

Pastor Russell's Sermon

GOD'S INFINITE WISDOM AND LOVE

The Creator's Noblest Gifts to Humanity.

HE THAT SEEKETH FINDETH.

Pastor Russell, in his address at the Missionary Inspection Committee, Welcomes at Shanghai, Expresses Sympathy for the Chinese—Holds Out the Hope of the Gospel for Them—The New Testament Has a Message of Salvation for All People.



Shanghai, China, Jan. 7th.—China's hundreds of millions of patient, incessant workers have had my sympathy from childhood. The philosophies of childhood are often as correct as those of mature years—sometimes more so. Well I remember as a child

Inquiring what would be the fate of the heathen, and the answer that I got, namely, that only through faith in Jesus, the Redeemer, is there any salvation. Then I queried, What is the penalty of their ignorance of the Only Name given under heaven or amongst men whereby we must be saved? The answer was the usual one of all of our "Orthodox creeds": that they would spend eternally in a hell of unutterable anguish. How my heart went out sympathetically toward every missionary movement on behalf of the heathen!

Then came mature thinking and I said, Like others I am imperfect in every way; my sympathy and love, therefore, cannot be as great as that of our Creator. How is it possible that God, with all the force of the Universe at His command, could look calmly on and see the operation of His own laws carrying thousands of millions to eternal misery and yet refrain from giving those creatures the necessary information? I said, there is something wrong with the Bible and with our creeds which we have built upon it.

I threw all away and began to reason—but, thank God! not along irrelevant lines. I reasoned that He who made the Universe also made man; that whatever noble qualities I could find in humanity were the work of the Creator. I said, man's noblest qualities are justice and love, and hence the Creator must possess these unlimitedly. I bowed in worship before God, infinite in Wisdom, Justice, Love and Power.

He That Seeketh Findeth.

I said, Oh, great, almighty God, although unknown to me, I worship Thee! I adore Thee! My whole being cries out for the pleasure of more intimate acquaintance with Thee, that I might know Thy will regarding me and Thy purposes respecting humanity. I said, Assuredly, as God is All-Wise, He must have an All-Wise purpose, of which I need not be ashamed! So surely as He is just and loving, all of His plans and purposes must accord with these qualities; and having made man capable of appreciating these qualities, He will surely be willing to bestow the information which I desire—information as to how I can best please and serve Him and as to what His purposes and intentions are respecting mankind.

My prayers convinced me the more that there must be a Divine Revelation somewhere in the world. I thought that I had searched the Bible faithfully and proved it unreasonable and contrary to every conception I could have of a Divine Creator and His purposes; hence my eyes turned toward this Eastern land and your sacred books. I studied them for a time, only to find them far less satisfactory to my intellect than the Bible I had already cast aside.

I returned to the Bible. I asked myself, Might you have been prejudiced when you examined it before? Although I thought not, I made a fresh investigation, because I felt there must be a Revelation from the true God somewhere, and because the Bible thus far gave the best testimony. It, indeed, told of a God of Love, as no other religious books do, yet its teachings respecting the future of the non-elect staggered me, for I was sure that they were not Godlike, but the reverse.

Proving the Bible Reasonable.

Disregarding the Old Testament Scriptures entirely I began with the New. I said, Was not Jesus a most wonderful character? Is it not true that "never man spoke like this Man?" Both heart and head answered, Yes! His teachings are the noblest found on earth! His example fully conforms with His teachings! I asked, Can I rely upon the evidence? My mind replied, Yes. If just such men today told you their observations you would believe them implicitly. These men confessed that they were ignorant and unlearned men, telling of their own weaknesses in a way that impostors would not do. Their Message abounds in "good tidings of great joy for all people," and not merely for their own nationality. My heart began to take courage. I began to feel that I had found a footing for my faith and that the Bible indeed differed considerably from the various and conflicting creeds

which claimed it as their support and Authority.

However, I suddenly remembered that much of the New Testament is composed of passages from the Old Testament and comments thereon. Alas! I said, for I cannot accept the Old Testament Scriptures. But the more I studied the matter the more convinced I was that if Jesus and the Apostles were at all what they claimed to be the Old Testament must be as true as the New—as St. Peter declared, "Holy men of old spoke and wrote as they were moved by the Holy Spirit."

