

PEOPLE'S PULPIT...



Sermon by CHARLES T. RUSSELL, Pastor Brooklyn Tabernacle.

The Law of Retribution

Sowing and Reaping--Visiting Sins of Parents Upon Their Children--Justice of the Divine Arrangement--Grace So Much More Abounds--Else Were Your Children Unholy.

Philadelphia, Pa., June 12.—Pastor Russell of the Brooklyn Tabernacle preached here twice today to large and attentive audiences. We report his discourse from the text, "I, the Lord thy God am a jealous God, visiting the iniquities of the fathers upon the children unto the third and fourth generation of them that hate me; and showing mercy unto thousands of them that love me and keep my commandments" (Deuteronomy v. 9, 10). A report of the discourse follows:—

No one of experience can question the fact that our text is corroborated by all our experiences in life. However unjust some may claim it to be that the children should inherit the weaknesses resulting from parental dispositions and violations of the Divine law, the fact remains that however at times may question the existence of a God or infidelity doubt the inspiration of His Word, no one can question the two facts of this text, (1), that sin and its penalty can be inherited and (2) the fact that God is merciful to such as renounce sin and turn to him and seek to walk according to his direction. However these blessings upon evil doers and their children and these blessings upon well doers and their posterity may be termed natural laws and laws of heredity, it does not alter the fact, because the Almighty is the one who made these laws of heredity.

Under the delusion handed down to us from the "dark ages"—that God had condemned to eternal torment all the children of Adam because of his sin—we are all inclined properly enough to feel rebellious against any such matter and to assert that from the standpoint of human reasoning it would be entirely unjust to torture the posterity of Adam eternally for his transgression—"original sin." But as we get the eyes of our understanding opened to see what is the real penalty for sin, that it is death, extinction, and that our perfect parents, fully informed respecting the divine will, were culpable, worthy of death, and when we learn further that whatever is enjoyed by Adam's posterity in the way of life, however disadvantageous the conditions, is so much of divine leniency and mercy and comes so much short of being the full penalty, death, extinction—then we begin to see that life under any conditions and disadvantages is still a boon, better than extinction.

In Wrath Have Mercy, Lord. Recognizing the wrath of God as manifested in the death penalty (not in an eternity of torture) we can see that the Scriptures everywhere declare that the wrath of God is resting upon our race; that every member of it is subject to this very penalty which came upon father Adam and has been entailed upon all of his posterity.

The Almighty Creator did not wait for us to cry out for his pity and compassion, but from the very beginning, foreknowing our fall into sin, he had the plan arranged for our redemption and ultimate recovery from this condition of wrath, curse, death. We are informed that our Lord Jesus was the Lamb of God slain from the foundation of the world—in the Divine purpose and arrangement—though only now being made manifest to the Church and shortly to the world. Thus viewed there has been no injustice practiced against our race in permitting the children to share with their father Adam in his penalty. Rather they had esteemed it and do esteem it better than the sentence itself, and furthermore in the Lord's providence the world's present experiences in the fall and later on in the recovery from the fall in the hands of the great Redeemer during the Millennial Age, is to prove a lesson, a schooling, in the exceeding sinfulness of sin, which the race as a whole will never forget and out of which many now the Church, later on the world will draw lessons of wisdom and grace.

Looking still more deeply into the Divine Plan as it is revealed in the Lord's Word for those who are his (Psalm xxv. 14), we find a particular reason why it was not only advisable but necessary that this law of heredity should operate in our race, even though it brought in its train a terrible list of experiences to our race. The reason for this is based upon one element of the Divine character—Justice—the very element which at one time we supposed was violated by this law of heredity. As our eyes open to the teaching of the Scriptures we perceive that if God had not permitted his law of heredity to operate, but had permitted each individual of the race to come forth to perfection and to stand an individual trial such as father Adam was subject to, it would doubtless have meant that at least one-half of the race, possibly more, would have deliberately chosen a course of sin as father Adam chose it. To expect more than one-half to be obedient would be unreasonable. Rather, from what we see about us in the experiences of life, we would have been liable to conclude that only a very small majority, perhaps one-tenth, would have been obedient to God, while the remaining nine-tenths would have been disobedient.

