

SERMON XLIV

CHRIST THE CHIEFEST AND FIRST MERCY

Tobias Crisp

"He that spared not his own Son, but delivered him up for us all, how shall he not with him also freely give us all things?" {Rom.8:32}

The apostle having in the foregoing discourse excellently amplified the large spiritual privileges of Christ's members, conveyed by his Spirit into them, in the closing up of this sweet subject, endeavors to establish and settle the reeling hearts of weak believers, that they might have the more joy in believing, by sundry clear convincing arguments. The first is in the preceding verse, taken from the security which God's presence and side-taking with them, gives, in respect of his being infinitely too hard for whatever may oppose them. The second argument is in my text; where consider, the argument; the evidence, that is, the thing he would make good and clear, and the argument he useth for that purpose. The thing he would clear is the certainty of future supply of whatever is needful, in the last clause. The argument to prove this is a far greater mercy than all that which is to follow already bestowed in the former clause; which is a determining argument indeed; it is like this, he that hath given a man a field, how can he deny him a bush in it to stop a gap? Only there is an infinite disproportion between the things in this and the apostle's argument. The sum of the argument is, that Christ, the Son of God, is the dearest thing in his Father's eye; if ever he would have stuck at anything, or been loath to part with it, here he would have stopped and made a stand, when he was to make the soul of his Son an offering for sin; all things else being inconsiderable with God in comparison of him, who was daily his delight, his beloved in whom he was well pleased. But now having broken through this iron gate, {as I may say,} or so undauntedly waded through such a bottomless deep as this, all other passages must needs prove but shallows to him, where he need not put off anything to get over. In delivering up of his Son for sinners, he was fain to put off all he could possibly put off, and strip himself as naked as could be; in all other passages of mercy, God walks dry-shod, {as I may say,} only here he wades. An admirable argument it is to silence the strongest objections of the most subtilized spirit, prompted with the most acute sophistry of hell; for the devil suggests tormenting wit enough to rack the afflicted soul.

That which we will observe out of this golden sentence of scripture, is that God bestows Christ himself, the chiefest of all his mercies, first unto sinful men. That all other mercies necessarily follow. In handling the first, I shall endeavor to make clear unto you, that Christ himself is the chiefest of all God's mercies bestowed on sinners; how he is said to be the first of them; the end, or reason, why he bestows him first; all which will make excellent way for a profitable and comfortable application of the point in hand, whereby I hope our labour shall not be vain in the Lord. First, to make it clear unto you, that Christ himself, bestowed on sinners, is the chiefest of all God's mercies to them; the strength of the apostle's arguments lies in this; as will appear fully, if you consider, Christ given, as he stands in relation to God the Father, who bestows him; the value of the gift; what Christ is that is bestowed; the usefulness of this gift to those to whom he is given; and the manner how he is bestowed on sinners.

1. I say, Christ bestowed will appear to be, by far, the chiefest of all mercies, if you consider Christ given as he stands in relation to the Father giving him. Mercies, you know, are greater, or less, as the giver is more or less interested and endeared in what he gives; the nearer and dearer any thing is to the giver, the greater price is put on the gift in his parting therewith. As you know, a kingdom being of nearer and dearer concernment to a king, than a cast of his countenance, or such like, the

