

THE ROYAL SAVIOUR



CHARLES H. SPURGEON (1834-1892)

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THE ROYAL SAVIOUR

*“Him hath God exalted with his right hand
to be a Prince and a Saviour, for to give
repentance to Israel, and forgiveness
of sins.”—Acts 5:31*

This was part of the answer of Peter and the other apostles to the question and declaration of the high priest: “Did not we straitly command you that ye should not teach in this name? and, behold, ye have filled Jerusalem with your doctrine, and intend to bring this man’s blood upon us” (Act 5:28). Then Peter and the other apostles replied, “We ought to obey God rather than men. The God of our fathers raised up Jesus, whom ye slew and hanged on a tree” (Act 5:29-30); and, in the verse following our text, they claimed to be witness-bearers for the risen and reigning Prince and Saviour. And, more than that, they declared that they were co-witnesses with “the Holy Ghost, whom God hath given to them that obey him” (Act 5:32).

These apostles were the representatives of Messiah the Prince, acting under His authority and, so far as they could, filling up the gap caused by His absence. They asserted that their preaching and teaching had been done by divine command, which could not be set aside by any human authority, imperial or ecclesiastical; and that the true Prince of Israel, the Son of David, alone had the power and the right to issue commissions to those who owned allegiance to Jehovah. They declared that Jesus, Whom the chief priests had crucified, was still alive, reigning in glory, enthroned at the right hand of God, and that they were only fulfilling His royal commands when they were “standing in the temple, and teaching the people” (Act 5:25).

Moreover, when the apostles stated that, in addition to being a Prince, Jesus was also a Saviour, and that He had been exalted with His Father’s right hand in order that He might “give repentance to Israel, and forgiveness of sins,” they gave the very best reason in the world for their preaching—for they were all engaged in preaching that sinners should repent, and in assuring those who did repent that their sins were forgiven for Christ’s sake. I cannot conceive of any better argument than this, which the apostles used when answering the high priest: “You command us not to teach in Christ’s name; but the command of the Son of God, our Prince and Saviour, is ‘that repentance and remission of sins should be preached in his name among all nations, beginning at Jerusalem’ (Luk 24:47); so, as ‘we ought to obey God rather than men,’ we have filled Jerusalem with His doctrine; and we mean to go on preaching repentance

and remission until, as far as we are able, we have filled the whole world with this doctrine.”

That purpose of Christ was, at least in part, fulfilled by the apostles in their day. God did give repentance and remission of sins to a chosen remnant of Israel. And when the rest of the Jews rejected the testimony of Christ’s servants, they said, as Paul and Barnabas did to the Jews at Antioch, “It was necessary that the word of God should first have been spoken to you: but seeing ye put it from you, and judge yourselves unworthy of everlasting life, lo, we turn to the Gentiles” (Act 13:46). We must never forget, beloved brethren and sisters in Christ, that we owe the first preaching of the gospel to the Jews. They were, in all lands that were then known, the heralds of Christ, publishing the royal proclamation far and wide. Under the old dispensation, “unto them were committed the oracles of God” (Rom 3:2), and the gospel of the New Covenant was in the first instance entrusted to them. And it was through the Jews that it was made known unto us gentiles.

Let us remember this fact as we contemplate the glorious future both of Jews and Gentiles. Israel as a nation will yet acknowledge her blessed Prince and Saviour. During many centuries, the chosen people, who were of old so highly favoured above all other nations on the face of the earth, have been scattered and peeled, oppressed and persecuted, until sometimes it seemed as if they must be utterly destroyed; yet they shall be restored to their own land, which again shall be a land flowing with milk and honey. Then, when their hearts are turned to Messiah the Prince, and they look upon Him Whom they have pierced, and mourn over their sin in so long rejecting Him, the fullness of the Gentiles shall also come, and Jew and Gentile alike shall rejoice in Christ their Saviour.