Some might ask, Would not even that have been better than the Divine arrangement as we see it operating now, that the whole race should suffer for one man's disobedience? We answer, No! Not according to the testimony of the Scriptures. The Bible shows us that while this law of retribution has worked such terrible havoc in Adam and his race for now 6,000 years—while 20,000,000,000 have been born in sin and sorrow and pain and after a few years of trouble have died in sorrow and pain, nevertheless in God's due time all of these shall have more favorable opportunities of knowing God's true character and of attaining to a full character development in his likeness during the Millennial Age. This means that probably more will gain eternal life and blessing under the divine arrangement as we have it than we could reasonably expect would have been saved had the Lord not provided this law of heredity and condemnation of all, but on the contrary had permitted each to be born in perfection and to stand his trial as between loyalty to God with the reward of eternal life or disobedience punished with death. But we shall see that it means much more than this.

Condemned In One—Redeemed By One.

A great economic law is connected with the divine arrangement: The condemnation of a race in one man's loins because of his transgression made possible the divine arrangement that a Second Man should pay the penalty for the first and redeem both him and all who were in him at the time of his condemnation. This is at once a demonstration of Divine Wisdom and of Divine Justice. Suppose, for instance, that the law of heredity had not prevailed, had not been instituted by our Lord, but that each individual had come forth perfect and had been personally placed on trial and been personally condemned to death. Would it not have required an individual savior for each one condemned under such an arrangement? Surely it would. Hence, had one-half of the race proven themselves sinners and been personally condemned it would either have been necessary to avoid redemption altogether or to redeem the sinner half of the race, by giving a life for a life—a perfect being's sacrifice for or instead of each imperfect life. Estimating the total number of our race at 20,000,000,000, Justice would have been obliged to require 10,000,000,000 of perfect beings to be offered as the ransom price for the 10,000,000,000 of sinners. Under the very best estimate that we can possibly make, this would have required the death of all the perfect ones of the race as redeemers for all the imperfect members of the race, and what a havoc that would have implied—with just as many dying as under present conditions, namely, one-half as sinners and the other half as redeemers, ransoms. Besides, we perceive that it would not have been just on the part of the Almighty to compel the righteous ones to suffer for the unrighteous as their redeemers, hence there would have been no assurance even then that any but a fraction of the sinner race would have been redeemed. On the contrary, how wise, conservative and economical was the Divine arrangement that by one man's disobedience under the laws of heredity the many would be born sinners and sharers in his penalty, death, and that then in due time one Savior, one perfect one, the "man Christ Jesus," might redeem Adam and, redeeming him, redeem all of his race from the death sentence, the curse, the wrath of God, and as a result of the redemption obtain the right, the authority, the power, during his Millennial Kingdom and in association with his glorified Church of the Gospel Age, to bless all the families of the earth and to uplift as many as would be willing out of all their ignorance, weakness and sinful and dying conditions to all that was lost in Adam.

We have seen that in harmony with the Divine law it would not have been just for the Heavenly Father to oblige the righteous to die for sinners and that hence the redemption of the sinners would have been problematical—very doubtful. But on the contrary the Heavenly Father well knew in advance the loyalty of his First-Begotten, his only Begotten, who is declared to have been the "beginning of the creation of God" (Revelation III. 14). He knew not only of Jesus' loyalty but that his experiences with him in glory would every way qualify our Lord for the tests and the sacrifices necessary for the redemption of the race with his own precious blood. The Scriptures assure us furthermore that the Father set before him some certain joys, certain blessings, certain promises, in connection with the work of man's redemption; as we read, "Who for the joy set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is now set down on the right hand of the majesty on high" (Hebrews XII. 2).

