

Pastor Russell's Sermon

THE PENALTY OF UNTHANKFULNESS

Gratitude For Mercies Enhance Their Value.

DIVINE BLESSINGS MANY.

Pastor Russell in His Thanksgiving Sermon Says Unthankfulness Breeds Discontent and Undermines Happiness—True Christians Accept Their Life's Experiences Cheerfully, Knowing the Lord's Measure to Be Just.



New Haven, Conn., Nov. 26.—Pastor Russell, of the Brooklyn and London Tabernacles, addressed large and interested audiences here twice today. We report his discourse on Thanksgiving. He said:—Our experiences in life are to a considerable extent what we make them. Bible students should be philosophers—every one of them. Why? Because the Wisdom from above is the noblest science and best instruction. As St. Paul declares, it tends to promote the spirit of a sound mind—and a sound mind is necessarily a philosophical one. Murmurers and complainers are not philosophers, but the reverse. A sound mind tells us to take things as they are, to make the best of them rather than to quarrel over them and find fault with Divine providence and make ourselves and everybody else in our environment miserable.

True Christian people in every land and under all conditions have found plenty of cause for thankfulness, even though they have had their share, or more, of life's difficulties. Nor was this thankfulness because they had mastered the Divine philosophy and understood the why and the wherefore of the present reign of sin and death. They accepted their portion of life's joys and sorrows by faith, believing that their portion was measured to them by the Lord and that full obedience and submission, with cheerfulness, was their duty.

Excuses For Unthankfulness. We are ready to concede that the world, awakening from the sleepy superstitions of the past, can readily find many excuses for declining to be thankful. If we mention some of these it will not be by way of endorsing them, rather to show the unthankful masses that we recognize their viewpoint but do not agree with it. We would point them to the better course of thankfulness and proportionate happiness. To their complaint that they have fewer and smaller blessings than their more wealthy neighbors, we remind them that the poor of this favored land habitually waste more than would make very thankful some of the poor of other lands.

We remind that under Divine blessing upon the soil and the Divine blessing upon human skill conveniences and comforts have multiplied about us so that the "common people" of our land have home comforts and conveniences and educational facilities and parks and libraries, well paved and lighted streets and cheap transportation such as were not dreamed of in our grandfathers' days, nor enjoyed even by the rich. Let us not greedily ask more along these lines until we have fully appreciated present privileges and blessings and returned thanks therefor.

"But," says one, "our forefathers were superstitiously thankful, and we must avoid that. They gave thanks to God for the sunshine and the rain. We have learned that these are provisions of nature and we thank nobody for them. Our forefathers thanked God for escape from feudal slavery, but we see that they should have rebelled against feudalism and bought their freedom with their own courage."

"Our forefathers thanked God, if they were sick, that they did not die and go to eternal torture. We are coming to the rationalistic idea that they should have thanked their physician for recovery from sickness and should not have believed in an everlasting future of torture, because so far as we can see that teaching is all humbug. Intelligent people of the world have no more knowledge than ourselves respecting a future. We agree with the college professors that our race is progressing by an evolutionary law of nature, and that God has nothing to do with it, and that there is no future life for us except in the sense that we, in the future, will be represented on a higher plane of living, by our evolved children. You will perceive, therefore, why we consider Thanksgiving Day a piece of medieval superstition."

Replies to the Unthankful. Our reply to this reasoning must be along two lines: first, philosophical; second, analytical:—(1) Are not these increasingly large numbers of pantheistic and atheistic evolutionists unphilosophical? They admit that they have blessings far beyond anything known to their forefathers, and they admit that their unhappiness has increased in proportion as these blessings and reasonings respecting them have been received. Would not a true philosophy tell them

that if happiness is their aim and desire, their loss of happiness is not due to the increased blessings, but to the improper and unthankful manner in which they have received them? Would not philosophy alone, apart from the Bible or religion, have warned them that, even if their theories were true, it would be unwise to cultivate them in their own minds and in the minds of others?

(2) Let us now analyze the foregoing complaints. Who can prove to us that there is no living and true God—that there is merely a god of nature, a blind force? Who can explain to us the power which holds our earth in its orbit around the sun, and which has given us summer and winter, cold and heat; has given us mountains and valleys, hills and plains, in pleasing variety and loaded with minerals most useful to us and merely waiting our heaven-directed genius to bring them forth for the blessing of our race, and to make of earth the Paradise of God?

