

Sermon by Philip C. Herrmann, March 12, 1972

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... happens to be almost at the end of the New Testament. Written by a man who knew the Lord intimately, when he was here upon earth, and writing as an old man, perhaps older than myself, he has this to say. Because in the 30 or 40 or 50 years between the time that the Lord left the earth, after he had been crucified and rose again, error had crept into the church of God, and there were heresies abounding. A person who had so gloriously glorified his Father, his God, by dying on the cross, and rising again, and was seated on God's right hand, even then as the apostle wrote, he gives us this testimony, to refute the arguments that were being propounded then. That Christ was not the son of God in the way the apostles knew him. He was not come in the flesh, that he was not God. So, the apostle writes in the fifth chapter of I John, these words: "if we receive the witness of men, the witness of God is greater." [1 John 5:9]

Just think of it. The witness of men is finite. We may read our newspapers from day to day, and we believe that they are telling the truth, because different organizations that control the press, the two, United Press and Associated Press, if their witness, if their testimony, if their copy is the same, it agrees, we believe it. We have no reason to think they're lying, or that they're deceiving us. They are out to tell the truth, because if they told a lie, their competitor would immediately show them up. It's a simple argument, isn't it. If the witness of men is true, if the witness of men can be believed, how much more should the witness of God be believed. The witness of God is greater, infinitely greater.

Then he says, "For this is the witness of God, which He has testified of His Son. He that believeth on the Son of God has the witness in himself. He that believeth not God has made Him a liar, because he believeth not the record, or the witness, that God gave of His Son. And this is the record, or witness, that God has given to us eternal life, and this life is in His Son. He that hath the Son hath life, and he that hath not the Son of God hath not life." divides the human race into two parts, those who have the Son, those who know the Son as their savior, and those who don't.

And then he concludes this particular portion with this statement, "These things, these divine things, have I written to you, that believe on the Son of God, that you may know that you have eternal life, even you who believe on the name of the Son of God."

Some months ago I spoke from a verse, or a few verses, in the book of Jeremiah, and I'd just like to remind you of those. It's along the same lines, that we have in this, almost the last pages of the New Testament. This is in the middle of the Old Testament, and is a revelation of what God thinks. What the Lord thinks is important, what was essential, fundamental, in the time when men were still looking forward to the coming of the Son of God. The Jewish nation looked forward to the Messiah. And according to the writings, which were always prefaced by the statement "Thus saith the Lord" and these were exact quotes, what the Lord has said, they weren't allowed to use their own words, it must be God's words, it's "thus saith the Lord" and I think this is repeated thousands of times in the Old Testament.

So that God pledges His word as being true; it is His word, not man's word, although men communicated it, and wrote it down, and it has been brought down to us. This is a wonderful record. This is the record, part of the record, that we were reading of in the Epistle of John. This is the record that God

has witnessed of His Son. In the Old Testament it was the witness of the Lord himself, God the Father and God the Son, of what was to come. But it was only a partial revelation.

Let me just read those two verses in Jeremiah 9. “Thus saith the Lord, let not the wise man glory in his wisdom, Let not the mighty man [or the strong man], glory in his might [or strength]. Let not the rich man glory in his riches, But let him who glories [today, a better word for glory would be the word boast] But let him that boasts boast in this, that he understands and knows me. That I am the Lord, who exercise lovingkindness [that’s the love of God], judgment, and righteousness in the earth.” [Jeremiah 9:23-24] Those two words are the equivalent of the other side of God’s character, His infinite holiness. He loves man but He hates sin. So, he has to deal with it.

And all that are not sheltered under the work that Christ did upon Calvary’s cross, who haven’t accepted salvation from that Person who hung upon the cross and died for them, to cover the question of their sins, they are outside the fold, they are not those who know him. They’ll wish they had, in eternity. That will be their constant regret, their eternal psalm, and that’s why the Lord came to earth, to do a work for you and for me, and for everyone, for those who lived before his time, and those who come after so that we might enjoy the life that we read of in the first of John.

Now when the Lord came to earth, he brought us a full revelation of who and what God is. I said before that in the Old Testament, that is the time that we consider B.C., before Christ, it was just a partial revelation of God. God revealed Himself to the prophets, to the kings, and the priests, of the nation of Israel. His message was for all, but by and large, he dealt with the nation of Israel, the one that is still in existence, and that will be one day the leading nation in the world. Although they have more enemies than anyone else, God is going to keep his promise to one man, that was the patriarch Abraham, to whom he said that in thee, that is in Abraham, and through his Seed, that is Jesus Christ, he would bless, infinitely bless, the whole earth. And that blessed time remains to be carried out, and will be carried out, in the period of a thousand years, of infinite blessing.