In taking such a text as this, I think it is right always to give first the actual meaning of the passage before using it in any other way. This I have already done by showing you what I suppose the apostles meant in replying as they did to the high priest; now let us try to gather other truths from this passage.

1. Prince and Saviour

First, let us learn that *all who rightly receive Christ receive Him both as Prince and Saviour*. He is exalted this day for many purposes: as a reward for all the pangs He endured upon the cross, as our covenant head and representative, and that He may rule over all things for the good of His Church, as Joseph ruled over Egypt for the good of his brethren. Christ is exalted as a pledge of our exaltation, for “we know that, when he shall appear, we shall be like him; for we shall see him as he is” (1Jo 3:2).

But our text declares that God has exalted Jesus that He may be to His own chosen people *a Prince and a Saviour*—not that He may be a Prince only, or a Saviour only, but that He may be both a Prince and a Saviour. He is a Prince, to receive royal honours; a Prince, to be the leader and commander of His people; a Prince, Whose every

word is to be instantly and implicitly obeyed. A Prince, before Whom we who love Him will gladly bow—even as, in Joseph’s dream, his brethren’s sheaves made obeisance to his sheaf, and as they themselves afterwards “bowed themselves to him to the earth” (Gen 43:26) when he became a great lord in Egypt. The Lord Jesus Christ is a Prince among men, a Prince in His Church, and a Prince in the highest heavens.

Indeed, He is more than a Prince as we understand that word, for He is “KING OF KINGS AND LORD OF LORDS” (Rev 19:16). But He is also a Saviour, to be trusted; a Saviour, to be accepted with our whole heart; a Saviour Who exactly meets our need, for we feel that we need to be saved. We recognize our inability to save ourselves, and we perceive in Him the ability, grace, power, and everything else that is required in order to save us. So He is a Saviour to be trusted and accepted, as well as a Prince to be obeyed and honoured.

Let us never imitate *those who talk of Christ as a Prince, but will not accept him as a Saviour*. There are some who speak respectfully of Christ as a great leader among men, a most enlightened teacher, and a holy man Whose life was perfectly consistent with His teaching, so that He can be safely followed as an exemplar¹—He is their Prince, but that is all. We cannot occupy such a position as that. If we were to say that Christ is our Prince, but not our Saviour, we should have robbed Him of that honour which is, perhaps, dearer to Him than any other. It was not simply to reign over the sons of men that He came from heaven to earth. He had legions of nobler spirits than those that dwell in bodies of clay, every one of whom would gladly fly at His command to obey His behests.² Besides, if He had pleased to do so, He had the power to create unnumbered myriads of holy beings who would have counted it their highest honour to be subservient to His will.

Mere dominion is not what Christ craved; from of old His delights were with the sons of men because He had covenanted with His Father that He would save them. Therefore was He called Jesus, because He came to save His people from their sins. In order to accomplish that great purpose, it was necessary for Him to take upon Himself our nature, and to live a life of perfect obedience to His Father’s will, and at last to die a shameful death upon the cross, that He might offer the one sacrifice for sins forever that alone could bring salvation to all who believe in Him.

We never read that Jesus said to His disciples, “I am longing for the hour when I shall take the reins of government into My hand, and wear upon My head the crown of universal sovereignty”; but we do read that He said to them, “I have a baptism to be baptized with; and how am I straitened till it be accomplished” (Luk 12:50). We never read that He said to the Jews, “I am come to reign over you.” On the contrary, when men would have taken Him by force and made Him a king, He hid Himself from them. He was a King, but not a man-made king, and His rule was to be a contrast to that of

¹ **exemplar** – an ideal model.

² **behests** – orders; commands.

every other monarch. Christ's own description of His mission was, "The Son of man is come to seek and to save that which was lost" (Luk 19:10). Methinks that our royal Saviour puts the saving before the ruling, and if I call Him Prince, and deny Him the title of Saviour, He will not thank me for such maimed and mutilated honours. No; God exalted Him to be a Prince and a Saviour, and we must receive Him in both characters or not at all.

