

LETTERS TO THE ARMY

August 2008

PASTORAL LETTERS FROM THE OFFICE OF THE GENERAL TO SALVATIONISTS ACROSS THE WORLD

This is the ninth in a series of Pastoral Letters from the General to every Salvationist across the world.

The Pastoral Letters are intended to be distributed unchanged and entire to all Salvationists and may be shared also with others interested in the sacred purposes for which God raised up The Salvation Army.

INTRODUCTION

Greetings in the name of Jesus Christ.

This comes to all Salvationists with my strong, ongoing affection in Christ for you, and with my prayers for your effectiveness in the sacred calling that God, in his supreme wisdom, has placed upon the peoples known as Salvationists.

It has been laid upon my heart that I am to take a step of obedience under God by reaching out to you all through Pastoral Letters written from time to time. I write therefore in order to obey the one who has created us all, and with a longing that what is written will affirm, encourage and inspire you.

The themes for these occasional Pastoral Letters continue to be the themes God reveals. His holy will is made known in many ways. I pledge myself to be mindful that his will is often revealed through interaction with members of the Body and not only or always in the seclusion of the place of prayer.

It is my deep hope that each Pastoral Letter will be read wherever Salvationists are to be found, whether in private or in public settings. The chosen themes may prompt discussion, prayer and – as appropriate – action.

All Scripture quotations are from the *New International Version*, unless otherwise stated.

Shaw Clifton
General

PASTORAL LETTER NINE

SALVATION

Warm Salvationist greetings from London!

The theme of this ninth Pastoral Letter is that of salvation, a theme so basic and central to the whole gospel, and therefore a theme that goes right to the heart of Salvationism and of what it means to be a Salvationist in today's world.

I find myself often seeking to grasp afresh all that God has done for me in his plan of salvation. I ask myself if I have truly plumbed the depths of it all, if I have fully understood. Sometimes God's actions, in gifting to us a Saviour, seem so astounding that they take on an appearance of impossibility. Even the great hymn writers felt the need to express this, such as Charles Wesley:

*'And can it be that I should gain
An interest in the Saviour's blood?'*

Wesley goes on in that same verse to press home similar questions:

*'Died he for me...
how can it be...?'*

I can identify so strongly with Wesley's words. Can you?

How is it possible that Almighty God has looked upon us with deep compassion, with mercy so powerful that he sent Jesus? How is it possible that Jesus, so pure and divine, became a mere man for my sake and for yours? How is it possible that he suffered death for me and you (Hebrews 2:9)? How is it possible that he rose from the grave to defeat death for ever and to guarantee for us eternal life through faith in him?

Even the great apostle, Paul, recognised the outrageous nature of Christian belief. He described his message – our message still today - as 'foolishness' (1 Corinthians 1:21), and as a 'stumbling block' (1:23). He knew that according to mere human logic the claims of Christ make no sense at all, but that God's 'foolishness' is 'wiser than man's wisdom' and that the 'weakness' of God is 'stronger than man's strength' (1:25).

So by mortal standards salvation makes no sense at all. Yet it was all God's idea, God's amazing initiative, all because he is pure love and will not let us go without a fight. We end up lost in wonder, love and praise! What a miracle! What wonderful, wonderful love!

All this is one outstanding reason why I am in the Army, with its marvellous name: The *Salvation* Army, a name given by God to our sanctified forbears and signalling the most important events, the most miraculous truths, and the most astounding claims the world has ever witnessed. Yet we must never allow our name, and its frequent use

or its close familiarity, to soften or blur for us the keen cutting edge of the deep spiritual meaning of the word, salvation. It is a word denoting the very nature of the heart of the Creator.

Therefore you and I, as Salvationists, are called of God to live saved lives. We are intended by him, as are all believers, to show to the world what a saved life looks like, to make - by his grace within us - a daily reality of the effects of salvation. Am I living like that? Are you living like that?

Because he has set us free from the shackles of sin we have become servants of divine and righteous planning (Romans 6:18). Let us serve well.

There is of course one thing that above all else can prevent us from serving well and that is sin. I am thinking now of personal sin. Being saved is no guarantee of freedom from temptation or of exemption from falling. That is why it is so vitally important for a believer to press onward into the blessing of a clean heart and a hatred of all sin whatever form it takes, large or small.

Also the Army, as an organisation for Christ, must be on guard against sin creeping in. Sometimes it seems there is sin in the camp (Hebrews 13:11-14) – such as back-biting, horrible gossip, self-seeking, boasting, dishonesty with money, unholy ambition, lack of Christlike love. When this happens we become weak and ineffective for the gospel. We see decline. Instead we want the Lord to walk among us because he finds us to be a saved and holy people, beneficiaries and exemplars of his salvation, so that his matchless, divine protection remains with us and we can be abundantly fruitful for him (Deuteronomy 23:14).

Fellow Salvationists, I am on my knees with you to pray for his constant presence, asking that the Father's plan of salvation will not be in vain in my life or in the Army.

You are all constantly in my prayers, and again I commit you to the perfect love of Christ.

Shaw Clifton
General