Luke - Commentaries by Andrew Miller

Meditations on the Grace and Glory of the Blessed God, Compel Them to Come In

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The grace of God may be compared to a stream gushing from the mountain side; which, though frequently meeting with opposition, flows on. The force of the current manifests the fullness of the fountain. It has many obstacles to overcome; but the stream being fed by an exhaustless spring, it acquires strength in its progress; and rushing past or over every hindrance, it runs on, refreshing the region of its course, until it reaches the meeting-place of kindred streams.

The believer, looking up to God his Father, can say, " All my springs are in thee." The stream of life-giving grace which has reached his soul, flows from the heart of God. " God is love." "Where sin abounded, grace did much more abound." (1 John 4; Rom. 5) From this everlasting spring the stream of saving grace has been flowing on, through our sin-blighted and barren world, ever since the lost condition of man called it forth. It was always there; the shed blood of a spotless victim opened up a channel for its righteous flow, " that as sin bath reigned unto death, even so might grace reign, through righteousness, unto eternal life, by Jesus Christ our Lord." Faith's eye will always see the stream of grace, tinged, as it were, with the blood of Jesus.

But oh! with what opposition, from all quarters, has grace had to contend! How often, for a moment, has its course been interrupted, and violently forced into another channel! The nature of God's grace is entirely contrary to man's selfishness. He is angry with God, and hates his brother, because the highest favors of heaven are bestowed on the most unworthy of the children of men. Hence Cain was angry, and killed Abel; and the elder brother was angry, and would not go into the house where grace reigned. (Gen. 4; Luke 15) It has ever been so. Naturally, man dislikes it-speaks against it-seeks to turn it aside and get rid of it altogether, like Israel at Sinai, or, failing in this, he seeks to pollute the pure stream of heaven, by mingling with it the fancied worthiness of his own feelings and doings. In all ages of the world, from every human heart, grace has met with determined opposition; but such is the depth, fullness, and energy of the love of God, the native source of all grace, that nothing can effectually stay its course, or even hinder its progress. The fountain can never fail, the channel can never be choked, and grace, free grace, in spite of every obstacle, must flow on through this desert world, until it has visited, refreshed, and blessed its most distant nations.

These thoughts have been suggested in reading Luke 14:15-24. Here, our Lord points out the onward course of the pure grace of God, and the spring from whence it flows. In reply to the one who said, while He sat at meat with Him, " Blessed is he that shall eat bread in the kingdom of God," the Lord immediately assured him that the supper was ready, that grace had provided and prepared everything, and that he had a free invitation to come and eat of that heavenly bread. " Then said he unto him, a certain man made a great supper, and bade many; and sent his servants at supper-time to say to them that were bidden, Come, for all things are now ready." They had been previously invited, but now they are intreated to come, for it was " supper-time " and all things were ready. But, alas! " they all with one consent began to make excuse." None of them said, in plain terms, " I will not come," but they were full of excuses. How like the reception that the full, free, and hearty invitations of grace still meet with from many! Few will say plainly, I shall have nothing to do with Christ or His salvation; yet how often are both neglected, nay, despised, for a worldly pleasure—a self-gratification—a shadow—a nothing.

From the beginning God had acted in grace, and saved them that believed His word. But the full expression of His grace was reserved until Christ came. He was " full of grace and truth." (John 1:14, 16, 17.) " God was in Christ, reconciling the world unto himself, not imputing their trespasses unto them." (2 Cor. 5:19.) Grace reigned. None, observe, were unfit or unwelcome guests for the feast on account of their sins. God was not imputing their trespasses unto them. He was acting in grace-pure grace-grace without rebuke. So that there was full forgiveness to the chief of sinners, according to the riches of grace. The guest that was cast out, according to the account given by Matthew (chap. xxii), was condemned by the king, not on account of what he had done, but on account of what he had refused. Grace had provided everything. But he despised the robe that was suited to the feast.