giving of the one is a greater gift than the cost of the other; and, if he have nothing dearer than it, the gift thereof must be the chiefest of gifts from him; this illustration will give some light to our purpose; Christ given to sinners, is the nearest and dearest thing to the Father; he is his Son, his begotten Son, his only begotten Son, in whom he is well pleased. Thus he stands in relation to him; as the second person, being equally God with himself; and as he is God and man in one person, the Mediator of the covenant. "For unto which of the angels said he at any time, Thou art my Son, this day have I begotten thee? And again, I will be to him a Father, and he shall be to me a Son?" {Heb.1:5} So also is he the nearest and dearest to the Father of all things beside; no creature so like God as he; the apostle calls him "the brightness of his glory, and the express image of his person;" {Heb.1:3;} no creature advancing God as he, none compassing his great ends as he, so pure and conformable to his mind as he; he is the first-born of many brethren, the heir of all things, the co-worker with God in the framing and managing of all things, to whom God gave all power both in heaven and in earth. Now, what can be found so near, so dear to God, as this Christ? All other things of God, are of our inferior rank to him, whether thrones, dominions, or angels, they are not daily his delight as the Son is. In parting therefore, with this his Son, and not sparing him, but delivering him up, he parted with the nearest and dearest thing he had, and therefore, he must needs be the chiefest of all his mercies to men; not only the chiefest he hath bestowed, but the chiefest he could, having no better thing to bestow.

2. Christ given will appear to be the chiefest of mercies, if you consider the value and worth of Christ himself. Mercies are not only rated according to their esteem, but also their value and greatness of worth. Affection or fancy may make mean things of high esteem, but where there is real worth, as well as high esteem, in gifts bestowed, this adds much to the greatness of them. Now, for Christ, he hath more real worth than all the world besides; and this is plain, because when weighed in the balance with divine justice, it was found too light to counterpoise it; all together could not make up the full sum or value that should satisfy that; no man, nor all creatures, could make an agreement for man; it must cost more to redeem a soul; but Christ could and did pay the utmost farthing. He is a mass of treasure big enough; the travail of his soul did satisfy; therefore the church might well call him, "the chiefest among ten thousand;" and Peter calls his blood "precious blood;" in that, therefore, Christ alone, and nothing else, amounted to such an infinite value, he may well go for the chiefest of God's mercies bestowed on sinners.

3. If you consider the usefulness of Christ, to those on whom he is bestowed. Nothing in the world, nay, the entire world could be as useful to sinners as he is. Without him, men should have lost their souls; "and what profit is there in gaining the whole world, and losing them?" Mercy is valued as it stands a man in stead, and serves his turn; things of value may in some cases be useless, when things of little value may be precious; as bread to the hungry will do more good than a mouthful of gold for that purpose; that indeed is the chiefest mercy, that will do a man most good; now, what is so useful, or can do a man that good, that Christ can? What, but he, can reconcile God to man, ingratiate man with God, pay all his debts to him, make all things work together for good, heal all the agonies, torments, and horrors of spirit, suck out the suffocating venom of corruptions, vanquish sin, death, and hell, raise the moldered carcass from corruption to incorruption, and invest it with a state of eternal glory, in the highest heavens; wiping all tears from the eyes, and filling with fulness of joy, and pleasure for evermore at his right hand, in that kingdom which shall never fade? There is nothing, except Christ, but is dry to many purposes, and leaves men destitute; he only can abundantly satisfy, and filleth all in all; therefore he is the chiefest of all mercies.

4. Christ is the chiefest of mercies, in regard of the manner of bestowing him. Not any of all God's mercies strained him, {if I may so speak by an anthropopathy,} as the making Christ so useful a mercy as he is, or cost Christ so dear. Other mercies God gives, and there is no more ado but giving and taking; but, before Christ could be such a mercy as he is, the Father must bruise him, and take pleasure in it; give him the bitter cup of his indignation, and be inexorable to his strong cries; nay, withdraw himself, and forsake him in his sorest conflicts. Christ also must endure an examination of his divine glory, and bear an eclipse of that excellent majesty; he must strip himself of all repute and

esteem in the world, be despised and rejected of men, and become a man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief; be mocked, scourged, crucified, and slain by miscreants; yea, wrestle with the wrath of his Father, even as much as all the sins of his people deserved, "the Lord must lay on him the iniquity of us all," and proportion his wrath thereunto, that "by his stripes we might be healed." All this, and a great deal more there must be, before this mercy in Christ could be ripe and fit for our use; so that here is not only Christ given, but prepared in such a manner for our good as that it is hard to say, whether the substance, or the circumstances, contain the greater mercy. It is certain, that no other mercies cost the Father of Christ himself so dear. All which particulars put together show how far this mercy, in giving Christ thus, exceeds all other mercies, and by far the chiefest.

