

Primitive Preacher by Elder Grigg Thompson
FOURTH SERMON TO LITTLE ONES

“As newborn babes desire the sincere milk of the word, that ye may grow thereby;” [1Pe 2:2](#)

The good Lord has blessed us with one more privilege of talking together about the goodness of our God, the riches of his grace, his parental care and watchfulness over us for our good and comfort. It makes our hearts burn within us with love when we talk about his goodness, tender care, and unchanging love to us poor, unworthy beings. O how sweet it is to lean upon his breast, to feel his loving arms around us, and with tears of love falling from our eyes lookup and say, “My Father!” the sweetest words ever pronounced by infant lips. Some of us will never forget that happy day, when we were enabled to cry, “Abba, Father,” and felt the witness within that God was our Father; that within his arms we had a safe protection, a resting-place, a shelter from the stormy blasts, that howl around us, a secure hiding-place from our fierce enemies. “The name of the Lord is a strong tower; the righteous run into it, and are safe.”

The Lord’s people are often called babes, little children, and lambs, that need the constant care, attention, and protection of the Father or Shepherd. But in our text they are called “newborn babes,” such as have just begun to breathe the vital air, and are helpless, and have no knowledge where their food is to come from, or how they are to be fed and strengthened. They have life and the senses; they can feel pain and the cravings of hunger and thirst; they will cry under a sense of their needs, but they know not where their comforts are to come from. The little one’s cry will fill the mother’s heart with joy, for she knows her child is alive; she will embrace it in her arms, and nurse it tenderly, that it may be comforted and strengthened, and grow thereby.

I remember that when I was a little boy I went one night with my father to meeting, and after he had preached, several young persons, the children of the brethren and sisters, came to my father and fell down upon their knees around him, crying like their hearts were broken, and saying, “O pray for me, a poor, lost sinner.” My father prayed, and then they sang several hymns, and all seemed to be happy but these young people who seemed to be overwhelmed with grief. I could see their parents singing, and expressing the joy of their soul, and I thought it strange, and that they were unfeeling parents, to be happy, and singing, and rejoicing, when their children were there upon their knees, grieving and crying, like those suffering great distress, and in despair. I thought they ought to get down and weep with them, and try to comfort them,

and not be singing and shouting over their suffering children. But now I understand it; by the groans and cries of those dear children the parents knew that God had given them life and sensibilities, and had begun a good work in them, which he would finish in righteousness.

Peter, the author of my text, had not forgotten the solemn charge of his Master, "Feed my lambs." The little, helpless things need nursing, attention, and feeding; and to this important work Peter was set apart, and by his Master prepared to do; for a dispensation of the gospel was given to him, and this was the food the little ones needed, and they would grow and thrive thereby. Peter was not told to give eternal life to the dead; for this power the Lord had never given to Peter nor any other one whom he had called and qualified as under-shepherds to feed the flock. God himself is the fountain of life; it is derived from him and none other, and Jesus says of his sheep, "I give unto them eternal life, and they shall never perish."

Paul tells the elders of the church at Ephesus to "feed the church of God, which he hath purchased with his own blood." God has called them to this work, and given them the food the flock needs, and they will be dishonest to their God, to themselves, and to the flock over which God has made them overseers if they withhold. Peter says, "The elders which are among you I exhort, who am also an elder, and a witness of the sufferings of Christ, and also a partaker of the glory that shall be revealed; feed the flock of God which is among you, taking the oversight thereof, not by constraint, but willingly; not for filthy lucre, but of a ready mind; neither as being lords over God's heritage; but being ensamples to the flock. And when the chief Shepherd shall appear ye shall receive a crown of glory that fadeth not away;" ([1Pe 5:1-4](#)).

The apostle here declares what the duties of the elders are, and what their reward shall be; but there is not one hint that it is required of them to quicken or give eternal life to the dead. Their duties are specified: 1; "Feed the flock of God which is among you." 2; "Not for filthy lucre, but of a ready mind." 3; "Not as being lords over God's heritage." 4; "To be ensamples to the flock in all godly conversation and conduct."

Paul, in his letter to the Roman brethren, says, "For I long to see you, that I may impart unto you some spiritual gift, to the end ye may be established; that is, that I may be comforted together with you, by the mutual faith both of you and me." He loved them, longed to see them, and ceased not to make mention of them in his prayers; their peace and spiritual comfort was the desire of his heart; and as the servant of God, and their servant, he owed them a debt, and wished to pay it, that he might have fruit; among them, as among

other Gentiles. For he says, "I am debtor both to the Greek and to the Barbarian, both to the wise and to the unwise;" ([Ro 1:11-14](#)). A treasure was committed to him for their benefit and comfort; and he would be unfaithful to God and dishonest to them, if he did not deliver to them what was committed to him for their good. So greatly did he feel this obligation resting upon him, he says, "Woe is unto me if I preach not the gospel." It was not for worldly wealth or honor; it was not to fill his pockets with money, or to live in ease and affluence that Paul was so earnest in his work; but God had committed to him a treasure for his children, and he must pay it over to them. This was the feeling of our primitive preachers, and they counted not their lives dear unto themselves, so that they might discharge this duty faithfully. Persecutions, bonds, afflictions, imprisonment, and stripes could not deter them; they would be faithful in their vocation to him that had called them, and to the lambs of his fold whom they were called to feed.

