

Save Thyself

by Catherine Booth

Salvation requires human effort and self-denial, as taught by Jesus Christ and the Apostle Paul.

Scripture: Matthew 7:13, Mark 8:34, Luke 13:24, Philippians 2:12, James 4:7

Topics: "Personal Sanctification", "Overcoming Sin"

Description

Catherine Booth preaches about the necessity of striving for Salvation, emphasizing the importance of human effort in overcoming obstacles to enter the Kingdom of God. She highlights the need to address personal hindrances such as secret sins, idols, worldly companionship, unlawful gain, frivolous reading, and indulgence in strong drink or worldly amusement that can prevent individuals from fully surrendering to Jesus. Catherine urges listeners to embrace the cross, make sacrifices, and strive to overcome these barriers in order to experience the peace, joy, and eternal life that come from following Christ.

Transcript

LUKE xiii. 23-25.-`Then said one unto Him, Lord, are there few that be saved,? And He said unto them, Strive to enter in at the strait gate; for many, I say unto you, will seek to enter in, and shall not be able, when once the master of the house is risen up, and hath shut to the door.'

THE man proposing this question in the 23rd verse, we may be sure, was actuated by a vain curiosity; it was a speculative question, which had nothing to do with his own Salvation, so our Lord gave no direct reply, but seized the opportunity to turn the attention of the inquirer and those around Him to a subject infinitely more important to them than the relative number of the saved and the lost, even that of their own Salvation. As though the Saviour had said, `What is it to you, how many will be saved or lost? The great question for you is, Are you saved? Till this is settled, you are in no position to speculate about the secrets of the future. Make haste to make your own calling and election sure.'

`Strive to enter in at the strait gate: for many, I say unto you, will seek to enter in, and shall not be able.' I would like to note, in passing, that this text is very commonly misread and misunderstood through an error in the punctuation. The full-stop at the end of the 24th verse should be removed to the middle of the 25th, and then the true meaning of our Lord's words would come out. The text should read thus:

`Many will seek to enter in, and shall not be able, when once the master of the house hath risen up, and hath shut to the door.' They will not be able to get in because they will be too late and the door will be shut, not because they had not strength to get in if they had tried in time.

Then you perceive that our Lord teaches most unmistakably in this passage that HUMAN effort is indispensable to Salvation, and for this reason, that human obstacles have to be overcome.

I think every reader of the New Testament must have noticed two classes of passages bearing on the question of the conditions of our Salvation, the one class representing it as an exceedingly easy thing to be saved: as for instance: 'And it shall come to pass that whosoever shall call upon the name of the Lord shall be saved,' and 'God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in Him should not perish, but have everlasting life'; 'Look unto Me, and be ye saved,' and so on, all of which texts represent one side, and a glorious side, of God's truth, but not the only one; whereas many teachers and preachers have culled all these texts, and made them almost the exclusive foundation of their teaching--even to the hoisting of placards in the streets, 'Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved,' without any qualifying or explanatory texts. We can scarcely take up a religious book but we have this easy, one-sided Gospel preached to us; and we scarcely hold a service in which we do not meet some persons who have so thoroughly imbibed it that, say what we will, we cannot alarm or make them see the necessity of a change of heart and life.

Now I want carefully to look at both sides of the truth relating to Salvation, for this is a momentously important question; to be mistaken respecting it would be awful, and to mislead others still more awful!

I have said that the class of texts to which I have referred represent one side of truth, but that it is only one. You will find in your New Testament quite as many texts, quite as relevant, quite as important, and just as much inspired as the former class, which represent it as an exceedingly difficult thing to be saved, requiring as much of human effort and sacrifice as though Salvation all depended on ourselves. Such is my text: Strive. We find this word would bear a stronger rather than a weaker interpretation. It would bear to be interpreted, 'fight, wrestle, agonize to enter in at the strait gate.' Why strive, if there are no difficulties? Why fight and wrestle if there are no enemies to be encountered? and why should it be written, as we read in the lesson, that except a man be willing to leave his father or mother, and even life itself, he cannot be--not he is not--but he cannot become the disciple of the Lord Jesus Christ? And again, 'If thy right hand offend thee, cut it off; and if thy right eye offend thee, pluck it out?'

The Apostle Paul, in Acts xxvi., says he preached the same doctrine--'that men should repent and turn to God, and do works meet for repentance.' But supposing this doctrine were confined to the teachings of Jesus Christ, I take all these to be prospective. Surely these texts do not refer to the men of His generation only. Did He not know what was in the human heart, and what would be the necessary conditions of Salvation in the nineteenth century as well as in the first? And do not His conditions apply to all people in all times? Evidently Paul and all--the Apostles so understood and applied them.

