

Christ, the Saviour of the Lost.

by Edward Payson

Christ came to seek and save the lost, offering salvation to all who will humbly and thankfully accept it.

Scripture: Psalm 139:23, Luke 19:10, John 3:16, John 14:6, Acts 4:12, Romans 5:8, 2 Corinthians 5:17, Ephesians 2:8, 1 Timothy 1:15

Topics: "Salvation", "Redemption"

Description

Edward Payson preaches about the profound significance of Christ's mission to seek and save the lost, emphasizing the human race's moral depravity and distance from God, leading to a state of being lost to holiness and happiness. He highlights the necessity of Christ as the guide and Savior for lost sinners, pointing out that without His intervention, mankind would remain ignorant and unwilling to return to God. Payson underscores the immense love and sacrifice of Christ in coming to earth to offer salvation, providing a way for humanity to be reconciled to God and experience true happiness and freedom.

Transcript

"The Son of man is come to seek and to save that which was lost"

Luke 19:10

cannot, my friends, be a more striking and satisfactory proof of our stupid insensibility to religious truth, than the indifference with which we naturally view the gospel of Christ. Among all the wonderful things which God has presented to the contemplation of his creatures, none are so well suited to excite our deepest interest and attention, as those which this gospel reveals. We see that God, who is wise in counsel, and wonderful in working, constantly employed for four thousand years in making preparations for Christ's appearance on earth.

We see many holy and divinely inspired prophets raised up in different ages, to predict his incarnation. We see a person, born contrary to the common course of nature, employed as a harbinger to prepare his way. We see an angel sent from heaven to his intended virgin mother, to announce his approaching birth. We see a multitude of the heavenly host, sent to reveal the accomplishment of this event, and hear them shouting, Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, good will to men.

We see a miraculous star appearing in the East, to announce the same event to distant sages, and guide them to the feet of the new-born infant. Finally, we see the heavens to his intended opened over his head,

the Spirit of God descending like a dove to rest upon it, and at the same time hear the voice of the omnipotent, eternal Father of the universe; exclaiming, This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased. By comparing the predictions of his birth, with other parts of revelation, we find that the child thus born, the son thus given and ushered into our world, is in fact the mighty God, the everlasting Father, the Prince of peace, God manifest in flesh, God overall, blessed forever, by whom and for whom all things were made, and in whom all things consist.

And what is the end and design of all these wonders? For what purpose is all this preparation made? Why do we thus see heaven opened, its inhabitants descending, and behold God dwelling in flesh, living, suffering, and dying as a man? To these questions, our text furnishes the only satisfactory answer. It teaches us, that all this was done for our salvation. The Son of man came to seek and to save that which was lost. In meditating on this passage, we are naturally led to inquire, I.

What it is that is here spoken of as lost? It can scarcely be necessary to say, that it is the human race. Mankind are invariably represented by the inspired writers, as morally depraved, ruined and lost; and they are here spoken of as one, because they are all alike in the same lost condition, in consequence of their descent from the same parents. In Adam all die. As descendants from him, all are lost. In the first place, they are lost to God. He is our Creator, our Shepherd; and we, as the Psalmist expresses it, are the people of his pasture, and the sheep of his hand.

But, to use the language of the prophet, we have all gone astray like lost sheep, and have turned every one to his own way. Like the prodigal son in our Saviour's affecting parable, we have forsaken our Father's house, and wandered from him into a far country. These, and other passages which represent us as being at a distance from God, are to be understood, however, not in a natural but moral sense; for in a natural sense, it is impossible for any creature to depart from God, since in him we live, move, and have our being, and cannot go from his Spirit, or fly from his presence.

But while we are thus constantly surrounded by God, we are far from him in a moral sense. To use the expressive language of Scripture, He is not in all our thoughts; we live without him in the world; we have lost his moral image, and he is become to us an absent and unknown God, so that it is necessary, as the apostle expresses it, that the sons of men should seek after the Lord, if peradventure they may feel after him and find him, though he be not far from every one of us.

