

PEOPLE'S PULPIT...



Sermon by
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Unfit For the Kingdom.

"No Man Having Put His Hand to the Plow and Looking Back, is Fit For the Kingdom of God" (Luke ix, 62).

Sunday, Dec. 5.—Pastor Russell had a large attendance today at the Brooklyn Tabernacle. He took for his text the words of the Savior, "No man having put his hand to the plow, and looking back, is fit for the Kingdom of God" (Luke ix, 62). The discourse follows:

The Great Teacher did not use the methods of modern revivalists to secure a following. He did not ask the multitudes to raise their hand if they would prefer to go to heaven at death and then publish them as converts—Christians. Indeed his methods were the very reverse of this, avoiding all kinds of sensational appeals to pride, selfishness, vanity, etc. He set forth in plain terms the difficulties to be expected by all those who espouse his Cause and become his disciples. He forewarned them that it would mean the taking up of a cross and the bearing of it in his footsteps in the narrow way of self sacrifice. He warned these, saying, "Marvel not, if the world hate you. Ye know that it hated me before it hated you. If ye were of the world, the world would love his own; but because ye are not of the world, but I have chosen you out of the world, therefore the world hateth you" (1 John iii, 13; John xv, 18, 19).

Instead of trying to produce an excitement which would over-balance the judgment of his hearers and lead them to profess what they subsequently would not be able or willing to practice, the Great Teacher, on the contrary, said to those contemplating discipleship, "Sit down first and count the cost." Instead of attempting to sway the multitudes, our Lord took a different course and attempted to make disciples of only a special class—not the poor, not the rich, not the learned, not the ignorant, but, irrespective of these class lines and distinctions, his call was to all those who loved righteousness and hated iniquity. All those who were weary and heavy-laden, oppressed by sin and its penalty to themselves and their friends—these he called to learn of him and find rest of soul.

Thenceforth that class, having been brought in touch with the Redeemer,

can make further progress only through faith in him and submission to his guidance into all Truth and into fellowship with the Father. The class thus influenced we believe to be small as compared to humanity as a whole—only that portion which in honesty of heart deplores sin and longs for righteousness and fellowship with God. These, like the remainder of the race, are by nature fallen, imperfect, sinful, condemned, but in these still persists some trace of the image of God, in the perfection of which father Adam was created. It is this trace or strain of the Divine character represented by conscience and faith which leads them to recognize their fallen and sinful condition, as compared with the Divine standard of perfection, and this becomes the basis of their calling or drawing of God, their "ear." "He that hath an ear, let him hear" (Revelation ii, 7). It will be observed that we are not specially blaming or condemning those who have not the hearing ear. On the contrary we remember the gracious words of Scripture, that in God's due time, "All the blind eyes shall be opened; all the deaf ears shall be unstopped" (Isaiah xxxv, 5). We are glad of this promise of God that ultimately all shall see and all shall hear and all shall know Him, from the least to the greatest. We rejoice, too, that when they know Him truly, they will rejoice, even as do we now. That will be their time of responsibility, their time of trial or judgment for life or death eternal on the earthly plane.

The Kingdom of God.
Our text speaks of the Kingdom of God. And it is important that we first of all notice that these words have in the Scriptures a two-fold significance. For instance, our Lord Jesus taught that we should pray to the Father, "Thy Kingdom come; thy will be done on earth as it is done in heaven." The reference of this prayer is to the Millennial reign or government of Christ, which St. Paul declares will begin at the Second Coming of our Lord, and continue until he shall have put down all insubordination, all sin, everything contrary to Divine character and Law. It will be the Kingdom of God which will subdue all things. It will be the Kingdom of God amongst men perfected when all things shall have been subdued. And when Christ's mediatorial Kingdom shall be, at the end of the Mil-

lennium, delivered back to God, even the Father, God's Kingdom will have fully come in the earth. God's will then will be possible of accomplishment by men, because all will have reached perfection; and Christ's mediatorial Kingdom will end because it will be no longer necessary. It will have accomplished the great purpose for which it was intended.