If we look carefully and impartially at both sides of this question, we shall see that both these classes of texts are perfectly harmonious when looked at from the right point of view. If you take your friend's letter in order to discover his view of any question, every child knows that you must read it through, or else you cannot possibly judge what your friend means. It would be unfair and dishonest to read a part, and then give me a theory built on that part; you must read and judge of the WHOLE. Just so with the Word of God. All that bears on the subject of our Salvation must be read in juxtaposition. We must look at it all round, and then we shall arrive at the truth.

'Well,' you say, 'but how do you reconcile these apparently contradictory texts?' I say that to my mind they present no difficulty whatever, simply because, if you will allow me the expression, I regard the former

class as referring to God's side of the question, and the latter class as referring to man's side of the question. What a mercy it is, too, for those who are struggling after Salvation to remember that there are no difficulties on God's side of the question. There might have been, and indeed there were once, difficulties against which we might have struggled all our lives, and we could never have overcome them. There was the barrier of the broken law, with its awful penalty, which we could never have removed out of the way; but when there was no eye to pity and no arm to save, His eye pitied and His own arm brought Salvation, and by the glorious scheme of redemption He swept the difficulties on His side out of the way for ever; He bridged the yawning gulf which sin had created between Himself and us, by throwing across it the broken body of His Son; and now, so far as God is concerned, the way is open and easy back again to His throne and to His heart. There is nothing more to be done on His side. Jesus Christ came from the loftiest throne in Heaven, all the way down to Gethsemane and to Calvary, and took away every barrier on that side of the cross; and now God, as it were, stands at the cross ready and waiting to receive every sinner who will come to Him.

Nevertheless, there are difficulties in the way of the Salvation of every human being, fitly demanding the utmost effort which he can put forth; for although on the Godward side of the cross all the barriers are cleared away, on the manward side we have need to strive and wrestle and agonize to get through the crowd which still intervenes.

If this be true, we can see the necessity for the exhortation of our text and of many similar ones to strive, to seek, to knock, to sell all, to forsake all, to leave father and mother, and life itself, in order to save the soul. What a different idea such texts give us of our share in securing our Salvation to that commonly entertained in these days! Many people seem to think that all they have to do is to sit still and wait for a wave of Divine influence or power, which will come and carry them into the Kingdom of God without any concern or effort of theirs. Alas! I fear thousands wait till death cuts them down, and they find their portion with the idle and unprofitable servant in outer darkness.

Some of you have been trying this plan for years, but you are as far from Salvation as ever. How is this? There must be something wrong. God would never keep you waiting so long for a sense of His mercy and Salvation if you were on the right track. Depend upon it, you are under a delusion of the Devil. If ever you are to be saved, you will have to bestir yourself; you will have to strive against those things which keep you back from the Cross. You are like the man who said, 'Lord, I will follow Thee! but suffer me first to go and bury my father.' You have a 'but,' or it may be many 'buts,' in the way. Here is the great difficulty with many. They want to be saved without effort--without suffering. They are like some sick people we meet with sometimes, who go to the doctor and expect he is going to cure them without any self-denial or self-discipline on their part. They want to write a prescription that will cure them straight off; and when he begins to ask them about their diet, and to order them to leave off this and to take that, or to practice the other--'Oh!' they say, 'am I to cure myself? I can't be at all this trouble.' And so thousands of people remain sick because they will not endure the self-denial and trouble which the regimen requires to cure them. This will not cure them without the physician. They require his treatment all the same; but all his prescriptions and treatment will not cure them without their co-operation. Your heavenly Physician has never proposed to cure you without your co-operation. He has never promised anybody to do so. And even when you are cured, you are to go on doing what He wills to will and to do in you, or you will soon fall back again, and make shipwreck, as thousands do. You will have to go on, on your part, working out your own Salvation to the end, abiding in Christ, and keeping His commandments, or you will fall back and become a withered branch. Salvation means co-operation with God all the way through, from the first ray

of light till He bids you come up higher. So you see I do not profess to preach an easy gospel, or to bring you Salvation without suffering and cross-bearing. I don't believe that anybody has ever found such a Salvation, and I fear those who think they have will find themselves to have been utterly deceived at last. But I want to help those of you who are awakened, to strive and wrestle, to overcome whatever your 'but' may be.

What is your 'but?' That which represents in your case the man's father, whom he wanted to stop and bury; or the possessions of the young ruler, which Jesus told him to sell; or the honour which some of His hearers preferred to the honour that cometh from God only. These and kindred things are the obstacles and enemies against which men have to strive and wrestle in coming to the Cross; and your case will be no exception.

