

The Heavenly Calling

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"Holy Brethren, partakers of the heavenly calling" (Hebrews 3: 1)

It is deeply important to realise that, as believers in the Lord Jesus, we are not only saved from judgment, but we are called to heaven- "partakers of the heavenly calling". The Apostle does not exhort us to partake of the heavenly calling; he says we are partakers. The believer is as much a heavenly man as he is a saved man. But we have with shame to own that our conduct is not always becoming to heavenly men, any more than it is always consistent with being saved men.

We gladly own that our salvation is not "of works", but, "By grace ye are saved through faith" (Ephesians 2: 8, 9). In like manner we partake of the heavenly calling, not by "our works", but, by His grace. So we read, "God hath **saved** us and **called** us with an holy calling, not according to our works, but according to His own purpose and grace (2 Timothy 1: 9). Our walk and ways neither secure our salvation, nor make us a heavenly people; but the fact that we are saved, and partake of the heavenly calling, will greatly effect our walk and ways.

The common thought even in evangelical Christendom is that the Gospel relieves us from our guilt, and then sets us up on earth as better men, and better citizens, in improved circumstances, and finally takes us to heaven where we die. There seems to be little appreciation of the great truth that Christianity takes us completely out of the world, gives us a new place in heaven, and thus makes us strangers and pilgrims on earth.

Turning from what we see in Christendom to learn from Scripture God's own thoughts, we shall find that the grace of God,

Firstly, meets our needs as sinners, and relieves us of our guilt and judgment;

Secondly, it brings us under a new power by which we are cared for and kept waiting for the coming of the One that has saved us;

Thirdly, it connects us with our new place in heaven so that even now, while yet on earth, we are partakers of the heavenly calling.

When we turn to the Gospel of Luke, it is deeply instructive to trace in the different incidents how grace in the Person of Christ has visited us from on high, reached down to us in all our depth of need to lift us into the heights from which grace came, and thus makes the sinner that believes a partaker of the heavenly calling.

(1) **The forgiveness of sins** (Luke 7: 37, 38, 48, 50). In the first chapter of the Gospel, Zacharias, in his hymn of praise, so beautifully can say, "The dayspring from on high hath visited us". With the coming of Jesus the new day of grace had dawned upon the world. In the fourth chapter we learn how the Lord opened this day of grace as He quotes the prophecy of Isaiah foretelling the coming of the Lord to preach the Gospel to the poor and to heal the broken-hearted. Then the Lord can say, "This day is this Scripture fulfilled in your ears". In the seventh chapter we find this grace reaching down to a poor degraded sinner and forgiving her sins. "A woman in the city which was a sinner" finds herself in the presence of the Saviour. She realises that she is in the presence of One who knows all her sins and yet is full of grace toward her. The result is, her heart is broken and her heart is won. Her tears speak of

a broken heart, and her kisses of a heart that is won. At once the Lord in His grace binds up her broken heart by saying, "Thy sins are forgiven . . . thy faith hath saved thee, go in peace". Here then is the start of all our blessing. We are not forgiven because of anything that we have done, but because of what Christ has done, and we know we are forgiven, as the woman knew that she was forgiven, not because we believe that we are forgiven but because God says so. "In Him all that believe are justified from all things." This is indeed a great blessing, but, in the case of the woman the blessing hardly goes beyond the forgiveness of sins.

(2) **Carried and cared for** (Luke 10: 33-35). In this fine scene we see a further stage in the blessings that grace brings to us. The Good Samaritan binds up the wounds of the dying man; as we may say, he receives the forgiveness of sins. But he receives further blessings. His wounds having been bound up, the Good Samaritan set the man on "his own beast, and brought him to an inn, and took care of him". And, passing on his way, he leaves a message to say that he is coming again for him. So with believers, when forgiven we are not left to find our way through this world as best we can. We are carried in the power of the One who has forgiven us; we are brought to an inn; as we may say, we are made strangers in this world, we are cared for every step of the way, and the One that has blessed us and cares for us, is coming for us. But in all this, though there is a great advance upon the truth of forgiveness there is nothing about heaven.

(3) **Heaven opened to us** (Luke 14: 16-23). In this passage we have a great advance upon the truth brought before us in Luke 10. There we found ourselves cared for as pilgrims in this world. Here, in this beautiful picture, we learn that we are called into an entirely new scene. The supper takes place in the house and the invitation is, "Come, for all things are now ready". Not only 'Come to Christ', however true and necessary. Here the invitation is to come into a new place-the Father's house. The invitation is, "**Come**"; the servant is instructed to "**bring in hither**"; and again the word is, "Compel them **to come in**". The great object is that the house "may be filled".