What philosophy can prove to us that these things have happened by chance and that we are wrong in accepting the Scriptural suggestion, "Day unto day uttereth speech and night unto night showeth knowledge, and there is no place where their voice is not heard"—proclaiming an All-Wise and beneficent Creator? We know that the wisdom and beneficence of our Creator were hidden from our mental view by our superstitious and irrational creeds of the past, but now, as the electric light has superseded the tallow candle, so God's Word today is shining forth to those who have eyes to see its beauty.

Let us not boast ourselves as possessed of so much greater courage than had some in feudal times. Let us note, on the contrary, that the patriotism which demanded and got the "Magna Charta" of our liberties was as noble and courageous as any that we have today, or more so. Our freedom from some of the superstitions of the past is the result of the spread of education, and we must thank neither ourselves nor our forefathers for this widespread education; we must thank the Lord for it. It came upon the world in spite of the opposition of the rich and the indifference of the poor. It came because God's due time for it had arrived.

The Scriptures fully assure us that it is a special mark or evidence that the New Era of Divine blessing, prophesied in the Scriptures long ago, is now at hand. Compare St. Peter's words (Acts iii, 19-21) with the words of the Prophet Daniel. (Daniel xii, 1.) Rightly understood and appreciated the very arguments used to oppose God are grounds for sincere praise and gratitude and hope for the future.

A Word to Higher Critics and Evolutionists.

The law of sin and death is referred to in Scripture. We grant, as all thinking people must, that the teachings of the creeds formulated in the Dark Ages, respecting the torture of the dead, are absurd; and more than this we hold that they are unscriptural; that they were conjured up under superstitious fears, and that certain symbolical pictures of the Bible were wrested to the support of those misconceptions of the Divine character and Plan. But does the rejection of those absurd theories disprove an intelligent Creator and disprove the Bible's declaration that He is a God of Love, and that there is a rational explanation of the present reign of sin and death, and a rational basis for hope for the resurrection of the dead, under the glorious reign of Emmanuel, the Prince of Life, and the blessings which His Kingdom will surely bring to every member of our race?

That the human family is in a weak and depraved condition, mentally, morally and physically, is beyond dispute; and evolutionists have not proven the Bible in error in its explanation that present weakness, mental, moral and physical, is proof of degeneracy which came to our race because of sin. Consanguinity between the human and the ape has not been proven, but if it had been there would be just as much ground for reasoning that a monkey is a degenerate human as for claiming that humanity are evolved apes.

In opposition to this irrational theory we note that mankind in general, even those of humble birth, have organs of the mind which they rarely use, and which cannot, therefore, be said to be evolved by them; and those organs are not the lower but the higher ones, the nobler ones. These qualities of mind are present but dormant, merely waiting to be quickened into activity. This fact favors the Bible view that mankind are fallen and that few are living up to even the best of the impaired organism which they possess.

The evolutionary theory, that we should live and die simply for the advancement of future generations, may prove an incentive to some, but in our judgment these will be few. Of far greater interest is the Bible's teaching that the present is the right time, in which our friends and neighbors and ourselves, one by one, fall asleep in death; and that God's Infinite Wisdom and Power and Love have provided a resurrection of the dead, both of the just and the unjust—the just to glory, honor and everlasting life, the unjust to a glorious condition very different from the present reign of sin and death—under the reign of the Prince of Life, with glorious opportunities, for a thousand years, of uplifting blessedness. Then everlasting life will be the reward to the faithful and appreciative.

Discontent the Viper of Anarchy. We have noted that unthankfulness means discontent, and that discontent means unhappiness and misery. Who then can afford to be unthankful, or to take the road of unbelief, which sure-

ly leads thereto? St. Paul draws our attention to the fact that much of the degradation of the heathen should be directly traced to unthankfulness. He declares that the Headship of the Almighty over all creation, and His unlimited power, are clearly manifested in the things of nature.

He declares that the heathen "are without excuse, because they, when they knew God, glorified Him not as God, neither were thankful, but became vain in their imaginations, and their foolish heart was darkened. Professing themselves to be wise they became foolish" and idolaters. "Wherefore God also gave them up to uncleanness, through the lusts of their own hearts, to dishonor their own bodies between themselves." (Romans i, 21.) Unthankfulness to God was not punished directly nor threatened with a future punishment. Acting automatically it separated the unthankful ones from their Creator, and their course became downward, degenerate.

