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The Cross & the Sepulcher

MESSAGE INTRODUCTION

Many people who have embraced Jesus Christ as Savior and Lord continue to question whether or not they are truly saved. Sometimes this struggle is rooted in intellectual uncertainties. Others may wrestle with their salvation due to the enemy's spiritual attacks or the continued presence of certain sins in their lives. Like many other believers, Christian has continued to be burdened by conviction of his sin. In this message, Dr. Thomas will describe Christian's process of arriving at assurance and examine why it is that Christians can rest upon the saving work of Jesus Christ.

SCRIPTURE READINGS

Zechariah 3:1-5; 2 Corinthians 5:21

TEACHING OBJECTIVES

1. To warn against the potent danger of "Easy-Believism."
2. To articulate the biblical doctrines of justification and imputation.
3. To help Christians to understand and experience assurance of salvation.
4. To encourage God's people to celebrate and delight in Christ's redemptive work.

QUOTATION

*Thus far did I come laden with my sin;
Nor could aught ease the grief that I was in
Till I came hither: What a place is this!
Must here be the beginning of my bliss?
Must here the Burden fall from off my back?
Must here the strings that bound it to me crack?
Blest cross! Blest sepulchre! Blest rather be
The Man that there was put to shame for me!*

—Christian, free from his burden

LECTURE OUTLINE

I. Deliverance from the Burden

- A. As Christian left the house of Interpreter, the burden on his back still weighed him down.
- B. After climbing uphill, he came upon a cross with a sepulcher, or tomb, somewhat below it.
 - i. When he reached the cross, the burden upon his back suddenly fell from his shoulders.
 - ii. The burden rolled down the hill and disappeared into the sepulcher.
- C. Though this is a joyous moment for Christian, its full significance can be difficult to perceive.
 - i. Many suggest that Christian did not actually become a Christian until he arrived at the cross.
 - ii. Others, including Dr. Thomas, believe that Christian became a Christian when he entered at the wicket gate and received assurance of his salvation at the cross.

II. An Alternative to “Easy-Believism”

- A. In Bunyan’s day and ours, many people embrace the gospel outwardly without experiencing regeneration and inner communion with Christ.
 - i. “Easy-Believism” encourages sinners to trust in Christ’s saving work with little or no regard for his lordship over all of life.
 - ii. In contrast, Christian continued to grapple with the reality of his sin even after his sins had been forgiven.
- B. Bunyan reminds his readers of the need to persevere through trials.

III. Assurance of the Great Exchange

- A. As Christian was freed from his burden, three shining beings gave him assurance of his new identity.
 - i. The first declared that Christian’s sins had been forgiven.
 - ii. The second exchanged Christian’s rags for new clothing.
 - iii. The third placed a mark upon his forehead and gave him a scroll bearing a seal.
- B. The cross stands as a declaration that Christ has atoned for human sin.
- C. The removal of rags depicts God’s act of imputing human sin to Jesus Christ.
 - i. Through His *passive obedience*, Jesus endured the punishment that sinful humanity deserves.
 - ii. The Father “made him to be sin who knew no sin” (2 Corinthians 5:21a).
- D. The new clothing represents God’s act of imputing the righteousness of Christ to sinners.
 - i. Through His *active obedience*, Jesus earned a righteous status that God requires but humanity cannot attain.

- ii. We are clothed in the obedience of Christ "so that in him we might become the righteousness of God" (2 Corinthians 5:21b).
- E. The sealed scroll is a symbol of Christian's assurance of salvation.
 - i. In this scroll, God confirms that Christian's identity is now found in Him.
 - ii. Such assurance is a treasure both to be delighted in and to be guarded closely.

STUDY QUESTIONS

1. What happened when Christian reached the cross?
 - a. He took off his burden and placed it at the foot of the cross
 - b. His burden fell off and disappeared into the nearby tomb
 - c. Evangelist explained the gospel and led him in the sinner's prayer
 - d. His burden pulled him to the ground, but an angel helped him up
2. Dr. Thomas believes that his arrival at the cross marks Christian's conversion to the Christian faith.
 - a. True
 - b. False
3. _____ greeted Christian after his experience at the cross.
 - a. Three men named Simple, Sloth, and Presumption
 - b. The risen Christ
 - c. An evil spirit that tempted him
 - d. Three shining beings
4. The gifts that Christian received included a _____.
 - a. Sealed scroll
 - b. Golden ring bearing the king's emblem
 - c. Bible
 - d. Map of the road ahead
5. God's elect can lose assurance of salvation, but not salvation itself.
 - a. True
 - b. False

BIBLE STUDY AND DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. When did Christian become a Christian? Do you agree or disagree with Dr. Thomas? Why is this timing significant?
2. What is "Easy-Believism?" Why is this approach to faith dangerous? How does John Bunyan address the threat of "Easy-Believism" in *Pilgrim's Progress*?

3. What is the difference between the active obedience of Christ and the passive obedience of Christ? Why are both of these crucial to God's redemptive work?
4. What does it mean to have assurance of salvation? How can a person have such assurance? How can assurance of salvation change a person's life?