He was a rejecter of the free grace of God in Christ Jesus. " And when the king came in to see the guests, he saw there a man which had not on a wedding garment? And he said unto him, Friend, how camest thou in hither not having on a wedding garment? And he was speechless. Then said the king to the servants, Bind him hand and foot, and take him away, and cast him into outer darkness; there shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth."

Here, observe, nothing is said to the man about what we may call his sins in general, but simply that of having come hither without the wedding garment; and having refused the grace of God, which alone could meet his need, all his other sins, of heart and life, remained, and sank with him into the place of outer darkness. This is deeply solemn. Every remembrance of the ground of condemnation must prove an awful pang of in the depths of woe.

Christ alone is the sinner's salvation. He alone meets all our need. " God hath given to us eternal life, and this life is in his Son." Clearly, then, the Son must be received, or we can never receive eternal life, for the life is in Him The one question then is, Have I received the Son as my eternal life-my eternal all? When Christ is received by faith, all is received—life—righteousness—pardon—peace, and acceptance.

"My strength, my shield, my safe abode,My robe before the throne of God."

We have all in Him. " He that hath the Son hath life, and he that hath not the Son hath not life." (1 John 5:10, 11.) Until Christ is received, nothing is received. The sinner remains in all his guilt, and under the awful weight of his unpardoned sins. Oh how marvelous that any should be found refusing to be saved, refusing to be clothed in the king's raiment, decked with the king's jewels, and made happy forever in the king's royal favor. Oh, then, destitute sinner, come! Christless, graceless, homeless sinner, come! Thy God calleth thee, the Savior inviteth thee, the Holy Spirit entreateth thee, "for all things are now ready." A home, a robe, a welcome, a royal feast, all await thee. Why not come?

Why not come now? Remember, oh, remember, that ere long, it must either be the king's banqueting house, or the deep, dark pit of eternal despair.

Our blessed Lord, in the parable before us, refers to three classes in connection with the stream of grace.

1. To those who were much engaged with their own earthly interests, and so had little relish for a heavenly feast. A piece of ground, five yoke of oxen, domestic duties, were more to them than the rich provisions of grace. These things, though right and lawful in themselves, so filled their hearts, as to lead them to slight and neglect heavenly things, and thereby proved their eternal ruin. The king at last most solemnly declares of all such, " that none of those men who were bidden shall taste of my supper." They were not condemned, observe, for having, or for attending to these things, but because they were satisfied with them, cared nothing for the provisions of grace, and so refused the invitation to the "great supper." But grace, though disregarded by such, flows on to others.

2. The second class, to whom the Master sent the invitation, were those who were poor and helpless, in the streets and lanes of the city-the right class to value kindness from others. When brought to see and feel our need, and our utter helplessness, such as are here pictured before us, the kindness that offers to meet all our need will be welcomed and appreciated. And what a picture the Lord here draws of man's spiritual condition! Poor, maimed, halt, blind. In poverty, and without hands to work, or feet to walk, or eyes to see. Oh, what a condition! What but the pure grace of God in the Gospel of His Son can meet such a state of things? It is not enough merely to open a place in a locality, and announce that there will be preaching. If grace be at work, it will do much more, knowing the soul's deep necessities. The neighborhood must be visited, the streets and the lanes searched, that the spiritually destitute may be found out, an invitation given with beseeching earnestness, and, if possible, brought, it may be, in the first place, to where the Gospel is preached, but with the one object of their being brought to Christ, that they may, ere long, fill the house of the Lord, and dwell with Him forever. " Go out quickly into the streets and lanes of the city," is the Master's own most urgent command.

3. The third class are found in the extreme outer circles, "the highways and hedges." The nations of the Gentiles, which, when compared with the city of Jerusalem, God's earthly center, are the distant places of the earth. But grace flows on, its energy and power manifestly increasing notwithstanding the world-wide circle of its course, and the opposition it has had to overcome in every inch of its progress. Its source is in the living God.

Two things seem to characterize the scene of Gospel labor before the banqueting-house is filled, and the door closed.

