

PEOPLE'S PULPIT...



Sermon by
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God's Promise

Text, "The Blessing of the Lord, It Maketh Rich; and He Addeth No Sorrow Therewith" (Proverbs x, 22).

Sunday, Oct. 3.—Pastor Russell, of Brooklyn Tabernacle, preached today on the above text. He said:—

Looking about us in the world we find abundant corroboration for the Scriptural declaration that instead of the Divine blessing resting upon the earth there is a "curse" or a blight upon it. Accordingly St. Paul wrote, "The whole creation groaneth and travaileth in pain together." In the context he declares the relief from this groaning condition—out of the bondage of corruption into the liberty, favor and blessing to follow. He indicates that this blessed "change" will come through the "manifestation of the sons of God" and intimates also that these sons of God are now being "called" and will shortly be "glorified" and thus be empowered to do the work of blessing for the groaning creation, relieving them of the burden of sin and death.

Still the question arises, Why should humanity be so differently circumstanced from the angels? Why should not holiness and purity and freedom from sorrows and pain and death prevail on earth as well as in heaven? Why should the great Creator so differently condition one branch of his creation from the other? True, the Lord's prayer tells us that we may expect ultimately that Divine power will intervene and succor humanity. The declaration, "Thy Kingdom come; thy will be done on earth as it is done in heaven," is more than a prayer; because uttered by our Lord it is also a prophecy of what will ultimately obtain. But the question is, Why should it be necessary for us to pray and to wait to subdue sin and to lift mankind out of evil conditions? Why should not God's will have been done on earth all along, as it is done in heaven? Why have sin and death been permitted to "reign," as the Scriptures declare?

Thy Word is Truth.

The Bible alone answers our query. It explains that originally our race

words our present accursed or condemned, unfavorable condition as a race is God's just penalty against us as sinners.

We are a race of convicts, and the conditions of nature are Divinely arranged with a view to speeding us onward to the tomb—to the fulfillment of our "curse" or sentence—death. In other words all the mental unbalance and distress, including insanity, imbecility and cross temper, are elements of death—the results of death working in us as a race; likewise our moral deflection. We were "born in sin and shapen in iniquity; in sin did our mothers conceive us." Phrenology, as well as physiology, shows clearly these facts. The misshapen heads indicate the unbalance in which we were born, and the Scriptures declare that we are "prone to sin [disposed to sin,] as the sparks to fly upward." In view of these things how distinctly God's Word is corroborated. In comparison with this just manifestation of indignation of God against sin how unreasonable and unsatisfactory are the various theories that came down to us from "the dark ages" unsupported by the Word of God, teaching that our whole race was born under an original condemnation or sentence to eternal torture; and that the only ones saved would be the few grasped by Divine favor during this Gospel Age and lifted from relationship to the world and transformed into saints.

It is true enough that the Bible teaches that God has a special reward for those who love him supremely—more than self, houses, lands or any other creature. True it is, indeed, that he has for these "exceeding great and precious" blessings; but it is quite untrue, as it would be quite ungodly, that our Creator should either by predestination or through lack of foreknowledge or for any other reason consign our race as a whole, either to centuries of suffering in Purgatory, as some declare, or still worse, as others affirm, everlasting sufferings.

The Blessing of the Lord.

Having considered the Divine explanation of the curse of sin and death upon the world, and having found it true to all the circumstances and facts, let us now with confidence turn to the same record, the Bible, for an explanation of what blessings God has in reservation for the saints, and also for the world in general. "The blessing of the Lord, it maketh rich."

The blessing of the Lord has, to some extent, come to the Church, but it is a blessing receivable only by faith. It is not the real blessing, but, as the Scriptures declare, a foretaste, "an earnest" of the coming inheritance or blessing. This foretaste is very precious to all of the Lord's saints, giving them a feast and joy and comfort under the most trying circumstances of the present life. It is indeed "The

peace of God, which passeth all understanding" which rules in their hearts, as St. Paul said to the "little flock" of 144,000, who are named in the Scriptures as the "very elect," the Ecclesia, "the Church of Christ, which is his Body." These believers in God's promises and arrangements for the blessing of humanity through the merit of Christ's death and by the power of the Millennial Kingdom may rejoice therein in advance. It is not the intimation, however, that the Church shall keep the restitution privileges. They are credited to them so that they may have something to "offer," something to "sacrifice." By faith they receive earthly rights and restitution blessings and privileges, as God's gift through the Lord Jesus. By faith they make a sacrifice or surrender of those rights to the divine nature and to joint-heirship with Christ their Lord and Redeemer in his Millennial Kingdom. By faith, in return, they receive the begetting of the holy Spirit. They are content, not satisfied. They rejoice, though oft it be in tribulation. Their assurance is that present tribulations are working patience, experience, hope, and preparing them for the actual "glories which God hath in reservation for those that love him." Like the Apostle, they hope for the actual salvation or deliverance, "the blessing of the Lord which maketh rich" at the coming of our Lord, when the saints shall be united to him most precisely, as represented by the Scriptural figure of a Bride united to a Bridegroom. The marriage of the Lamb will come, for his wife will have made herself ready (Revelation xix, 7).