Retributive Joys and Rewards. We are to remember too, that the

Scriptures distinctly teach that the condition of the affairs of our world—sin, retributive punishment, the redemption through Jesus, the call of the Church and their sufferings with their Redeemer and the promises of future blessing and glory both for the Church and for the world—are subjects in which the angels of God are interested. As the Apostle Peter says, "Of which salvation the prophets have enquired and searched diligently. . . . Searching what or what manner of time the Spirit of Christ which was in them did signify, when it testified beforehand the sufferings of Christ, and the glory that should follow. . . . Which things the angels desire to look into" (I Peter. I. 10-12). They wondered when all the sufferings of Jesus and the Church would be completed and when the glory time would come and recovery from sin and death conditions; when God's purpose would thus ripen and bear fruit in the recovery of those who fell from his favor in Adam's disobedience but were redeemed by the precious blood.

The great lesson of what constitutes disobedience, and how serious a sin it is, and what it would lead to if allowed to take its course, was illustrated in man's experiences; and all the hosts of angels looked on with amazement, no doubt. God's Justice was fully demonstrated in the infliction of the death penalty and the permission of its inroads upon the mental, moral and physical perfection of his creatures, bringing many of the race down almost to brutality. God's Love was manifested in the gift of his Son, in the arrangement of his plan by which for the joy set before him, Jesus might become Adam's Redeemer, and the Bridegroom of the Elect Church and ultimately the great King of Glory who, during the Millennial Age, is to restore, revive and bless and test Adam and all his race.

Christ and the Church Crucially Tested

We cannot wonder if all the holy angels looked on in amazement as they beheld the Only Begotten Son of God leave the "glory which he had before the world was" and humble himself to take human nature—to be born a man that he might redeem Adam and his race. It must have seemed wonderful to them not only that the Heavenly Father would arrange such a plan but wonderful also that the glorious "Only Begotten," "First-Born," should be the one to whom the proposition would be made to show his faith and love for the Father, to do his will to the extent of such a sacrifice, not only of glory but, eventually, of life. They had yet to see a further operation of the divine law of retribution operating in Jesus for his blessing and honor. So intent were they in looking at the humiliation of the Only Begotten, and then at his death, that apparently they did not so carefully note the fact that the Heavenly Father had set before him great joys, great blessings, great exaltation, when he should finish his work.

Already the Only Begotten was next to the Father in glory and dignity, honor and power; what more of divine honor could be bestowed upon even the First-Born of every creature? The Only Begotten himself appears not to have thought particularly of the promised glory; The joy set before him, however, seems to have been that he would do the Father's will and thus demonstrate his absolute loyalty even unto death. While, no doubt, it was a joy to the Lord to be the Father's Agent in the rescue of Adam and his race from sin and death, nevertheless we believe that his chief joy in connection with the matter was that thus he might demonstrate to the Father his absolute love by his submission and obedience. Our Lord's own words were, "Father, glorify thou me with the glory which I had with thee before the world was" (John xvii. 5). He knew of the Father's proposed exaltation of him as a reward, but he did not mention this; he would merely ask of the Father that when he had accomplished the Divine purpose he might have back the same honor and position and divine favor which he had laid aside when he humbled himself to become Adam's redemption price, the world's Savior. Such modesty and loyalty are difficult for us to comprehend because of our fallen, imperfect conditions.

But the Apostle explains to us, speaking under the power of inspiration, that because of our Lord's obedience in leaving the glory and becoming a man and dying for our sins, therefore "God hath highly exalted him and given him a name above every name, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of things in heaven and things in earth" (Philippians II. 9, 10). Elsewhere in the Scriptures we are assured that our Lord became partaker of the Divine nature in his resurrection; that thus he attained a reward far above anything that could have been thought, not only above angels, but also far above his own prehuman condition. In thus rewarding the faithful the Lord is carrying out the spirit of our text—he has been exemplifying what is otherwise taught in the Scriptures—"whatsoever man sareth that shall he also reap" (Galatians vi. 7). Adam sowed disobedience and his race have reaped a terrible harvest of degradation, suffering and death. The Only Begotten sowed obedience, as prophetically expressed of him at the time of his baptism, "I desire to do thy will, O my God; thy law is written in my heart" (Psalm xl. 8). Laying down his life in harmony with the Divine program was his sowing and the reaping at the resurrection was glory, honor and immortality, the divine nature. How richly Jehovah rewards every demonstration of loyalty to himself and the principles of righteousness.

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