1. The Master's longsuffering, and patient perseverance in grace. To the first class, He " sent his servant at supper time to say to them that were bidden, Come: for all things are now ready." To the second class, He says, " Go out quickly.... and bring in hither the poor," &c. But to the third, He says, " Go out.... and compel them to come in." Evangelists should be like the press-gang of heaven.

2. The energy of the servant, as one who has caught his Master's spirit. He can return from his preaching mission and say, " Lord, it is done as thou hast commanded, and yet there is room." Blessed is that servant who can give in such an account, " Lord, it is done as thou hast commanded," and still be as fresh for work as ever. " Yet there is room; " as if he had said, May I go out again, and find some more to fill up that room? Oh, what a happy state of things, in any sphere of worthy service, when the servant enters into the Master's spirit, but surely, most of all, in such a sphere as this.

" I think I see the meaning of that text, now, Compel them to come in," said an earnest preacher to the writer a few days ago, and gave in substance the following explanation. " If I meet a friend in the street that I am anxious to see in my own house, I do not merely say to him, The door is open, come in, we shall be glad to see you. No; I entreat him, I urge him, I take him by the hand, and so cause him to feel the earnestness of my heart, that he is compelled to come in. Well, so should we cause unconverted sinners to feel assured of our love for their precious souls, as to compel them to come to Him who loves them infinitely more than we do. I was so convinced that this is the spirit of that text, that last Lord's day evening I was constrained to adopt a new line of action. I felt great earnestness for the conversion of souls in preaching. At the close of the discourse I stated to the people that I should be happy to remain for prayer and conversation, as the Lord might lead, after the usual service was over. I gave a hearty invitation to all, but especially to those who were anxious. Very few left. And, for the first time in my life, in place of remaining near to my desk until the people had removed, I went straight in amongst them. Some of the brothers prayed most earnestly. I began to speak to some who were in deep concern; others followed my example; so that in a short time we had quite a scene of deep interest, and rich blessing-indeed, such as we have never had before on any occasion. Several were brought into peace, others were passing through deep exercise of soul. One man was so pressed in spirit that he stood up, and in a few simple words, declared what God had done for his soul. The effect was most blessed. We have had special meetings for prayer, that the work may go on. The brethren are all stirred up."

Thus the stream of God's rich, full, unwearied, persevering grace flows on, and thus it must flow on, ever deepening, widening, and extending, until it has reached the utmost limits of God's purposes of love, and gathered from the nations of the earth as many precious souls as shall fill the house, which is as large as the heart of God.

May the Lord, the heavenly Master, so teach, guide, and lead all His dear servants now in the gospel-field, fully to carry out the true meaning of the text, in the divine power of the Holy Spirit, so that many around us may be morally compelled to come in, and that His house may soon be filled.

" I want an even, strong desire, I want a calmly fervent zeal,To pull poor souls out of the fire,So snatch them from the verge of hell, And turn them to a pardoning God,And quench the brands in Jesus’ blood."

Meditations on the Grace and Glory of the Blessed God, Strait Gate, The

THE question here raised is one of deep, personal importance to the sinner, namely, that of salvation. " Lord, are there few that be saved?" The Lord Jesus had spoken of the certainty of coming judgments on impenitent sinners, and on mere professors in the kingdom, however flourishing in appearance: "Except ye repent, ye shall all likewise perish." (Luke 13:18, 19, 1-10.) This is truly solemn as coming from the lips

of their own Messiah. " Ye shall." If impenitency and mere formality be persisted in, there is no hope for the future: the soul must " perish." What a dreadful thought is conveyed by that dreadful word " perish." It means all is lost-forever lost! the soul perished, hope perished, all forever perished, body, soul, and spirit, in the place of woe. Oh! that careless sinners and mere professors would think on such things now, ere it be too late-ere the Master be risen up, and the door shut.

