

Pastor Russell's Sermon

PASTOR RUSSELL ON MARS HILL

Preaches to the Athenians and Corinthians.

THE MESSAGE OF ST. PAUL

Reaffirms the Apostle's Argument. God Offered Forgiveness to All Who Would Believe in Jesus—Mankind Has Made Serious Mistakes Respecting the Divine Purpose—Reward For Those In Harmony With God.



PASTOR RUSSELL

Corinth, Greece, March 10.—The L. B. S. A. Missions Investigation Committee is here. Pastor Russell, its Chairman, delivered an address in our largest Auditorium, Rev. Bosdayann served as interpreter. His text was: "God hath appointed a Day in which He will judge the world." (Acts xvii, 31.) He said:

do so is manifest, for all the repenting they could do and all the righteous living possible to them would not have saved them—they would have died anyway. Hence there could have been no message sent to them, for if the messenger had come and had said, "Repent, and live contrary to your fallen tastes and appetites," the people might properly enough have said, "Why, for what reason should we practice self-denial, self-restraint? Would it bring us any blessing of everlasting life or harmony with God?" The truthful answer would have been, "No, because you are already under a death sentence and alienated from God as sinners."

Hence, God merely overlooked or "winked" at the ignorance and superstition of the period from Adam to the close of the 4361 years. But as soon as Jesus had died, "the Just for the unjust," to make reconciliation for iniquity—immediately the message went forth—God offered forgiveness and reconciliation to those who would believe in Jesus and would accept the Divine terms. Such have their sins forgiven. Such may come back to fellowship with God. And, in the next Age, such may eventually attain full human perfection by restitution processes, up, up to all that was lost in Adam and redeemed at Calvary.

God's Appointed Day.
Let us note carefully what the Apostle says respecting God's appointed Day for the judging of the world. He says that the command to repent now goes forth to all men everywhere, "because God hath appointed a [future] Day, in which He will judge the world." The Apostle does not refer to that Day as already begun, but as merely appointed or arranged for in advance. He means that in arranging that "Jesus, by the grace of God, should taste death for every man," God was arranging that every man might have a judgment or a trial, to determine whether or not he will be worthy of this blessing which Jesus' death provides him an opportunity to secure. The Day was future in Saint Paul's time, and it is still future, because God has other work which He proposes shall be accomplished first, before the world's Day of Judgment or trial shall begin.

The world's trial Day, or period of judgment, or testing as to worthiness or unworthiness for everlasting life, will be one of the thousand-year days mentioned by Saint Peter, who said, "A day with the Lord is as a thousand years." The same period is called elsewhere the "Day of Christ," the Day or period of Messiah's glorious reign. By the righteous ruling of His Kingdom, by the suppression of Satan and sin, and the scattering of darkness, ignorance and superstition, by the shining forth of the Sun of Righteousness with healing in its beams, that glorious Day will bring blessing to the world in general—opportunity for each individual to come into judgment or trial, the result of which will be either the reward of life everlasting or the punishment of death everlasting—"everlasting destruction from the presence of the Lord and from the glory of His power."

That great thousand-year Day is still future; and, meantime, the Apostle's words respecting mankind are still true: "The whole creation groaneth and travaileth in pain together"—"waiting for the manifestation of the sons of God." (Romans viii, 22, 19.) If the nineteen centuries' delay in the introduction of this great Day seems long, let us not forget that it is less than half as long as the period which preceded—the period prior to the coming of Jesus and His dying, "the Just for the unjust." Nor is the entire period long from the Divine standpoint. For as the Prophet declares: "A thousand years in God's sight are but as yesterday, or even shorter, as a watch in the night." The six great Days of a thousand years each, in which sin and death have reigned, are to be followed by a great Sabbath of rest from evil—a thousand years of refreshment, reinvigoration, upbuilding, restitution.—Acts iii, 19-23.

"The Mystery of God."
The purpose of the nineteen centuries between the time when Jesus died as man's Redeemer and the time when He will take His Throne as the Restorer of Adam and his race is spoken of as a Mystery, because the great work of grace herein accomplished is measurably hidden from the world. The Jews do not understand it; they expected that Messiah's Kingdom and their own national exaltation would have come long ago. They cannot tell now why they have been for eighteen centuries outcast from the Divine favor. It is a mystery to them.

The Scriptures tell us who may know or understand this Mystery and when it will be finished. They say: "The secret of the Lord is with them that fear Him, and He will show them His Covenant." They tell us that in the days of the voice of the Seventh Angel, when he shall begin to sound, the mystery of God shall be finished, "which He hath kept secret from the foundation of the world." Saint Paul refers to this mystery, saying that it was "hidden from past Ages and Dispensations," and that it "is now revealed to the saints." He explains what it is, namely, that we should be fellow-heirs and of the same Body with our Redeemer—Ephesians iii, 6.

This clearly means that the entire Church class, sometimes called "the Body of Christ, which is the Church," and sometimes styled "the Bride, the Lamb's Wife," is to be sharer with the Redeemer in the sufferings of the present life and in the glories of the future. The nearly nineteen centuries of this Age, therefore, according to the Scriptures, have been for the purpose, not of giving the world its trial for everlasting life or death, but for the trying, testing, the electing or selecting

of the Church, and her perfecting with her Lord as sharers in "His resurrection."—"the First Resurrection."—Philippians iii, 10; Revelation xx, 5.
We have in the past made two serious mistakes respecting the Divine purposes. One was that we assumed without Scriptural authority that the whole world is now on trial for eternal life, falling to see that it is merely the elect Church, the consecrated class. The other mistake is that we reasoned as though the Church were part of the world and, therefore, that the trial of the Church meant the trial of the world. But hearken to the Scriptures respecting the Church: "Ye are not of the world, even as I am not of the world;" and again, "Let your light so shine before men that they, seeing your good works, may glorify your Father which is in heaven;" "in the day of their visitation."—I Peter ii, 12.

