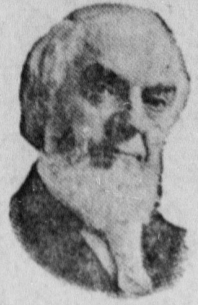


PEOPLE'S PULPIT...



Sermon by
CHARLES T. RUSSELL,
Pastor Brooklyn
Tabernacle.

Thieves In Paradise.

"Verily I say unto thee to-day, thou shalt be with me in paradise" (Luke xxiii, 43).

Seattle, Wash., July 25.—Pastor Russell, of Brooklyn Tabernacle, addressed the Bible Students' Convention twice today. We publish one of his addresses as follows:—

The theology which came down to us from the dark ages was wonderful in its extremes. It pictured Divine wrath as unsatisfied with anything short of an eternity of torture for the sinner, and in the next breath assured us of a Divine mercy which would take the vilest sinners to an eternity of glory without character development, merely at their request. One would suppose that neither of these doctrines could command support amongst reasoning, intelligent people, but they do; and the only explanation of the matter is that by reason of the fall the balance of human judgment, on moral questions particularly, is sadly undone. It is fair, however, to suppose that the majority of intelligent people have never so much as given these subjects consideration. Receiving them through the various creeds from childhood's hour, they have swallowed them without reflection, taught that to doubt them would bring the doubters under the ban of Divine displeasure, and make sure that Divine mercy should never reach them.

Bad Effects of Error.

It is difficult to measure the bad results which have flown from the mis-interpretation of our text. (1) The Divine character and government have thereby been traduced and measurably brought into contempt as unphilosophical, unreasonable, arbitrary, instead of wise and just. Two vagabonds gambled and quarreled, drew their revolvers and shot each other. The more contemptible of the two killed his antagonist instantly, while he himself lingered in consciousness for a few minutes, during which he had opportunity to say, "God be merciful to me a sinner." The creeds of Protestantism tell us that the one who used the magical words was instantly ushered to heavenly glory and companionship with the pure and holy throughout eternity. The other, we are told, though less vile, went instantly to eternal torture and despair, without a single ray of hope.

Is it any wonder that such unreasonable conclusions have driven many of the brighter minds of Protestantism into infidelity, and led others back to the teachings of the Church of Rome, which, to say the least, is more consistent, in that it would put both of the culprits into "Purgatory," where after centuries of torture and instruction in righteousness they might be prepared, either or both of them, for heavenly glory. We are not advocating either infidelity or Romanism; we are defending the Bible, but incidentally must admit that our Protestant views of some portions of Holy Writ have been very unsatisfactory and very baneful.

(2) Who can measure the evil effects of this doctrine upon thousands, leading them to believe that whatever their crime, a few magical words of repentance will straighten it all out? Can it be doubted that this wrong theory is accountable for much of the wickedness committed by those who know better, who reside in civilized lands? First of all they doubt the doctrine of eternal torment, being unable to imagine how any one could burn forever and yet not be destroyed. Secondly, if there be such a place of eternal torment, they reason, it is quite improbable that they will die so suddenly as not to have time to offer a petition for mercy—a petition which, if offered, will surely be heard and answered, and bring them to the regions of the blest.

The further reasoning is, that while heaven is certainly desirable, it is useless to seek it via the strait gate and narrow way and self-sacrificing experiences of Jesus and the Apostles and all the saints. The reasoning is, that these saintly ones may indeed occupy a higher position in heaven than those who are saved after a life of sin and carelessness by a momentary prayer in the dying hour; but the philosophizing is, that the pleasures of sin for a season more than compensate for the higher glory of the saints, since even the sinners are to get to paradise at the small cost of nine words—the supposed teaching of our text.

The True Interpretation.

