

THIS SERMON IS A REGULAR WEEKLY FEATURE

PEOPLE'S PULPIT...



Sermon by
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Three Men and Two
Women Whom
Jesus Loved.

Text, "Lord, He Whom Thou
Lovest Is Sick."

Chicago, June 26.—Pastor Russell of the Brooklyn Tabernacle preached here twice today in Orchestra Hall. As usual he had a large and attentive audience. We quote one of his discourses in part as follows:

All men who have any knowledge of Jesus esteem him—Christians, Gentiles, and Jews. All men whatever their religious convictions are ready to admit the surpassing personality of the great Nazarene and his wonderful words of life. It is as respects his Messiahship that they differ. However, we submit that if he were not the special servant of Jehovah, the Son of God, as he claimed, sent into the world on a special mission, then he must of necessity have been either a deceived man or a wicked impostor. His wonderful personality and words of justice and wisdom and love contradict the thought that he was either ignorant or a deceiver. Hence the only tenable ground is that he was a deceived man or else that he was indeed the Son of God who acted and spoke and performed miracles under Divine direction and power. We hold that the evidences of his teaching overwhelmingly corroborate the truth of his claims. But here we make a distinction between the claims which our Lord Jesus made for himself and other claims which have been made for him without his sanction and without apostolic or other inspired corroboration.

Let it not be supposed that we are forgetting the length and breadth of Jesus' love for all humanity and a special love for all his disciples, yes, for all who loved righteousness and sought, as he did, to do the Father's will. In keeping with this was his prayer for his disciples on the night before his crucifixion. In connection with which we read, "Jesus having loved his own, loved them unto the end" (John xiii, 1). And again his statement "Greater love hath no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends" (John xv, 13). And again his statement, "Who is my mother, and who are my brethren? And he stretched forth his hand to his disciples, and said, Behold my mother, and my brethren! For whosoever shall do the will of my Father which is in Heaven, the same is my brother, and sister, and mother" (Matthew xiii, 48-50). These expressions give us a glimpse of the length and breadth of the love of Jesus. But for the present occasion let us consider those persons whom Jesus is said to have specially loved.

"Jesus Beholding Him Loved Him."
The rich young nobleman who came to the Lord said, Rabbi, what good thing shall I do that I may inherit the Kingdom of God? Jesus saith unto him, Thou knowest the commandments... and he said unto him, Master, all these have I observed from my youth. Then Jesus beholding him, loved him. Jesus lovingly admired the young man who was thus desirous of being in full accord with the Heavenly Father's will. That young man had very much of the Master's own spirit. He wanted to do right and he desired to have the gift of God, eternal life. He thought that he must have merited this by his faithful attention to the Law. Yet he knew that he had not attained to eternal life, that the death sentence was still upon him. He sought counsel of the greatest Rabbi, the greatest Teacher. That Teacher loved so earnest a spirit and proffered him advice on what he still lacked of coming fully up to God's requirements of those who will be granted a place in the Messianic Kingdom, which in "due time" is to bless Israel and, through Israel, all the families of the earth.

In no uncertain terms the Master gave the young man to see that while he had been keeping, probably to the best of his ability, the commandments of the decalogue, he had only imperfectly discerned the meaning of the Divine requirement of love for his neighbor as for himself. The young man was very rich. And to fulfill the requirements of the Law to love his neighbor as himself would have meant not the hoarding of wealth, nor necessarily the distribution of it all, but the wise use of it in the interest of his fellowmen. But to gain a share in the Kingdom would require even more than this. He must take up his cross and become a follower of Jesus—walking in the steps of full obedience to the Divine will. The price was too much for the young man, and he went his way. Jesus merely answered the question but did not urge the young man to thus present himself a living sacrifice to God and his service. Indeed in no case did Jesus ever do more than invite—never did he urge. On the contrary he advised, sit down first and count the cost of discipleship.

What could we surmise respecting the eternal destiny of this young man who had been striving so earnestly to keep the Law and to gain eternal life, and who turned from Jesus and declined to take up the cross and follow him? Could we suppose that Divine Justice would send such a man to eternal torment under these conditions? If there were such a penalty over him

could we suppose that Jesus would have allowed him to go without urging him strenuously, without at least warning him, that by his course he was making the choice of eternal torment? Can we suppose that our Master knew that all the people whom he addressed and who failed to accept his message would be consequently consigned to eternal torture, and that he let them go without urging the matter upon them? We could not so think! Thank God we are gradually getting free from the bondage of error fastened upon us by those who mis-translated certain words in our Bible.

