

Lost or Saved Acts 26

by John Nelson Darby

John Nelson Darby's sermon emphasizes the transformative power of the gospel in revealing humanity's lost state and offering grace through Christ.

Scripture: Acts 26:18, Romans 3:23, Ephesians 2:1

Topics: "Grace", "Salvation"

Description

John Nelson Darby emphasizes the transformative power of the gospel, which actively engages individuals and reveals their lost state before God. He illustrates how the gospel, unlike Judaism or heathenism, confronts people with their sinfulness and the need for repentance, turning their world upside down. Darby explains that the gospel not only identifies humanity's lost condition but also offers grace and salvation through Jesus Christ, who provides forgiveness and righteousness. He highlights the importance of recognizing one's need for God and the assurance of salvation that comes from faith in Christ. Ultimately, the message of the gospel is one of hope, inviting all to experience the fullness of God's love and grace.

Transcript

The peculiarity of the gospel is its activity towards man - dealing with individuals to whom it is addressed, and not merely propagating opinions. It is quite intelligible that a person may like to spread his opinions, but he will soon get tired of it. The gospel deals with man individually, and goes out actively towards man: neither Judaism nor heathenism ever did this.

The character of the gospel is as when Paul preached it, that it turned "the world upside down." Nothing was to stand before it; nothing could be allowed with it: Judaism, heathenism, etc. - it overturned all. It brought in the claims of God upon individuals. It not only brought truth about God, etc.; but it shewed those addressed to be in a certain position towards God. The gospel comes and says, "You are lost"; and it does turn the world upside down. It is a new thing for them to be told, You are all wrong. Paul did this. He stated soberly what it was - gave proofs of it, but could not convince man's mind. He treated every living soul as a sinner, a child of wrath, a child of disobedience. That must be from God, not man, and it turns the world upside down. Paul was sent out to all the world, and so were others also; 1 Cor. 15:10. His mission was peculiar; and he brought the claims of God before men, calling everyone to repent, warning them they were all away from God, and telling them to submit to the gospel.

It is a solemn thing for a man to stand up, and say, "You are all lost." And this is what Christianity tells us is the state of all by nature; and yet it comes in grace. It is not law: the law never did that. It came to a people already redeemed. They had been brought out of Egypt, and now God said, You are to have that law, and to you only can I give it (any who come in as a Jew may have the same privileges). The law maintained the unity of the Godhead, and it gave a rule of life, or rather principles of blessedness for a creature, if he could keep it . It was given to a feeble people to maintain the truth until the "Seed" came; but it dealt with man (while convincing him that he could not keep it) on his own ground that he could keep it. The Jews to whom it was given were a specimen taken from human nature to test it, and to prove whether any good thing could come out of it. What is the good, you may say, of telling men they are lost? Why not leave it till the day of judgment? This would not be grace; it would do for law, but not grace. There was most important truth conveyed in the law - one God, etc.; but He was behind the veil. He sent out to tell man what He was, but He hid Himself in thick darkness. He never revealed Himself under the law. He gave a law telling men what they should be, but could not reveal Himself. He would not have put man to the test if He had, for "God is love," and love could not deal in law.

182 If God had revealed Himself, He would have said, "You are perfect sin; but I am perfect love, and can put away your sins." "Where sin abounded, grace did much more abound." The gospel tells you not only that you have done wrong, but that you are a sinner in the presence of a God who reveals Himself. It comes revealing God in such a way, that the contrast between Himself and you is brought to light - sin and light. "Light is come into the world, and men loved darkness," etc. Christ never turned away any; but He did not cover over man's sin - He brought it to light. There is truth as well as grace. He came presenting God to the conscience of man, and laid it open and bare before Him. Why should God trouble Himself about my sins, and not leave it all till the day of judgment? It is all grace that makes you conscious of what you are in His presence now. There is life-giving or quickening power from Him, which, however terrible the conviction arising from it, brings a longing for holiness when I have not got it. There is a new nature that cannot get peace for itself; it has the desire after holiness, but knows it has not got it. It is there, heavy laden, though delighting in God, and desiring Him. There is a consciousness of a burden, but no power to get from under it. There must be something else The gospel brings salvation to the person for whom it is wrought

There must be righteousness; but the new nature is not righteousness. I have to find out, not only what is in my heart, but what is in God's heart about me. Confessing my faults will not make me happy. Can I be happy, if I have offended my Father, because I feel sorry about it, without knowing what His thought about me is? The gospel brings knowledge of divine love in salvation. The gospel is the perfect full answer from God to the desires He has produced. In a word, it is salvation.

183 Paul, when the gospel came to him, was full of himself, self-righteousness, and self-complacency. He had been spending his life in doing things to make himself righteous in God's sight, and then found out that it was all in vain, and that the "carnal mind is enmity against God." Self had been the object of all. He had been spending all his activities to drive God out of the world, and hinder the gospel of His grace; if he could have done it, he would. That is the character of every one by nature; though not so energetic as Paul, they are the enemies of God. Will a wealthy man like to hear money spoken of as good for nothing? If he has none, perhaps he will be glad to hear it; but men do not like what they pride themselves in to be made nothing of. God and man are at enmity. Man is righteous in his own sight, and how will he like to hear his own righteousness called "filthy rags"? "He eateth and drinketh with publicans and sinners" was the complaint against Christ. Will He go to the sinners and slight their righteousness? Will they have such

a God as that? Saul was an enemy of God, when in his own sight he was righteous. He wanted his eyes opened, and that is what he got. When it pleased God to reveal his Son in me." Two things must accompany each other - the revelation of God's Son and the knowledge, by that revelation, of ourselves. Paul had all manner of truth before; but God was not revealed to him.