Little ones, is this the character of the popular clergy of today? They claim to be the successors of these primitive preachers, but they have none of their character and features. They take the oversight of the flock that will feed them, and give them the most money; and Christ and him crucified is a stranger in their sermons. One of them has been preaching a series of sermons in our little town, and his first text was, "A Model Son;" his second, "A Model Daughter;" his third, "A Model Wife;" his fourth, "A Model Husband." His sermons had no Christ, no Savior of poor, lost, helpless sinners in them; there was no food for little children and little lambs in the whole series; the whole labor was to get out a crowd and gather money. Do you think that Paul, or Peter, or John would claim relationship with such preachers? No; they would say, "Away with such trash." "For I determined not to know any thing among you, save Jesus Christ, and him crucified." Paul would feed the little babes with milk, the sincere, pure, unadulterated milk of the word; for it was what their new life and nature required, and what their souls hungered and thirsted for, and they could not live and grow strong without it.

The newborn babe could feel its necessities, but knew not from whence its supplies must come; it could feel pain and grief of soul, but knew not where to look for ease; it could feel its sinful state, and hear the awful curse of the law pronounced against it, but it was blind to any way of salvation; it could see and feel that it was a slave to sin and death, but was blind to any way of deliverance. Little children, you know this. You can look back, and remember it all and how you wept, mourned, and cried in your despair and helpless state; but was blind to any way of escape. Paul had traveled the same road, and by divine light shining within, he was made to see the glory of God in the

face of Jesus Christ; and by revelation and a special call he was made a minister of the gospel of Christ, to go and hunt up these little ones among the Gentiles; “to open their eyes, and to turn them from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan unto God, that they may receive forgiveness of sins, and inheritance among them which are sanctified by faith that is in Christ;” but it is not once said, to give life to the dead; that is God’s work, and he will have the glory of it. Paul, nor any other minister, is not allowed to do this, directly, nor instrumentally, lest some should say, I am of Paul, or I of Appolus, or I of Cephas; and the glory would be given to men, and taken from the Lord. But the newborn babe may be taught and comforted, and have its mind and eyes directed to the true fountain of peace and salvation by the nurses and feeders that God has called and sent to it; as the eunuch was taught and comforted by Philip, the jailer by Paul, and Cornelius by Peter.

If the Jews argument against Paul were true, that faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the word of God, it would not affect our argument; for the dead can not hear, and there is no human power that can make them hear. The natural man can not know the things of the Spirit; and no power can make him hear or know, but the power that can give life, hearing, and all the senses. This is a proposition too plain to be misunderstood, and I am sure it is understood by the little ones to whom I am talking, for the anointing they have received from the Holy One has taught them this truth, and they know that faith is not the medium through which life is given; but it is the evidence of life, and the fruit of the Spirit. “He that believeth on the Son of God hath eternal life, and shall not come into condemnation.” How do you know that he hath everlasting life? Because he is a believer, and faith is an evidence that he possesses that life.

There are two systems of salvation taught in the world that are consistent in themselves; one is consistent with the teaching of the Bible, and Christian experience; the other is not. You little ones will see this yourselves, when I present them.

The one teaches that man is not dead in sins, nor totally depraved, but has life and abilities in and of himself to hear the gospel, believe it, repent, and do all its conditions, come to Christ, and be saved. There is no grace in this system. One of its advocates, in a debate with me said, “When I do the commandments, I will demand heaven as a matter of right.” This is consistent, and makes all depend upon human works and instrumentalities; and he that attempts to mix grace with it, spoils the system, and makes it a batch of inconsistencies.

The other teaches that men, in their natural, unregenerated state, are totally depraved, dead in sin, past feeling, without strength, and can not know the things of the Spirit; that it is God's work to quicken and make alive the dead, and this he does independent of all instrumentalities; that it is the blood of Christ alone that cleanses from all sin; and that the salvation of the sinner is wholly by grace, and not by works of righteousness which we have done, or can do. This gives God all the glory, and humbles the sinner down in the dust at his feet. Any effort to mix instrumentalities and human agencies with this system, robs God of his glory, and makes it a batch of inconsistencies and contradictions, which can never be reconciled by human wisdom.