Now we come to consider, how Christ is said to be the first of all mercies God bestows on sinners. That he is so, is plain in the text; having {to wit already} "not spared him, how shall he not give all things?" Intimating that other things remain to be given, when he is given.

Christ is the first, as "all things were created by him, and for him," as the apostle tells us, Col.1:16; that is, for his sake, as well as use; so that all creatures are beholden to Christ for their being. Had it not been for him, nothing had been made. God's love is primarily fixed on Christ, and secondarily on the creature; as through Christ he takes content therein, and gives content to him thereby; especially his love to man originally runs through Christ; not only to create him such as he is, above all other creatures, but also from all eternity to elect him to eternal glory. The apostle tells us, that "we are elected in Christ," and that all Christ's delights were "with the sons of men." {Prov.8:30,31} And Christ himself being daily the delight of the Father, it pleased the Father for the satisfying of Christ's desire, to make the sons of men his delight also. Thus you may understand that voice from heaven, Matt.3:17, "this is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased;" that is, I am well pleased with mine elect in Christ, for to them I conceive the word "well pleased" is to be referred; his well pleased-ness to his Son being sufficiently expressed in the word "well-beloved." God would never have cared for man, especially as a sinful wretch, but in and for his Son. Thus Christ is the first mercy bestowed on man, as he is the first, nay, sole moving cause to stir bowels in God to him. But, and principally, Christ is the first mercy, {not in respect of common, but spiritual mercies,} and not only as a mover to other mercies, but as God doth actually convey Christ himself first, before he conveys any mercy; he gives sinners a full interest and propriety in him, before he shows any special love to them; he makes Christ himself first thine and mine, before he pours out, or sheds abroad his love in the heart, or communicates any sanctifying grace, comfort, or spiritual privileges whatsoever; this you see fully cleared by the prophet Isaiah {42:6,7} who brings in the Lord speaking thus to Christ, "I the LORD will give thee for a covenant of the people, for a light of the Gentiles; to open the blind eyes, to bring out the prisoners from the prison, and them that sit in darkness out of the prison house." First he gives Christ, then afterwards he opens the blind eyes by him; and he doth not first loose the prisoners, and then give Christ; but first gives him and then loosens them by him. The same expression, this prophet uses, {49:8,9} "thus saith the LORD, I will give thee for a covenant of the people, to establish the earth, to cause to inherit the desolate heritages; that thou mayest say to the prisoners, Go forth; to them that are in darkness, Show yourselves." Peter, speaking of Christ as he is mentioned, {Psal.118:22,23} tells us, that "to whom coming, as unto a living stone, disallowed indeed of men, but chosen of God, and precious, we also, as lively stones, are built up a spiritual house, an holy priesthood, to offer up spiritual sacrifices, acceptable to God by Jesus Christ." {I Pet.2:4,5} Men come first to Christ, then grow up and do acceptable service by him. Learn this well, for it is of great use, as you shall hear anon; only let us first consider the last thing propounded, why God gives Christ first before other mercies?

1. That we may be more fully assured and satisfied, that he will not withhold succeeding mercies; this is the main reason why the apostle mentions it in this place. God knows how apt we are, upon every surmise, or at least slip, and his withdrawing awhile, to be full of jealousies and sad doubts, that now the Lord "will be gracious no more, and hath shut up his loving-kindness forever in displeasure," as Asaph pitifully complains in his doubting fit. {Psalm 77} For this cause God at first leaves a pledge, or hostage in our hands, that looking thereon it may check our suspicious, and put us

in mind, that whatever thing it is we suspect he will not grant, we may see we have in possession from him already, that which is of far greater value than what we now pursue. He deals as able men do with suspicious creditors, who leave pawns of far greater value than what they owe, which may pay all that is behind, that so poor souls may be at rest.