For, mark you, *we cannot really receive Christ as Prince unless we also receive Him as Saviour*. If we say that we accept Him as our Prince, but reject Him as our Saviour, is there not merely disloyalty, but treason of the deepest dye in that rejection? This gracious Prince tells me that I am lost and undone, and bids me to trust Him to save me. If I practically tell Him that I do not need Him to save me—and I do that by rejecting Him—I virtually say that He came from heaven to earth on an unnecessary errand, at least so far as I am concerned. If I do not put my trust in His expiatory³ sacrifice, I say, in effect, that His death upon Calvary was a superfluity,⁴ that He foolishly threw away His valuable life in needless self-sacrifice—but that would be rank blasphemy.

If I reject Christ as Saviour, I do by that very act reject Him as Prince. It is sheer mockery for me to say, "I honour Jesus of Nazareth, the King of the Jews, but I refuse to be washed from my sin and uncleanness in the fountain filled with His blood. I am willing to accept the Man Christ Jesus as my exemplar, and I will try, as far as I can, to follow His steps, but I will not accept pardon at His hands." If I talk like that, Christ is neither my Prince nor my Saviour, but I am His enemy; and, unless I repent, and bow before Him in real homage, and accept Him both as Prince and Saviour, He will at the last condemn me with the rest of His enemies, who said, "We will not have this man to reign over us" (Luk 19:14). You may extol Him with your tongue, but the sacrifice of a broken and contrite heart would be far more prized by Him than all your empty praises. It is a higher eulogium⁵ to Christ to stoop to kiss His pierced feet, and find in His wounds perfect healing for all the wounds that sin hath made, than to pronounce the most fulsome panegyrics⁶ upon His spotless character. He wants not the meaningless flatteries of men, but He thirsts for the trustfulness of souls that are willing to be saved by Him. This is the best refreshment He can ever have, as He told His disciples when He had won to Himself the soul of that poor fallen woman at Sychar, "My meat is to do the will of him that sent me, and to finish his work" (Joh 4:34).

There are *some who seem willing to accept Christ as Saviour who will not receive Him as Lord*. They will not often state the case quite as plainly as that; but, as actions speak more plainly than words, that is what their conduct practically says. How sad it is that some talk about their faith in Christ, yet their faith is not proved by their works!

³ **expiatory** – having the attribute of making satisfaction for offense.

⁴ **superfluity** – something unnecessary.

⁵ **eulogium** – high praise; commendation.

⁶ **panegyrics** – high or exaggerated praises.

Some even speak as if they understood what we mean by the covenant of grace⁷—yet, alas, there is no good evidence of grace in their lives, but very clear proof of sin (not grace) abounding (Rom 6:1-2). I cannot conceive it possible for anyone truly to receive Christ as Saviour and yet not to receive Him as Lord.

One of the first instincts of a redeemed soul is to fall at the feet of the Saviour, and gratefully and adoringly to cry, “Blessed Master, bought with Thy precious blood, I own that I am Thine—Thine only, Thine wholly, Thine forever. Lord, what wilt Thou have me to do?” A man who is really saved by grace does not need to be told that he is under solemn obligations to serve Christ; the new life within him tells him *that*. Instead of regarding it as a burden, he gladly surrenders himself—body, soul, and spirit—to the Lord Who has redeemed him, reckoning this to be his reasonable service (Rom 12:2). Speaking for myself, I can truthfully say that, the moment I knew that Christ was my Saviour, I was ready to say to him—

*“I am Thine, and Thine alone,
This I gladly, fully own;
And, in all my works and ways,
Only now would seek Thy praise.*

*“Help me to confess Thy name,
Bear with joy Thy cross and shame,
Only seek to follow Thee,
Though reproach my portion be.”*

It is not possible for us to accept Christ as our Saviour unless He also becomes our King, for a very large part of salvation consists in our being saved from sin’s dominion over us. And the only way in which we can be delivered from the mastery of Satan is by becoming subject to the mastery of Christ. The “strong man armed” (Luk 11:21) cannot keep us under his cruel sway when the stronger One overcomes him, and sets us at liberty. In order that we may be rescued from the power of the prince of darkness, the Prince of light and life and peace must come into our soul. He must expel the intruder, and take His own rightful place as our Lord and Master, guarding by His own power what He has saved by His own right hand and His holy arm.