And now what is this record that the apostle writes about, “this is the record that God has given of his Son.” What was the chief thing, that when the Lord came to earth, he came in the humblest form. He was born into the family of a carpenter, one of the poorest in Israel. And the Lord was known as the son of the carpenter, that was, apparently. Men did not know of his miraculous birth, they do not know what we know from the first chapter of Luke, that the Holy Spirit came upon Mary, and she gave birth to this supernatural Son. And that was necessary, because if he had been born in the way that you and I have been born, through an earthly father and mother, he would have had the sin in him, that each one of us has inherited from our father and mother, going back all the way to Adam.

So it was necessary that he be born supernaturally, so that there would be no taint of sin in him. The record of him according to the matter of sin is that in him is no sin, or was no sin. That’s told us by the apostle John. Peter writes, Peter was another disciple who was familiar with the Lord, travelled with him for three and a half years, before his crucifixion, and then was led of God to speak that wonderful message on the Day of Pentecost that resulted in the salvation of three thousand souls. Not that Peter did the saving; Peter just gave the message. Peter was filled with the Holy Spirit and he gave the message for that day. He charged the nation of Israel, and all that were listening to him that day, and there were plenty of Israelites, and proselytes from other countries there, so that a good representation of the world was present. And he preached that the very person who crucified the Lord could now be forgiven,

just by turning to him and pleading for forgiveness, throwing themselves on the mercy of God, and they would receive the highest gift that God could give them, that is eternal life, and the Spirit of God to animate that life.

So this is the record that God has given us, the chief message that the Lord brought to earth was that everyone that believes in him, puts their trust in him, committed their lives to him, and followed him faithfully, or as faithfully as they could, thereafter, to the end of their life, and looked for his coming again, to receive them to himself, they had eternal life, and they would never perish.

That is the other side of the coin, so to speak, If we don't receive eternal life, then we still remain in the state of death into which we are born, born as sinners. As sinners we come into this world. We haven't committed any sins, but we have a fallen nature. That the moment we are thwarted, or that we are asked to obey something we don't like to, or do anything that is contrary to our ideas, we immediately resent it, we hate it, fight it. And that, you see is a picture of the old nature. That's what Adam did. Adam had the opportunity of refusing the fruit that Eve gave him, or offered him, but he took it, and scripture says that he was not deceived, but he took of the fruit deliberately, in defiance of God. So God had to banish him from the Garden, and the verdict of scripture is that Adam sinned, and just let me read you the verse in Romans that tells us: By one man, that is Adam, sin entered into the world, and death by sin, Remember the Lord had said that "the day that thou eateth thereof thou shalt surely die" This not only meant physical death, but it's far worse, it meant spiritual death.

Because God created man in His image, and He gave him a never-dying soul, and spirit. The body dies, and is put into the ground, but the spirit and soul live on, and becomes accountable to God. Lives forever, just as God lives forever, and has always lived. So man, though he has a beginning, he has no end. And if there is anyone here that is not a believer in the true sense, has not received Christ as his or her savior, I would beg you to think of this. That you have an eternal life in this sense: that you will exist forever. And there's only two places that God mentions in His word.

I remember reading a story of Mark Twain. Mark Twain was an agnostic, that is, his thought was that you can't tell about these eternal things, because you can't see them. Who's to come back from the grave and tell us about them? Well the Lord did, so Mark Twain was wrong there. And Mark Twain was once asked at a dinner whether he believed in Heaven or Hell. As was his custom, he always gave a funny or comical answer, and his answer was this: After quite a bit of hesitation, as you know, Mark Twain was a hesitant speaker, took a long time to say what he had, but it was very dramatic, he said, "I'm afraid I can't speak on that subject, because I have friends in both places." So he believed, no doubt, in a judgment of God that banishes man from God forever, and that's called Hell, wherever it is, and however terrible it is, I'll always picture it in terrible language. The other is heaven, a place where God's throne is, where Christ is now, and where every person that has ever believed, that has ever trusted in God or in Christ, will live forever, in eternal bliss.

