

‘He spared not His Son’.

This evening I want to think with you about the words of the apostle Paul in Romans 8 verse 32: ‘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?’

And I wish to focus in particular on the expression ‘He that spared not His own Son’.

And who is this, I ask, ‘who did not spare His own Son’? This, I answer, is the only true and living God.

This is the God who :

(i) according to another apostle (the apostle Peter) ‘**spared not the angels that sinned, but cast them into hell (ταρταρώω) and delivered them into chains of the deepest gloom to be kept until the judgement**’.¹

We know little for certain of these angels beyond that which Jude adds in his short epistle; namely, that they ‘did not keep within their own position of authority, but left their proper dwelling’.²

As far as further details are concerned, I am reminded of the words of Mark Twain, who, referring to a question he had been asked, said, ‘I was gratified to be able to answer promptly, and I did. I said *I didn’t know*’. And, frankly, as far as any details of the angels’ trespass are concerned, that is precisely what I have to say ... ‘I don’t know’. But what I *do* know is what Peter says, namely, that God ‘spared not the angels *that sinned*’.

And *I have no problem with that*, whatever it was they had done, and whenever and wherever they had done it. As having sinned, they fully merited their terrible judgement.

*But what am I to make of Paul’s statement, that God spared not His own Son ... who, in the words, not of 2 Peter 2 but of 1 Peter 2, ‘did no sin, neither was guile found in His mouth’?*³

‘He who did not spare His own Son’ ... who, I ask again, is this? This is the God who:

(ii) again according to the apostle Peter, ‘**spared not the old (the ancient) world, but saved Noah, one of eight, a preacher of righteousness, bringing in the flood upon the world of the ungodly**’.⁴

The passage in the Bible which speaks of the great Flood tells us that ‘*the Lord saw that the wickedness of man was great in the earth, and that every imagination of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually. And it ...grieved Him (the Lord) at His heart*’.⁵

At the beginning, God had told man to ‘*fill the earth*’,⁶ and fill it he most certainly had, but, not only as God intended, *with offspring*, but ‘*with violence*’.⁷ Long before, ‘*God saw everything that He had made, and, behold, it was very good*’,⁸ but now, ‘*God saw that the wickedness of man was great on the earth*’.⁹ And so He determined to destroy man from off the face of the earth,¹⁰ to wipe out, as Peter said, the ‘ungodly’ with a flood.

And *I have no problem with that*, for, along with the angels, the ancient world fully merited their judgement.

But *what am I to make of Paul’s statement, that God spared not His own Son ... who is on record in John 8 as having said, ‘He that sent me is with me: the Father hath not left me alone; for I do always those things that please Him’?*¹¹ And the God who spared not the ancient world whose imaginations and thoughts were only evil ‘*continually*’ and who thereby ‘*grieved Him*’, spared not His own Son who did ‘*always*’ those things which only ‘*pleased*’ Him!¹²

For a third time, I ask, who is this? This is the God who:

(iii), according to Psalm 78, **spared not the ancient Egyptians**. Verses 50 and 51 of that psalm describe graphically how ‘He (the Lord) made a path for his anger; He did not spare them from death, but gave their lives over to the plague. He struck down every firstborn in Egypt’ (extending, as we know, from prince to prisoner¹³).

And I have no problem with that. I have only to listen to the arrogant defiance of the then Pharaoh in response to the Lord’s demand, ‘Let my people go, that they may hold a feast to me in the wilderness’, which he spoke through Moses His ambassador.¹⁴ Listen to Pharaoh, ‘Who is *the Lord*, that I should obey His voice to let Israel go? *I know not the Lord*, neither will I let Israel go’.¹⁵ Arrogant, blasphemous man!