Should a man by any means be deprived of sight, he might be said to be lost to the sun, though this luminary would still shine around him, warm him with its beams, and produce the fruits which preserved his life. But he would have lost all views of its brightness, and of those objects which it discovers to others; its light would no longer guide him, nor enable him to discern the dangers which might be in his path. In a similar manner are men lost, with respect to God. Though his glory shines around them, and his power preserves their lives and gives them all the blessings they enjoy, yet they realize not his presence; they are blind to his perfections; they see not his glory in his works; they hear not his voice in his word; they are not guided by his light, they discern not the objects which he reveals.

In a word, the Father of lights, the great sun of the universe, has no existence in their apprehensions. And when they look up to heaven, all is dark and the eternal throne appears empty. When they contemplate the visible creation, they see only a fair but lifeless body; for of God, the animating, guiding soul, who fills, upholds, and directs every part, they perceive nothing. Even when they look into the volume of his word, it is to them only a dead letter, and they find there nothing of God, though he lives and speaks in every line.

Having thus lost the knowledge of the true God, they turn of course to some created idol, and transfer to it that affection, confidence, and dependence, which belongs to him. Forsaking the fountain of living waters, they have hewed out to themselves cisterns, broken cisterns, which can hold no water. Thus they are lost to God, as this world would be lost to the sun, should it fly off into the regions of eternal frost and darkness. In the second place, being thus lost to God, mankind are of course lost to holiness.

In forsaking him, they forsake the path of duty and become sinners. In forsaking him, they forsake also the author of all holiness in the hearts of creatures. Turn a mirror from the sun, and it ceases at once; to reflect his image. Place it in darkness, and it emits not a gleam of light. So when a creature turns from God, he loses at once his holy image. Forsaking the fountain of good, he becomes wholly destitute of goodness. Should the most perfect created spirit in heaven wander from God, he would cease to be holy; he would become wholly depraved.

He would be a devil. Agreeably, the Scriptures invariably represent mankind as by nature entirely destitute of holiness; as alienated from the life of God through the ignorance that is in them, because of the blindness of their hearts; in a word, as dead in trespasses and sins, and of course as devoid of holiness as a dead man is of life. In consequence of being thus lost to God and holiness, mankind are consequently lost to happiness. God is the fountain of felicity, the only source of real happiness to intelligent creatures.

In his presence only is fullness of joy: at his right hand alone, are pleasures forevermore. His favor is life, and his loving kindness is far better than life. He is the proper element of the soul, as the ocean is the element of its inhabitants, and as well might the inhabitants of the ocean, be happy in the burning sands of Arabia, as man can be happy in a state of absence from God. As the prodigal, who wandered from his father's house, soon experienced the miseries of famine, and found that the husks on which he fed, could not satisfy his hunger, so mankind, in their absence from God suffer a famine of happiness; they constantly hunger and thirst after satisfying pleasures, but find nothing of a satisfying nature.

They often imagine indeed that they have found happiness, but painful experience soon undeceives them, and thus the miseries of perpetual disappointment are added to those of constant hunger and thirst. Their situation, to borrow the language of the prophet, is like that of a hungry man who dreameth, and behold he eateth, but he awaketh, and his soul is empty; or like that of a thirsty man, who dreameth, and behold he drinketh, but he awaketh and behold he is faint. Thus do men often dream that they have found some real good, something that will satisfy the soul, and as often awake to the pains of disappointment and unsatisfied desires.

In addition to this negative unhappiness, the sinful feelings, passions, and pursuits of men bring upon them many positive miseries. Instead of living together in love, as a band of brothers, as they would do, had they not wandered from God and holiness, they are almost constantly engaged in wars, strifes, and contentions, which not only disturb personal, domestic, and social happiness, but often spread desolation, wretchedness, and death over whole provinces and kingdoms at once.