If it were possible for sin to be forgiven, and yet for the sinner to live just as he lived before, he would not really be saved. He might be saved from some part of the punishment due to sin, but he would still be a most wretched man. For, if there were no other punishment for sin than the slavery and tyranny of sin’s own self, that would be punishment enough to make a man’s life utterly miserable—like the poor wretch chained

⁷ **covenant of grace** – God’s gracious, eternal purpose of redemption, conceived before the creation of the world, first announced in Genesis 3:15, progressively revealed in history, accomplished in the Person and work of Jesus Christ, and appropriated by faith in Him.

to a corpse, and compelled to drag it about with him wherever he went. Let a man once know what sin really is, and he needs nothing else to make him thoroughly unhappy.

I was talking, only today, with a Christian brother about our crosses, and I said that I thanked God we were not left without a cross to carry. “Ah!” my friend replied, “but there is one cross we would gladly throw away if we could, and that is the heaviest cross of all—the body of sin and death that is such a burden to us.” Yes, that is indeed a grievous burden to true Christians. That is the iron that enters into our very soul. That is the gall of bitterness, the deadly venom of the old dragon’s teeth. Therefore, brethren and sisters in Christ, we do not really receive Christ as our Saviour unless we also receive Him as Prince; and when He comes to reign and rule in our mortal bodies, the tyranny of the usurper is broken, and we know Jesus as the complete Saviour of our body, soul, and spirit. He would not be our Prince if He were not our Saviour, and He would not be our Saviour if He were not our Prince—what a blessed combination these two offices make!

The man who is taught of God to understand this great truth will be a wise teacher of others. I believe that many errors in doctrine arise through lack of a clear apprehension of Christ’s various relationships towards His spiritual Israel. To some, Christ is only a Prince, so they have a sort of lifeless legality. Others live in antinomian⁸ licentiousness⁹ because Christ is not the Prince and Lord of their lives. But, beloved, he who receives Christ both as Prince and Saviour has the blessed and happy experience of resigning his own will, and subjecting all the passions of his soul to the sacred control of his glorious Prince. And, at the same time, he daily realizes in his soul the cleansing power of the precious blood of Jesus, and so, as Mary sang, his spirit rejoices in God his Saviour (Luk 1:46-47).

This also is the true Christian practice as well as true Christian doctrine and experience—to be ever “looking unto Jesus” (Heb 12:2) as my Saviour, feeling that I always want Him in that capacity, and that I shall need Him to save me even to my last moment on earth; yet also looking up to Him as my Prince, seeking to be obedient to Him in all things as far as I can learn His will from His Word, and by the teaching of His Holy Spirit—to conform my whole life to the royal and divine commands that He has issued for my guidance. I have not the time to enlarge upon this truth, but it seems to me that there is a practical lesson to be learned from the fact that all who rightly receive Christ, receive Him both as Prince and Saviour.

There are preachers who preach mere morality. I trust their number is smaller than it used to be, but there are still too many professedly Christian ministers who are like that notable man who said that he preached morality till there was no morality left in the place. Yet afterwards, when he imitated Paul, and preached Christ crucified, he

⁸ **antinomian** – pertaining to the theological view that God’s Law has no place in the life of a believer.

⁹ **licentiousness** – unrestrained immorality.

soon found that vice hid her dishonoured head, and that all the graces and virtues flourished under the shadow of the cross. So have we found it, and therefore, whoever may preach anything else, we shall still stick to the old-fashioned theme that Paul preached, that old, old story which the seeker after novelties condemns as stale, but which, to the man who wants eternal life and longs for something that will satisfy his conscience and satiate¹⁰ his heart, has a freshness and charm—that the lapse of years only intensifies, but does not remove.

