

“I DO NOT THIS FOR YOUR SAKES — BUT FOR MINE HOLY NAME’S SAKE”

GOD’S PASSION FOR THE HONOUR OF HIS NAME

But I had pity for mine holy name, which the house of Israel had profaned among the heathen, whither they went. Therefore say unto the house of Israel, thus saith the Lord GOD; I do not this for your sakes, O house of Israel, but for mine holy name’s sake, which ye have profaned among the heathen, whither ye went (Ezekiel 36:21-22).

This whole chapter is a description of a condition of national and religious distress. The people of God, and the name of God are held in contempt by the heathen; and the enemy are described as glorying in the possession of such places as had belonged to the people of God. The enemy said, “Aha, even the ancient high places are ours in possession.”

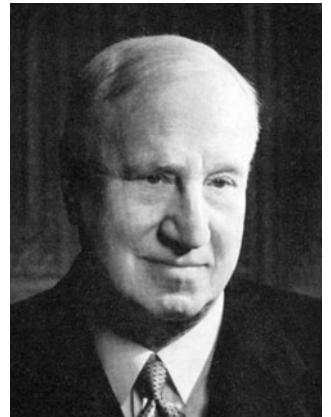
Now God always works on the same principle. God does not change. The God of the Old Testament is the God of the New Testament, and the principles governing the exercise of divine providence, the overruling of national events by the sovereign power of God, apply equally in our day, and have applied always through the intervening years.

Here was a hopeless situation. The enemy was in possession, and the people who were called by God’s name had been collaborators with the enemy; and they are described as having “profaned” the name of God “among the heathen.” There were none of them deserving of any consideration from the Lord. They had all brought themselves, both heathen and Israel, under the righteous judgement of God.

Well now, if you institute a parallel between conditions as then obtained, religiously, and conditions obtaining today, I think the analogy is equally complete. That we are living in a day of very serious spiritual declension no one of any spiritual discernment can possibly question.

In these verses, the Lord announces *His sovereign determination to do something, out of pity for His great name*. He said, “I had pity for mine great name.” The people had no regard for the divine name. It was no grief to them that the name of Jehovah was profaned among the heathen. They did not care what people thought of God. How terribly true it is that the name of God is still profaned!

If we could trace every movement of the divine benevolence in all the history of the world, back to its source, we should find that such a stream, like the river of water of life, proceedeth out of the throne of God, and of the Lamb. That is where all such movements have their rise. And that is the world’s hope, even though the world does not know it. There is One at least who will say, “Thus far hast thou come, but thou shalt come



BY T.T. SHIELDS

*That is the philosophy of grace. That means that salvation in its origin, in its outworking, in its application to you and to me, is all of grace, which means of God. He had pity on His own great name, and He did something for us, not because we deserved it, but because **He was sovereignly resolved to glorify Himself.***

no farther. I have pity on My great name. And I will honour My name. I will glorify My name whether anyone else will or not.”

In all the universe God is the only One who may justly make the honour of His name the motive of His actions. You have no right to do anything for your name’s sake, nor have I. What do our names matter? What do they stand for? Nothing at the best! There is only One—who has no equal. A rival, yes, but no competitor. He sits alone in solitary splendour, King of kings, and Lord of lords, and His name is all-important, not merely to individual Christians, but to the whole universe. He cannot afford to have His name profaned; therefore He finds in Himself the motive for His actions when He says: “I had pity for mine holy name.”

What could God do for your sake, or for mine? Look abroad upon the world. What can you find in any human being that could call for the exercise of divine power in any other than in a way of judgement? That is the only thing that God could do for our sakes. For our sakes He could visit us swiftly. That is true of every sinner in Toronto, and everywhere. There is nothing in us that is of value. Even when the sinner prays, “God be merciful to me, a sinner” he pleads only for mercy. And the only reason for answering that prayer is in God Himself—never in the sinner. When we came as sinners to the mercy seat, asking divine forgiveness, God had to draw on His own resources. He had to do what He did, not for your sake, but for His holy name’s sake, or He never would have answered our prayer.

And I want to make it clear that this is equally true of all who are called Christians. There never was any reason in you, why God should answer your prayer. There are some good people who seem to me to be woefully uninstructed in the Word of God. They do not intend to teach error, but they are fond of telling us that prayer will be answered when we fulfill conditions. Is that so? Then I have to be something or to do something, or both, in order to make myself worthy for God to answer my prayer! My dear friends, if that were true, we might as well give it up now. You have only to recall in the experience of your life that there never has been a day, even since you have been a Christian, when you could come before God, and say, I have been very good today. I have not done anything that was wrong today; and because I am so good, please listen to my prayer tonight.” Can you recall a day when you

could say that before a holy God? There never was a day when you had not to begin with this: “Forgive me my sins, as I forgive those who have sinned against me.” There never has been a day when we have not, in some measure, come short of the glory of God. And if God is to find something in you that would justify His holiness in answering your prayer, you would never have had prayer answered in all your experience.

“But must we not do this—or that? You know we have to pay a price!” No; you cannot pay any price: “None of them can by any means redeem his brother, or give to God a ransom for him... that he should still live forever, and not see corruption.” There is not any price. When you came to God in the beginning you had to come saying, “Nothing”—you did not say “not much” but:

*Nothing in my hands I bring,
Simply to Thy cross I cling.*

That is the philosophy of grace. That means that salvation in its origin, in its outworking, in its application to you and to me, is all of grace, which means of God. He had pity on His own great name, and He did something for us, not because we deserved it, but because He was sovereignly resolved to glorify Himself. That is why He forgave our sins.