The Lord's *intention* from the outset had been, of course, to *wholly deliver* His people from the tyranny of Egypt, but He chose to confront Pharaoh with a much lesser demand, namely, that he (Pharaoh) should grant Israel a short holiday to enable them to celebrate a feast in His (the Lord's) honour, and to offer sacrifices to Him. And the Lord did this that He might expose the full extent of Pharaoh's scornful defiance and lack of reason. Though not the Pharaoh who had *originally* taken Israel into slavery, this Pharaoh and his people continued with the earlier policy of oppression and affliction, of bitter and cruel bondage, backed up with taskmasters and their whips.¹⁶ No less than thirteen times is the Egypt of the day labelled 'the house of bondage'.¹⁷

I have no problem therefore with the judgement which God executed on a cruel nation which held His people in bondage, sparing not their souls from death.

But *what am I to make, please, of Paul's statement*, that God spared not *His own Son*, who is on record again in John 8, not as having enslaved or held men in bondage, but as having said, 'If the Son therefore shall make you *free*, you shall be *free* indeed – you will be really free'.¹⁸

And then it was, Paul insists, God's '**own** Son' who He spared not.

We know from the Old Testament that God has many sons by *creation*. I refer, of course, to the angels, who are described there as 'the sons of God'.¹⁹

And, as we learn from the earlier section of Romans 8 (in particular verses 14 and 15), God has many sons by *adoption* (and, thank God, those of us who know the Lord Jesus as Saviour are among them). But the Son who God 'spared not' is *not* Son either by *creation* or by *adoption*. He is God's '*own*' – He is God's only-begotten, eternal and well-beloved – Son.²⁰

And **who is this** who did not spare His *own* Son?

This is **the God who once spared the great and sinful city of Nineveh**. The Old Testament book of Jonah closes as it began, with the word of the Lord to Jonah. 'God said to Jonah ... you have had pity on the gourd (possibly the castor oil plant, which grows rapidly to between 12 and 15 feet. Literally, 'you have *spared* the gourd'), for the which you have not laboured, neither made it grow; which came up in a night, and perished in a night: and should not I *spare* (the same word) Nineveh, that great city, wherein are more than 120,000 persons who cannot discern between their right hand and their left hand; and also much cattle?'²¹

In chapter 4, the Lord had proved Himself exceedingly gracious and patient with His servant. He hadn't left Jonah to sulk away over His sparing of Nineveh. But there was clearly no point in the Lord attempting to argue or to reason with Jonah; Jonah was certainly in no mood for being lectured. Indeed, he was no longer on speaking terms with God at all. For, whereas at the beginning of the chapter '*he prayed to the Lord*, and said ... O Lord, take, I beseech you, my life from me; for it is better for me to die than to live', more recently it is said only that *he wished in himself* to die, and said, 'It is better for me to die than to live'. That is, he now spoke only *to himself*, and *not to God*.

But the all-wise God knew how best to handle His servant. First, just as He had earlier 'prepared' a fish to deliver Jonah from *the terrors of the ocean beneath*,²² the Lord now 'prepared' a plant to deliver him *from the burning sun of the sky above*.²³ And so it was that, though *still 'exceedingly'* displeased on account of the sparing of Nineveh,²⁴ Jonah was '*exceedingly*' glad on account of the gourd and the welcome shade it provided him.²⁵

Ah *but*, alas for poor Jonah, his much-appreciated, divinely-provided shelter didn't last very long! For God caused the plant to wither as quickly as it had grown.²⁶

Jonah was utterly devastated; his gourd, his lovely gourd, was gone. And then, to add to Jonah's general discomfort, God set in motion, like the blast of some mighty furnace, the burning, blistering hot wind of the desert. And then, to cap it all, the sun's unbroken rays beat down mercilessly on the prophet's defenceless head.

Now it was Jonah's turn to wither! All of which proved too much for the desolate prophet, and he '*wished in himself to die*'.²⁷ And, when God ventured to raise with Jonah the question whether he was really justified in being so angry on account of the gourd, Jonah well-nigh exploded.²⁸ 'Angry?' he almost spat out, 'Angry to death!'

And, in this way, God had succeeded in making His servant angry on account of something which had *not been spared!*

And then came the punch-line! '*You have spared a gourd*', the Lord pointed out, 'which cost you nothing, and which was indeed of little value, and yet you presume to find fault with me because *I have spared a city* ... a city which is "great", not only in terms of its wickedness,²⁹ Jonah, but in terms

also of its sizeable human population,³⁰ any one of whom is of infinitely greater value than any number of leafy plants ... not to speak of its many cattle'.

