

PEOPLE'S PULPIT...



Sermon by CHARLES T. RUSSELL, Pastor Brooklyn Tabernacle.

PASTOR RUSSELL IN LONDON "HEREAFTER"

"There Shall Be No More Death, Neither Sorrow Nor Grief, Neither Shall There Be Any More Pain; For the Former Things Are Passed Away" (Revelation xxi, 4).

London, Eng., May 8.—Albert Memorial Hall, the largest and most renowned auditorium in the world, having a capacity of ten thousand, was crowded this evening to hear Pastor Russell, of the Brooklyn Tabernacle, New York, who delivered an address on "HEREAFTER" under the auspices of the "International Bible Students Association." Taking the above text, he said:

Man kind instinctively look for and believe in a future life; to the majority of minds it does not seem logical that death ends all. So surely as we believe our Creator to be all-wise, we must assume that he has some purpose in connection with our race, not attained as yet, something beyond the capacity of attainment in the present life, under present conditions. Even without a Divine revelation, therefore, we would be justified in anticipating a life beyond the tomb, but speculation upon such an important subject, of such vital interest, is not necessary. We are glad that our Creator has given us in the Bible clear intimations respecting his purposes, in relation to mankind in the future. Nevertheless these purposes were kept secret, not revealed until the first advent of our Redeemer. Thus the Apostle declares that "Christ brought life and immortality to light through the Gospel." It was invisible before, not brought to light, and its terms and conditions could not be clearly discerned.

Without any Divine revelation, we see a sufficiency on every hand to cause astonishment and to call anxiously for explanations. We see the world of mankind weak and depraved, fighting, crying and dying. "Transitory" is written upon everything human. The Scriptures assert that we of today are living under "a reign of sin and death," and that this dominion has lasted for over six thousand years. Why are these things so? Is it not true that there is but the one God? Is it not true that his creatures on the spirit plane are perfect, that in heaven there is neither sighing, nor crying, nor dying? There is no reign of sin and death there, no hospitals, no asylums, no jails, no penitentiaries—all is harmony, perfect, pure, in full accord with the Almighty. Why are conditions so different on this earth of ours?

Because One Man Disobeyed.
The Bible also offers us an explanation of the situation. It tells us that God created our race as pure, as perfect, as holy, as happy as the angels, and that he placed our first parents in Eden, surrounded with everything beautiful and desirable. It explains that our fall from that perfection into mental, moral and physical decrepitude came as a result of disobedience to God. It explains that "the wages of sin is death," that "the soul that sinneth, it shall die," that all the souls produced by Father Adam and Mother Eve are dying souls, in consequence of our sin-inheritance. This is bad enough, and enough; and, as was intended, our hearts cry out after the living God, for his mercy and compassion, that he would save us from death, save us from destruction. The answer of Divine Justice is, that we are unfit to live; that our Creator graciously designs that sinners shall not be immortal. But, hearkening, we hear a message assuring us that God has looked down in compassion and "heard the groanings of the prisoners." He foreknew our helplessness under the reign of sin and death, and in his Plan made provision for our case in advance—"before the foundation of the world."

After four thousand years of this reign of sin and death, exhibiting Divine Justice without mercy, our Creator revealed the wonderful features of his Program. He sent forth his Son, "that he, by the grace of God, might taste death for every man"—not for the Elect Church merely, but for all the families of the earth. Hence it is written that Jesus "gave himself a ransom for all"; and again, that "he is the propitiation satisfaction for our sins (the Church's) and not for ours only, but also for the sins of the whole world."

So, then, the death penalty pronounced against our race, which would have redressed Adam and his posterity to the hopeless condition of beings, as respects eternal life, God had already intended to set aside through the sacrifice of Christ. Nevertheless, he allowed sin and death to reign from Adam to Moses, and from Moses to Christ, and from Christ to the present. He has contented himself with laying the foundation for the world-wide blessing in the death of the Redeemer. He intends ultimately, the Bible assures us, to offer complete deliverance from sin and death, to Adam

and all of his children. The arrangement is that, "since by man came death, by man came also the resurrection of the dead. For as all in Adam die, even so all in Christ shall be made alive. But every man in his own order" (1 Corinthians xv, 21-23).