Before proceeding to discuss the principles involved as between the right and the wrong interpretation of our Lord's words, let us notice what he really did say and really did mean, and how it happened the true meaning was lost sight of and the erroneous one adopted generally. The Bible teaching that "the dead know not anything," together with the doctrine that the resurrection of the dead is the Divine provision, has long been lost sight of. Our Lord's own words that "No man hath ascended up to heaven" have been overlooked, and so has his teaching respecting his Kingdom—that the blessing of the Church and of the world awaits his second coming, when he will establish his Kingdom under the whole heavens in power and great glory. Losing sight of these truths has led directly to the acceptance of the general error respecting our text.

Let us begin the investigation by noting what the dying thief requested. He had heard his companion berating our Lord, saying, if thou be Messiah, save thyself and us. He had sufficient character to realize the dishonesty of classifying our Lord with evil doers. He spoke up, reproving his companion; and then turned to Jesus, and, as a reward, asked, "Lord, remember me when thou comest into thy Kingdom." He did not ask to be remembered in heaven, nor that day, but when our Lord, who was then being crucified, should attain to his Kingdom.

As the thief's request was a reasonable one, our Lord's answer was no less reasonable. He said, in the words of our text, Verily (truly) I say unto thee to-day (this day of my agony and rejection by Israel, and crucifixion by the Roman soldiers; this day, when I seem to be an imposter and not at all the Messiah; nevertheless, truly I tell you to-day) thou shalt be with me in Paradise. I do not tell you when you shall be with me, nor have you even asked me to tell you. You have asked to be remembered when I come into my Kingdom, when I shall have fully taken control of the Kingdom under the whole heavens, when the speedy result will be that the entire world will become a Paradise, and you have asked my assurance that you will be there, and will remember you as requested.

Punctuation Not Inspired.

It will be noticed that this different interpretation makes necessary the changing of the comma from before "to-day" to after it. We remark that the punctuation of our text was surely not inspired, for punctuation was not invented until centuries after our Bible was written. Our interpretation, with the comma after "to-day," makes this entire passage reasonable and harmonious—consistent with all the remainder of the Bible, and logical.

Further, be it remembered, that Jesus was not in Paradise on the day he died; nor has Paradise lost, yet been restored. Jesus was dead, and St. Peter declares he "arose from the dead on the third day." He then declared to Mary, "I have not yet ascended to my Father and to your Father, to my God and to your God" (John xx, 17).

As a matter of fact, the other thief also will be in Paradise. All mankind, redeemed by our Lord's sacrifice, will have the privilege of the Millennial blessings. As we read, "All that are in their graves shall hear the voice of the Son of Man and come forth." The Church will come forth to the heavenly glory and condition, for which they have been prepared by the trials, the disciplines, the lessons, the chastenings, the polishings, of this present life. There will be the instantaneous change, or resurrection, from earthly to heavenly conditions. Those of the spirit-begotten ones, all who willfully walk after the flesh and not after the Spirit, having had their trial in the present life, will be accounted worthy of the Second Death. All the remainder of mankind, not having come to a knowledge of the Truth, not having incurred, therefore, the responsibility of this age, will come forth during the Millennium when Messiah's Kingdom shall be established and his rule of righteousness shall have brought the earth to the condition of Paradise. Both of these thieves, and all other thieves and all other evil doers, all of the heathen, all who have not in the present life come to a clear knowledge of the truth, and sinned against light, against the holy Spirit, will be there—there to be blessed, to be enlightened, to be brought to a knowledge of the Truth, and if they will, to be helped out of ignorance, superstition, sin, weaknesses—mental, moral and physical.

Not Luck, but Character.

The attaining of eternal life will not be a matter of luck, but a matter of character. It is true at the present time that chance, or luck, would seem to be associated with many of our affairs, except as we are able to view them in the light of Divine revelation. Some of us were fortunate to be better born than others—born of religious parents. Some are fortunate in being born in religious communities, and in a land of liberty and enlightenment. Some are unfortunate in being born in heathen lands, of heathen parentage, etc. But the Scripture shows that during this present time God is exercising his sovereign power in electing a special class of special characters, and assures us that a majority of these are being called from amongst the mixed peoples of Europe and America, and that proportionately few are being gathered from other nationalities.

