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Barton, Vermont

PEOPLE'S PULPIT...



Sermon by CHARLES T. RUSSELL, Pastor Brooklyn Tabernacle.

Unfit For the Kingdom.

"No Man Having Put His Hand to the Plow and Looking Back, is Fit For the Kingdom of God" (Luke ix, 62).

Sunday, Dec. 5.—Pastor Russell had a large attendance today at the Brooklyn Tabernacle. He took for his text the words of the Savior, "No man having put his hand to the plow, and looking back, is fit for the Kingdom of God" (Luke ix, 62). The discourse follows:

The Great Teacher did not use the methods of modern revivalists to secure a following. He did not ask the multitudes to raise their hand if they would prefer to go to heaven at death and then publish them as converts—Christians. Indeed his methods were the very reverse of this, avoiding all kinds of sensational appeals to pride, selfishness, vanity, etc. He set forth in plain terms the difficulties to be expected by all those who espouse his Cause and become his disciples. He warned them that it would mean the taking up of a cross and the bearing of it in his footsteps in the narrow way of self sacrifice. He warned these, saying, "Marvel not, if the world hate you. Ye know that it hated me before it hated you. If ye were of the world, the world would love his own; but because ye are not of the world, but I have chosen you out of the world, therefore the world hateth you" (1 John iii, 13; John xv, 18, 19).

Instead of trying to produce an excitement which would over-balance the judgment of his hearers and lead them to profess what they subsequently would not be able or willing to practice, the Great Teacher, on the contrary, said to those contemplating discipleship, "Sit down first and count the cost." Instead of attempting to sway the multitudes, our Lord took a different course and attempted to make disciples of only a special class—not the poor, not the rich, not the learned, not the ignorant, but, irrespective of these class lines and distinctions, his call was to all those who loved righteousness and hated iniquity. All those who were weary and heavy-laden, oppressed by sin and its penalty to themselves and their friends—these he called to learn of him and find rest of

soul.

Thenceforth that class, having been brought in touch with the Redeemer, can make further progress only through faith in him and submission to his guidance into all Truth and into fellowship with the Father. The class thus influenced we believe to be small as compared to humanity as a whole—only that portion which in honesty of heart deplores sin and longs for righteousness and fellowship with God. These, like the remainder of the race, are by nature fallen, imperfect, sinful, condemned, but in these still persists some trace of the image of God, in the perfection of which father Adam was created. It is this trace or strain of the Divine character represented by conscience and faith which leads them to recognize their fallen and sinful condition, as compared with the Divine standard of perfection, and this becomes the basis of their calling or drawing of God, their "ear." "He that hath an ear, let him hear" (Revelation ii, 7). It will be observed that we are not specially blaming or condemning those who have not the hearing ear. On the contrary we remember the gracious words of Scripture, that in God's due time, "All the blind eyes shall be opened; all the deaf ears shall be unstopped" (Isaiah xxxv, 5). We are glad of this promise of God that ultimately all shall see and all shall hear and all shall know Him, from the least to the greatest. We rejoice, too, that when they know Him truly, they will rejoice, even as do we now. That will be their time of responsibility, their time of trial or judgment for life or death eternal on the earthly plane.

The Kingdom of God.

Our text speaks of the Kingdom of God. And it is important that we first of all notice that these words have in the Scriptures a two-fold significance. For instance, our Lord Jesus taught that we should pray to the Father, "Thy Kingdom come; thy will be done on earth as it is done in heaven." The reference of this prayer is to the Millennial reign or government of Christ, which St. Paul declares will begin at the Second Coming of our Lord, and continue until he shall have put down all insubordination, all sin, everything contrary to Divine character and Law. It will be

the Kingdom of God which will subdue all things. It will be the Kingdom of God amongst men perfected when all things shall have been subdued. And when Christ's mediatorial Kingdom shall be, at the end of the Millennium, delivered back to God, even the Father, God's Kingdom will have fully come in the earth. God's will then will be possible of accomplishment by men, because all will have reached perfection; and Christ's mediatorial Kingdom will end because it will be no longer necessary. It will have accomplished the great purpose for which it was intended.