With many the great and, as they think, insurmountable hindrance is worldly companionship. They say, 'I see that if I choose Christ and His Salvation, it means separation from all those I love best in the world.' As a young lady said to me a while ago, 'You see, I could not and would not be a hypocrite. I know what a real disciple ought to be, and how he ought to live, and I will never try to hold Christ in one hand and the world in the other as nearly all the Christians do, with whom I am acquainted; therefore I must leave every soul I know, and walk in a separate path.'

Alas! How truly these words echo the wail of thousands of young people of both sexes. God does not leave Himself without a witness in their hearts. Notwithstanding the rotten teaching many of them listen to, and the rotten practice they are forced to see around them, the Spirit of God sounds His own alarm in their souls. He convinces them of it, 'of righteousness, and of judgment.' He brings to their remembrance the words of Jesus; He exhibits His claims upon them; He shows them what it is to be a 'true disciple'; but instead of a warm, tender, separated, holy parentage, and Church, holding out their hands to the convicted soul and helping it over the bar of its worldly difficulties, they say, 'Oh, you are too scrupulous; your conscience is too sensitive; you are morbid; you are extreme; you can be a Christian without all that; the world is different now to what it was in the days of Christ and of Paul. There is no harm in this, and there is no harm in that,' until the young awakened soul either fritters away its convictions, puts out its light, and becomes such a one as themselves, or turns back in disgust from the pitiful caricature, and goes headlong into the world.

I charge it on thousands of half-hearted, inconsistent, world-loving parents that they are the deceivers and destroyers of their children's souls; and I charge it on thousands of lukewarm, backslidden, lucre-dried Churches, that when their children ask an egg they give them a stone or a fish, they give them a serpent. The very vitals of Christianity are gnawed away by the vermin of Antinomianism. There is nothing left that fits or meets a soul really quickened by the Spirit of God. Such a one must either consent to walk alone or put out his light.

My young friends, listen to the voice of the Spirit WITHIN YOU. Accept of no compromise between Christ and the world. You had better go back, as the young ruler did, than become a hypocrite, and lose both worlds. The conditions of discipleship remain unaltered. 'If any man come to Me, and hate not' (is not willing to give up, if fidelity to Me requires it), his father and mother, and his own life also, he CANNOT BE my disciple.' Jesus claims from first to last to be first in your love, your interest, your service. He never pretends to claim any less, and broadly says again and again, that whoever withholds this allegiance must forego all claim to His love and mercy for ever. You cannot keep your ungodly companions and have Jesus.

Now, make your choice; but, Oh! remember, I beseech you, that one hour of His love and peace will be worth more to you than a lifetime of empty vanity and mirth. True, you must lose some whom you love; but your love for Him, and His love to you, will make up a hundred-fold for what you lose. Think also that, although you must forsake your companions so far as worldly fellowship and enjoyments go, yet your soul shall be filled with Divine love and pity, which will vent itself in efforts to save them; and perchance you may win some of them to become brethren beloved in the Lord; and thus you shall not only save yourself, but those for whom Satan would have you sell your soul. All companionship out of Christ is a snare and a curse; and the more refined and fascinating, the bigger the curse! Flee from all those who 'love not the Lord Jesus,' except to try to save them. Confer no longer with flesh and blood.

Up, and fly for your life. Strive! wrestle! agonize! Parley not with any Delilah, Herodias, or Drusilla! 'Come out from among them, and be ye separate, and I will receive you, and will be a FATHER unto you, and ye shall be My sons and daughters, saith the Lord Almighty.'

Remember, also, that you will find companionship (if you seek out true saints) far more tender, and precious, and profitable, than any you can possibly give up, and such as will be welcome when you are dying, and which will last for ever.

Another great hindrance with many is unlawful gain. I once knew a gentleman who was deeply convicted and wanted to be saved, but he was engaged in an unlawful business. He came to our Meetings for about seven weeks, when the controversy in his soul reached such a height that he could scarcely sleep or eat. He said, 'I have a large capital involved, and I cannot consent to become a poor man.' His teachers would allow of no compromise, knowing that such a course would damn his soul; and so at last, when driven almost to despair in trying to persuade God to save him while holding on to his idol, he resolved that, business or no business, rich or poor, he would follow his Saviour and save his soul. Accordingly, he came out amongst the seekers of Salvation; and scarcely had his knees touched the ground, when his soul was set at liberty, and he went away praising God!