Well, the wonderful thing about the gospel is that it gives us the life of Christ, and it's not told us by one, but there are four records. The Apostle might just as well have said "This is the record, or these are the four records that God has given of His Son," because you have four gospels, four letters, four historical records, that were written in the first century, that acquaint us with the life of God's Son. And we know that in addition to the wonderful words he spoke, He authenticated them by the miracles he did. He spoke in simple language. A great many of the words of the four gospels are words of two

syllables. He didn't write in the learned language of the day, or didn't speak in the learned language of the day, nor did those who wrote of him. They wrote in the ordinary "Koina" or speech of the Greek of that day.

The Lord's wonderful words and works were attested to, by others, not just by himself. In the fifth of John the Lord speaks of the four witnesses that prove the validity of what he said, prove the truth. It was, first of all, John the Baptist. John the Baptist was the forerunner of the Lord Jesus Christ. He was the one that preached the gospel of repentance. He didn't preach salvation, of himself, but he preached that men should believe on the One who was coming after him, the One who was before him, meaning that he was from eternity, although the Lord Jesus was born six or nine months after John the Baptist.

Then the Lord said that the Father, in addition to John the Baptist, the witness the Father gave of him. The Father three times called down from heaven. Twice He said "This is my beloved Son, in whom is all My delight" and on one of those two occasions he said "Hear him." That is the best advice God has ever given, because no man can reach God, though men speak goodly today of God, and the fatherhood of God and the brotherhood of man, this is not borne out in the Scriptures. Though God loves everyone, he is not the Father of all men. He is the Father of all them that believe. By faith in Christ Jesus, we are all his children and the sons of God. That is the basis on which we get into God's favor. That is the basis on which we get His eternal life. And that life, as we read, is in His Son. If we have the Son, who is eternal life himself, He is the source of all life. But the eternal life that is spoken of here is not just the ever-existing life that we think of, but it is God's life himself.

If we would be in God's presence, if you want to be happy there, you want to be happy here, now, in the thought of God's presence, you'll have to have that eternal life, and that eternal life is Christ himself. The Lord said "Abide in me, and I will abide in you." and that means keeping his commandments, and his commandments are not grievous.

Well the Lord, for three and a half years, for three Passovers and some extra time, he went up and down the land of Israel, a land that is still a land of fighting, and of trouble. What land has ever been so troubled as that? And they are still in ahead for more trouble. That land was the place of the Lord's ministry. He went up and down the land preaching the gospel of repentance and faith. That was the first words he uttered, when he went out in his ministry. The beginning of his three and a half years, his first message was "Repent, for the kingdom of God has come. Believe the gospel" Here was the gospel, the good news from God, that he had eternal life to offer, and not only to offer, but to make good to men, in all its fullness.

Well, we know if we read the four gospels, that the Lord met nothing but opposition, He met hatred, men would have murdered him because he pointed out their sins. He put the finger on their hypocrisy. He called them to account, He told them that "you honor me with your lips, but your heart is far from me." And He had been doing this in his [22:37] incarnation in the 1500 years from the time that Moses led the Israelites through the Red Sea into the wilderness, and then through Joshua into the promised land, the land where they are now. And incidentally, that land should have been, according to God's promise to Abraham it should have been from the Nile, the river Nile, the great river, to the great river Euphrates, which would be about a million square miles. They have, or did have, recently, something like 10,000 miles, so they still have a lot to acquire, and they will acquire it in God's time.

The gospel of John, the same writer that wrote the epistle from which I quoted a few verses, he details the terrible controversies that the Lord had with the Pharisees. And the Pharisees are a good picture of us, or of the world at large, because I believe that all men that have any respect for God, they think that through their own efforts, they can satisfy God and get a place in Heaven for themselves. But the more the Lord labored with them, answered their questions, dealt with their insinuations and innuendos, and their terrible charges against him, that he was a deceiver, that he was a blasphemer, and that he deserved to be crucified, he still went on, despite all the ingratitude in return for his love. He did something that is amazing to say the least, and no one can speak of it, without emotion.

After man had exhibited all his hatred against God and against the Person who represented God, for the Lord said all of his words were dictated to him by his Father, and that he was speaking the words of his Father, men still hated him, the more, and they put him to death. But this is the wonderful story, that God used that very crime, God used the greatest crime that has ever been committed, for the perfect Son of God, against whom no sin could be levelled. He asked men which of you convinces me or convicts me of sin. No answer to that. And then he asked the further question, "And if I say the truth, why do you not believe me?" No answer to that either.