Then I began a more critical study of the Old Testament, and to my joy, as I sought, I found, as I knocked the door of Truth opened for me. I found the Bible teaching very different from what I had supposed it to be, very contrary to that of all the creeds. The latter, indeed, each and all, contain truths taken from the Bible, but truths incriminated with various human credulities and misconceptions—the Bible message as a whole divided amongst many creeds and made to contradict itself.

The Bible Hell is the Key.

To my surprise I found the presentations of the Bible not only more logical than anything else in the world, but absolutely the only logical presentation on earth. As interpreted by itself, and not by the creeds and theories of the Dark Ages, the Bible tells one beautiful, reasonable, harmonious story, from Genesis to Revelation. It tells nothing of a fiery hell manned by fireproof demons, and supplied with fuel for all eternity, to which Adam and his race were sentenced on account of sin. On the contrary, it teaches that "the wages of sin is death."

It tells that "the soul that sinneth, it shall die"; and tells that Adam sinned and came under this death penalty and that all of his race by the laws of heredity are subject to frailty, weakness, mental, moral and physical—and that these have triumphed in a reign of sin and death for now six thousand years. It tells that this death is the death into which Adam and all of his race go—*sheol*, the *hell* of the Bible, for all mankind, good and bad. It tells that there is no pain or suffering there, no knowledge, no work of any kind.

It tells that all, both good and bad, sleep, awaiting the resurrection of the dead. It tells that man's death would have been an extinction as complete as that of the brute beast had God in His Wisdom and Love not arranged for human redemption and a resurrection of the dead, both of the just and unjust. It tells that the Divine arrangement whereby God could be just and not repudiate the rulership of His own Court and yet recover man from the death sentence, was arranged for. The arrangement was that Jesus, "by the grace of God, should taste death for every man"; that "as by a man came death, by a Man also should come the resurrection of the dead; for as all in Adam die even so all in Christ shall be made alive, every man in his own order."—Hebrews II, 9; I Cor. xv, 21, 22.

First the Elect Bred.

With God "a thousand years are as one day." (I Peter III, 8.) He has therefore arranged that six of these great days shall constitute man's period of battling with sin and death and that the seventh of these great days shall be the Day of Messiah, the Sabbath or Rest Day to the world, in which Messiah, as the Divine Representative, shall lift up all the willing and obedient, opening their blind eyes, unstopping their deaf ears and causing all to know the Lord, from the least to the greatest.

As a result, some will refuse and die the "Second Death"—utter destruction. No more than a century of trial is to be granted, because we read, "The sinner a hundred years old shall be cut off"—a child a century old in sin shall be accursed—to the Second Death. (Isaiah lxx, 20.) But all who will accept Divine favor may then be brought to full human perfection, similar to that which Adam enjoyed at the beginning, plus the knowledge of good and evil, which he lacked.

Of these willing and obedient ones it is written, "Every knee shall bow and every tongue confess, to the glory of God." Many of you Chinese, doubtless, will then be bowing before the great King of kings and Lord of lords, whom then you will know completely; for "the knowledge of the Lord shall fill the whole earth as the waters cover the great deep." And your forefathers, whom you reverence, will be there, too; their eyes shall be opened and their ears unstopped, as it is written, "All the blind eyes shall be unstopped." What a great reunion time that will be for the Chinese hundreds of millions! Yes, and still more! As the Scriptures declare, all the families of the earth shall be blessed similarly with a knowledge of God and with a full opportunity for *restoration* to all that was lost in Adam—to all that was redeemed at Calvary.—Acts II, 39, 40.

Do you say to me, This news is too good to be true? Do you say, No missionary ever told us of such a gracious God and such a mighty Savior! Had we heard such a gracious Message it would have attracted our hearts long ago, for our gods are non-sympathetic—they are great, powerful and violent. But we thought as we heard the missionaries' message that the Christian God must be even more ferocious than ours, for the awful, burning hell of which we have heard through Christians is terrible beyond anything we heathens had ever heard of before or conjectured for ourselves!

Satan the God of This World.

Alas! my dear friends, I know this very well and the Bible explains the whole matter. It tells us that we have been believing "doctrines of demons" (I Timothy IV, 1). These vicious doctrines in the past, when more literally believed than today, led some no-

ble Christian people into most atrocious conduct.

We are all awaking from this sad blindness, thank God! We are emerging slowly from the darkness of the past. We are in the very dawning of the morning of Messiah's Kingdom, which is to bless the world. The rising of the Sun of Righteousness is to bring the New Day of emancipation from ignorance, superstition and death. The more awake we become the more clearly do we see the beauty of God's Word and the ridiculous inconsistency of things we once believed.