2. Christ himself is the first mercy, {I mean still when God effectually calls a sinner,} because, Christ is the soul to animate, or the principle of all spiritual life and motion, and therefore he must be first given, or else there can be no such life; as a dead body must first have a soul infused into it before it can live; when God had formed Adam's body, "he breathed into him the breath of life, {that is, a soul,} and then he became a living soul," or person. You know, when a soul is separated from a body, the body is a lifeless carcass; now, that Christ is this soul or principle of spiritual life, is most plain, in that he calls himself "the life," {Jn.14:6,} and tells us, {chap.6:33,} "that he gives life to the world," and that {chap.10:10,} he came "that they might have life, and that they might have it more abundantly;" and Paul saith, "I live, yet not I, but Christ liveth in me." {Gal.2:20} Hence it is that Christ is called the head of the body, because all the animal, sensitive spirits, which actuate the whole body with sense and motion, flow thence as from a fountain; intimating Christ to be the spring of all spiritual understanding and activity; for the same cause he is called the root, which is to the tree as the soul to the body, and the foundation on which the house rests for support and stability, and therefore is first laid before men attempt to raise any building. All this demonstrates the silliness of imagining that there can be any work of grace in a heart, before Christ himself be given or received, who brings all that is, or can be, along with himself, and finds nothing but a dead carcass as unto spiritual activity when he comes. For this, Christ is also called the everlasting Father, for that "we are begotten again to a lively hope, by the resurrection of Jesus Christ." Now you know there must be a father present to beget, before there can be a son begotten.

3. Again, Christ must be first given, because he is the prince, or prime author and principle worker of peace; so the word prince signifies; "he is our peace," saith the apostle, {Eph.2:14,} which caused the choir of angels at his incarnation, and coming to dwell among men to proclaim, "Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, good will toward men." {Lk.2:14} Now you know, that all grace from God follows peace with him; he first must be reconciled before he will show kindness; therefore the apostle tells us that "God is in Christ reconciling the world unto himself not imputing their trespasses," {II Cor.5:19,} first reconciled, then he forgives sin; and this order he observes in Christ; he must therefore first come and settle a peace, before there can be hoped any fruit or manifestation of his gracious love.

Therefore if Christ be the chiefest of all God's mercies, then let Christ himself be chiefest in your pursuit. Men usually aim at the best of things, as near as they can reach; the best wives, servants, grounds; if anything be better than other, that is meat for their mouths; he that contents himself with the refuse of things, it is because he can go no higher. Christ, as you have heard, is the chiefest and best of all God's mercies, therefore single him out from other things, and press hard after him. The prophet {Is.55:2,3,} hath a notable expostulation to this purpose; "wherefore do ye spend money for that which is not bread; and your labour for that which satisfieth not? Hearken diligently unto me, and eat ye that which is good, and let your soul delight itself in fatness. Incline your ear, and come unto me; hear, and your soul shall live; and I will make an everlasting covenant with you, even the sure mercies of David." All other things are not bread in comparison of Christ; they are lean, dry things to him, who is oily fatness. O you that "cumber yourselves about many things," like Martha, that waste and tire yourselves, that set thoughts and cares on tender hooks, to compass a little muck, or spot of earth, you labour for that which satisfies not; say, are you satisfied? Mary hath chosen the better part in sticking close to Christ. Paul saw so much pre-eminence in Christ, that, as learned as he was, he "desired to know nothing but Jesus Christ, and him crucified;" nay, he desires to be dissolved to be with him; and so would you, if so be you could but taste, that is, believe, how good the Lord is. None but Christ, none but Christ, wouldst thou then say as the martyr at the stake; how much better is thy love than wine! Silver and gold are not to be compared with him, say they that have found him. He is the treasure hid in the field, the jewel above price; wilt thou then sweat and melt thy grease in