We get the proper view when we remember that Jesus' message at that time was "The Gospel of the Kingdom." He was merely inviting whoever might have the ear to hear and the heart to appreciate the privilege to become associated with himself in the glorious Kingdom for which he told his disciples to pray, "Thy Kingdom come; thy will be done on earth as it is done in heaven." What the rich young man lost was the special privilege of becoming a joint-heir with Christ in that Kingdom which, in due time, will be established and whose mission will be the blessing of Israel and the world. It will bring to them "times of restitution of all things which God hath spoken by the mouth of all the holy prophets since the world began" (Acts iii, 19-21.)

"He Whom Thou Lovest Is Sick."
Our text stands related to a very wonderful chapter in our Lord's ministry. Jesus with his disciples was about three days' journey from Bethany, the home of Lazarus, Martha and Mary. But they knew his whereabouts, for he was a special friend and their home was his home whenever he was near Jerusalem. Lazarus took seriously ill. But the two sisters, Martha and Mary, feared nothing, since they had such great confidence in Jesus, even to belief in his ability to awaken sleepers from death. They thought it proper to send the Master word respecting Lazarus, but not proper to dictate to him what should be done in the case. Rather they left to himself to decide whether he should speak the word and rebuke the disease or whether he should come to Bethany and take the sick by the hand and say, Arise. The simple message they sent was, "Lord, he whom thou lovest is sick." The beautiful, childlike, simple faith which they exhibited must have been very precious in the Master's sight. Nevertheless Jesus said nothing, and did nothing in the matter for three days. Then he said to his disciples, "Our friend Lazarus sleepeth." They did not grasp his meaning until he said to them plainly, Lazarus is dead; and I am glad for your sakes that I was not there. I am glad because it will give me an opportunity to demonstrate to you and through you to all who shall be my disciples in the future the great power of God that is vested in me in respect to the resurrection of the dead.

All Bible Students surely have noticed how frequently in the Scriptures the word "sleep" is used as a poetical synonym for death. "Abraham slept with his fathers." "David slept with his fathers." Prophets, priests and kings are said to have slept with their fathers, whether good or bad. Likewise the New Testament uses the same figure of speech. We read that St. Stephen the martyr, stoned to death, "fell asleep." St. Paul speaks of the Church as falling asleep in death and refers to all of our friends, good and bad, who go down into death, as being "asleep in Jesus." He tells us that we need not sorrow for them as others who know not the resurrection hope. All who fall asleep in death because of Adam's transgression and its death sentence have in Jesus a Divinely appointed Redeemer who in God's due time is to awaken all the sleeping hosts of Adam's race. "All that are in their graves shall hear the voice of the Son of man and come forth." They that have done good (who have secured Divine approval as worthy of eternal life) shall come forth unto the resurrection of life (full perfection); and they that have done evil (that have not secured the Divine approval as being worthy of eternal life) shall come forth in the resurrection for judgment (John v, 28, 29) or trial, for discipline, for correction in righteousness during Messiah's reign of 1,000 years.

Coming forth in that judgment time or trial time, all the willing and obedient will eventually be lifted out of sin and death, while those disobedient to the light and opportunity will be again consigned to death—Second Death, everlasting extinction (John v, 28, 29, R. V.).

We have read our Bibles too carelessly in the past and have given too much heed to those who, with less opportunities than ourselves, grossly misinterpreted its teachings. What did we think respecting this word "sleep" anyway? Did we suppose that both the good and the bad "sleep" in heaven? We were told that the bad would go to a place too warm for sleep. But our own brains and our own Bibles never thought of using in connection with the subject. Now, when we hearken to the Word of God, how plain, how simple, how reasonable, are its teachings! The dead are dead and not alive. However, in view of God's plan that there shall be a resurrection of the dead "in due time" he speaks of the dead not as extinct like the brute, but as merely asleep. They are waiting for the morning—the glorious morning of Messiah's Kingdom, when "the Sun of Righteousness shall arise with healing in its beams," when Satan shall be bound for a thousand years and deceive the peoples no more. Instead of the reign of Sin and Death the reign of Righteousness and Life-everlasting shall begin. How beautifully the Scriptures answer the question of where the dead sleep, "Many of them that sleep in the dust of the earth shall awake" (Daniel xii, 2).

"Lazarus, Come Forth."
Jesus and his disciples turned their steps toward Bethany. Poor Martha and Mary meantime were sorely disappointed. Not for a moment did they suppose that their mighty Friend would allow this trouble to come upon them—that he would neglect to come or to use his power to save Lazarus from dying. So grief-stricken and so heart-broken were they that Martha only came to meet the Master, and her first words were those of gentle reproach reminding him of their disappointment in him: "Lord, if thou hadst been here—if thou hadst come when we sent thee word—our brother had not died."