Yes, God spared a sinful and violent city because it had *repented*, but, Paul insists, He 'spared not' His own Son, who knew no sin, who did no violence³¹ and who *needed no repentance!*

Yet again, ***who is this*** who did not spare 'His own Son'?

This is ***the God who once spared Abraham's son***. You may remember that, at the critical moment on the mount in the land of Moriah, when Abraham took the knife to slay his son, 'the angel of the Lord called to him out of heaven, and said, Abraham, Abraham: and he said, Here am I. And He said, Lay not your hand upon the lad, neither do anything to him: for now I know that you fear God, seeing you have not withheld your son, your only son, from me'.³²

So reads our English Bible.³³ But we know from Paul's many quotations from the Old Testament that it was his habit to use the Greek Old Testament. And that translation renders the verse, 'now I know that you fear God, and for my sake have *not spared* your son, the beloved', using the very same word translated 'spared' as here in Romans 8.

There are, of course, *many* points in common between the story of Abraham and Isaac and the relationship between God the Father and our Lord Jesus,³⁴ but there is one notable difference!

For, in the event, Abraham's knife never fell.

Abraham wasn't required to slay his son. Because what God wanted wasn't the death of Isaac, but the devotion of Abraham ... not the sacrifice of a human life, but the surrender of a human will. In a word, He wanted, not Isaac, but Abraham on the altar!

And, having that, He intervened to do what Abraham could not, dare not, do: He (God) spared Abraham's son – which rather spoiled the day for one hapless 'ram caught in a thicket by his horns'!

But, Paul, who I am convinced had his eye on this very story, was quick to observe that the God who spared *Abraham's* son didn't spare *His own* Son!

It is, of course, natural to '***spare one's own***.'

Just think of the parable which Nathan the prophet told to King David following David's great sins in connection with Bathsheba and Uriah.

We read that 'the Lord sent Nathan to David. He came to him, and said to him, "There were two men in one city; the one rich, and the other poor. The rich man had exceeding many flocks and herds: But the poor man had nothing, save one little ewe lamb, which he had bought and nourished up: it grew up together with him, and with his children; it ate of his own food, and drank of his own cup, it lay in his bosom, and was to him as a daughter. And there came a traveller (literally, 'one who dropped in') to the rich man, and *he* (the rich man) *spared to take of his own* flock and of his own herd, to dress for the traveller that was come to him; but took the poor man's lamb, and dressed it for the man that was come to him".³⁵

The wretched man in Nathan's story spared 'his own'. But, Paul tells us, *God didn't!*³⁶

God '*spared* not His own Son'. Imagine what that meant, that:

- He spared Him *none of the judgement* which was rightfully mine.
- He spared Him *not one drop* of the cup of wrath which He (God) gave Him to drink for me.³⁷
- He spared Him *not one stripe of His rod*, which stripes fell on Him, and by which I have been spiritually healed.³⁸
- He spared Him *not one thrust* of His unsheathed sword. I hear God's words in Zechariah 13, 'Awake, O sword, against my shepherd, against the man that is my fellow, says the Lord of hosts: smite the shepherd ...'.³⁹

We might well ponder the third verse of Elizabeth Clephane's grand old gospel song, 'There were ninety and nine':⁴⁰

*'But none of the ransomed ever knew
How deep were the waters crossed;
Nor how dark was the night the Lord passed through
Ere He found His sheep that was lost'.*

Did God *really* love me that much?

He did! And, far from 'sparing' His own Son, the apostle asserts that He 'delivered Him up *for us all*'. How wonderfully inclusive, and yet, at the same time, how wonderfully personal and individual; He did it for *every one of us*.

And yet there is one very sobering implication of all this; namely, that God must regard my sins very seriously indeed if He could not spare His own Son one iota of His judgement if He was going to save me. And this means that there is absolutely no way in which I can ever save myself, however good or worthy I may consider myself to be!