Can you, as a Christian, find any reason to expect God to answer your prayer? You say, “No; I am afraid I am not very good, but really I want to be, and I think I am trying to be better.” That is not my question: Is there any reason in yourself why God should answer your prayer for anything? You will have to say, “No.” Then are you to cease praying? “If there is no reason why God should answer my prayer, I may as well.” Yes, if you are looking for any moral reason in yourself.

But there is a place where a reason may be found. Do you not see the encouragement it gives to any one of us to turn our thoughts away to God as revealed in Jesus Christ and find in Him a reason for the answer to our prayers? That is what He meant when He said, “If ye shall ask anything in my name, I will do it.”

So you see, there is not any ground of confidence in ourselves. There is no rational ground of expectation of blessing in ourselves. I hope you will not think that ours is

What an argument for prayer! What inspiration, when, conscious of our own ill-deserts, our own nothingness, we can come to the great God, lift up our eyes unto the hills, to the Lord who “made heaven and earth.” To Him we appeal now: “For thine own sake, do what Thou hast said.”

a hopeless case, because it is the very opposite. He says, “Tell those people what I am going to do, but I do it for Mine own holy name’s sake. The reason is in Myself.” And what wonders He does for His holy name’s sake!

Do you say, “Well if that be so, and if it is so all the way through, it does not make much difference how I live, does it? I can commit any kind of sin, and still pray, ‘Do this for Thy name’s sake, not for mine.’” *Do what? What is God going to do for His own name’s sake?*

He will do nothing that is inconsistent with the honour of His great name. He will do nothing for you, or anybody else, that violates the principle of divine holiness. Whatever God does for anyone, anywhere, at any time, will be in harmony with His own holy nature. He will not “disgrace the throne of His glory,” as one Scripture has it, for He has taken pity on His holy name, and now He is going to glorify His name.

What is He going to do? He said, “I will sanctify my great name, which was profaned among the heathen.” In effect He said, “I am going to compel the heathen to respect My name. I am going to make the nations honour Me, and magnify My name, so that My name shall be set apart, exalted, sanctified, magnified, as the name of the only God of all the earth. I will sanctify My great name, which was profaned among the heathen (the outside world?—yes; even in the beer parlours, in the marketplace, in the gambling halls, in Parliament—it is almost as bad there as anywhere—among people who do not know God at all.)

He says, “I will sanctify my great name, and compel them to honour me.” How? “I will sanctify my great name, which was profaned among the heathen, which ye have profaned in the midst of them”—“sanctified in you before their eyes!” He will not let them go on in their iniquity. He says, “I am going to work a miracle in the hearts of these people of mine, so that the heathen will say, ‘God must have done that.’”


How will He do it? He will separate us from among the heathen. He says, “I will call you out, and make you a people of My own.” The church must be a little more particular in recognizing that it is different from the world, and separate itself from the world. That is something different from what we have been taught for some time, that the proper way to get on was to mix with the world. No; the measure of our influence over worldly men will be the measure of

our nonconformity, not our conformity to the world. Then God will be sanctified in us, and being sanctified in us, He will be sanctified among the heathen. And He says, “I will sprinkle clean water upon you... A new heart also will I give you, and a new spirit will I put within you” [Ezekiel 34:24,26]. And so God for His holy name’s sake, will come into the hearts and lives of His people, and make them over again, give them a new heart, and a new spirit, and cleanse them from their filthiness, and separate them unto Himself.

In our chapter the Lord says, “I have told you what I am going to do, but remember I am going to wait till you ask Me to do it: ‘I will yet for this be enquired of by the house of Israel, to do it for them.’” What an argument for prayer! What inspiration, when, conscious of our own ill-deserts, our own nothingness, we can come to the great God, lift up our eyes unto the hills, to the Lord who “made heaven and earth.” To Him we appeal now: “For thine own sake, do what Thou hast said.”

I believe it is when we are led to an appreciation of the fullness of divine grace, the greatness of grace, that we can pray all day, all night, and all the next day, as long as you like, only ask the Lord to do as He has said and to do it for His sake, and never for yours or anyone else’s.

That is grace. If it were otherwise, salvation would not be wholly of grace. Grace means God did it in the beginning, and all the way through, and to the end it is grace alone. What a terrific responsibility that puts upon us! He tells us that it is His programme, His resources, His power, that He will put all at our disposal. He asks only for our acquiescence, that we yield ourselves to Him and ask Him to do what He has promised.

A mother perhaps prepares a fine dinner for her children. They look hungrily at it. But mother is very wise, and says, “Now you must say, ‘Please.’ You must ask for it.” And the children say, “Please.” And so God waits to lavish all the fullness of His grace upon us, and all He asks us to do is just to say, “Please do it, Lord.” Then He will magnify His great name, and sanctify it in us. 

Dr. T.T. Shields was the pastor of Jarvis Street Baptist Church from 1910 to 1955. He was the founding editor of The Gospel Witness and exerted a large influence on the evangelical church in Canada during his ministry. This sermon was originally delivered at JSBC on September 6, 1945. It has been edited.