following a vein of clay, when a mine of the richest gold, and of diamonds, is in thine eye? Wilt thou glean after a churl that hath raked his field, when thou mayest be allowed to carry whole sheaves, nay, shocks, away at once? Wilt thou glean for fitches, when thou mayest glean pure wheat? Wilt thou cast thyself on a lousy beggar, when the king will take pleasure in thy beauty? Shall the treacherous world have all thy kisses and embraces, whilst Christ stands at the door and knocks? Oh, come to thyself, poor soul, {the Lord in mercy awaken thee, nay, quicken thee; that thou mayest,} and think what a game is in chace; savory meat indeed, such as thy soul will be satisfied with, when thou hast tasted; and lose not this present advantage to hunt after butterflies like silly children, which though when enjoyed are poor nothings, yet take their wings and fly away.

Furthermore if Christ be the first of all mercies, then they begin at the wrong end, that think to wind any graces from God first, and then seek after Christ; therefore no marvel if they make nothing of their work, but turn and toss, and make many a stop and broken end; whoever will go smoothly on, and make good riddance, must begin at the right end, and get Christ himself, before ever they expect to be a jot better than corrupt nature makes them; for who can bring a clean thing out of an unclean? Beloved, you may pump at your own hearts until you break them, before you can fetch up a drop of grace, {so dry are they,} unless Christ himself be first poured in; as you will first pour in a bucket of water into a dry pump, before you will attempt to dry up water. Many poor souls lie hacking and hewing with their own blunt and dull spirits, to grub up their tough corruptions; they plow with a wooden coulter and spade, to turn up the clods of their own fallow hearts; or rather put a dead horse to tear them up, whilst they toil in their own strength. Know that you must first get your spirits keened by Christ; when men begin to plough up their hearts, they plough upon rocks, and therefore Christ must come first and soften them, before you can so much as enter; it pities me to see how many poor souls are ignorant in this spiritual husbandry, therefore toil to no purpose. Is it not madness to begin to rear a roof first, and hope that then the foundation will be laid sure; I mean to erect a structure of grace, and then go downward to lay Christ the foundation? Alas; poor creatures, how will they get up, unless they lay Christ the foundation first, and by him go upward? He brings faith itself along with him; men do not get faith first, then Christ, but he brings itself. The apostle tells us expressly, that he is the author as well as finisher of our faith, by whom we believe; and again he tells us, that "faith is the operation of God."

You say, how can a man apply Christ without faith? I answer, he cannot; but yet faith comes not before Christ, but he comes and brings it, and delivers it to the soul, whereby it takes him. I cannot illustrate this better than by Jeremiah's getting out of the dungeon. Ebedmelech {a type of Christ} comes from the king to Jeremiah being sunk into the mire of the dungeon, and brings cords and soft rags with him; these he lets down into the dungeon to him, and bids him put the rags under his arm-holes, fastening them to the cords; which he did, holding the cords fast; then Ebedmelech herewith drew him forth. Now the cords came not before Ebedmelech, neither did he draw himself to Ebedmelech with them; but he brought them, and drew him up by them unto himself. Ebedmelech represents Christ, the cords and rags faith, Jeremiah the convert or saved sinner, the dungeon the deep pit of sinfulness and misery in which he sticks; Christ brings faith, and gives one end to a sinner to hold fast by, and keeps the other end in his own hand, and so draws the sinner towards him, who comes by the hold-fast of the cord immediately; but originally and principally, by the strength of Christ's own arm. In brief, you must conceive Christ graciously present whenever faith is. Now, if faith itself, the radical grace, come not before Christ, much less other graces that spring from it. The apostle tells us, from Christ, that "we are sanctified by faith," and that "faith purifies the heart." Do not therefore, put the cart before the horse, nor foolishly think to draw the horse with the cart. Some may say, we thought that we must first be humbled, changed, renewed, and then come to Christ. I confess too many go backward in this manner, and catch many a fall and bruise; I would we had not some blind leaders of such blind, who are both like to fall into the ditch; have I not cleared the contrary way to you by manifest scripture? I come not to you in my own name about this business.