If all of the non-elect were assigned to eternal torment, or even to Purgatory, a grave injustice would be chargeable against the Almighty Elector. But this is not the case. The Lord is no respecter of persons, but is taking out from the world of mankind, from every nation, those with suitable characters, those upon whom his Truth and Grace exercise a transforming influence. The non-elect, not worthy of a blessing amongst the faithful of the first class now being selected, pass at death to the tomb, to

the prison-house of *sheol, hades*, where there is no wisdom, knowledge nor device, as the Scriptures declare (Ecclesiastes ix, 10). Although unworthy of a share in the blessings now being dispensed, God's love and mercy pursue after these through Christ, and in their interest the Millennial Kingdom will be established. Under its domination Satan will be bound, every influence of evil will be restrained, and every good influence will be brought into captivity, to the intent that all those at present non-elect, and unworthy of the present salvation, may be brought to a savable condition through the rewards and punishments (judgments) of the Millennial Age. The result of the purifying influences of that time upon the willing and obedient will be full human perfection and the reward of everlasting life in Paradise restored—world-wide, under the whole heaven. The result to the unwilling who will resist God's grace and merciful provisions will be eternal death—extinction—the Second Death—Gehenna (Revelation xx, 14, 15).

Character a Prerequisite.

The Bible, in harmony with sanctified common sense, teaches that character is a prerequisite of Divine favor and eternal life. Whoever is called during this Gospel Age and fails to develop character, will fail to attain the reward of life eternal. Similarly, in the world's trial time, or Day of Judgment, the Millennial Age, character will be the test. All the influences of the great Kingdom of Messiah will be exercised with a view to the development of character, and only those properly exercised thereby will get the reward of earthly life eternal.

The question properly arises here, What kind of character will meet with the Divine approval and be granted the reward of life everlasting? We answer that God has but one standard, which is fully set forth in the Scriptures. The Law of God is the standard. That Law standard is, "Thou shalt love the Lord, thy God, with all thy heart, with all thy mind, with all thy being, with all thy strength, and thy neighbor as thyself." As our Redeemer testified, on these two commandments hang all the Law and the prophets; all the divine blessings and promises and covenants are to those who develop the character here described.

World Actually Attains.

The Scriptures show a difference as between God's dealings with the Church in this age and the world in the next age, even though there be but the one Law or standard of character for both. During the Millennium, when everything will be favorable to human uplift, during the "times of restitution of all things which God hath spoken by the mouth of all the holy prophets since the world began," actual obedience to the Divine Law, and actual attainment of this standard of character, will be required. Not all at once, however. The poor world, "born in sin and shapen in iniquity"—in sin did their mothers conceive them—are "prone to sin as the sparks to fly upward." Steeped in degradation they will require years, if not centuries, of determined resistance of sin and cultivation of the principles of righteousness to develop in them absolutely the character required by the Divine Law—Love supreme for God and Love for the neighbor as for oneself.

During the Millennium the weaknesses and imperfections of the race will be conceded by the great Teacher, Christ and the Church—Jesus the Head and the Church his members. The more degraded the will, the more perverted the conscience and judgment, the more difficult will be the ascent of humanity from the horrible pit of sin and death, even with the assistance of the Redeemer. The less degraded the mind, the less perverted the conscience, the stronger the will for righteousness, the easier will be the ascent along the Highway of Holiness, of which it is written, "The redeemed shall walk therein" (Isalah xxxv, 9). The laggards will receive the "stripes" of correction for their assistance; the zealous will receive the smiles and blessings of the great High Priest, the great Teacher and Mediator like unto Moses, of whom it is written, "And it shall come to pass, that every soul which will not hear (obey) that Prophet, shall be destroyed from among the people" (Acts iii, 23). All the reformation must be made during the allotted time—the thousand years of Christ's reign. Sin must be put down—not only outward sin, but inward sin, even in the very thoughts and intents of the heart. Sin must be eradicated, even to the extent of the destruction of the willful sinner in the Second Death.