We can hardly miss the point that Paul's statement that God 'spared not His own Son but delivered Him up for us all' forms part of a short (but very forceful) line of reasoning.

'How', Paul asks, 'shall He not with Him also freely (graciously) give us all things?' The apostle is arguing from the greater to the less. Having given *nothing* and *no-one less* than His own Son for our sake, Paul reasons, it is altogether inconceivable that God could or would deny us any lesser gift or blessing.⁴¹

In other words, it is unthinkable that the One who withheld nothing *from His own Son* by way of suffering and judgement *on my account*, should now withhold anything *from me* by way of true bliss and blessing *on His account*!⁴² Such is heaven's wonderful logic!

If we truly are numbered among God's people by faith in the Lord Jesus, we can *surely* trust Him to bestow and lavish on us all things necessary for our ultimate good and glorification.

I close with a verse of Horatio Bonar's hymn, 'Blessed be God, our God':

*He sparéd not His Son!
'Tis this that silences each rising fear,
'Tis this that bids the hard thought disappear;
He sparéd not His Son!*⁴³

Footnote

¹ 2 Pet. 2. 4.

² Jude 6.

³ 1 Pet. 2. 21-22.

⁴ 2 Pet. 2. 5.

⁵ Gen. 6. 5-6.

⁶ Gen. 1. 28.

⁷ Gen. 6. 11.

⁸ Gen. 1. 31.

⁹ Gen. 6. 5.

¹⁰ Gen. 6. 7.

¹¹ John 8. 29.

¹² And concerning whom He twice declared, 'This is my *beloved* Son, in whom I am *well pleased*'.

¹³ Exod. 12. 29.

¹⁴ Exod. 5. 1.

¹⁵ Exod. 5. 2.

¹⁶ Exod. 2. 23; 3. 7, 9; 5. 6; 6. 5, 9.

¹⁷ Exod. 13. 3, 14; 20. 2; Deut. 5. 6; 6. 12; 7. 8; 8. 14; 13. 5, 10; Josh. 24. 17; Judges 6. 8; Jer. 34. 13; Micah 6. 4.

¹⁸ John 8. 36.

¹⁹ In Job 1. 6 and 2. 1, and, as I understand it, in Genesis 6. 4.

²⁰ Indeed, I note that here in verse 32 Paul uses a stronger term than he had back in verse 3 ('what the law could not do, in that it was weak through the flesh, God sending *His own Son* in the likeness of sinful flesh, and for sin, condemned sin in the flesh'). The word translated 'own' here in verse 32 lays great stress on the intimacy and uniqueness of the relationship. Compare its use in John 5. 18: 'Therefore the Jews sought the more to kill Him, because He not only had broken the sabbath, but said also that God was *His own Father*, making Himself equal with God'.

²¹ Jonah 4. 10-11.

²² Jonah 1. 17. Jonah's prayer in chapter 2 was not a *plea* for deliverance, but *praise* for deliverance!

²³ Jonah 4. 6.

²⁴ Jonah 4. 1.

²⁵ Jonah 4. 6.

²⁶ Jonah 4. 7.

²⁷ Jonah 4. 8.

²⁸ Jonah 4. 9.

²⁹ Jonah 1. 2.

³⁰ Jonah 4. 11.

³¹ Isa. 53. 9.

³² Gen. 22. 11-12.

³³ Abraham had two sons but he had only one Isaac.

³⁴ Indeed the expression ('your son, the beloved') mirrors perfectly the expression used in the New Testament by the Father of our Saviour, 'my Son, the beloved', both at His baptism and on the so-called Mount of the Transfiguration, Matt. 3. 17 and 17. 5. It is well known that the word 'love' occurs for the first time in the Old Testament when describing the feelings of a father for a son (of Abraham for Isaac): 'your only son Isaac, whom you love' (Gen. 22. 2). Interestingly, the first reference to love in the New Testament is also of a Father for a Son, when the Father declared His Son to be His 'beloved' at the time of His baptism. Again, the offering up of Isaac was planned by God to take place on the mount which He chose in 'the land of *Moriah*', Gen. 22. 2-4, 9; and our Lord was crucified a little way outside the city of Jerusalem, not far from the Temple site, of which 2 Chronicles 3. 1 says, 'Solomon began to build the house of the Lord at Jerusalem in mount *Moriah*, where the Lord appeared unto David his father, in the place that David had prepared in the threshing floor of Ornan the Jebusite'. Yes, there are many points of comparison.

