

THE GREAT 8 BY 4 —

(2) HE WHO DID NOT SPARE HIS OWN SON ... ?

Bible Passage : Romans 8:32

Whenever I was a history student and later when I was a history researcher people inevitably asked me what I did. And when they heard what I did they would very often reply, 'Oh, I couldn't do history, I could never remember all those dates.' Now I must admit I've never been any great shakes at dates myself. My wife, who is also a history graduate, is great with dates. If you've forgotten the date of your wedding anniversary ask her, she'll probably remember! However the essence of being a good historian is not the ability to remember dates or facts or statistics. It is the ability to interpret them. You can remember all the dates in the world. You can remember every battle fought on British soil and its dates. But if you cannot explain the significance of the battle then those dates are useless.

And it is of course the same with practically every other discipline that you care to mention. Facts and statistics, information, they are of no use to you unless you can interpret them. You don't want to see a doctor who can tell you every part of the human anatomy if he cannot interpret your symptoms. You don't want to talk to an accountant who can faithfully relate the financial figures of your company if she cannot tell you what they mean. The capacity to interpret is crucial. And as we look at the concluding part of Romans chapter 8 this IS what we are concerned with—interpretation, understanding, drawing the correct conclusions. Paul throughout the early chapters of Romans has been concerned to explain the gospel—God's wrath against our sin, our guilt, our inability to save ourselves, the reality of God's grace in justifying us through faith. And he

has been working out the privileges that belong to the Christian because of the gospel—peace with God, union with Christ, freedom from the law and the gift of the Holy Spirit. And now at the end of chapter 8 the apostle is bringing all of this home. He wants us to be clear in our understanding about the interpretation of what all of this means.

And he does this by means of a series of questions that help us to interpret the message of the gospel and to apply it to our lives. This is so that we might truly understand the glory of the gospel and its wonderful implications for our lives. And the last time we thought about the first of these great questions, 'If God is for us, who can be against us?' To which we saw the resounding answer is no-one. Not God, not Satan, not other people not ourselves. If God is for us, no one can stand against us.

We come then to the second question in what I have termed 'the great 8x4' — the great 8 being the title the Puritans gave to this chapter and 4 being the number of key questions — 'He who did not spare his own Son, but gave him up for us all—how will he not also, along with him, graciously give us all things?' (vs 32)

(1) Now as we consider this question the first thing we must see is the general nature of Paul's argument. And it is an argument which he carries on from the greater to the lesser. It is also a deductive argument—if Paul's premise is correct then the conclusion he offers must logically follow. Now the fact that Paul argues in this way tells us something in itself about the nature of

the gospel. And that is that there is a logic to the gospel. Certainly it is not a cold logic but there is a logic here.

And that in itself is a point of very great importance when we think about the subject of the gospel. For very often we are prone to consider the gospel in terms of our feelings. Those feelings of whether or not we are up or down. Of whether or not we are feeling good about ourselves or bad about ourselves. Whether or not we are troubled by our sinfulness or feeling relatively good about ourselves. And our feelings of course have their place. We must not become what John Stott describes as ‘tadpole Christians’—nothing else but a big head with no heart.

But we must understand this as well, that there is in the gospel a logic. We can sit down and work things out, we can work things through. We ought not simply to be guided by how we feel that day or about a certain situation or condition. We can work things through, we can understand God’s dealings with us. The gospel is not simply about some kind of guess work. But about the truth of God applied to our lives. And that truth appeals primarily to our understanding. Were we often to apply ourselves to the logic of the gospel, then we would less frequently find ourselves troubled by many of the things that tend to get on top of us.

If you go to the doctor and he listens to all your symptoms and he replies, ‘It seems to me you have a bad case of indigestion’ you hope that he is diagnosing you on something more than sheer guesswork. You hope he is not simply following a hunch. But that he is applying logic, the logic of medicine to your case. And so it is in the cure of our souls. It is not simply about guesswork or a hunch, or a feeling. But about applying the logic of the gospel to our soul’s condition.

And that is what we find here is the logic of the gospel applied to our lives. Applied to our soul’s condition.

(2) We then read Paul’s great premise, the great foundation of his argument. He writes, ‘He who did not spare his own Son, but gave him up for us all.’ And it is indeed a great and grand statement. Commentators recognise in Paul’s words here echoes of Abraham on Mount Moriah. Where in Genesis 22 Abraham took Isaac up on to Mount Moriah in response to God and was ready to slaughter him. But as he reached out his hand to do so God intervened and said, ‘Do not lay your hand on the boy or do anything to him, for now I know that you fear God, seeing you have not withheld your son, your only son, from me.’ (vs 12) The depth of Abraham’s reverence for God was demonstrated in his not withholding his son.