You will say, until there be some such good beginning, I shall stink in Christ's nostrils with my filth and rottenness. But, you must know, that Christ comes and justifies the ungodly; he doth not find

them godly, or stay till they be, before he justifies them; but takes them as they are, ungodly, and justifies them then. As the father of the prodigal stays not until his tatter lousy son had shifted himself, and washed off his filth, but sees him afar off, falls on his neck, and kisses him, then calls for the best robe, and covers his nakedness; a notable parable, whereby Christ sets himself forth to poor sinners. Christ is not so squeamish as men are, nor doth he affect as men do, who look for comeliness or loveliness to stir their affections. Ah; do not then stumble at straws, and make bug-bears to fright thyself from coming to Christ; they are none of his setting up. If ever you partake of any spiritual mercies, whether of grace or comfort, you must begin with Christ himself.

What is it to take Christ first, may some may say? I answer, when God opens the heart, as he did the heart of Lydia, while Paul preached the gospel {and as it may be he doth of some now} to come to thyself, and sadly to think that thy present way is not right, that there will be bitterness in the end of it; and, therefore, thy heart is fully resolved to turn over a new leaf, let it cost what it will; when thy heart thus checks and spurs at once, then, without any more ado, seal the covenant with Christ, take Christ with all that he is, and hath, for thine own; though thy hands be never so foul, stay not the wiping of them, but take him unworthy as thou art; for he will wash and make thee clean himself. Do not stumble at this, it is not too good to be true; it is ratified in heaven, and proclaimed in the gospel, "and when I passed by thee, and saw thee polluted in thine own blood, I said unto thee when thou wast in thy blood, Live; yea, I said unto thee when thou wast in thy blood, Live." "Now when I passed by thee, and looked upon thee, behold, thy time was the time of love; and I spread my skirt over thee, and covered thy nakedness; yea, I swore unto thee, and entered into a covenant with thee, saith the Lord GOD, and thou becamest mine." {Ez.16:6,8}

I say, as before, when thy heart is opened, then pray for faith to look unto Christ, that so after thoughts of returning from backslidings may have life and power from him, and be supported by him; then are they like to prosper, else they will prove but faint velocities, or like the early dew, and become but a flashing spiritual qualm; but having, at the first dash, committed yourself and change to Christ's management, he will go through stitch with it, and make good riddance indeed; for the "pleasure of the Lord," on thy heart and life, "shall prosper in his hands." And therefore, it is a foul slanderous calumny, cast by ignorant, if not malicious hearts, on this sweet gospel, to say it makes void the law, and opens a gap to licentiousness. For nothing establishes the law like it, or binds souls to good behavior, as it doth; as you may easily see by the little hint I gave you even now. If you go this way, to begin with Christ himself, you may plow with his heifer, and so untie many a riddle, that will else puzzle your brains; by this means you shall have a strong and impregnable hold to retreat unto upon every occasion of danger; you shall carry a spring of aqua vitae about you always, against fainting; you shall have a wise Counsellor to direct you, or a north star in your eye, by which you may steer your course; a mighty champion, not only to order, but also to fight your battles, whilst you may "stand still and see the salvation of the Lord." By this means you shall never repent of your leaving Egypt, though you come to straits; for this angel of the covenant, going before you, shall level your way, and make it smooth, shall scatter and tread down the mighty that come against you, shall still and quiet the jealous risings of your heart, and so feed you with present earnest and first fruits, as shall draw you on with a longing, until you attain the full possession, both of grace and glory. "You have run well," saith Paul to the Galatians, speaking of the times when they embraced Christ first without works. There is no such progress in holiness, as where Christ enters and sets a soul at work, who oils the wheels, who fills the sails with a full and prosperous gale.