The spirit of unthankfulness as a malady threatens our present civilization with death. Year by year the sentiment is growing, and discontent, when fully latched out, will be the viper of anarchy, for whose virus there is no human remedy.

We thank God that although this awful anarchy foretold is near at hand, and is beyond human ability to cope with, yet Divine Love has promised to intervene to save the unthankful world by the establishment of the Messianic Kingdom in power and great glory, for the blessing of all the families of the earth; for the making straight of all the crooked paths; for the opening of the eyes of understanding, that all may see the Truth.

The Thanksgiving of Christians.

St. Paul, addressing Christians, says: "What manner of persons ought we to be?" Similarly, we might say, "How earnest should be the thanksgiving of Christians! But alas! Thanksgiving Day with us has lost much of the religious import known to our forefathers. Notwithstanding false doctrines inculcated by man-made creeds, our forefathers believed the Bible record of man's original perfection, his fall into sin and condemnation, the redemption accomplished through Jesus, and a restoration to Divine favor thus made possible. These truths constituted the foundation for a living faith in God and led them to give thanks for the harvest of the year, accounting that if every good and perfect gift comes directly or indirectly from the hand of God it should be received accordingly and acknowledged.

Today, however, we have the form of godliness without the power, because the precious faith has been well nigh destroyed by the Higher Critics and Evolutionists, who for the past fifty years have been laboring constantly to this end, and with wonderful success. Well does God ask, Who believes the Divine Record or Message, and who sees the Arm of Jehovah connected with the world's affairs?

Anyone having lost faith in the Bible and its God has therefore little left except the form of godliness, without its power. Nevertheless, here and there in all nations and all sects of Christendom are to be found loyal souls, bewildered by the present trend of affairs, and crying out to God for further light, and appreciative and giving thanks for every blessing, even though they do not understand the philosophy of their own experience.

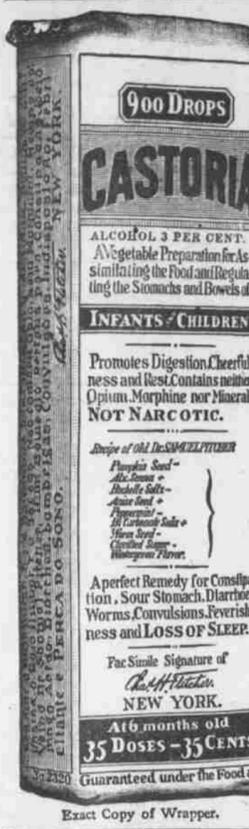
The Morning Star Dawn.

St. Peter declares that the sun-burst of the New Dispensation of Messiah's Kingdom will be preceded by the morning star, which will shine into the hearts of God's faithful people in the early dawn, to herald its approach. The Sun of Righteousness has not yet arisen, but many of God's people are noting the clear light now shining upon the Divine Word, and are realizing that it comes from Him, and that He is preparing them, through a better understanding of the Bible, to appreciate the glorious sunlight of Divine mercy which will soon overspread the world and scatter the darkness of earth's superstition, sin and death.

And so, as we get the matter rightly divided before our minds, we get the true understanding, the special enlightenment needed in our day, and we are enabled to rightly divide the Word better than did our fathers, so that to day we can see, as our fathers did not see, the teaching of God's Word respecting the "high calling" and "restoration"—the spiritual portion of blessing for the Church, and the human portion of blessing for the world. We also see something about the times and seasons—which apply to the Church and which to the blessing of the world.

We are not to forget that the Lord promised that He would guide His people in the way of the Truth and show them things to come. We are to "study" to show ourselves approved—study the doctrine and endeavor to have our course of conduct harmonize with it—study to perform faithfully the duties of a loyal soldier of the cross of Christ.

These alone are able to give thanks in the highest sense of the term, because they, better than others, appreciate the Divine Program and can fully endorse the words of our text. I urge all of this class to be very thankful, singing and making melody in their hearts to the Lord in respect to all of their affairs, and waiting patiently for the full development of the Divine Program, assured by faith it will prove exceedingly, abundantly more than we could have asked or thought. I urge the remainder of mankind to cultivate thankfulness to whatever extent they can see and appreciate the Divine character, and to exercise faith therein. There is a blessing in it, not only for the present lifetime, but as a preparation for the life to come.



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