Let us glance backward and note the earliest reference of the Scriptures—the earliest God-given intimations of coming blessings.

(1) Shortly after the fall the Lord declared that ultimately the seed of the woman (her posterity) would bruise the serpent's head—would utterly destroy sin, would triumph over sin and Satan.

(2) Later on Enoch prophesied that Messiah would come, and grant the world a fresh trial for life or death (Jude 14). The original trial or judgment, for life or death, was through the one man Adam; and his failure and its penalty affected the condemnation of his entire race, because all are imperfect and hence sinners. The promise of a Messiah, and that he would grant the world a fresh trial was indeed a rainbow of hope to those who could receive it.

(3) It was not until Abraham's time that God really definitely outlined the channel of the blessing which he proposed ultimately to give to the race, "the blessing of the Lord, which maketh rich." Let us examine this prophetic outline of coming blessing.

The promise made to Abraham was this, "In thee and in thy seed shall all the families of the earth be blessed"

Here we have something definite, something tangible. This promise was renewed to Isaac, also to Jacob and, later on at Jacob's death, it passed to all of his posterity, the nation of Israel. In due time, in fulfillment of this promise, Moses, as its mediator, instituted the Law Covenant between God and Israel. Under that Covenant it was stipulated that in order to inherit eternal life and all the blessing which Adam possessed and lost, and in order to inherit the promise made to Abraham of the privilege of blessing all the families of the earth, the Divine Law must be kept inviolate. God must be loved with all the heart, mind, soul, strength, and the neighbor must be loved as one's self. Moses as mediator of that Covenant might render every assistance he was capable of to that nation; but, alas, himself a fallen man, imperfect, he was unable to lift Israel out of sin and degradation—unable to bring them to that state of human perfection which would enable them to keep that Law Covenant and inherit its blessings! As God foreknew, they failed to keep their part of the Covenant. "By deeds of Law shall no flesh be justified." A number of discouraged Israelites continued to hope for blessing through the Abrahamic Covenant and, later on, the Lord revealed to them that in due time he would make a New [Law] Covenant with them and that Messiah would be its Mediator (Jeremiah xxxi, 31).

The promise of a New Covenant implied, as St. Paul points out, that God knew that the Law Covenant would not bring to Israel the hoped-for blessings. Thenceforth their hopes centered in the New Covenant, under which the Lord promised that he would entirely blot out their sins and take away their stony heart and give them a heart of flesh and that they should be his people. Confirmatory to this thought was the message sent to them through Malachi the prophet, assuring them that the messenger of the Covenant (the servant of the Covenant, the Mediator of the Covenant), whom they delighted in, the one they were hoping for, would ere long, come to his people. But the prophet intimated that few of them would be ready to receive him. He said, "Who shall stand when he appeareth?"

The Lord Crucified.

Expecting Messiah to appear in a very different way, Israel was unprepared for the "man of sorrow and acquainted with grief," "the Lamb of God which taketh away the sin of the world." They expected a great general, a mighty leader, who would appear to the learned, the wealthy, the noble. But our Lord appealed only to those who were pure in heart, "Israelites indeed." Such alone had the necessary faith to recognize him and

receive him. The others crucified him, but did it ignorantly. St. Peter declares, "I wot that through ignorance ye did it, as did also your rulers. Ye killed the Prince of life" (Acts iii, 15-17). And St. Paul says, "Had they known it, they would not have crucified the Lord of glory" (I Corinthians ii, 8).

However our Lord's crucifixion was merely a fulfillment of another feature of the Divine Plan to make the blessing of all mankind the deeper and broader.

By virtue of keeping the Law, Jesus would have had the right to earthly perfection for himself, eternal life and happiness. He also would have been heir of all the things that Adam possessed and lost. He might, therefore, have established an earthly empire and, by wise laws and regulations, he might have done much for human uplift—the very thing which people today are wanting to bring about. But his subjects would still have been under the Divine condemnation of death. He would merely have been the ruler, instructor, of fallen, dying men. God's promise of blessing meant more than this. And in harmony with it our Lord Jesus did not keep his earthly rights, but surrendered them, sacrificed them, laid them down on our behalf. The laying down of these earthly rights was finished at Calvary. Since this sacrificing was done in harmony with the Divine purpose, the Heavenly Father rewarded the sacrificer with a new life on a higher plane, "far above angels and principalities and powers."