St. Paul explains to us why Satan strives to put darkness for light and light for darkness. He explains why Satan represents himself as an angel of light and endeavors to besmear the Divine character and to make God the very personification of wickedness and injustice! It is a part of his general endeavor to thwart the Divine Plan, to mislead those who are seeking to know God. Hearken to the Apostle's words: "The god of this world hath blinded the minds of them that believe not, lest the glorious light of God's goodness, as it shines in the face of Jesus Christ our Lord, should shine into their hearts." (II Corinthians, IV, 4.)

In proportion as humanity misconceives God's character and His Word, in that same proportion they will shun the Bible and its God, and thus get away from the faith and hope revealed in the Bible. As I have told you, I had my own bitter experiences along this line. How I thank God for the "eye-salve" and for the glorious vision of the Divine character and Plan which now stands out so distinctly before the eyes of my understanding!

Good Tidings of Great Joy.

The Gospel of the Bible, the Message of the great God, Infinite in Justice, Wisdom, Love and Power, is a Message of grace, of mercy, as has emanated from no other quarter—such as no other religious book in the world presents. And what else should we expect than that the great Supreme Being would be a Fountain of grace, of blessing to His dependent creatures. It should not surprise us, then, to find the Bible clearly teaching that the God of all Grace has in store for humanity great blessings—"times of restitution of all things spoken by the mouth of all the holy Prophets since the world began." (Acts III, 19, 21.)

Another Message should not surprise us; it is the message that was sung by the angels on the night of Jesus' birth, "Behold, we bring you good tidings of great joy, which shall be unto all people"—the thousands of millions of the Chinese included! It is a joy to me to be permitted to tell this glorious Message to such as have the ear to hear it. It is a further joy to me that in the Divine arrangement the time is coming when "all the deaf ears shall be unstopped" and when the clear knowledge of God's goodness shall fill the earth as the waters cover the deep.

God first told this Message of His benevolent designs toward humanity about thirty-six hundred years ago, when He declared to His friend Abraham, I intend to bless all the families of the earth, and this shall be done through your posterity—"In thee and in thy Seed shall the families of the earth be blessed." The natural seed of Abraham was first developed and instructed, and consequently uplifted, under a Law Covenant. This arrangement prepared the natural seed of Abraham more than others of the world's peoples to receive Jesus; hence, when He presented Himself, and when afterward His message was proclaimed by His twelve Apostles, approximately sixteen thousand Jews became His footstep followers, were begotten of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost and after, and thus became members of the Spiritual Seed of Abraham.

The Number in the First Resurrection. But this number was short of the Divine intention—"a hundred and forty-four thousand." (Revelation xiv.) Hence, in due time, the Message of grace and the privilege of becoming members of the Spiritual Seed of Abraham was extended to one nation after another—to the Jew first, but also to as many as the Lord our God has called, of every nation, people, kindred and tongue. This "elect" number of spirit-begotten followers of Jesus will very soon be completely changed by the glorious First Resurrection, when this mortal and corruptible shall put on immortality. All those found faithful will be made partakers of the divine nature, far above angels, principalities and powers—associates with the Redeemer. (Ephesians I, 21.) Then the Seed of Abraham will be completed and qualified for its great work of blessing the race.

St. Paul declares, "Know ye not that the saints shall judge the world?" (I Corinthians vi, 2.) The judging will be in the nature of a trial or testing to determine how many of humanity can be helped up to human perfection and harmony with God and everlasting life, and how many unworthy will be destroyed in the Second Death. God who has elected these kings, priests and judges, has appointed a Day in which they shall rule, bless, instruct, judge mankind in general. It will be the thousand years of Messiah's Kingdom, for "a day with the Lord is as a thousand years."—(I Peter III, 7, 8.)

It affords me great pleasure to have the opportunity of delivering this Message of the grace of God in this, the Chinese Empire. May the Lord bless it, not only to the Chinese, but to all who have hearing ears and hearts appreciative of the Divine character. May it assist some in making their "calling and election sure" to membership in the "little flock" to whom the Kingdom is soon to be given. May it favorably influence others that they may walk nobly, reasonably, and be the better prepared to receive the Kingdom blessings and earthly restitution.

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