

Pastor Russell's Sermon

PERILS AMONGST FALSE BRETHREN

St. Paul's Experiences Duplicate the Master's.

HIS FAITHFULNESS TO CHRIST

Jesus' Footstep Followers Wounded in the House of Their Friends—The Philosophy of the Matter—How to Receive Such Experiences—Why They Are Permitted—The Results They Serve—Special Perils Today.



Pastor Russell

Ottawa, Ont., March 30.—Pastor Russell, who since his last visit has many friends here, arrived again this morning. As usual, the largest auditorium was engaged for him. He spoke twice today. We report one of his addresses, from St. Paul's words.

"Perils among false brethren." (2 Corinthians 11:26.) He said: St. Paul was remarkable in many respects, but chiefly for his loving devotion to the Master and His Cause. His faithfulness brought also many trying experiences. In our context he enumerated some of these. He served the Cause of Christ to such an extent that many thought him unwise, and counted him a fool. This service brought him stripes, whippings, as a disturber of the peace—not that he did disturb the peace, but that those who opposed his teachings raised a tumult and blamed him for it, in order to bring him into disrepute, hinder his service and forward their own interests. This at times brought him to prison, too, and even close to death's door.

Nevertheless, he rejoiced in all such privileges. He declared that five times he received whippings, stripes; once he was stoned, and three times he was shipwrecked. But none of these things moved him from faithfulness to his Master, whose servants he had persecuted before his eyes were opened.

Then he recounts various perils experienced from waters, from robbers, from the Jews, from the heathen—in the city, in the wilderness, on the sea. He winds up the list of perils in the words of the text, "Perils amongst false brethren."

One question which will arise in many minds is, "Were these sufferings—stripes, perils, etc.—deserved?" If asked, the answer would surely be that they were not deserved; for St. Paul was a noble character and bore the Message of God's grace in Christ—"good tidings of great joy which shall be unto all people." The next question with some would be, "If his sufferings were not punishments, what were they?"

We reply that they were the same as were the Master's—evidences of his loyalty to God and of the darkness of the world, which led them to oppose him. The declaration, "Whosoever will live godly will suffer persecution," was fully exemplified in his own experiences and in the Master's. The amount of suffering as a reward for well-doing marked the measure of loyalty and zeal, and the measure of hatred and malice aroused by the Adversary. The answer to the question as to why Jesus suffered is the answer to all such questions in respect to St. Paul and all other footstep followers.

Darkness Hates the Light.
The Master declared that He stood for the principles of light, righteousness, Truth; while Satan stands for the reverse—darkness, superstition, blindness. And so it is with the followers of Jesus. They must all be children of the light, must walk in the light, must be uncompromising in their attitude toward sin and all that is wrong. Therefore the world will hate them and say all manner of evil against them falsely. Yes, you will feel that they do God service when they slay the righteous, whether literally, as in Jesus' case and St. Paul's, or by "shooting out arrows, even bitter words," as is the more popular method of the present time.

today many extol the Lord and the Apostles, and denounce their persecutors, while they similarly persecute.

The climax of St. Paul's perils, the severest of them all, was from false brethren. How strange that seems! One would think that however much the heathen or the Jews might have persecuted him, at least all professed followers of Jesus would have thanked God for his example and ministry, and have esteemed him. But this was not so; and as we look back to the Master before him, we see the same to be true. As He declared, "A man's foes shall be they of his own household."

The Master was a Jew. The Jews were His brethren according to the flesh; and it was they that hated Him without a cause—they that persecuted Him—they that said, "He hath a devil and is mad"—they that "took up stones to stone Him"—they that finally crucified Him. "He came unto His own, and His own received Him not," except a few saintly, elect ones.

St. Paul also had persecution from the Jews, who repeatedly sought his life. He lived after the establishment of the Church. He had also Christian brethren, begotten of the Holy Spirit and fellow-members of the Body of Christ. Jesus had none such. "Of the people there were none with Him."

The Holy Spirit was not given until Pentecost; hence Jesus could not receive Christian persecution. The nearest approximation was the case of Judas. But if St. Paul enjoyed the sweetness of Christian fellowship in his study, labors and toils, he also knew the bitterness of opposition and persecutions from false brethren—the climax of his perils. We may be sure that such experiences were more difficult for him to bear than any others, because they came closer home. They came from brethren of the closest imaginable relationship—fellow-members of the Body of Christ.

The Godly Suffer Persecution.
As we glance down through this Gospel Age, from St. Paul's day to the present, we find that all followers of Jesus have had experiences such as He foretold for them—persecutions. We find that these persecutions have come from every quarter, but none, apparently, more severe, more cruel, more perilous, than those which have come from Christian brethren. It is scarcely necessary for us to refer to history to demonstrate this fact. Disputes between Christians have been very bitter. Thousands have lost their lives at each other's hands. The word *heretic* became more obnoxious than any other term in the dictionary.

Neither Catholic nor Protestant can deny the terrible story of the pages of history. All true men are ashamed of the record. All are ready to say, "We would not so have done." Monuments stand in various parts of the world, marking places where sectarian strife has manifested itself in atrocious, barbarous acts. Our Catholic friends blush at the story of the Huguenots. Our Church of England friends blush at the story of the Covenanters and other non-conformists. Our Presbyterian friends, in turn, blush for atrocious acts, injustice, etc., done in the name of Calvinism.

We might almost say that each denomination in its turn has been a subject of persecution from one and another. Baptists were publicly whipped—sometimes driven from their homes to exile. So were the Puritans, who afterwards became persecutors themselves. The Methodists also suffered from sectarian spite and jealousy, ignorance and superstition. Indeed, who will dispute that Christendom has good cause to be ashamed of her own record, no matter what her standpoint may be?