In short, sin has turned almost every man's hand against his brother, and even in the best regulated society, the petty jars and quarrels of families, the clashing of opposite interests, the contentions of differing political parties, and the slanderous reports, whispers and insinuations which are publicly or privately circulated, greatly disturb its peace, and leave little of happiness but the name. These however are only the natural consequences of sin. If in addition to these, we consider its penal consequences, we shall be still more fully convinced that men are lost to happiness.

By the penal consequences of sin, we mean those present and, future miseries which the justice of a holy God has attached to its commission. Among these miseries maybe mentioned those guilty fears and reproaches of conscience, which, in a greater or less degree, all sinners experience. If you will look into your own breasts, my friends, and consider how much you suffer from fears of death, apprehensions of God's anger, and self-reproach; if you reflect how often these things haunt you in secret, and how often they render you unhappy in society even, when an aching heart is concealed by a smiling countenance, you will feel convinced, that if other men are like you, they must feel much more unhappiness than they appear to feel, or than they are willing to confess.

And, my friends, other sinful men are like you, and the mental sufferings which agitate your breasts, are a faithful counterpart to those which they experience; and never do these sufferings cease, till the sinner becomes holy, or his conscience is seared, and he is given up of God. In the next place, among the penal consequences of sin, may be reckoned death, with all the diseases, pains, and sufferings which precede it, and the heart-rending anguish which it often occasions, when it deprives us of our children and friends.

By sin, death entered into the world, and it passes upon all men, because all have sinned. Were there nothing else to render sinful men unhappy, the certainty of death would alone be sufficient to do it; for the more happy they were in other respects, the more would their happiness be disturbed by a dread of that awful hour which must put an end to it; and if their happiness depended on the enjoyment of friends, the uncertainty of their life would furnish new cause for anxiety and alarm.

But these things, though sufficient to render men strangers to happiness, are not all the penal consequences of sin. On the contrary, they are but the beginning of sorrows, for the wages of sin is death, including not the death of the body only, but the death, the eternal death of the soul. By the broken law of God, all sinners are doomed to be cast into the lake of fire, which, says an inspired writer, is the second death; there to sink deeper and deeper through eternity in the abyss of wretchedness and despair, lost, forever lost, to God, to holiness; to happiness and hope.

Consider now the brief view which we have taken of the situation of sinful man. See him at first created in the image of his Maker, perfectly holy and upright, a stranger to pain, sorrow, sickness and death, enjoying perfect peace of conscience, and power with God, breathing nothing but love to him and his creatures, constantly employed with delight in his service, tasting the purest felicity in communion with him, and perpetually approaching nearer and nearer to that heaven which was his destined, eternal home.

See the same creature, now deprived of the image and favor of God, wholly sinful and depraved, the slave of ungovernable passions and insatiable appetites and desires, a prey to guilty fear and remorse; exposed to sorrow, sickness and death in ten thousand forms; living for a while without God and without hope in the world, wholly neglecting the great end for which he was created, wandering farther and farther from the path of duty and happiness, with nothing before him but a fearful looking for judgment, which will doom him to depart accursed into everlasting fire.

Consider these things, and then say, is not this creature lost. Yet such is the natural situation of mankind; such would have been the inevitable, irreversible doom of all, had not the Son of God visited our world. To seek and to save this lost creature was the design on which he came; and this is the II. General topic to be considered in this discourse. In treating it, I remark, 1. The Son of man came to seek the creatures thus lost. In this passage, our Saviour probably alludes to his character of a shepherd, and to a parable uttered by him not long before, in which he compares himself to a man going into the wilderness in search of a lost

sheep.

You need not be told, that this animal, when lost, never of itself returns to its shepherd, but rambles farther and farther from his fold, and even often flies from him as an enemy, when he comes to seek and conduct it home. Thus it is with lost man. Having once forsaken God, he has neither the disposition to return, nor the ability to discover the path which leads back to him. It is the natural tendency of sin, under whose influence he is, to carry him still farther from God, to take away all disposition to seek him, and to render him perfectly ignorant of the way in which he may be found.