It is to such the gospel is preached, and preached by the same Jesus. " God so loved the world, that he gave his only-begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life." (John 3:16.) Here the mere worldling is represented as perishing, but not yet perished. Glorious gospel! It perfectly meets the case; only listen to its voice, and believe its message of love, to thee, 0, perishing sinner. God loves the sinner; Christ died for the sinner-whosoever believes it, shall not perish, but have everlasting life. " God commendeth his love toward us, in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us." (Rom. 5:8.) Thus saith the word of the Lord!

The question here put, " Lord, are there few that be saved?" seems to be a merely curious or idle question, on the part of the one that asked it; such as unconverted men will sometimes ask about the doctrine of election. But the Lord, in His usual way, so answered it as to turn it into a serious one. What a lesson for us! He replied, so as to meet, not the question, but the real state of the man's soul. As if the Lord said, Few or many, do you " strive to enter in at the strait gate." That is your personal, all-important matter. " For many, I say unto you, will seek to enter in, and shall not be able. When once the master of the house is risen up, and hath shut to the door, and ye begin to stand without, and to knock at the door, saying, Lord, Lord, open unto us; and he shall answer and say unto you, I know you not whence ye are; then shall ye begin to say, We have eaten and drunk in thy presence, and thou hast taught in our streets. But he shall say, I tell you I know you not whence ye are; depart from me, all ye workers of iniquity."

Surely this is a solemn and searching reply, and well fitted to turn the curious into an anxious inquirer. The Lord, in His rich mercy, grant that it may do so in the case of all into whose hands this paper may fall. There are many who are still merely curious inquirers, whom we desire to see deeply anxious and earnest ones. Surely the salvation of the soul is of all others the most personal matter possible. The door is still open-the invitation is to all: " Come, for all things are now ready." Enter while there is room. The Master is patiently waiting; oh, delay not! " Strive to enter in at the strait gate."

The connection, and strict interpretation, of this passage refer to the Jews. Christ was speaking to Jews, and of their then present privileges and future miseries, because they were rejecting Him He plainly showed them, that although their privileges had been great, such as eating and drinking in His presence, and hearing Him preach the gospel in their streets, still there was no salvation for them, and no entering the kingdom, while they refused to own Himself, to receive Him as the true Messiah, and the only Savior of sinners. He would at last say, " I know you not whence ye are; depart from me all ye workers of iniquity." Observe, He does not deny that they enjoyed great privileges; but He repeats this awfully solemn truth, "I know you not whence ye are." They had never made themselves known to Him They had never come to Himself, individually, as sinners to a Savior. They knew their privileges, and boasted in them, but they refused Christ. " 0 Jerusalem, Jerusalem, which killest the prophets, and stonest them that are sent unto thee; how often would I have gathered thy children together, as a hen doth gather her brood under her wings, and ye would not." Christ Himself was rejected. Israel would have none of Him. Therefore they were left desolate, like chickens without the sheltering wing, and the " fox " in the midst of them. Oh, what a picture of utter helplessness and certain destruction!

But although this portion of scripture, strictly speaking, refers to the Jews, it has, nevertheless, a most solemn voice to us. And, morally, it strikingly illustrates our own present position, we can only enter in at the strait gate by faith in Him who died and rose again. It is too strait for self in any form.

Let us now look at the subject in its application to our own time.

When Christ had finished the great work of redemption on the cross, He ascended up on high, and sat down at the right hand of God in heaven. His work being finished, He sat down. " When he had by himself purged our sins, he sat down on the right hand of the Majesty on high." (Heb. 1:3.) The sacrifice for sinners was offered and accepted, by which their need was fully met. God was glorified. The rights of His throne were vindicated by the blood of the sacrifice sprinkled on the mercy-seat. All the perfections of His character were displayed in their full glory, and the principles of His moral government maintained. All being done,-perfectly, and forever done-the door of mercy is thrown wide open to the chief of sinners. The way into the holiest of all is made manifest. And the voice of gracious invitation goes forth into all the world-to every creature-whosoever will let him come and drink at the fountain of the water of life freely-gratis. God is free to receive to Himself, and pardon with overflowing love, all who come to Him by faith in the finished work of His dear Son. Thus we have, glory be to God, at the present moment,

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