Thank God for the advancement made along the line of human sympathy! No longer can civilized people take pleasure in public executions, tortures, burning at the stake, as in former times. Whatever competition may remain between Christian brethren, the peril is not that of open persecution; for general sentiment has advanced beyond the point where physical torture could be tolerated.

We have come to the time when Calvinists erect a monument to Servetus, expressing dissent from their great leader's mistake in causing a Christian brother to be burned. We have come to the place where the "perils amongst false brethren" are of a different kind. Now whatever jealousies or rivalries there may be, either at home or in the mission fields, are recognized as improper and suppressed, so far as brethren connected with popular and influential bodies of Christians are concerned.

But is it not true today that the Truth is unpopular? Has this not always been the fact? Is it not true that in proportion as the denominations have become popular they have escaped persecution? But was he to those who, as were Jesus and the Apostles, are unpopular! If they indeed escape the cross, the guillotine, the rack and the fagot, they are amenable to other means of torture. Something can be trumped up against their personality. Insultations can be given by word and look, and stung of shoulder. More damage can be accomplished in this way than in outward attack.

the Master is still of the same mind as St. John expressed when he declared, "Whosoever hateth his brother is a murderer, and he knoweth that no murderer hath eternal life abiding in him." (1 John 3:15.) Murderers may indeed receive severe stripes, and eventually learn better under Messiah's Kingdom; but no one of a murderous condition of heart, seeking to do evil to a brother, could possibly be of suitable character to be a joint-heir with his Master in the Kingdom.

"One of the Least of These."
In every time, and now, the spirit of persecution naturally would strike most prominently certain leading figures; nevertheless, even as Jesus' words implied, all lovers of righteousness are to have more or less share in such experiences of opposition. St. Paul mentions this, saying, "Ye endured a great fight of afflictions; partly, whilst ye were made a gazing-stock . . . and partly whilst ye became companions of them that were so used." (Hebrews 10:32, 33.) Jesus gives us the same thought in His declaration that whosoever shall offend one of the least of these, His disciples, it were better for him that a millstone were hanged about his neck and he were drowned in the depths of the sea.—Matthew 18:6.

This, of course, is very highly figurative language, and yet it must have a special meaning. It must mean that the Lord has a special care over all of His consecrated saints; and that no matter how poor, how weak, how ignorant, they may be, the very least of His followers are supervised, and injury to the least is punishable. Of course, there would still be an awakening from the dead for the one who was drowned in the sea; and so there are possibilities of help and recovery for those who would stumble the Lord's "little ones." Nevertheless, the intimation is that of drastic punishment. This would not mean anything like we once supposed—eternal torment—but some just recompense of reward for every evil deed.

From this standpoint we may readily assume that considerable satisfaction of Justice is necessary; for surely a considerable number of the Lord's "little ones" have suffered persecution. And as we have seen, not all of this persecution lies at the door of the world. Much of it lies at the door of the professed Church of Christ—"false brethren."

Speaking of some such, Jesus once declared that they would have great disappointment when the time of rewards would come. He says, "Many shall say unto Me in that Day, Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in Thy name, . . . and done many wonderful works? And I will declare, I do not recognize you." They will not be worthy of the Lord's recognition as amongst His Elect Church, His Bride class. We shall be glad if they will be found worthy of some blessing under His Kingdom. But there will be great disappointment to them. They missed the greater point of the Gospel—Love.

Love For the Brethren.
The Lord's will concerning all His followers is that they should love one another as He loved them. St. John expressed this sentiment, saying that as Jesus loved the Church and laid down His life for the Church, so also His followers should lay down their lives for the brethren. (1 John 3:16.) If this is the love standard that the Lord has set for His people, how sorely some will soon be disappointed in respect to His will if they have ignored this requirement. If, instead of loving the brethren and laying down their lives for them, they say all manner of evil against them, etc., what then? Then they are false brethren. Then they are the peril of the true brethren, as mentioned in our text.

Oh, how much the true followers of Jesus need to impress upon themselves this great lesson—that love does no ill to his neighbor, that love is sympathetic, suffereth long and is kind, vaunteth not itself, is not puffed up, saureth not merely its own interest and welfare, but seeketh the interest and welfare of others!

The supreme test of our loyalty to God is our love for Him. And this love is manifested by our desire to do those things acceptable to Him. There is little that we really can do for the Almighty. He is so great and we are so small! But if we have His spirit of Love, then we shall love all those who love Him. And our conduct toward them will demonstrate the real sentiment of our hearts. Thus seen, we are daily making our reward in the Lord's sight, daily showing Him to what degree we are worthy or unworthy of His great reward.

Those mentioned in our text as false brethren, but did not get into this position immediately. It was a growth, a development. The wrong spirit gradually supplanted the right. It is well that Christians note this insidious canker which gnaws at the root of brotherly love, tends to poison the spirit and to bring forth the evil fruitage mentioned. Apparently, in some cases, the spirit of pride, the spirit of sectarianism, the spirit of ambition, are the leading features of the wrong course, which, if permitted to go to the heart, will develop a bad fruitage, such as we are discussing. It will produce false brethren, persecuting brethren, blind to the real spirit of their Master, heady, high-minded.

Let us then, beloved, be more and more on guard against the encroachments of the Adversary upon us as New Creatures! Let us be more and more zealous for the Spirit of our Master and show forth the praises of Him who has called us out of darkness into His marvelous light! In no way can we better show forth these praises than by exemplifying in our daily conduct the lessons we have learned of Him!

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