What message of comfort did Jesus express? Did he say, Martha, Lazarus is far better off in heaven! He is with the angels! He is singing and very happy! Surely you would not bring him back to earth again! Were these the words of Jesus? No. He merely said, "Thy brother shall rise again." He thus implied that her brother was not alive but really dead. How could he rise again if he had not ceased to live? Martha's reply indicates that she understood what were the teachings of Jesus and of the prophets. She said, "I know that he shall rise again in the resurrection at the last day." But Jesus wished to draw her attention to the present and to have her ask him even at this time to call Lazarus back from the sleep of death. So he said, "I am the resurrection and the life." You, Martha, recognize me as the Messiah, the Son of God. You believe that eventually when the resurrection does take place, God's resurrection power will be exercised through me. And now I am here with you. Why do you not ask me to exercise some of this power in advance? Where have you laid him?

Martha finally caught the thought, but replied, No, no, Lord, it is too late now. By this time he stinketh, for he has been dead four days. If you had come when I sent you word, or even had gotten here within a day or so, there would have been some hope, but now it has gone too far for that; for decomposition has set in. No miracle could possibly reorganize broken-down tissues. But Jesus insisted that they should show him the place. When he came to the tomb, what did the Master do? Did he command Lazarus to lay aside his crown and harp in heaven and bid the angels goody and come back to earth life? No! Did he call for him to come up from Purgatory, the location of which nobody knows? No! What did he say? Addressing the tomb, he said, "Lazarus, come forth!" And what occurred? The dead one came forth. He was not alive at all! He was dead!

The Beloved Family.
We read again, "Now Jesus loved Martha and her sister, and Lazarus." Some have thought that they discerned Lazarus amongst later disciples of Christ—possibly Barnabas. But anyway he was one whom Jesus loved, even though he was not one of the apostles who followed with the Lord. And Martha has come down to us as a synonym of bustling, energetic hospitality, "busted about many things." Yet surely she was loving and loyal to the Master. Jesus loved Martha and we may be sure therefore that he loves all of similar character. But he loved Mary also. And we do not forget that when she gave up some of her household that she might sit at the feet of Jesus and learn of him the Master declared that she had "chosen the better part." This was the same Mary who anointed the Master with the precious spikenard ointment five days before his burial. Martha and Mary both loved and were loved of the Lord, yet, evidently, Mary's love and the form it took was specially approved of the Master.

Finally we come to John the loving disciple of whom it is said that he was "that disciple whom Jesus loved." What a glorious testimony was John's! We remember that he and his brother loved the Lord so dearly that they desired that in his Kingdom in the future they might be next to him, one on his right hand, the other on his left hand. We remember that the Master answered that only by drinking of his cup of shame and ignominy, and by being baptized into his sacrificial death could they hope to sit in his throne at all. And we recall how loyally they agreed to these terms.

In proportion as we are desirous of having the Master's approval and smile, let us each seek to cultivate his character-likeness. The Apostle tells us that such copies of God's dear Son are to be honored with a share with him in his Kingdom glory on the heavenly plane. To such will come the honor and privilege of blessing and uplifting mankind in general—to an earthly salvation in Paradise restored—by and by. As we note the special features of character which called forth the Master's love we will more and more be able to copy them in reaching our goal.

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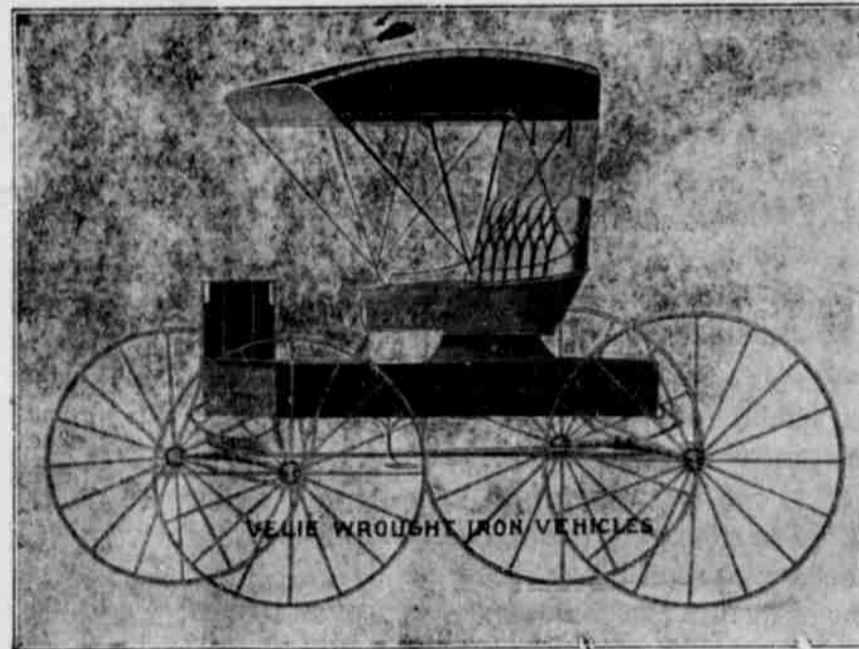
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