And so it is here. The greatness of God’s action is demonstrated in His not withholding His Son. Here is the great and remarkable truth that lies at the heart of the gospel—that God did not spare His own Son. When it came to the cross. When God could have delivered His Son. When he could have sent ten legions of angels. When he could have assumed Him into heaven. When He could have delivered Him in untold ways because He is the sovereign Lord, He did not spare Him. He did not spare Him the agony of the garden. He did not spare Him the beatings in the guard room. He did not spare Him the crown of thorns. He did not spare Him the injustice of the trials. He did not spare Him the anger of the crowd. He did not spare Him the pain of crucifixion—the piercings, the thirst, the asphyxiation. He did not spare Him the mockery of the crowd. He did not spare Him the burden of our sin, nor His wrath against that sin. He did not spare Him the curse of the law. Nor the stroke of death.

When we see that God did not spare His Son we see the greatness of His action. Octavius Winslow, a famous Nonconformist minister of the 19th century, wrote, ‘Who delivered up Jesus to die? Not Judas, for money; not Pilate, for fear; not the Jews for envy; — but the Father for love!’ Here is the greatness of God’s action in not sparing His Son —

that He might show to us clearly and beyond a shadow of a doubt His great love for us. We see in the fact that God did not spare His very own Son the magnitude of His love for us.

For as Paul continues, God 'did not spare his own Son, but gave him up for us all.' Here the message of God's love becomes amplified. For in not sparing His Son, He is giving Him up for us all. He did not spare His Son so that He might spare us. It is the wonderful message of the substitution of Christ. The wonderful message of the great exchange summed up by Paul writing to the Corinthians, 'For our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.' (2 Cor 5:21) God did not spare His Son who was innocent of any crime. Instead He consigned Him to the cross. So that there on behalf of those who were guilty and condemned, He might take their place and bring them to God.

Paul is inviting his readers to recognise here the greatness of what God has done. The greatness of what He has done in giving His own Son to be our Saviour. And that is the challenge that comes before each of us. Do we recognise the greatness of what God has done for us in Christ? Do we recognise the magnitude of this? That God has not spared His Son but spared us. That His innocent Son has taken the place of guilty people such as you and me.

For a parent to lose a child at any age is a terrible thing. To lose a child to an accident, or violence or illness is a terrible thing. It devastates families. It can destroy lives. It can ruin marriages. It can lead to a lifetime spent in grief. And we would do anything, would we not, to spare ourselves, the death of a child. And yet here God the Father gives His one and only Son. He gives Him up for us all, the innocent for the guilty that we may go free. The parallel here in God giving His Son is not an exact one. The experiences, the emotions are not the same. But it helps us to grasp something of the magnitude of what occurred in God giving His Son for us.

If we begin to grasp this well might we understand the words of Martin Luther when he wrote, 'Learn to know Christ and Him crucified. Learn to sing to him and say 'Lord Jesus, you are my righteousness, I am your sin. You took on you what was mine; yet set on me what was yours. You became what you were not, that I might become what I was not.

(3) If we grasp his great premise, then Paul says we, must also let that lead us to this wonderful, logical, conclusion, 'He who did not spare his own Son, but gave him up for us all-how will he not also, along with him, graciously give us all things?' Again Paul is asking us to think upon the magnitude of what has occurred. But not only is he asking us to consider this, he is asking us to see the immense value of the gift of God in Jesus Christ. That in giving us His Son God has given us an incomparable gift. He is asking us to realise that there is no greater gift that God can give us than the gift of His Son.

We must think it through; there is no greater gift that God can give us. Should He give us wealth beyond measure, all the kingdoms of this world, unending pleasure, every happiness that we can imagine, none of these things can compare with the gift of His Son. For it is through the giving of His Son that God gives us something that goes far beyond every reward that this world has to offer. He is giving us the gift of eternal salvation.

Again listen to the logic of Paul's argument, 'He who did not spare his own Son, but gave him up for us all-how will he not also, along with him, graciously give us all things?' If God has given us His very own Son. The one who is very God of very God. The one who was His beloved Son from all eternity. If He has given us the greatest gift that the eternal Father can give to mankind, then how can He not also along with Him graciously give us all things?

Imagine that you loved your wife so much that you decided that that the

best way to express that love was to go to Lunns and buy your wife the most expensive diamond ring in the shop. And so you purchased the ring costing thousands of pounds and because it was so expensive they gave you a special presentation ring box to keep it in. Imagine you then gave your wife the ring and she loved it. So she said, 'I'll just keep it in this box.' And you said, 'Hold on. I'm giving you the ring, I didn't say anything about the box!' It would make no sense. If you gave her this lavish gift, you would not deny her the comparatively cheap box that goes along with it.

And this is the logic of Paul's argument here. If God has given us the greatest gift that He can give to mankind, then how can He not also along with Him graciously give us all things? In giving us His Son He is not withholding anything from us.

This is the logic of Paul's argument here and it is worth taking time to think through some of the implications of what He is saying here.

(i) The first is to note that Paul speaks of how God the Father will along with Christ 'graciously give us all things.' The giving of His Son is God's supremely gracious act. An act of God's own good pleasure. An act that is not rooted in anything that we have done. It is an act that God performs freely. And Paul is here reminding us, as he was in the previous verse, of God's disposition towards us. That God does not stand opposed to us but is graciously disposed to us. That gracious disposition is revealed in the gift of His Son.