So you see that God the Father and God the Son were in unity, in charging men with their awful sin, but God used the very fact of the crucifixion of His Son, to make the way open for him to righteously forgive us. That is the fact that charms me, that God in His wisdom, not in His strength, or in His power, but in His wisdom and in His love, made a way possible for all men, before Christ and A.D., Anno Domini, the year of our Lord, to have salvation without cost, though it cost him everything.

Remember the picture of Abraham, sacrificing, about to sacrifice his son, and the three days that he was journeying on to the top of that mountain, to do it, what sorrow must have crossed his heart. And yet I believe that Abraham had the conviction that God's promises of ultimate blessing would be carried out. He believed that God was able to raise his son up. Well it says in the book of Romans from which I've already quoted that "He that spared not His own Son," (this is God, not sparing His own Son) "but delivered him up for us all," (for all men, He gave His Son as a gift to the world) "so that all might be saved, shall He not with him freely give us all things." [Romans 8:32]

And I take those "all things" not only to mean things that we get in this life, but the spiritual things, those that last for eternity, because, after all, that's what counts. Jeremiah said that, through the Lord's words, that knowing him, knowing the Lord, was the greatest thing. That was more than all the wisdom, the strength, the might, and the riches of man. To know the Lord, to know that he is the one that uses lovingkindness, in return for all the hatred and the sins of men, but not at the expense of his holiness. So that holiness required that sin be paid for, and it was paid for upon the cross of Calvary. It's another grand thought that we find in reading the Scriptures. And what would we do, what would we know of God or of Christ apart from this. This is the miraculous book. It was written beginning 1500 years before Christ, and was completed in the first century after Christ, so that in those 1600 years God was taking different men, from different occupations, different educations, and giving them His word.

And all of it hangs together, it's a miraculous, it's a supernatural revelation of God the Father and God the Son, and the Spirit of God, the third person of the Godhead, for God is a triune God. We speak of Him as one God, but He is revealed in these Persons. That's a mystery we cannot understand, we

have to accept it by faith. We shall understand it someday, but in our present state of knowledge, in our present state with a fallen nature, which we don't lose when we become Christians, that's a sad fact, but it's one that we have to contend with, and that's why the eternal life is so important for us, because one of the gifts of that eternal life, one of the features of that eternal life, is that God gives us the power over sin.

Just let me read a portion in the eighth of John. The Lord in one of his many controversial talks with the Pharisees, with the Jews, said to those who believed on him, "If you continue in My word, then you are my disciples indeed." You see, it's not only that we should be believers, but disciples, that is, following him. "And ye shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free." [John 8:31-32] Now in my city of New York, where I was born, there is perhaps the largest university in the country, Columbia University. And on one of the buildings, one of the many buildings that comprise that University, there's this quotation. And it's interpreted to mean that if you know the truth, if you have a good education, which we supply you here, you shall be free. Free of ignorance, I suppose.

But how does the Lord interpret this? The Jews in that day interpreted a different way. Just listen to this. Today we be Abraham's seed, we're the descendants of Abraham, and were never in bondage to any man. How sayest thou then, "Ye shall be made free." You see they were thinking of the Romans, though they were in bondage to them, and this was a deliberate lie, or certainly a misconception on their part. They were self-deceived if they really believed this, that they were never in bondage to any man. They had been in bondage to four nations, The Babylonians, the Persians, the Greeks, and finally, when the Lord came to earth, to the Romans. They said we were never in bondage to any man, how do you say we'll be made free? The Lord just dismissed the misconception, and he says, "verily, verily I say unto you, whosoever committed sin is the servant," or slave "of sin." "And the servant abideth not in the house forever, but the Son abideth ever. If the Son therefore," that is himself, the Son of God, God's representative here on this earth, "shall make you free, ye shall be free indeed." You see it was the question of sin, uppermost in the Lord's mind, and he had plenty of it to contend with, in fact he contended with it always, even in his disciples. They were sinners, they needed to be made free. And this is the purpose of eternal life.

Now we read in the second verse of our text this morning that those who have believed have the witness in their own life, believing in the Son of God. And I believe that this refers to the change that comes over a person the moment he or she believes that their sins are forgiven, that they've trusted in Christ for their eternal salvation. There's a change comes over them. God gives them the witness in themselves. And who is that witness? Isn't it the Spirit of God? That was one of the great promises that the Lord made, and which he has fully kept, that when he disappeared, when he went back to the glory, went back to heaven, the Spirit of God would come down, and indwell every one who has believed in him. And this came true, the day of Pentecost.

