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Chapter XI

"SALVATION IS OF THE LORD."

"Salvation is of the Lord." — Jonah ii. 9.

"Work out your own salvation." — Phil. ii. 12.

SALVATION is of the Lord, or not at all.

It is a touch; a revelation; an inspiration; the life of God in the soul. It is not of man only, nor of that greatest of human forces—the will of man, but of God and the will of God. It is not mere will-work, a sort of self-raising power — it is a redemption brought home by a personal Redeemer; made visible, tangible, knowable to the soul redeemed in a definite transaction with the Lord. It brings forth its own fruits, carries with it the assurance of its own accomplishment, and is its own reward. It is impossible to declare too often or too plainly that Salvation is of the Lord.

I.

And yet, around us on every side are those who are relying upon something short of this new life. They have set up a sort of human virtue in the place of the God-life. They are slowly mastering their disordered passions. The base instigations of their lower nature are being thwarted. Greedy appetites which reign in others are in them compelled to serve. Tendencies to cunning and falsehood, the fruits of which are only too apparent in the world at large, they watch and harass and pinch. Animosities, and jealousies, and envies — those enemies of all kinds of peace — are repressed, if not controlled.

And these followers of virtue go further than this. They aim at building up a character which can be called noble, or at least virtuous. And some succeed-or appear to themselves to do so. They cultivate truth. Honesty is with them, whether as to their business or their social life, the best policy. They are just. They are temperate. By nature and by training they are kind and generous;



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so much so that it is as difficult to convict them of an unkindly act as it is easy to prove them more generous and liberal than many of the professed followers of Jesus. Often they are charitable, giving of their substance to the poor; not hard to please, considerate of their inferiors, patient with one another; in a very high sense they have true charity. And after long periods of struggle, and lofty and faithful effort, they may be able to claim that they have developed a fine character; that by self-cultivation, and perhaps by a kind of self-redemption, they have produced a very beautiful and desirable being!

I will not stay to inquire how far heart conceit and heart deceit may account for much of this, or to suggest that a great contrast may exist between the outer life and the unseen deeps within. I will admit for the moment that all is as stated, and even more. What, then? With much of grace and beauty, it may be; trained and tutored in the ways of humility and virtue; able to live in the constant and kindly service of others, and devoted to truth and duty — with all these excellencies they may yet be dead while they live. "That which is born of the flesh is flesh; and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit." Generous, lovable, dutiful, honourable flesh, but only flesh. A chaste, and, if you like to have it so, a useful life, but LIFELESS. A fine product of a lifetime of labour in the culture of the physical, intellectual, and moral powers, but, after all-DEAD. For He that believeth not on the Son of God hath not life."

II.

In this view the body, and in a larger degree the mind, becomes a sepulchre for the soul. All the attention given to education, to refinement and culture, to the development of gifts — for instance, such as music or inventive science — to the practice of self-restraint and the pursuit of morality, is so much attention to the casket that will perish, to the neglect of the eternal jewel that is enclosed. It may be possible to present a kindly, honest, law-abiding, agreeable life to our neighbours; to go through business and family life without finding anything of great moment with which to condemn ourselves; to be thought, even by those nearest to us, to be living up to a high standard of morality, and yet-for all this has to do with the casket only — to be dead all the while in trespasses and sins.



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The young man who should spend his fortune upon his tomb would be scarcely so great a fool as he who spends his life on those things in himself which are temporal, to the neglect of those which are eternal. Only think of the absurdity of devoting the splendid energy of youth and manhood, the grand force of will, the skill of genius, and the other gifts which commonly men apply to their own advancement and success, to the adornment, enriching, and extension of one's grave!

And yet this is very much the case of those of whom I am thinking. All their advances, whether in moral attainment, in personal achievement, or in worldly advantage, are, at the best, but enlargements and adornments of a tomb, and of a tomb destined itself to perish!

III.

Do I, then, discourage good works? Has man no part to play in his own deliverance? Is he, after all, only an animal—the mere creature of circumstance and natural law? Have I forgotten that “faith without works is dead”? No, I think not. I have but remembered that works without faith are dead also. The one extreme is as dangerous as the other. The legal, mechanical observance of the rules of a right life, apart from a living faith in Christ, can no more renew the heart in holiness and righteousness, than can a mere intellectual belief of certain facts about Christ, apart from working out His will, save the soul, or make it meet for the inheritance of the saints. In both cases the verdict will be the same. The faith in the one is “dead”; the works in the other are also “dead.”

The fact is, Salvation is a two-fold work. It is of God — it is of man. Did God not will man's Salvation he could not be saved. Unless man will his own Salvation he cannot be saved. God is free. Man also is free. He may set up a plan for saving himself; but, no matter how perfect, it will fail unless it have God for its centre. And God, though He has devised the most infinitely complete and beautiful and costly scheme of redemption for man, will none the less fail unless the individual man wills to co-operate with Him. Man is not a piece of clay which God can fashion as He likes. He is not even a harp out of which He can get what strains He will without regard to



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its strings. There is in man something — a force — an energy — which must act in union with God, and with which God must act in wonderful partnership, if His will is to be accomplished.

IV.

It is true, of course, that God does much for a man without his aid. I do not now refer to material blessings. He it is who gives us "life, and breath, and all things" — and gives them largely without our effort. But even in man God does much without his help. He calls. He stirs up conscience. He gives flashes of light to the most darkened heart. He softens by the hand of sorrow, and rebukes with the stripes of affliction. Memory, human affection, hope, ambition, are all made means by the Holy Ghost to urge men to holiness. The ministry of goodness in others is so directed as to point multitudes to the way of the Cross. But this will not provide the one thing needful. Instruction, clear views of the truth, belief in the facts of God's love and grace, admiration of Salvation in other lives, even the desire to declare the Gospel, may all be present, and yet the soul be — DEAD — dead in trespasses and sins — cursed, bound, and corrupted by dead works. Just as the noblest and highest efforts of man towards his own Salvation, without the co-operating, life-giving work of God, can result only in confusion and death; so the most powerful, gracious, long-suffering and tender yearnings and work of God for man's Salvation, without the co-operating will of man, can result only in distress, disappointment, and death.

V.

Are you dead? Are you in either of these classes? Are you relying on God's mercy; waiting for some strange visitation from on high; depending with a faith which is merely of the mind upon some past work of Christ; but without the vital power of His mighty life in you? Filled with desires that are not realised; offering prayers that are not answered; striving at times to work out a law of goodness which you feel all the time is an impossibility for you? Living, so to speak, out of your element — like a fish out of water? That is DEATH. Or are you, on the other hand, depending for Salvation on your own labour to build up a good character, and to live a decent, honourable, and honest life? Conscious of advance, but not of victory? The servant of a high ideal, but without liberty? The devotee of your own self?



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All the powers and qualities of your nature growing towards maturity, except the powers of your soul? The casket — as life goes on — growing more and more adorned, while the eternal spirit, the priceless jewel made to receive the likeness of God and enjoy Him for ever, seems ever of less and less worth to you? That also is DEATH.

The man who is in either class is dead while he lives. He is a walking mortuary.