It was not, however, respecting that Millennial reign, that mediatorial Kingdom, that our Lord spoke in our text, nor did he refer to the perfect Kingdom, as it will be turned over to the Father at the end of the Millennium and will last forever. Our Lord used the words, "Not fit for the Kingdom of God," as he did in many others of his discourses—in respect to the Church class now called of the Father to be the "Kingdom," in the sense of being the kings and priests of that Kingdom—the royalty of that Kingdom—the reigning family—the Queen, the Lamb's Wife, associated with the Heavenly Bridegroom, King of kings and Lord of lords, in his rule of a thousand years.

Not Fit For the Kingdom.

We now have before our minds the two ways in which the expression, Kingdom of God, is used and we can readily see that our Lord could not refer to the Millennial Kingdom and say that any would be too degraded to be fit for the influences of his Millennial Kingdom, because that Kingdom is designed for the very purpose of dealing with the unfit and gradually, during the thousand years of its reign of righteousness uplifting men out of sin and death conditions, if they will, to the full human perfection which Adam lost, which Jesus redeemed, and which is to be restored to the willing and obedient, as St. Peter declares (Acts iii, 19-21). It follows, then, that our Lord must have referred to those called of the Father and accepted by himself to be chiseled and polished—to be taught in the School of Christ and eventually to become his Bride and joint-heir in the Millennial Kingdom. No man will be esteemed fit for a share in that Millennial Kingdom, unless he attains to the glorious qualities of character, saintship, which the Scriptures set forth as the Divine standard—"Copies of God's dear Son" (Romans viii, 29).

"Fit for the Kingdom?" Let us think for a moment what these words signify. First of all we recognize that, as sinners, we were most thoroughly unfit for any favor of God, much less this greatest of all favors, joint-heirship with his Son and "partakers of the Divine nature" (1 Peter i, 4). But that difficulty has all been overcome with those who have come unto God through Christ and been made partak-

ers of his holy Spirit of adoption. Of such we read, "It is God that justifieth! Who is he that condemneth" (Romans viii, 33-34). It is Christ that died for our sins and who now is our Advocate. Who could in any wise come between us and our Savior and our Heavenly Father?

But this justification is not enough. If we were perfect actually instead of merely reckoned we would not be fit for the Kingdom of God—we would not be fit to govern others—to be "kings and priests unto God and to reign on the earth" (Revelation xx, 6). We should still be unfit to be the judges of the world, as the Scriptures declare that we shall be, saying, "Know ye not that the saints shall judge the world?" (1 Corinthians vi, 2). Our Heavenly Father in bringing many sons unto glory made the Captain of their salvation (Jesus) perfect through sufferings. Should we think it strange that we, his younger brethren, justified through his blood, should be required, not merely to make a profession of Godliness, holiness, but also to approve or attest that sentiment to be a part of our very character? Is not what we as the Church of Christ experience very reasonable indeed—who would be prepared to teach the world meekness, patience, brotherly-kindness, long-suffering, love, without first of all developing these various qualities of character in himself? And how could he develop these and be tested except under just such schooling and disciplining influences as now are upon the Church of Christ, with a view to making us fit for the glorious position of our high calling of God in Christ Jesus?

When the Scriptures refer to the Church as being fit for the Kingdom and as being the "overcomers" for whom the Kingdom is prepared, and who shall share its glories and honors, because "they are worthy" (Revelation iii, 4), we are to understand this worthiness and fitness, not that they were originally so, but that by God's grace, through Christ, a transformation work will eventually bring some to this glorious position where God himself will esteem them worthy to be called his children, and to be joint-heirs with his Son, the Great King.

There is one certain standard of fitness for the Kingdom and none other will do; but there may be quite a variety of conditions which make one unfit for the Kingdom. One of these is murder. "No murderer hath eternal life abiding in him" (1 John iii, 15). He would be unfit for the Kingdom. This would not signify, however, that one who had once been a murderer might not, by a sound conversion and by faithfulness in the School of Christ, become a member of the Kingdom class. But the word murder here used has a broader meaning than is generally attached to it—the meaning which St. John gave to the word when he said that whosoever hateth his brother is a murderer (1 John ii, 11). We

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