Thus when Jesus was raised from the dead on the third day he was no longer a man, but a spirit being, a partaker of the Divine nature, far above angels. More than this, he had his earthly rights which he had sacrificed, and these now constituted an asset or thing of value which he possessed and which he might bestow upon others. He laid down his earthly rights that he might receive life again on a high plane and have a right to give the sacrificed earthly perfection, honors and privileges to others. It was in this manner that the Lord provided for the blessing of the world—"the blessing of the Lord that maketh rich and to which he addeth no sorrow." Though the blessings have not yet come to the world, as we have seen, the foundation has already been laid in the redemptive work accomplished at Calvary.

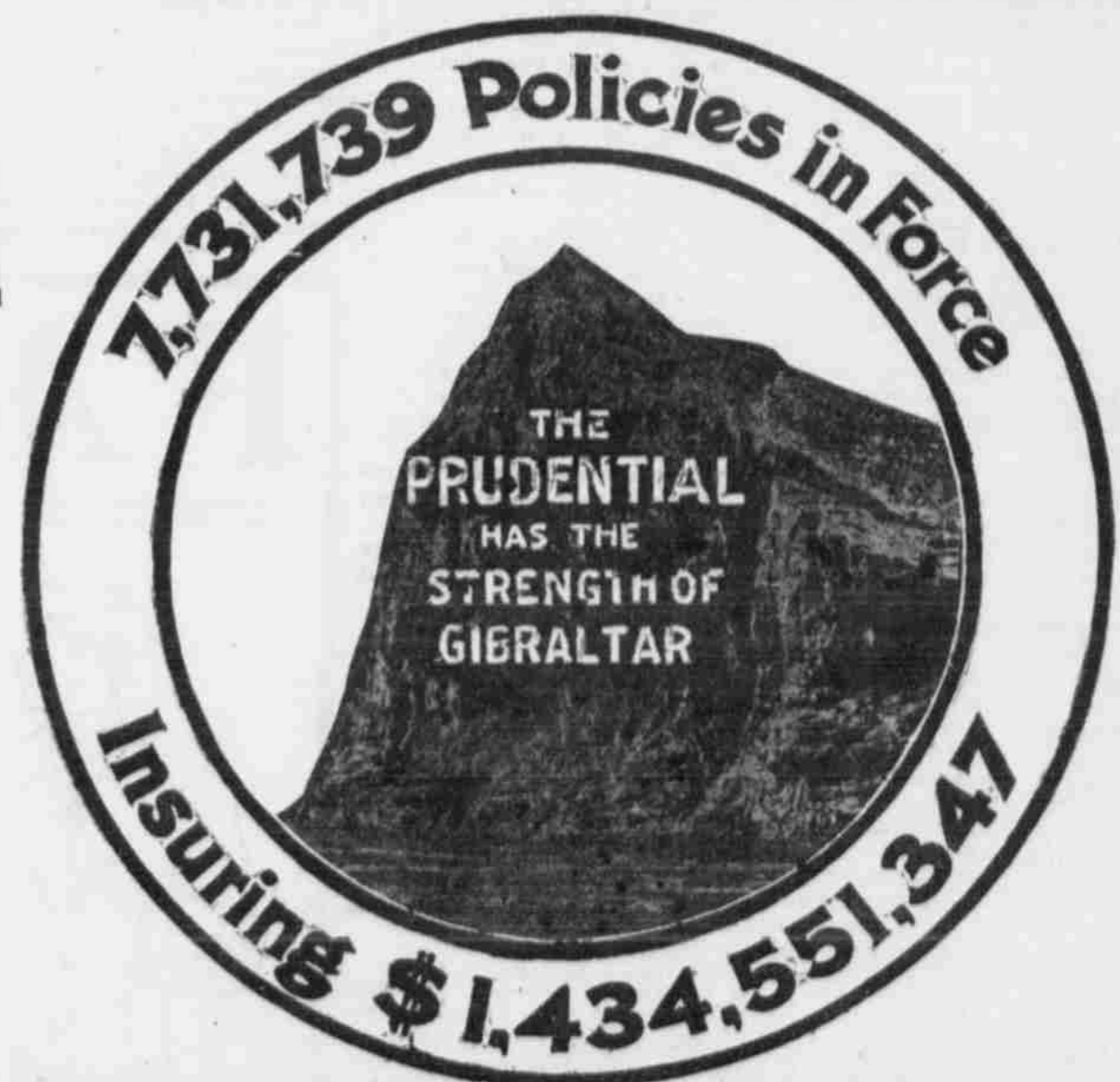
We cannot in this discourse trace the blessing to its conclusion. But knowing that our discourses weekly reach about seven million readers we shall hope to address the majority of you through the public prints a week hence. We hope then to show how the Lord has promised that his blessing under the Abrahamic Covenant

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