³⁵ 2 Sam. 12. 1-4. And then the bomb went off! David could still remember the despicable actions of Nabal, the rich man who had been determined to hold onto all his possessions and to share them with nobody else others – and that included David! (1 Sam. 25. 10-11.)

It is by no means impossible that in the parable of Nathan (2 Sam. 12. 1-4), the Lord portrayed the bad man in such a way as to remind David of Nabal. Note the reference to the man's riches, to his 'exceeding many flocks and herds', and to his fundamental selfishness which expressed itself in refusing to part with 'his own flock and of his own herd' for the benefit of someone else – for the 'traveller' (the 'one who dropped in').

This association of thought (together with David's shepherd-feelings for the 'one little ewe lamb' {for the like of which he would onetime have readily risked his life in tackling lion and bear, 1 Sam. 17. 34-36}, together with his inbuilt sense of justice) may well account for David's anger being 'greatly kindled against the man', and for David's decision that the wretched man would 'surely die' (that he was 'a son of death', literally) (2 Sam. 12. 5), just as Nabal had died at God's hand.

It was, for David, an extremely pointed and stirring story! Did David ever come, I wonder, to see the striking contrast between the 'Nabal/Abigail' situation and the 'Uriah/Bathsheba' situation? That he obtained each woman as his wife following the death of her husband, but that the hands which were clean of 'blood' in the case of Abigail, 1 Sam. 25. 26, 31, 33, ran red with blood in the case of Bathsheba? (2 Sam. 11. 15.)

³⁶ 'A man spares his son who serves him', God said, Mal. 3. 17. Yet He 'spared not His own Son' who was His supremely obedient Servant, Phil. 2. 5-8.

³⁷ John 18. 11.

³⁸ Isa. 53. 5.

³⁹ Zech. 13. 7. This was a verse quoted by the Lord Jesus of Himself on the way to Gethsemane, and, from there, to the cross, Mark 14. 27. I note that the place of our Lord's crucifixion was in the vicinity, not only where the angel of the Lord *spoke* to spare *Abraham's son from Abraham's knife*, but where God *spoke* to stay the hand of the destroying angel – to *spare Jerusalem from the blows of the angel's outstretched sword*, 1 Chron. 21. 16-27. It was in that very vicinity that God's *own sword* smote His Shepherd. No 'sparing' voice resounded over Golgotha that mid-afternoon!

⁴⁰ It was originally written as a poem, rather than as a song or hymn.

⁴¹ There is indeed an emphasis in the opening words of verse 32 which is lost in the King James Version rendering of '*He that* spared not'. This would be better translated '*Who indeed* spared not'; that is, 'He is *the very One who* spared not'. Grammatically speaking, the particle underlines the pronoun; It involves intensifying the normal sense of a conjunction. (See Handley C. G. Moule on Romans 8. 32, and Daniel Wallace in 'Greek Grammar Beyond the Basics'.)

⁴² True, *human selfishness* might argue that, 'having already given so much, we cannot expect God to give still more', but *divine love and generosity* argues rather that, 'having already given so very much, we can rest assured that God will most certainly give, not only more, but graciously and freely *give* us 'all things' which are for our real and ultimate good – just as He *works* and regulates 'all things' for our real and ultimate good! (Rom. 8. 28.) And so none of the mind-blowing blessings Paul lists in this section of Romans (the indwelling Holy Spirit, our sonship and justification, God's calling, the hope of glory, an over-ruling providence, eternal security – or whatever) should surprise us.

⁴³ The hymn commences ...

*Blessed be God, our God!
Who gave for us His well-beloved Son,
His gift of gifts, all other gifts in one.
Blessed be God our God!*