"Doctrines of Demons."
The truth about this matter is severe enough; it shows forth Divine Justice, intertwined with Divine Mercy and Love. We admit, our present ungratefulness of life eternal and feel grateful for proposed assistance through Christ, but our great Adversary, operating through ignorance, and superstition and fear, seized the opportunity to deceive us and misrepresent our Creator by bringing in what St. Paul designated, "doctrines of demons" (1 Timothy iv, 1). These have been promulgated, not merely in heathen lands, but amongst the civilized. These false doctrines have tended to alienate the hearts and minds of humanity from God and his revelation; they have put a barrier between God and his creatures.

These "doctrines of demons" are presented from various standpoints, but they are all in one respect; namely, they all teach that God deceived our first parents when he told them that the "wages of sin is death." These "doctrines of demons" assert the contrary, that man cannot die, but must live somewhere to all eternity. Thus on the basis of man's fears, this doctrine that God thrust immortality upon his creatures, the demons built up for us a theory so horrible as to be unseemly and terrifying to every sane and healthy mind. These "doctrines of demons" have been promulgated far and near, and with various colorings, but in essence they are all the same. They have come down from the "dark ages," represented in all our creeds, Catholic and Protestant.

Our Catholic friends have developed this thought to a theory. They tell us that of those who die, only a mere handful are fit for heaven and go there immediately. They tell us that the most respectable class, heretical rejectors of Divine Truth, will be sent to a hell of eternal torture where they will never die. They assure us, however, that the number who will receive this extreme punishment is small in comparison with the race as a whole. They tell us that the majority, Catholics and Protestants, civilized and heathen, are unfit for heaven at death, and likewise not deserving of eternal torture, and that thus the great mass of mankind, nine out of every ten, go to death in Purgatory, there to suffer for centuries or for thousands of years in expiation of sins, and for purification of their souls, that they may be eventually fit for Heaven and its blessings. Our hearts rebel at such a view of the "hereafter." While giving our Catholic friends, and our own forefathers who were Catholics, credit for being as sincere as ourselves, we conclude that the light of our day, and the light of our intelligence, will not permit us to believe and rejoice in such a view of the "hereafter" as this. We say to ourselves, Surely the Great God has something nobler than this in reservation for his creatures.

Protestant Views Worse.
What shall we say of the "Hereafter" from the standpoint of our Protestant creeds? How do these compare with the Catholic views foregoing—how much worse? When our forefathers thought they had found something erroneous in the teachings of Purgatory, when they concluded that Purgatory was not to be found in the Bible, they heroically determined to cast it out of their creeds. But alas! When discarding it, they did not realize that they were making a bad matter worse. They held on to the "doctrine of demons," that God had created man so that he could not die, and could not be destroyed, and so they proceeded to interpret matters along that line. Realizing the Scripturalness of the proposition that only the saints were fit for heaven, and rejecting the theory of Purgatory, they logically consigned all except the saints thereafter to eternal torture. Alas! How inconsistent it is; how strange that we ever thought Divine Foreknowledge, Wisdom, Justice, Mercy, Love and Power should have created man to the number of thousands of millions, with the fore-knowledge and fore-intention and desire that they should suffer an eternity of torture.

Parting of the Ways.
Thus, my dear hearers, you with myself and others of the intelligent people of the world, find ourselves today in a most trying position. Our hearts have repudiated the doctrine of eternal torture as being un-Christ-like, unworthy even of a devil. We can believe neither in a Purgatory of centuries, nor in eternal torture as a consequence of penalty for Adam's disobedience in eating of the forbidden fruit; nor as a penalty upon his children for not living perfect lives when they were "born in sin and shapen in iniquity" and "prone to sin as the sparks to fly upward." Our hearts cry out for the living God and the true light upon his dealings.