I need not argue with you which of these is the truth; the anointing you have received from the Holy One has already taught you your helpless, ruined, lost condition, and that whatever change has been wrought in you is all of grace; and you can say, with Paul, "By the grace of God I am what I am." If grace had not interposed, if God had not, of his own rich mercy and sovereign love, quickened and raised me up from that state of death, and changed the affections of my heart to love the things I once hated, I should today have been dead in sin, walking in the course of this world, fulfilling the desires of the flesh and of the carnal mind. So, whatever spiritual life I have, or hope of immortal glory, all are the gifts of God, and of free and sovereign grace. It was grace that taught my soul to fear, and gave me a view of God's justice in my condemnation; and it was grace that relieved my fears, and gave me a view of Christ, the end of the law for righteousness to me, a poor sinner. O it was of grace, God's rich, abounding grace, that I was given to Christ, and he was made unto me wisdom, righteousness, sanctification, and redemption; so that all the glorying I have is in the Lord, and through his rich, unbounding grace to me, the chief of sinners.

There is no philosophy and vain deceit in this. You little ones who have been taught of the Lord know it; you have been taught it in your own experience. You can well remember when you had no hungering and thirsting for righteousness, no panting after the living God, no love for Jesus or his dear people; their society you would shun, and their pleasures were no pleasures to you. But when spiritual life was given you, you felt a great change; there was a hungering and thirsting after spiritual food and drink that you had never felt before, which you will never forget; nor will you ever forget how you fainted and sunk down in despair when those means and instrumentality men came and tried to feed and comfort you with their conditional, old covenant gospel that had no grace, no life, no justification in it for the poor, condemned sinner, who laid guilty and helpless beneath the curse, and could draw no hope nor

comfort from the law. All the promises their gospel gave were on conditions which you had no power to perform. If the food they offered had been within an inch of your mouth you had no power to take it, or appropriate it to yourself. You could not believe that any promise or invitation of the gospel belonged to such a vile and justly condemned sinner as you felt yourself to be.

Their conditional means gospel once suited you well, for you then believed you had power to comply with all the conditions, and it would have been an insult for any one to have told you that you were sunk in helpless guilt, justly condemned, with no power to help yourself, or to save yourself from endless woe. But now, prostrate on the ground, with a despairing heart, you have confessed this truth to God, and in the language of the poet can say.

Should sudden vengeance seize my breath,
I must pronounce thee just in death;
And if my soul were sent to hell,
Thy righteous law approves it well.

O what a change you have felt! It is not a mere change of conduct, but the affections and desires of the heart are changed; your views of God are such as you never had before; he is now just, even if you are sent to hell, and all the world is saved; for you are such a vile sinner. I remember, about sixty years ago, of hearing a little boy of eleven years tell his experience to the church in Lebanon, Ohio; and when he was speaking of the views he had of himself as a great sinner, he said, "I felt that God was just if I were lost, and every body else were saved." My father said, "Robert, how is this? You are but eleven years old." He looked up to father, with the tears streaming from his eyes, and said, "O, eleven years, spent in sin against such a holy, good, and just God, are enough to sink me forever."

O, little ones, you know what the boy felt; for you have drank of the same bitter waters; you have passed under the same dark and gloomy cloud of sin that cast you down in despair at the foot of Sinai, where you heard the voice of words, which killed your last, lingering hope, and taught you that there was no life or salvation for you in any conditional system. The conditions of the law ruined you, for you had violated them, and they cursed you. When the law was broken, the conditions not complied with, the penalty was certain and unconditional: "The soul that sinneth it shall die." O what a dark moment that was to you, dear child! You almost lost consciousness, and felt that you were sinking into eternity without hope, without God, to bear the just penalty of sin forever and ever. If sin had sealed your lips so that you could not pray, your wounded, broken heart made the confession, "It is just." But O, what a change now took place! The voice of words, that was so terrible you could not bear

them, ceased to sound in your ears; the thunderings of Sinai were all hushed, and Calvary, with its bleeding sacrifice, its atoning blood, the cleansing fountain that washes away all guilt, and purges the heart from an evil conscience, was brought before your eyes; and 0 the sweet voice of words you now heard sounding in your soul, and filling you with joy inexpressible and full of glory! There was no curse in them, no condition; they met your case, dispelled your gloom and despair, raised you up from the gate of endless misery, and filled your soul with love, joy, and peace, and your heart with the sweet songs of praise. 0 the word came from the blessed IMMANUEL: "I was made to be a curse for you; as it is written, Cursed is every one that hangeth on a tree." The conditions of the law are all fulfilled for you, poor, helpless sinner; you are no more under its curse, but under grace. "I will be merciful to their unrighteousness, and their sins and iniquities will I remember no more." This unconditional promise gave you hope then, and it gives you hope today; it has been your resting-place in all the warrings, fears, and temptations through which you have past; and you have his unconditional word: "I give unto them eternal life, and they shall never perish." This strengthens your hope, and brightens your prospects, for your sorrows here will soon end, and in heaven, your eternal home, there is no sorrow, no sin, no death. Dear little ones, our meetings here will end; but there we will meet to part no more, and God and the Lamb will be the light of the place. So let it be, dear Lord.