It was not, however, respecting that Millennial reign, that mediatorial Kingdom, that our Lord spoke in our

text, nor did he refer to the perfect Kingdom, as it will be turned over to the Father at the end of the Millennium and will last forever. Our Lord used the words, "Not fit for the Kingdom of God," as he did in many others of his discourses—in respect to the Church class now called of the Father to be the "Kingdom," in the sense of being the kings and priests of that Kingdom—the royalty of that Kingdom—the reigning family—the Queen, the Lamb's Wife, associated with the Heavenly Bridegroom, King of kings and Lord of lords, in his rule of a thousand years.

Not Fit For the Kingdom.

We now have before our minds the two ways in which the expression, Kingdom of God, is used and we can readily see that our Lord could not refer to the Millennial Kingdom and say that any would be too degraded to be fit for the influences of his Millennial Kingdom, because that Kingdom is designed for the very purpose of dealing with the unfit and gradually, during the thousand years of its reign of righteousness uplifting men out of sin and death conditions. If they will, to the full human perfection which Adam lost, which Jesus redeemed, and which is to be restored to the willing and obedient, as St. Peter declares (Acts iii, 19-21). It follows, then, that our Lord must have referred to those called of the Father and accepted by himself to be trained in the School of Christ and eventually to become his Bride and joint-heir in the Millennial Kingdom. No man will be esteemed fit for a share in that Millennial Kingdom, unless he attains to the glorious qualities of character, saintship, which the Scriptures set forth as the Divine standard—"Copies of God's dear Son" (Romans viii, 29).

"Fit for the Kingdom?" Let us think for a moment what these words signify. First of all we recognize that, as sinners, we were most thoroughly unfit for any favor of God, much less this greatest of all favors, joint-heirship with his Son and "partakers of the Divine nature" (II Peter i, 4). But that difficulty has all been overcome with those who have come into God through Christ and been made partakers of his holy Spirit of adoption. Of such we read, "It is God that justifieth! Who is he that condemneth?" (Romans viii, 33-34). It is Christ that died for our sins and who now is our Advocate. Who could in any wise come between us and our Savior and our Heavenly Father?

But this justification is not enough. If we were perfect actually instead of merely reckoned we would not be fit for the Kingdom of God—we would not be fit to govern others—to be "kings and priests unto God and to reign on the earth" (Revelation xx, 6). We should still be unfit to be the judges of the world, as the Scriptures declare that we shall be, saying, "Know ye not that the saints shall judge the world?" (1 Corinthians vi, 2). Our Heavenly Father in bringing many sons unto glory made the Captain of their salvation Jesus perfect through sufferings. Should we think it strange that we, his younger brethren, justified through his blood, should be required, not merely to make a profession of godliness, holiness, but also to approve or attest that sentiment to be a part of our very character? Is not what we as the Church of Christ experience very reasonable indeed—who would be prepared to teach the world meekness, patience, brotherly kindness, long-suffering, love, without first of all developing these various qualities of character in himself? And how could he develop these and be tested except under just such schooling and disciplining influences as now are upon the Church of Christ, with a view to making us fit for the glorious position of our high calling of God in Christ Jesus?

When the Scriptures refer to the Church as being fit for the Kingdom and as being the "overcomers" for whom the Kingdom is prepared, and who shall share its glories and honors, because "they are worthy" (Revelation iii, 4), we are to understand this worthiness and fitness, not that they were originally so, but that by God's grace, through Christ, a transformation work will eventually bring some to this glorious position where God himself will esteem them worthy to be called his children, and to be joint-heirs with his Son, the Great King.

Various Kinds of Fitness.

There is one certain standard of fitness for the Kingdom and none other will do; but there may be quite a variety of conditions which make one unfit for the Kingdom. One of these is murder. "No murderer hath eternal life abiding in him" (1 John iii, 15). He would be unfit for the Kingdom. This would not signify, however, that one who had once been a murderer might not, by a sound conversion and by faithfulness in the School of Christ, become a member of the Kingdom class. But the word murder here used has a broader meaning than is generally attached to it—the meaning which St. John gave to the word when he said that whosoever hateth his brother is a murderer (1 John ii, 11). We