Two Different Rewards.
We should notice also the wide difference between the reward promised the Church and that proffered the world. In both cases the reward will be everlasting life. In both cases this will mean full harmony with God, because "All the wicked will God destroy." And again we read that "Whoever hath the Son hath life, and whosoever hath not the Son shall not see life." So, then, the attainment of everlasting life, either by the Church class or by the world, will mean coming into full harmony with the heavenly Father and with the Lord Jesus, by the merit of Christ's sacrifice. It will mean a full turning away from sin and a full devotion to God and to righteousness.

The difference will be as to nature. The reward for the world will be earthly nature, human nature, with everlasting life in an earthly Paradise or Eden—world-wide. Mankind never lost a spiritual or heavenly condition through Adam's disobedience, nor in any other manner. He never had such a condition or nature, or a right to it, that he could lose it. He was made man, "a little lower than the angels." His crown of glory and honor was an earthly crown. His dominion was over the birds of the air, over cattle and over the fish of the sea. This which he lost Jesus paid the redemption price for at Calvary; and these things lost are the very things which Jesus and His elect Bride will restore to mankind during the thousand years of the Messianic Kingdom. Thus we read: "The Son of man came to seek and to save that which was lost."

Partakers of the Divine Nature.
The reward of the Church, eternal life, perfection and harmony with God, will be on the spirit plane—wholly different from the human. Man in perfection will again be a little lower than the angels; but the Church, as the Body of Christ, will share with her Lord in His exaltation, "far above angels, principalities and powers and every name that is named"—the divine nature. This reward comes to the Church under a special covenant of sacrifice, which the Bible specifies.

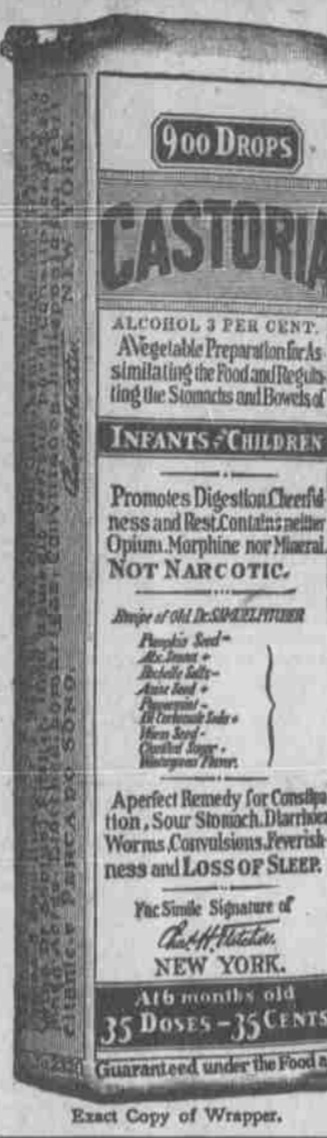
This Church class, like her Lord, must sacrifice the earthly nature, earthly interests, hopes and aims, and must be begotten of the Father to a heavenly, spiritual nature, in order to be a sharer in the First Resurrection; and she must enter into her reward before the Messianic Kingdom can be established for the blessing of mankind in general—the saving of the world from sin and from death.

Thus the Apostle wrote that the groaning creation "waits for the manifestation of the sons of God." (Romans viii, 19.) "Now are we the sons of God, but it doth not yet appear what we shall be (how glorious, how great), but we know that when He shall appear we shall be like Him." Our resurrection change will make us like the Savior; as it written, "We shall all be changed, in a moment, in a twinkling," because "flesh and blood cannot inherit the Kingdom of heaven."

"Commandeth All to Repent."
Come back again to Saint Paul's words. He does not say that God commanded the Church to sacrifice, for if sacrifice were a command it would cease to be a sacrifice. Nowhere are God's people commanded to present their bodies living sacrifices, nor to walk in the footsteps of Jesus, nor to take up the cross and follow Him. To the saints these sacrificing features are set forth as a privilege—as an opportunity. If they do these things the Divine arrangement is that through the imputation of Christ's merit their sacrifice will be holy and acceptable unto God, and they will be granted a share with the Redeemer in His high exaltation—the reward of sacrifice, of self-denial, of loving, voluntary service to God, the truth and the brethren.

But to the world in general the Lord issues a command, viz. Repent; turn from your sins; come back to Me; seek My face; seek to know and do My will. The basis of this command is the Divine declaration that God's grace has provided redemption in the blood of Jesus, a reconciliation through His blood, and that by and by the whole world will be on trial for life or death everlasting, in a great Day of trial, which God has ordained and over which Christ and the Church will supervise, as Judges.

Whoever comes to a knowledge of this great Divine arrangement through Christ has an incentive to live righteously, soberly and godly in this present time. Whoever hears and heeds this command is laying up for himself a good treasure of character and preparation for his life or death trial in the great Judgment Day of the Messianic Kingdom. Whoever ignores this knowledge and "saves to the flesh" will find himself reaping to the flesh further weakness, further degradation and severer stripes or punishments in that great thousand-year Judgment Day.



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