You see, at last he embraced the Cross, submitted to suffer if so the Lord permitted. He strove, agonized with himself, and would not give in till he had overcome his enemy and won Christ. So must you if you are entrammelled in any net of unlawful gain. There are no bonds harder to break, perhaps than these. 'The love of money is the root of all evil.' I used not to understand that text, but I do now. I meet with people all over the land who have sold their souls over and over for money, who sell their sons and daughters, body and soul, for money. Nay, who sell Jesus Christ over again for money. Money is the idol which they have set up, and before it they worship and sacrifice day and night. Has the Devil got any of you into a trap of unrighteous money-making? Man, you have only the shadow of a chance for your soul. Up! up! strive! agonize! Look into Hell. Think how long eternity will be, to spend in reckoning up the profits on broken hearts, wrecked brains, murdered bodies, and lost souls! Such reckonings are bad enough on a sick-bed, are they not? It takes a lot of the Devil's opiates to compose you to sleep after them; but what will they be, to go over and over for ever in the light of the flames of the bottomless pit! Oh, dishonest man, strive now, and resolve to conquer or die! Your only chance is in one desperate leap away from your gains through the strait gate.

Another hindrance with many in this day is frivolous, trashy reading. In a series of services in the North of England, a gentleman came every night for about a month, and was excessively miserable; he was a member of a Church, and a man of influence in the town. He stopped to the Prayer Meeting every night, and friends talked to him, and tried in every way to find out his difficulty, but in vain. One night I went to

him, as a sort of last desperate effort, for I felt deeply concerned about him. I said to him, 'My friend, are you not afraid of quenching the Spirit by this attitude?' He said, 'Yes, I am; but you've hit the right nail tonight.' I said, 'Have I? Say, the Lord has hit it. Will you let it be effectual?' He said, 'You would never suspect what has been my besetment, which has kept me from the enjoyment of the peace and love of God. It has been novel-reading. Many a night I lie reading till daylight that accursed trash, and I could not make up my mind to give it up, but I have tonight;' and he arose and followed me to the penitent-form, and got saved in a few minutes.

He wanted no more teaching, he just yielded the controverted point. You see, he had to 'strive' to do battle with himself in resolving to deny himself that sinful indulgence; then Salvation came to his soul. If anybody here is thus held captive by the same snare, go and do likewise. Never expect to find Jesus, while your mind is preoccupied with the husks and trash of foolish worldly literature. The fact that you can relish such stuff, proves that you are far too worldly and indifferent to seek in such a way as to be likely to find the Pearl of great Price.

With others the hindrance is indulgence in strong drink. The Spirit of God has shown them the soul-ruining character of these drinks, and that their use is incompatible with their serving Him; but they hesitate, and argue, and try to make themselves believe that this is too small a matter to keep them out of the Kingdom of God. I knew a gentleman who was kept out of peace and joy for fifteen years through indulging in a couple of glasses of wine per day. He felt that he ought to wash his hands of the evil thing, but he refused to do it. He did not 'strive'; he shrank from the self-denial, and so lost the joy of Salvation And, Oh! how many knowingly sell their souls for drink! These say to us sometimes, 'You don't know the dreadful power of this appetite; it is too strong for me.' We might answer, 'Why did you create it? but seeing that you have done so, now your only chance of Salvation is in a determined and desperate leap right out of its clutches at once; if you parley, you are undone.' You say, 'But I shall suffer so.' Very likely; even Salvation does not prevent people reaping the physical consequences of their sins, but you must embrace the suffering. Strive, man, strive! Eternal life is at stake.

The suffering will only 'endure for a night, but joy cometh in the morning.' Supposing you had to suffer and wrestle with this appetite all your life, what would that be compared to an eternity of peace and joy? Is it not better to enter into life halt or maimed, if need be, than having two hands or two feet to be cast into everlasting fire? But the suffering in your case will only be short, a month or two of 'striving' with the physical appetite, and you will be a free man for the rest of your life. Will you be such a COWARD as to lose your all, for want of this bit of wrestling? If God is willing to pardon the past, and to help and strengthen you for the strife, will you sit down and say, 'I can't?' God forbid. Arise and take hold of His strength. Who knows but He may deliver you even from the physical craving? He will if you will trust Him to do it, and you shall 'walk, and leap, and praise God.' We have hundreds of men in The Salvation Army who have been the veriest slaves of drink for years, living and working only to get drink, who testify that, at a certain hour of a certain day, God did work this mighty miracle in them, and that from that hour they have neither craved nor missed the deadly draught. Will you strive with your appetite so far as to bring it to Jesus to be cast out? The Lord help you!