And Paul wants us to understand that since God is graciously disposed to us, He will not withhold any good thing from us. Instead His grace is always extended towards us. He stands as it were poised to pour His grace into our lives at every point. Paul wants us to get rid of any duality in our thinking that leads us to see God at once graciously disposed to us and at the same time

holding back on us to see how we get on. God is graciously disposed to us. Full stop.

And we are faced with the question of whether or not we have grasped that. Do you realise that as one of His children God is graciously disposed to you? That He is not harbouring anything against you? But is graciously disposed to you in all things. If you are tempted to doubt that then look and see what He has done in giving you His Son.

(ii) Paul writes that God will along with Christ graciously give us all things. Now as we think about this we must recognise that Paul is not here talking about two things. He is not talking about giving us Christ and then everything else. Rather He is talking about giving us all things with Christ or in Christ. The all things come with Christ.

Paul is saying the same thing here that he says in writing to the Ephesians, 'Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in the heavenly realms with every spiritual blessing in Christ.' (1:3) It is the same thing that he writes to the Colossians, 'For in Christ all the fullness of the deity lives in bodily form and you have been given fullness in Christ.' (2:9)

In other words Paul is not saying that God has given you Christ and there are other things to follow. Instead He is saying God has along with Christ given you all things.

And again it is vital that we understand this in this whole matter of salvation. That in Christ God has given us all things. There is nothing to be added to Christ. Instead in this whole matter of salvation we must endlessly look to Him and recognise the magnitude of what God has given us in His Son. One of the very great problems that we face in the Christian life is that we start the Christian life by looking to Christ but then we continually look to ourselves. We continually look to our performance and that leads either to hypocrisy or desperation. But we must continually

look to Jesus. And see that in Him God has given us all things.

(iii) We must consider this phrase 'all things'. Now the first thing that we must say, is we must say what it is not. 'All things' does not mean 'all things' in the sense of everything. Or everything we want. You can easily see how this phrase might be taken up and distorted by those who hold to the so-called prosperity gospel—'God has promised to give you all things, so lay claim to your sports car, your villa or your perfect health.' But that is not at all what Paul means here. It is an idea that is completely at variance with the message of the gospel.

Rather in his use of the phrase 'all things' Paul is indicating two important ideas. The first is the idea that I've already alluded to. That is that in Christ God has given us all things necessary for our salvation. Our salvation is complete in Him. If we go back again to vs 30 which speaks of our having been predestined, called, justified and glorified, we see that these things happen in Christ. It is through our union with Him that we receive these gifts. Everything that is necessary for our salvation is provided in Christ. There is nothing that we could mention related to our salvation that God has not provided for us in Christ. This is the essence of the finished work of Christ.

The second idea contained in Paul's phrase 'all things' looks not to our present condition but to our eternal condition. For the 'all things' also speaks of our sharing with Christ in His eternal reign. Back in vs 17 Paul writes that 'if we are children, then we are heirs—heirs of God and co-heirs with Christ.' And Christ, we are told, is appointed heir of all things. (Heb 1:2) Through Christ we have become heirs of an eternal kingdom. And just as He has been raised from death to glory so we also will share with Him in that eternal glory. God has given us His Son and with Him will give us all things, including that share in His eternal glory.

The NT speaks of this truth in many ways. In the Sermon on the Mount Jesus speaks of us inheriting the kingdom of heaven. Paul writes to the Colossians that when Christ appears we shall appear with Him in glory. He writes to Timothy that we shall reign with Him. Vs 17 speaks of our sharing in His glory. We have been given everything in Christ.

Now we cannot begin to comprehend what this means. We cannot begin to fully grasp that which awaits those who are in Christ and in Him have received all things. But we do realise that the future that God has prepared for us is glorious. And that we have been given it along with Christ. In Christ God is withholding nothing from us but with Him is giving us all things.

(iv) We must consider the outcome of all that Paul is saying as he asks this question. And that is that he is once again emphasising, as he has been doing since vs 28, that the work of salvation is God's work and as such it is a complete work. It is a work that lacks nothing. That can lack nothing and will lack nothing. It is work whose end is not in doubt.

Indeed we must understand here in relation to this question that the completeness of this work is seen in the giving of Christ. In the giving of His Son God has given us all that is necessary for our salvation. In giving us His Son God has secured our salvation. In giving us His Son God has freely given us all things.

And so at each and every stage along life's journey we must lift our eyes. We must lift our eyes from off ourselves and look to Christ and all that God has given us in Him. When the struggles of life threaten to swamp us. When the going gets so tough it seems that our faith must give way. When Satan stands to accuse us of all that we have done. When we are weighed down by sin and failure. When the struggle of the years begins to take its toll. Then let us look to Jesus and see that in Him God has freely given us everything and will continue to

give us everything. So that in Christ our salvation is complete in every way.

*'Not what I am, O, Lord, but what
Thou art!
That, that alone, can be my soul's
true rest;
Thy love, not mine, bids fear and
doubt depart,
And stills the tempest of my
tossing breast.'*

Message: He who did not spare his own Son ... ?

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