If the thieves and liars and evil doers in general would realize that they are either making character or undermining character every day, what a helpful influence it would have upon the social and political and financial life of the world! The effect would be the very reverse of that which is now made by the false interpretation of our Lord's words to the thief, which we are seeking to correct.

If every pernicious word uttered were realized to be so much of an undermining influence, if every pernicious thought were similarly recognized, with what carefulness would mankind come to guard their thoughts and their words, as well as their deeds. They would attentively learn the great general lesson set forth in the Scriptures, and also in the book of nature, namely, "Whosoever a man soweth that shall he also reap." Who shall say that there would not be less "sowing of wild oats" if all were assured that a proportionate crop would be unavoidably reaped, and that no mere prayer of repentance would constitute an "open sesame" to heavenly glory to the one who had lived a life deserving reprobation and punishment.

LEFT TO NANCY HANKS AND GOD.

What would modern education experts have made of Lincoln if, as a baby, he had been put in their care? They would probably have started him on sterilized milk, clothed him in disinfected garments, sent him to kindergarten where he would have learned to weave straw mats and sing about the "Blue Bird on the Branch." Then the dentist would have straightened his teeth, the oculist would have fitted him with glasses, and in the primary grade he would have been taught by pictures and diagrams the difference between a cow and a pig, and through nature study he would have learned that the catbird did not lay kittens. By the time he was eight he would have become a "young gentleman," at ten he would know more than the old folks at home; at twelve and fourteen he would take up manual training, and within two years make a rolling pin and tie it with a blue ribbon. In the high school at sixteen, where in four years he would learn that Mars was the reputed son of Juno, and to recite a stanza from "The Lady of the Lake." Then to college, where he would have joined the glee club and Greek letter fraternity, smoked cigars and graduated, and then become a clerk in a banker's office; and never, never do any one any harm! Well—perhaps—we don't know and can't tell what might have been, but we can't help feeling thankful that Lincoln's training and education were left to Nancy Hanks—and God.—Universalist Ledger.

Politics in Labor Meeting.

Bad feeling among the members of the Central Labor Union over the injection of city politics into that body became so intense in Philadelphia on Saturday that the President, John J. Murphy, was obliged to adjourn the regular weekly session in a summary manner. A motion had been made to endorse the candidacy for Register of Wills of E. O. Lewis, the candidate of the William Penn and Democratic parties. This caused a violent protest from the delegates who are in sympathy with the regular Republican organization and the meeting ended in an uproar.

U. E. Festival.

The members of the United Evangelical church, of Spring Mills, will hold a festival on the church lot, on August 21, 1909.

Rough House at Lock Haven

The Roat brothers—E. K. and Tom, of Gallagher township, with several companions, went to Lock Haven on Friday and proceeded to get on the outside of too much booze. After knocking one or two men down on Jay street late in the afternoon, and disporting themselves in wild west style, they sauntered forth looking for more trouble, after each of the brothers had provided themselves with a brick bat as a weapon of defense. About 6 o'clock the brothers entered the Irvin house bar room and asked for beer, which was refused them by the clerk, George Kyler. They demanded to be served with the drinks or they would smash things up, whereupon George forcibly ejected one of them from the room. Aaron Kyler, proprietor of the Irvin house, then appeared on the scene, and ordered the other brother out of the place. They were afterwards jailed.

Communion.

The second quarterly communion service will be held in the local United Evangelical church, next Sunday evening, at which time the presiding elder of the district, Rev. J. C. Reeser, will preach the word and officiate. The people of Bellefonte always enjoy hearing Rev. Reeser and honor him with a good attendance.

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