know, then, that no brother-hater is fit for the Kingdom. But, some may have been brother-haters and have been washed, cleansed, sanctified, brought into heart-relationship with the Lord and into love of the brethren. If so, the implication is that they have lost the spirit of murder from their hearts and are brother-haters no longer. The Scriptures tell us also that it will be possible for a man who has been figuratively washed from his former condition of sin-defilement and who has been clothed of the Lord symbolically in a robe of righteousness and who had been begotten of the holy Spirit of love to turn from this holy commandment of love—to turn from the way of righteousness, to his former condition of sin-defilement. The Apostle gives the illustration of the sow that was washed returning to her wallowing in the mire (II Peter ii, 22). But the case of such is hopeless if the step be taken with full intention and deliberation—if the return to a murderous condition of heart—brother-hating—be with the full consent of the heart. The Apostle, however, does intimate that up to a certain point there is hope of recovery and hence he urges all of the faithful to assist these, saying, "He that converteth a sinner (once a brother) from the error of his ways shall save a soul from death."

Again we read, "No drunkard shall enter into the Kingdom of God" (1 Corinthians vi, 10). He surely would be unfit. This does not, however, imply that all total abstainers from intoxicant liquors are fit for the Kingdom. Neither does it imply that a drunkard might not reform and thus cease to be a drunkard, and by the Lord's grace, become fit for the Kingdom. Moreover the word drunkard in the Bible is frequently used in a figurative sense. It represents an added condition of the mind; as for instance, we read, that Babylon's cup made all the nations drunk (Revelation xviii, 2-3). This signifies that fellowship with false doctrines has permeated, influenced, bewildered the world in general. God's people partaking of Christ's cup of suffering are said to receive "the spirit of a sound mind"—clearness of understanding respecting the Divine character and Plan and the principles of righteousness. All who will be fit for the Kingdom may be expected to have considerable clearness of understanding respecting Divine things. They are to know God, and by receiving his Spirit, they are to have understanding of "the deep things of God," which the natural man cannot understand (1 Corinthians ii, 10-14). Of this our Lord spoke, saying, "This is life eternal, that they might know thee the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom thou hast sent."

The Importance of Fidelity.

Pride is another quality of the heart which would render its possessor unfit for the Kingdom of God. We read that the Lord "resisteth the proud and giveth grace to the humble" (I Peter v, 5). Pride is one of the things which God hates. It is a foe to righteousness in general and leads captive many into sin. When we read that God shows his favor to the humble, we may be sure that the favor of joint-heirship with the Redeemer is for the humble alone. With what carefulness this should lead us to search our hearts and put away everything in the nature of pride, self-conceit. Love is the fulfilling of the Law. Love is the Law of the New Creation; and pride is a foe to love. It is related to selfishness, which is a deep seated foe of every grace of the holy Spirit.

The Lord wishes us to see that the Heavenly Father is not merely calling for those who have generally good intentions and who would rather do right than do wrong. We may rejoice with such that they are better than their neighbors, but they are not fit for the Kingdom of God, unless their love for righteousness, for Truth, for the will of God, be so firmly established that they are ready and willing to "endure hardness as good soldiers of Jesus Christ" and to "fight a good fight" to the end of the course, laying hold upon eternal life and glory and immortality. One of God's objects in permitting the world and the flesh and the Adversary to have the power which they now possess to counteract and to

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fight against our good intentions and good resolutions is explained in the Scriptures. We read "The Lord your God proveth you, to know whether ye love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul" (Deuteronomy xiii, 3). If love of sin or love of self or love of any earthly thing can overbalance our love to the Lord and to his Truth and his people, we are not worthy of a place in the Kingdom—not fit for the Kingdom. Not merely good professions, but faithfulness unto death, fixity of character, are required of the Lord of such, as he would honor with a share in the Kingdom.

An Abundant Entrance.

Having noticed that lack of love, lack of zeal, lack of constancy, lack of devotion would unfit for the Kingdom, let us notice some of the characteristics necessary to a place in the Kingdom—some of the qualities, therefore, which we must each cultivate in our own hearts, which we must each develop in his own character. The Apostle explains these and urges the matter thus, "Add to your faith fortitude; and to fortitude knowledge; and to knowledge temperance; and to temperance patience; and to patience godliness; and to godliness brotherly kindness; and to brotherly kindness love. For if these things be in you and abound, they make you that ye shall neither be barren nor unfruitful in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ... for if ye do these things, ye shall never fall; for so an entrance shall be ministered unto you abundantly into the everlasting Kingdom of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ" (II Peter i, 5-11).

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