Thus God tells us that He has opened His house and disclosed the desire of His heart to have His house filled with sinners saved by grace. Cast out of Paradise on earth, man has become a homeless wanderer in this world's highways and hedges, but the grace of God can reach down to man in all his misery to bring him into the warmth and joy of the Father's house.

(4) **Sinners brought home to heaven** (Luke 15: 4-6). Here we have a further advance on Luke 14. There we see the Father's house thrown open, and sinners invited to "Come". Here we see in picture lost sinners saved and brought into the home. We find the Good Shepherd going after the lost sheep. But what for? Is it simply to save the sheep? He does indeed seek and save the sheep; but He does more. He picks it up and carries it on His shoulders. But is this all? He does indeed save, and carry, and care for the sheep; but He does more; He brings it home; thus we read, "When He cometh home". What end had the shepherd before him when He went out into that lonely wilderness? Was it simply to find a wandering sheep and bring it back to the fold from whence it had strayed? Ah no! He found it, picked it up and He carried it, and He brought it **home**. Nothing less than His home will do for His sheep.

Then in the story of the prodigal son we see how grace can reach a sinner in all the misery and want into which his sin has plunged him in the far country, to bring him into all the nearness and joy of the Father's home.

Finally, in the case of the thief, brought before us in Luke 23: 43, we see an actual case of one who was taken from the depths of sin to the height of paradise. The first word the Lord uttered to this man was, "Today shalt thou be with Me in Paradise". We might have thought that surely the first word that the Lord would say would be, "Thy sins are forgiven". Ah no! the Lord's first word to this believer

was to let him know that heaven was opened to him, that he was fitted for heaven and called to heaven—a partaker of the heavenly calling. Such is the efficacy of the death of Christ that the vilest sinner that believes in Him can be taken into heaven with Christ.

Why are we partakers of the heavenly calling? These incidents very blessedly tell us that grace comes down to us from on high, meets our deepest need, and lifts us to the height from whence grace came, to be with Christ in heaven. But these passages tell us more; they tell us why we are called to heaven. Does God set us before Him in heaven simply to make us happy? Truly we shall be happy, for in His presence there is fulness of joy. But, if He brings us there it is not simply for the joy of our hearts, but for the gratification of His own heart. When the Shepherd picked up the sheep, it is true that he rayed it on his shoulders rejoicing; but His joy was not complete until he had brought the sheep into His own home. Then, He says, "Rejoice with Me". So with the Father; His love and compassion were expressed outside the house; but it is not until we pass within the house that we hear of the Father's joy. Then we read, "They began to be merry". This wonderful story tells us that such is the love of the Father's heart that He actually desires our company. That is why He has called us to heaven and made us partakers of the heavenly calling.

The practical effect of the heavenly calling (Hebrews 11: 13-16). What, we may ask, will be the practical effect on our walk and ways of heartily embracing the great truth that we are partakers of the heavenly calling? Do we not see the practice that flows from faith in this great truth livingly set before us in the history of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, as recorded in Hebrews 11: 13-16?

In Abraham we see one who was "called to go out into a place which he should after receive". He had the promise of "a better country, that is, an heavenly". Together with Isaac and Jacob, they saw by faith this heavenly country "afar off", and heartily embraced the promise of this country. The result was:-

Firstly, they became "strangers and pilgrims on the earth". They saw the King in His beauty and the land that is very far off. And their links with the heavenly city severed their ties with earth.

Secondly, being strangers and pilgrims they became true witnesses for God in this world, as we read. "They that say such things **declare plainly**". It was not simply what they said with their lips; it was their lives that spoke to the world around.

Thirdly, declaring "plainly", as true witnesses, they escaped the snares of the enemy who sought to draw them back into the world by giving them opportunities to return.

Fourthly, taking the place of strangers and pilgrims, declaring plainly that they seek a country, and refusing every opportunity to turn back to the world, "God is not ashamed to be called their God".

What a wonderful example we have, then, in these Old Testament worthies! In a far more direct way the heavenly calling has been opened to us since Christ has come to tell us of heavenly things. Christ has died to secure heaven for us and to fit us for heaven. We are called to heaven and made partakers of the heavenly calling. But we may well challenge our hearts by asking ourselves, Have we heartily **embraced** the heavenly calling? Have we confessed, in our words and ways and walk, that we are "strangers and pilgrims on the earth"? Have we **declared plainly** as witnesses for God that we seek a country and that our hopes are in another world? Have we **refused every opportunity** to return to this present world?

As we look at Christendom we cannot but see how the great profession has entirely failed to enter into the heavenly calling of Christianity. But what of the true people of God in the midst of the profession? And in particular, what of ourselves? What is the truth as to each one individually? Have

we not each one to challenge our own hearts and ask ourselves: have we so embraced the heavenly calling, and walked in consistency with it, that at last God will be able to say of us, as He said of the patriarchs of old:-

"God is not ashamed to be called their God"?