Under this awakening intelligence, thousands of noble men and women are leaving God's Book, and leaving all of the Churches to go after Theosophy, Christian Science, and especially after Evolution, with its companion teaching of Higher Criticism—that the Bible is thoroughly unreliable. We are living now in a time of great falling away from the faith; few intelligent people any longer believe in the Bible. Our colleges and universities—and, so to say, our theological seminaries—are busy turning out unbelievers—infidels. Nor are these people wicked or immoral in their unbelief; they are as well-meaning as ever, but have lost their way. They reject the Bible because they believe it to be the foundation of the various inconsistencies in their creeds; they are stumbling for lack of knowledge; they cannot believe that man's hereafter is one of centuries of suffering, or of eternal suffering.

Seeking the Old Paths.
The Lord, through the Prophet Jeremiah, told his people to "Inquire for the old paths," and this is the appropriate lesson for each of us. We do indeed, need to discard the creeds of the past, not because they contain nothing of truth, but because error commingles in them to such a degree as to make them perversions of truth as a whole. We need to take off the credal spectacles with which we have hitherto been studying God's Word, and come to the Bible afresh, to hear its message. Thus coming, many of us have been surprised as we have found its purity and consistency and harmony with itself. We have already intimated the Bible view of man's death sentence, and the Bible redemption that Christ died for our redemption, and the Bible assurance that as a consequence, in "due time," "the knowledge of the glory of God shall fill the whole earth." We have also the Bible assurance that not merely the living will profit by the provision of God's grace, but that "all that are in their graves shall come forth" to share in and to be blessed by the favorable conditions which God will by and by inaugurate.

The Bible declares that the penalty for sin is being experienced by humanity at the present time—the death penalty—and that the redemption price of Christ's death is sufficient for the sins of the whole world. It declares that on account of this redemption, ultimately the resurrection of the dead shall take place—"all that are in their graves shall hear the voice of the Son of Man and come forth." It is because of the Divine intention that there shall be a resurrection of the dead, that the Bible everywhere, both in the Old and New Testaments, speaks of those who have died, both good and bad, as being "asleep," and the promise is that "They that sleep in the dust of the earth shall awake."

Nor will they come forth to similar conditions of sorrow that now surround us all. On the contrary, the First Resurrection is to be composed of the holy, the saints, and they are to be associated with their Redeemer as his Bride and Consort, to assist in delivering and restoring mankind. Later the imperfect, who have not had their full trial, the great mass of mankind, will be brought forth, that they may learn the ways of righteousness, that they may learn to know God, and Jesus Christ, and in due time be uplifted out of the conditions of sin and death. They will come the time mentioned in our text, The Hereafter for the world. How joyful is the message, "There shall be no more death, neither sorrow, nor crying, nor dying; for the former things have passed away." All, how different is God's proposition of a general uplift of the worthy and their assistance back to perfection—to all that was lost in Adam. How different is this from the "doctrines of demons," which have perplexed us, which have divided the Church of Christ into numberless sects and parties, and which have almost driven us from Christ and the Bible.

Life, Not Immortality.
Thus we see that God's provision in Christ for mankind is that each individual member of our race may yet, if he will, attain to everlasting life through the merit of Christ's sacrifice, and through the operation of his Kingdom. Each may attain to all that was lost in Adam and redeemed at Calvary; namely, human perfection and Edenic blessedness. But additionally, note the blessings which God has provided for the Church—a spiritual blessing, a change of nature. These are called out now from amongst men, that they "might be a kind of first-fruits unto God of his creatures" (James i, 18). These are to be a "royal priesthood," associated with Christ, now in the priestly work of sacrificing, presenting their bodies living sacrifices, holy and acceptable to God, which is their reasonable service. And when the sacrificing shall be finished, they are to be joined with Christ in the glories of his Kingdom, and share with him in the work of blessing mankind. These are the "elect" who, in God's providence, shall be by and by uplifted and blessed the non-elect. These are the ones to whom will come the promised "glory, honor and immortality." Our Redeemer brought to light, life eternal for the world, and he also brought to light immortality for the Church.

Let us then be glad and rejoice in the "Hereafter" that God has provided, and let us search his Word more diligently and more carefully than ever, that we may know the things which God has freely given to us. Thus we may avail ourselves of our present privileges and opportunities and by and by hear the Master's "Well done—enter thou into the joys of thy Lord."

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