Well the next thing in our text is that whosoever does not believe this wonderful promise of eternal life to those who believe on His Son, they are making God a liar. Well, just think of the solemnity of that. Calling God a liar, treating Him as unworthy of belief, treating Him as though we could take Him as we wished. If there was one thing that the Lord insisted upon, and he said this almost at the very end of his life, before he went to the cross, He said "For this purpose came I into the world." He said this to Pilate, standing there, a bleeding man, his back scourged with thongs, thongs which had glass, ragged

glass, at the end, and every blow would cut a gash into that back. In the words of the prophets it was said his back was plowed with furrows. Well that was the Man that stood before Pilate and said "For this came I into the world. For this was I born, and for this came I into the world, that I should bear witness to the truth." So all that he said was truth, he insisted on that. I've already quoted, "If I've said the truth, why do you not believe me?" He said further on that, "I am the truth... I am the way, the truth, and the life. No man cometh unto the Father but by me."

So friends, beware of those who speak glibly of God, and yet bypass the Lord Jesus Christ. They are missing the fundamental point that the Lord made in his life. "No man cometh to the Father but by Me." And we had the quotation from the sixth of John this morning, in our first meeting, it says that "All that the Father giveth me shall come to me, and him that cometh to Me," that is, he or she, any person, who comes to the Lord as a repentant sinner, "I will in no wise cast out." [John 6:37] The greatest sinner, and the least sinner, whatever you place yourself, in what category you do, that person can have forgiveness, and enter into eternal life, the very life of God Himself, God's best gift to man.

But, it is a gift. That's one thing I would impress upon you. Everyone of us would like to do something to attain our salvation, if we hadn't already received it. That is the natural thing. I suppose if you were to ask 100 persons whether they were saved, they wouldn't like to admit either way, one or the other, but they would say, "I hope so." And that's a very flimsy answer. I think it's an escapist answer, because we don't act that way in natural things, do we.

If I were to ask you if you have a bank account, you couldn't say I hope so. If I asked whether you had a house, or a husband, or anything that we could speak of as a natural thing, we wouldn't say "I hope so." You either know so, that you have it, or you haven't it. And so in this question, it's the paramount question, it's the question above all questions, whether we have the life of God Himself, whether we've entered into that, although we'll only enter into it fully in the day to come, when we're translated from this scene.

So eternal life is the gift of God. "God so loved the world," the Lord said to Nicodemus, "that He gave His only begotten son," (begotten in time by his eternal fellow), "that whosoever" (that takes in everyone, doesn't it), "believeth on Him should not perish, but have everlasting life." [John 3:16] And he reinforced it to the crowd that he spoke to after he had cured the impotent man at the pool of Bethesda. He said "He that heareth My word, and believeth Him that sent me," (believes in God his Father) "hath everlasting life and shall not come into condemnation, but is passed from death into life." [John 5:24] Just think of it. There the Lord promises an instant, and immediate, and eternal possession of what will only be experienced to the full in eternity.

And the apostle concludes this little portion of his message with this wonderful statement: "These things have I written to you that ye may know that ye have eternal life, who believe on the name of the Son of God, even to you that believe," (it's repeated) "that believe on the name of the Son of God." If we have believed on the name, that name, the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, the name of the Son of God, the Lamb of God, how many names there are, there are some dozen of them in the very first chapter of the Gospel of John. If you are interested in receiving eternal life, there is where you can find it, find the first introduction to the wonderful Person who offers this great gift, the gift of God Himself. The gift of God, "the wages of sin is death" says the apostle in the book of Romans, "but the gift of God is eternal life." [Romans 6:23] If I have succeeded, if I have whetted your appetite, so to speak, to

know something more of this eternal gift, that is the difference between your eternal blessing and eternal woe, I would beg of you, not to let the moment go, but to read this first chapter, and continue to the 21st chapter. And see for yourself what a divine person God has provided, for your salvation and mine.

May we pray. Gracious God and Father, We ask that Thou would impress us with the necessity of reading thy word, those of us that have believed, and even those who have not, those who are perhaps wavering, those who have gone back in their souls, get back to Thy word, for there alone can we find forgiveness, and comfort, and the knowledge of eternal life. We thank Thee that Thou has provided so simple a way, whereby everyone, from the youngest to the oldest, in an instant, can receive forgiveness of sins, and have peace with God, and be justified from all things, and have a place in heaven, and an inheritance with Thee. We ask Thy blessing upon all that has been said this day, and give Thee thanks in the Lord's precious name. Amen.

The meeting is over.