Another hindrance with many is worldly amusement. They are so far awakened as to perceive that all those pastimes and recreations from which God is excluded are contrary to Scripture, and deadening and injurious to their religious impressions. The Spirit warns them to have no fellowship with the world, if they wish to find Him who was not of the world, and who declared that His disciples were equally not of the world. They realize all this; but instead of coming out from it and being separate, they try to trim and

compromise and thus spare themselves the conflict which a decided course would bring upon them. They 'love the praise of men more than the praise of God,' and so they go here and go there, and do this and the other which their consciences tell them is wrong rather than suffer and strive. If any of you are in this case, don't you see there is but one way for you--EMBRACE THE CROSS! You can never be saved till you GIVE UP THE WORLD! Settle that, and then weigh the world in one scale, and your soul--your eternal destiny in the other, and apply yourself to solve our Lord's problem, 'What is a man profited if he shall gain the whole world and lose his own soul?'

There are many other hindrances that intervene between awakened sinners and their Saviour; in fact every soul has a 'but.' Will you put your 'but' under your feet, and say, 'Lord, I WILL FOLLOW THEE, and leave the dead to bury their dead?' Will you? Do you say 'It is so hard'? Yes, it looked hard to the young ruler; but we can see now what an infinite gainer he would have been by the loss of all things--how great a gainer eternity alone can unfold. Satan draws his great black wing over all the gain. He tries to hide from our view the peace, and gladness, and glory that God has in store for us when our choice is made. The prodigal did not know that his father would put on him the best robe, and give him the kisses of his love, till he came home. The silver lining is on the inside of the cloud; you must pass through before you can see it. There never was a saint yet who did not count whatever he might have sacrificed in order to win Jesus as dung and dross compared with his infinite gain. But, Oh! how ashamed many have been to think that they could have hesitated or argued for a moment with such a prize in view! Having Him, truly we possess all things. Some of you have written me that you want to find Him. Will you let go the 'but'? Will you pass through the crowd and come now and touch the hem of His garment? If so, you shall be healed of whatsoever plague you have, and songs of praise and thanksgiving shall well up from your satisfied soul continually. But you must press through; you must wrestle and struggle, not with Him, but with yourself and your sins, to get at Him. Will you strive to enter in?

Strange that some people have the idea that there is some merit attaching to this strife! Was there any merit in the woman's pressing through the intervening crowd in order to get at Jesus? There certainly was great wisdom and some courage, but I cannot see any merit! Was there any merit in the prodigal, when on the verge of starvation, starting to go to his father? Certainly, if he had not gone, he would never have been taken in; but I cannot see that his going merited his reception! What merit can there be in throwing away our husks and rags in order to be taken in and fed and clothed with the best there is in our Father's house? Surely the merit is all on the Father's side; but it is a condition of His receiving us that we leave all of ours, to receive of His.

Suppose a man in the water yonder, struggling and battling with the waves. He wants to get out, but he cannot. The more he struggles, the sooner he sinks; he cannot save himself. There is a man on the shore who sees his situation, and by great effort and sacrifice procures a rope, which he throws within the grasp of the drowning man, crying aloud, 'Clutch the rope, and I will save you.' But the man 'has something in each hand--perchance a bag of gold in one, and the title-deeds to an estate in the other--and he answers back, 'I can't let these go. Can't you save me with these? What should I do without my money?' The man on the bank cries, 'Man, you are drowning! If you don't clutch the rope, I cannot save you; let those things go, and save your life.' The man feels that he is sinking, and at the last moment he lets his treasures go, and seizes the rope, and is pulled to shore.

Now will any sane person say that his action merited his rescue, or that he saved himself? Will not all the newspapers and everybody else give the credit and the praise of his Salvation to the man on the bank?

Of course they will, and properly so; but twenty men on the bank could not have saved the man without his own co-operation. He had to sacrifice his idols, and hold on to the rope. He had to `strive' with himself against his love of money and of ease, and embrace the means provided for his rescue. Just so, sinner, if you will be saved, YOU must FIGHT YOURSELF. Your indifference, your presumption, your selfishness, your worldliness, your unbelief: you must wrestle your way, in spite of all these barriers, to Jesus. He has procured the rope of Salvation, and now throws it once more within your grasp! Will you clutch it? will you let go those idols? will you cut off and cast away from you every hindrance, and spring for your life? If you sit still, you will be lost. If you awake and ARISE from the dead, Christ will give you light, and you shall be saved; but all the praise and the glory will be due to Him, without whose, blood and sacrifice you might have striven for ever without hope.

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