2. Repentance and Remission of Sins

The second lesson we learn from our text is that *repentance and remission of sins are both needed by those who desire to be saved*. Those needs are clearly indicated by Christ's offices as Prince and Saviour. Inasmuch as He is a Prince, we must repent of our rebellion against Him; and inasmuch as He is a Saviour, He is exalted with His Father's right hand to give us remission as well as repentance, and we must have both these blessings if we are to be saved.

First, *we cannot be saved without repentance*. No remission of sin can be given without repentance. The two things are so joined together by God, as they are in our text, that they cannot be separated. Many mistakes are made as to what true evangelical repentance really is. Just now, some professedly Christian teachers are misleading many by saying that "repentance is only a change of mind." It is true that the original word does convey the idea of a change of mind; but the whole teaching of Scripture concerning the repentance that is not to be repented of, is that it is a much more radical and complete change than is implied by our common phrase about changing one's mind. The repentance that does not include sincere sorrow for sin is not the saving grace that is wrought by the Holy Spirit. God-given repentance makes men grieve in their inmost souls over the sin they have committed, and works in them a gracious hatred of evil in every shape and form. We cannot find a better definition of repentance than the one many of us learned at our mother's knee—

*"Repentance is to leave
The sin we loved before,
And show that we in earnest grieve
By doing so no more."*

I am always afraid of a dry-eyed repentance. And, mark you, if forgiveness could be granted to those who were not sorry for their sin, such forgiveness would tend to aid and abet sin, and would be no better than the Romish¹¹ heresy that, when you have sinned, all you have to do is to confess it to a priest, pay a certain sum of money according to the regular Roman tariff, and start again on your career of evil. God forbid

¹⁰ **satiate** – satisfy to the full.

¹¹ **Romish** – of the Roman Catholic Church.

that we should ever fall into that snare of the devil! If I could keep on living in sin, and loving it as much as ever I did, and yet have remission of it, the accusation of the blasphemer that Christ is the minister of sin would be a just one—but it is not so! On the contrary, we must loathe sin, leave sin, and have an agonizing desire to be clean delivered from it; otherwise, we can never expect the righteous God to say to us, Your “sins, which are many, are forgiven” (Luk 7:47).

Besides, if remission could be obtained without repentance, the sinner would be left very much as he was before; indeed, he would be in a worse condition than he was in before. If God *could* say to him, “I forgive you,” and yet he remained unrepentant, unregenerated, unconverted, he would still be an enemy of God, for “the carnal mind is enmity against God: for it is not subject to the law of God, neither indeed can be” (Rom 8:7). Forgiveness would only make such a man a more impudent, hardened, self-righteous enemy of God than he was before. If there is not such a thorough Spirit-wrought change in him that he flings away his weapons of rebellion, and casts himself penitently at the feet of his offended Sovereign, I fail to see in what sense we can call him a saved man. No; repentance is the absolutely necessary prelude to remission.

On the other hand, *we cannot be saved without the remission of our sins following upon our redemption*. God exalted Jesus “with his right hand to be a Prince and a Saviour, for to give repentance to Israel, and forgiveness of sins.” Note that “repentance” and “forgiveness of sins” are separate and distinct gifts of the exalted Christ. Our repentance does not entitle us to claim from God the pardon of our sin apart from His gracious promise to give it to us. If I get into a man’s debt, and then feel sorry that I owe him so much money, that regret will not pay my debt. If I transgress the law of the land, and when I stand in the dock¹² say how grieved I am that I have broken the law, my sorrow will not pay the penalty that I have incurred. The magistrate or judge, in passing sentence upon me, may remit a portion of it because of my contrition, but I have no right to claim even that clemency on his part; and, before God, my sorrow for my sins gives me no claim upon Him for the remission of them. No; I must say to Him, as Toplady so truly sings—

*“Let the water and the blood,
From Thy riven side which flowed,
Be of sin the double cure,
Cleanse me from its guilt and power.
“Could my zeal no respite know,
Could my tears for ever flow,
All for sin could not atone:
Thou must save, and Thou alone.”*

¹² **dock** – place in a courtroom where the accused stands before the judge.