So you too may have plenty of truth or doctrine and not know God. If God is revealed to me, it is because I have not known Him before. Could you be conscious of being in the presence of God - every one is in His presence; but could you be conscious of it - and not know what you are? When the eye is open, we see with the truth of God. Philosophy argues about God, but what are the thoughts of man about Him? Think of a man with plenty of money being told the Lord was to come to-morrow. What would he think of his money? Would he not hide it? We live the life of fools in this world (I do not mean Christians, but in our natural state); and what is more, we know it, but we do not like to know it. "The fool hath said in his heart, There is no God. You must take a child to get the simple expectation of good from this world: men do not expect it; they know they are pursuing what cannot satisfy them.

184 In verse 17 of this chapter we get a new starting-point. Paul was one to whom the gospel came thus, his enmity having reached its height, he was turned "from darkness to light, from the power of Satan to God." Paul tasted the perfect grace of God, that left not a thought of sin between Him and Paul. "I am Jesus whom thou persecutest." He saw Christ, and was taken up in the midst of his enmity and sin, and made an apostle, "to turn from darkness to light." We are not only living in darkness, but we are darkness until our eyes are opened. The sun does not give light to a blind man, and such are we till our eyes are opened. When a person sees with the eyes of God as to himself, as to light, as to God, this is repentance, not salvation yet; and a sinner needs salvation. I cannot get the sun at all, without having a little heat; but this is not peace. You must be at home with God to have confidence - you must see Him. The consciousness that we want God, and the consciousness of knowing Him, are different things. It is what God has done for man that is salvation, not what He has done in man. We can tell men they are lost, because we know it for ourselves. We can tell them they are lost, because we know we are saved. When I have got the remedy and know it will cure, I can tell of it. I know there are sins, but I have got Christ. I have got something beyond the new nature that longs for holiness. I have forgiveness - no mention of sins against the man who believes in Christ.

The gospel not only tells men they need forgiveness, but it tells them they have it - not a single spot - all the sins gone. Any Christian can say he has it, who knows and believes the gospel. But how can you say that? you ask. Does not God say so? Perhaps you are not caring for it! It is terrible if you are not - terrible that God should send His Son and you not care about it! This is worse than breaking the law, for the blood was shed to wash away that sin. Now when atonement has been made, and is rejected or treated with indifference, what can be done? For "there remaineth no more sacrifice for sin." By the gospel we announce the forgiveness of your sins, and a perfect righteousness wrought out for you. Have you got it? Do you think God has sent His Son to atone for our sins, and to work out this righteousness, and we not need it? If you need it, have you got it? Nay, do you know you want it? Have you ever been in the presence of God? Have your eyes ever been opened to see your nakedness in the presence of God? The blind man does not know his state. When God has clothed a man, he is not naked. God clothed Adam with skins. When a man has put on Christ, surely it may be said, "By grace are ye saved."

185 Christ has wrought out a righteousness in which we can be in the presence of God, and in which He can Himself sit on the throne of God. He has clothed me with divine righteousness as well as given me forgiveness, and He preaches peace. I know, when clothed, I have perfect peace. After this, there is the

full and blessed result in glory. What Christ is entitled to we get. He has a title to everything, and I have a portion with Him in all that He has. The work which has earned the glory for Him as Son of man gives it to me. When He comes, we shall come with Him in the glory. There is the "inheritance "; but, what is better, we are to be with Him who is the universal Heir. He has finished the work for salvation. For whom? For me; for every believer.

Do you say, Ought not I to wait till I am in the glory, before I believe that I am cleansed from all sin? Surely not. The angels will see it then; but we, are not we to see the salvation? We do when we have faith. Those who only expect to see it when they get there will not see it at all. Ought I to wait till then to know the cross of Christ? The effect of knowing it is forgiveness. Am I to wait to know righteousness then? The only way to have it is to see Him by faith, while we cannot see Him. The gospel reveals the answer of God to my soul, that what I want I have in Christ - forgiveness, righteousness, life, peace, glory. My sins are borne away already, and my title to glory just as perfect as when I get there. "We have redemption through his blood." The consequence of knowing I have it, is that I can walk with God.

How can you walk with God if you have not peace, if you have not forgiveness, if you are not cleansed from sin? Could Adam walk with God when his conscience told him he had sinned? No. But the gospel brings salvation, as it is said, "The grace of God which bringeth," etc. Now, have you got salvation? If your eyes are open, you will want it; have you got it? God does not deceive you. He does not say you are saved, if you are not. The craving after it is not the answer to it. If He has given the craving, He will complete the work; but it is not the answer. If you say, How can I tell? you have not submitted to the righteousness of God; you are going about to establish your own righteousness by the fruits of grace you want to find in yourself, and so to get a proof of your standing before God. But will fruits of grace give you forgiveness, righteousness? They are not the blood of Christ; they are not Christ. How can they cleanse from sin? God delights in the fruits of grace, but they cannot put away sin. It is the work of Christ on the cross which alone does that God has set Him at His own right hand; and when I believe it, I see how God has loved me. May you be in yourself so broken down, that you may find One who never breaks down!

186 Grace reigns through righteousness, and will produce all manner of fruits through our Lord Jesus Christ.

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