It leads the sinner to say to God, Depart from us, for we desire not the knowledge of thy ways. It is therefore evident, that if these lost creatures are ever brought back to God, it will not be by their own exertions. God must seek them, or they will never seek him, and consequently will never find him. It is therefore necessary, that a guide should be sent from heaven to seek them and point out the way of return. Should this world, which now revolves round the sun, wander from it so far as to lose sight of its beams, it is evident that it could never again find its way back to the sun.

It could hold up no light by which to discover this luminary; for the sun can be seen only by its own rays, and if the world should once lose sight of these rays, and be lost in the regions of eternal night, there would be nothing to guide it back, nothing to direct its course toward the sun. Then the only way to secure its return, would be for a ray of light proceeding from the sun to follow the lost planet through all its wanderings, and thus point out the way to the luminary from which itself emanated.

Such is the situation of mankind with respect to God, the sun of the universe. They have wandered from him so far, that they have lost sight of his beams, all knowledge of his character and of the way to find him. Now Christ considered as the Son of man, is a ray of light from this Sun, sent to find and guide us back to God. This, we are told is the brightness, the effulgence, the shining forth of his Father's glory, the true light which enlighteneth every man who cometh into the world.

To find lost man, he undertook a long and toilsome journey; even a journey from heaven to earth, and at his return to heaven, he pointed out the way, and commanded, invited, and encouraged man to follow. Nor was it only to the men who then lived on earth, that he thus pointed out the way to God, heaven, and happiness. No, he left infallible directions recorded in his word; he sent his blessed Spirit to supply his place on earth as a teacher and guide, and appointed under-shepherds to go forth under his directions, to seek and find lost sinners, and conduct them to his feet.

By his Spirit, his ministers, and his word, he is still seeking them, and is often found of them who sought him not, and made manifest to them that asked not after him; and whenever you read the word of God, whenever you hear it preached, and above all, when you feel something within, silently urging you to comply with it, you then hear the voice of Christ, and have a fresh proof that he is still seeking those who are lost; and when by any of these things you are convinced of your sinfulness, guilt and danger, and of your need of such a Saviour and guide as Christ, it is a proof that he has found you, and is calling you to follow him in the path which leads to heaven. 2.

The Son of man came to save that which was lost. He seeks in order to save, and if he did not save, it would be in vain for him to seek; for as we have already observed, men are not only ignorant of the way to God, but unwilling to follow it when pointed out to them. In addition to this, they are held in captivity by the prince of darkness, who will not suffer them to return; they are defiled by innumerable sins, which render them unfit for the presence of God and heaven; and by their apostasy, they have violated his holy law,

whose demands they must satisfy, and whose curse, like a flaming sword turning every way, bars all access to the mercy seat.

From all these things therefore, from all the natural and final consequences of sin, they must be saved, or they can never return to God; and to save them from these things, was the grand object for which Christ came into the world; for, it is a faithful saying and worthy of all acceptance, that Christ Jesus came into this world to save sinners; and with this declaration his name, Jesus a Saviour, perfectly agrees. In conformity with these, and other similar declarations of Scripture, Christ has accomplished a complete salvation for all who will humbly and thankfully accept it; and for his sake God has promised that all his chosen people shall be willing thus to accept it, in the day of his power.

The way into heaven, the holiest of all, is now laid open; every bar which once closed it, is removed; a flood of light shines around us, to discover it to our view. The blood of Christ has taken away those mountains of guilt which once interposed between us and God, and cleanses penitent believers from all sin; his Spirit sanctifies our polluted natures, and delivers us from the slavery of the world, the flesh, and the devil; prepares us for admission to heaven, and guides, supports, and comforts us in our journey thither, through this vale of tears.

In a word, the empire of Satan is subdued, the power of sin is destroyed, the sting of death is taken away; the bars of the grave are broken; life and immortality are brought to light; the flaming sword is quenched, God is reconciled; the eternal doors of heaven are thrown open, that which was lost is saved, the world is redeemed, and man is happy and free; happy that is, if he knows his own happiness and embraces the Saviour and the salvation thus freely offered; otherwise lost, more fatally, hopelessly lost, than ever.