Suppose I do now hate some sin that I once loved, or that I hate all sin, [then] no credit is due to me, for that abhorrence of sin is what I ought always to have had. God had the right to claim from me the hatred of sin of every sort, but that hatred does not discharge the debt which I owe to God. I will go further than that, and say that no one ever repents of sin so thoroughly as he does when he knows that it is forgiven. Hence, when Christians begin their new life, they do not repent once, and then leave off repenting; but repentance and faith go hand in hand with them all the way to heaven. Indeed, dear old Rowland Hill¹³ used almost to regret that, even in heaven, he might not still have the tear of penitence glistening in his eye; but, of course, that is not possible, for of the redeemed in glory it is expressly declared that “God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes” (Rev 21:4).

3. Gifts from Christ

Thirdly, *both repentance and remission are gifts from Christ*. God hath exalted Him “to give repentance...and forgiveness of sins.”

The same Lord Who gives the remission also gives the repentance. This is wrought in us by the effectual working of the Holy Spirit, yet it is not He Who repents. He cannot do so, and He has nothing of which He needs to repent; but *we* repent, and though it must always be our own act, yet it is Jesus’ gift to us and the Spirit’s work in us. Jesus bestows this gift upon us in His capacity as Saviour, and we never truly repent until we recognize Jesus as our Saviour, and put our whole trust in His atoning sacrifice. Smitten by the cross, our rocky heart is broken, and the streams of penitential tears gush forth even as the water leaped from the rock smitten by the rod of Moses in the wilderness. When Jesus grants the grace of forgiveness, at the same moment He gives the tender heart that mourns that it should have needed forgiveness. I believe that if this truth were thoroughly understood, it would help many more to receive the Calvinistic¹⁴ system of theology, which now puzzles them. I know that when I first realized that my repentance was the gift of God, the whole doctrine of salvation by grace fell into my soul as by a lightning flash.

The other side of the truth is that *the same Lord Who gives the repentance also gives the remission*. No one will dispute the fact that the forgiveness of sins is the free gift of the exalted Saviour. This priceless blessing could never be purchased by us, or deserved by us on account of our feelings, promises, doings, or anything else. It is a gift—freely, wholly, absolutely—a gift of God’s grace. It is given *with* repentance, but not given *for* or because of repentance. And wherever remission of sin is given, it works in the soul more and more repentance of sin; but it is, in itself, a gift, independent of

¹³ **Rowland Hill** (1744–1833) – popular English preacher, enthusiastic evangelical. He preached at the Surrey Chapel, London; was chairman of the Religious Tract Society and a supporter of the London Missionary Society.

¹⁴ **Calvinistic** – pertaining to the orthodox doctrine of the Christian faith as articulated during the Reformation.

repentance, yet given with it—a royal gift from the royal Saviour exalted with His Father’s right hand. So that what you have to do, dear friends, is to look to Christ, and to Christ alone, to give you penitence while you are impenitent, and to give you pardon when you are penitent. So, as Hart¹⁵ sings—

*“Come, ye needy, come and welcome,
God’s free bounty glorify;
True belief, and true repentance,
Every grace that brings us nigh,
Without money,
Come to Jesus Christ, and buy.
“Let not conscience make you linger,
Nor of fitness fondly dream;
All the fitness He requireth,
Is to feel your need of Him:
This He gives you;
’Tis the Spirit’s rising beam.”*



¹⁵ **Joseph Hart** (1712-1768) – 18th century minister and hymn writer in London. His works include “Hart's Hymns,” a much-loved hymn book used for more than 200 years. He preached at Jewin Street Chapel in London to a congregation of significant size.