holy Spirit, but I have never been able to explain Him. I have never been able to exhaust the truth in regard to Him. The Holy Spirit of God is the unspeakable gift.

We read in Romans 6:23, "The wages of sin is death; but the gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord." Eternal life, then, is the gift of God. Yes, "God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in Him should not perish, but have everlasting life," and so we are told, "He that hath the Son hath life; and he that hath not the Son of God hath not life" (1 John 5:12). Jesus, the Holy Spirit, eternal life, these constitute the gift of God. Explain eternal life. I cannot. It is God's unspeakable gift, and I hear my Saviour saying, "This is life eternal, that they might know Thee, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom Thou hast sent" (John 17:3).

"O what a gift the Father gave,
When He bestowed His Son;
To save poor ruined guilty men,
By sin denied and undone."

III. Receiving the Gift

What should be our attitude toward a gift like this, and toward the Giver? What attitude can we have if we are right-thinking people, but to receive the gift and thank the Giver. Have you done that? Have you received the gift and thanked the Giver? Or are you foolish enough to try to do what the poor woman did —are you still offering your paltry little two shillings worth of human merit? Are you saying, "It is very good of Thee to offer me salvation and in such a cheap way, but then you know, I am not absolutely bankrupt; I have a little human merit. I am really a very moral kind of a person, and if you will just take my goodness and my morality and my church membership, and a few more things, I will be glad to exchange these for your gift."

There is nothing that irritates me more than when I invite some one to go to dinner with me to have him try to snatch the check. In the first place, I generally select a place that is within my means, and I do not invite anyone unless I truly desire his company. I enjoy saying to my friends, "Now, you just take anything you wish." And then when they say, "It is nice of you, but I would like to pay," I say, "Look here, I didn't invite you here in order that I might sell you a meal! You are my guest!"

God invites you to come and sit at His table, and receive His

wonderful gift, and you insult Him when you talk about paying Him. We have one instance in the Book where the servant of God acting for his master, became intensely indignant. Peter came down to Samaria to see a mighty work of God, and as he laid his hands on men, the Holy Spirit fell on them. There was a wretched fellow who came and offered the apostle money and said, "Give me the power to convey this gift; I will pay you for it," and Peter turned on him and said, "Thy money perish with thee, because thou hast thought that the gift of God may be purchased with money. Thou hast neither part nor lot in this matter: for thy heart is not right in the sight of God. Repent, therefore, of this thy wickedness, and pray God, if perhaps the thought of thine heart may be forgiven thee. For I perceive that thou art in the gall of bitterness, and in the bond of iniquity" (Acts 8:20-23).

It is a wicked thing to offer God anything for His salvation when it is already paid for by the Blood of His own precious Son. Do not insult Him by pleading any merit of your own, but come as a poor bankrupt sinner; confess you have nothing to offer and be willing to be saved by grace. Receive the gift so freely proffered.

IV. Refusing the Gift

Just a closing word concerning the solemnity of refusing such a gift. Let me quote again that verse I have already repeated, "For God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in Him should not perish, but have everlasting life." What does that tell us? It tells us that if we accept the gift, we have life and salvation; if we refuse, we perish. God would never have put it in the way He did in that verse if we were not to so understand it. Accept Christ and live; refuse Him and perish.

Some years ago a young man, careless and indifferent entered a mission hall. He sat and looked curiously around the room, and saw on the wall a printed motto, and he read carefully, "It must be Christ or Hell. To neglect the one is to choose the other." He did not like that; he did not like the word "hell" stuck up on a sign. You would not like it put in your parlour for your friends to read. That young man looked at the sign, re-read it, and then said to himself, "That is pretty serious. I guess that is what I have been doing all my life. I have neglected Christ, though I never thought of choosing hell. But I believe that sign is right. By the grace of God, it will be Christ from now on," and he was saved that night.

I was having meetings in a western city, and was introduced to a young woman, and was told, "She will sing a solo to-night."

"What do you want me to sing?" she asked.

I said, "I have a song here," and I gave her my book. I was going to preach on Eternity and showed her the hymn, "Eternity."

"Eternity! time soon will end,
It's fleeting moments pass away;
O sinner, say where wilt thou spend
Eternity's unchanging day?
Shalt thou the hopeless horror see
Of hell for all eternity?"

She looked at it and said, "I don't like that word."

"Which word?"

She put her dainty finger on the word, "Hell," and I said, "You don't like that word?"

"No, that is not a nice word to sing. I never sing words like that."

"Well," I said, "you will sing that or nothing for me."

She went away, but she came back a half-hour later with tears in her eyes and said, "I guess I will sing it if you still want me to."

I inquired, "Do you really believe it?"

"Yes, I think I do. I have been looking it up, and the Word is used in the Bible quite a little. "It is," I said, "and God means men to know that it must be heaven or hell for eternity."

If you refuse the gift of God, there is nothing but judgment ahead. Accept the gift and live. Reject it and perish.

People do not like to hear of judgment to come. They would rather listen to smooth things, and hear sweet and eloquent discourses on the love and the goodness of God. But it is because He loves us that He so solemnly warns us of the fearful consequences of refusing His unspeakable gift, the reception of which will save from unspeakable misery, both in time and in eternity.

"To-night may be thy latest breath,
Thy little moment here be done.
Eternal woe, the second death—
Awaits the grace-neglecting one;
Thine awful destiny foresee.
Time ends and then—Eternity.

"Eternity! but Jesus died,
Yes, Jesus died on Calvary;
Behold Him, thorn-crowned, crucified,
The sinless One made sin for thee.
O sinner haste, for refuge flee,
He saves and for eternity."

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