I close with a few reflections. 1. From our subject we infer that the word of God is of all books the most interesting, and would be so, even if we had no personal concern with its contents. Other books, even the most interesting, contain only accounts of human wars, terrestrial enterprises, and expeditions for the conquest or deliverance of nations, and the struggles of the oppressed for liberty, or of the daring exploits, and perilous achievements, and hairbreadth escapes of the falsely brave.

But the Bible, independently of many other most interesting subjects, gives us an account of a war between good and evil, between God and the powers of darkness; of an expedition undertaken for the deliverance of a ruined, lost, enslaved world, an expedition planned in heaven; devised in the remote ages of eternity, and finally accomplished in the most successful manner by the eternal Son of God. In this war, we behold sin and Satan, and death and hell, with all the power of earth, marshaled on one side; and on the other, the seed of the woman, the Son of man, going forth unarmed and alone to certain victory, and not less certain death; to victory which could be obtained only by his death; but which was completed by his triumphant resurrection and ascension to heaven.

As the prize contended for in this warfare, we see millions of immortal souls, the least of which is of far more value than this world, with the worlds around it; souls whom the Son of man is seeking to raise to heaven, while his foes wish only to sink them deep in hell. Such is the war which the word of God describes, such the combatants, such the spoils of victory. How much more interesting this, than all that human histories relate. How still more interesting when we recollect that we were the cause of this war, the prize for which such combatants contended.

Why then do we peruse this volume with so little interest? One reason only can be assigned. We do not believe it. 2. How glorious, how amiable, how interesting does the Captain of our salvation appear in the

light of our subject! You would contemplate with eager interest and admiration, a monarch who, reigning in perfect peace and prosperity over a country extensive as his wishes, should go forth and jeopardize his life in the high places of the field, merely with the benevolent purpose of delivering an enslaved people from oppression.

You would follow him to the field of battle, tremble at his danger, sympathize with him if wounded, rejoice in his success, recount with pleasure his victories, and follow his triumphant return with praise. All this, and more than this, has taken place in our day with respect to a now living monarch in Europe. Thus has he been admired and praised by thousands. Why then do so few admire, praise, and love the Son of God. He was great and glorious, and happy in heaven to the utmost extent of his wishes, yet he cheerfully left it all to seek and to save a lost world, a world which was ruined, lost by ungratefully forsaking and rebelling against himself.

Though he was rich, for our sakes he became poor. Though he was in the form of God, and equal with God, yet for our sakes he made himself of no reputation, took upon him the form of a servant, and suffered himself to be despised, rejected, spit upon, buffeted, and finally crucified by his own creatures, when with infinite ease he could have avoided it all. In a word, to redeem us from the curse of the law we had broken, he consented to be made a curse for us. Why then, we repeat the question, why is he so little admired, praised and beloved by those whom he died to save?

Why do so few comparatively commemorate his dying love? Why is he not extolled as much above all other deliverers, as he really is above them? The same answer must be again returned; it is because men do not believe. To believe that he has actually done this, and not to love, admire, and extol him above all beings, is impossible. The apostle believed it, and we know to what efforts and sacrifices it impelled him. What then shall we say, my professing friends, we who profess to believe that he actually has done this. what shall we say, or rather what will be said of us, if we do not supremely love, admire, and praise the Saviour?

May it not, must it not in that case, be said of us, that our faith is vain, since it does not produce love, and that, notwithstanding our profession, we are yet in our sins? Lastly, did Christ come into our world to seek and to save lost sinners? Then it becomes us all most carefully to inquire, whether he has found and saved us. That he has found us, is evident, for the voice of his gospel, the voice of this great Shepherd, even now sounds in our ears. But has he saved us?

Have we felt constrained to obey his call? Surely, if he has saved us, if we have been made new creatures; if we have passed from death unto life, we cannot but know something of it. Say then, have you found Christ? The pearl of great price, have you found it? And as you answer these questions, remember how much is implied in being lost, and how ample the provision for your deliverance, since the Son of man is come to seek and to save you.

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