

The Home Mission Journal.

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The Dying Saviour to the Dying Thief.

A sermon preached by Rev. A. J. Hughes, Pastor of the Central Square Baptist Church, East Boston, Sabbath morning, April 1st, 1900.

TEXT:—Luke 23:43.—“And Jesus said unto him, Verily I say unto thee, to-day shalt thou be with me in Paradise.”

PART II.

2. Let us consider the malefactor's prayer, “Lord remember me when thou comest into thy Kingdom.”

It is a crowning victory when a bad man is led to pray. Here we have such a victory record at the very confines of the eternal world.

This prayer has a meaning that is worth finding out. For one thing it means that Jesus established a Kingdom while here. “Lord, remember me when thou comest into thy Kingdom.” He did found a Kingdom. He bore witness to the fact before Pilate. Pilate said to Him, “Art thou the King of the Jews?” Jesus replied, “sayest thou this of thyself, or did others tell it thee of me?” The governor answered, “Am I a Jew? Thine own nation, and the chief priests, have delivered thee unto me: What hast thou done?” Then came the mysterious answer, “My Kingdom is not of this world. If my Kingdom was of this world, then would my servants fight, that I should not be delivered to the Jews; but now is my Kingdom not of this world.” Pilate asked, “Art thou a King, then?” To which the divine man replied, “Thou sayest that I am a king. To this end was I born, and for this cause came I into the world, that I should bear witness unto the truth.” Or, in other words, “that I should found a kingdom. Now the kingdom founded by He who stood as a culprit before the Roman governor is the greatest institution under the stars and heaven. Men and nations do not reckon with it. Indeed, they count it a thing of noight. But its King is reckoning all the while with men and nations, and He is turning and overturning Kingdoms and empires, and republics as well, until He shall return again, and vindicate His right to reign. The fallen eagle of France—the first Napoleon paid his tribute to the Lord of this Kingdom during his exile on Saint Helena, saying, “Alexander, Caesar, Charlemagne, and myself, founded great empires, but they depended on force. Jesus Christ founded His empire upon love, and to this day millions would die for Him.”

For another thing, the malefactor's prayer means that Jesus is coming to earth again in the interest of the Kingdom He founded. “Lord remember me when thou comest into Thy Kingdom.” The prayer was in keeping with the promise of the Founder of the Kingdom mentioned in the prayer. He said He was coming to earth again. When in the upper room in the Holy City, He offered the symbolic wine to the Apostles. He spoke on this wise, “This cup is the new covenant in my blood, which is shed for many for the remissions of sins. Drink ye all of it. For as oft as ye eat this bread, and drink this cup, ye do show forth the Lord's death until He comes.” This was His own deliverance as to His return. We can receive with confidence what God's Son says. But further, the prayer was in keeping with the deliverance of a pair of eagles. On Ascension Day, as the disciples were gazing at the scarcely visible form of the ascending Lord, two men in white apparel stood beside them, and said, “Ye men of Galilee, why stand ye gazing up into heaven? This same Jesus who is taken up from you into heaven shall so come in like manner as ye have seen Him go into heaven.” We can receive with confidence also what God's angels say. The ascended King is going to return.

For yet another thing, the malefactor's prayer means that Jesus' return will be fraught with blessing to the subjects of His Kingdom. “Remember me,” he prays. Why? Because in that final restitution which will occur in connection with the Lord's return, when the old earth, staggering through the millennium of time under the weight of its primeval curse, shall be purged of its iniquities, its abominations, its sorrows, its heartaches and its tears, it will be worth one's while then, to be remembered by the Lord of the Kingdom. For He will then correct the wrong of time, He will lift up the heads of His saints, He will verify the promise; “To him that overcometh will I grant to sit with me in my throne, even as I also overcame, and am set down with my Father in His throne.” “At that time,” prayed the malefactor, “remember me.” We may all make the prayer, and if it be answered to us, unspeakable will be our joy.

The malefactor's prayer has not only a meaning that is worth finding out, it has, too, a spirit that is worth analyzing. It is noticeable that the spirit of sorrow speaks in it. I seem to detect a tone of confession therein, as though he said, “Pitiful Lord, I have thrown my life away and have done so without excuse. Yet remember and forgive me.” No wonder that he should so pray, for it is a criminal act for man or woman to throw the life away. It is noticeable also, that the spirit of humility speaks in the prayer. “Remember me. That is all. I do not ask for place; I do not ask for power. I ask simply to be remembered, that I drift not away into everlasting banishment and despair.” This is a humble prayer, and it got its answer. I announce this morning a new beatitude,—“Blessed are the prayers of the humble, for they shall be answered.” The publican in the Temple offered a humble prayer, “God be merciful to me a sinner,” and he got his answer in immediate justification. The prodigal in the parable offered a humble prayer—“Make me as one of thy hired servants,” and he got his answer in fresh raiment, and a banquet, and reinstatement in his father's house. Blessed be God, there never yet fell upon His ear a sincere and humble petition that did not bring back an answer larger than the petitioner's hope.

3. Let us consider Jesus' answer to the malefactor's prayer,—“To-day shalt thou be with me in Paradise.”

What magnanimity is displayed in this answer! The man could be of no earthly service to Jesus Christ, yet He saved him. Such is the habit of the Son of God. His salvation is not a commercial transaction, but a bestowment of love.

The answer given to the malefactor's prayer assures bliss. It assures Paradise as his future home. That means unspeakable bliss. The mother, in the well known poem, after telling her boy that the “Better Land,” about which he is enquiring with a child's eagerness, is not located where his imagination has placed it, says, “Eye hath not seen it, my gentle boy;

“Ear hath not heard its deep songs of joy.
Dreams cannot picture a world so fair;
Sorrow and death may not enter there.
Time doth not breathe on its fadless bloom,
For beyond the clouds, and beyond the tomb,
It is there, it is there, my child.”

The pious mother's definition of Paradise to her boy as a place of celestial bliss is corroborated by an inspired apostle in his life,—“I knew a man in Christ, above fourteen years ago, whether in or out of the body, I cannot tell, God knoweth, such an one caught up into Paradise, where he heard unspeakable words, which it is not possible for a man to utter.” Thus is the bliss of Paradise shown to be an unspeakable experience. But more than this, the Saviour's answer assures companionship with Himself in Paradise. “To-day shalt thou be with me in Paradise.” It would be a privilege of indescribable joy to walk with him the dusty thoroughfares of time; but to walk with Him the embowered paths of the Heavenly Paradise would be an experience begging language to describe. There to the dying thief did the Son of God open the gate of immortal and indescribable bliss.

Again, the answer given to the malefactor's prayer assured present bliss. “To-day shalt thou be with me in Paradise.” The poor penitent would not have to wait until the voice of the archangel, and the trump of God, and the gen-

eral resurrection, and the setting of the judgment, and the opening of the books before he should taste the sweets of Paradise. But before the sun should set on that awful day he would be numbered with the great multitude who also, in the upper sanctuary, cast their crowns at the Saviour's feet, and ascribe to Him the praise of their deliverance.

Yet again, the Saviour's answer assures certain bliss to the praying thief. “Verily I say unto thee,” act. Paradise was thus made sure to the man who prayed while the film of death was clouding his vision, and the weakness of death was making tremulous the very words of his prayer. By the same answer is Paradise made sure to us also who have accepted the penitent's Saviour. Why, then do you bother yourselves with needless fears? Rather,

“Sing, oh sing, ye heirs of glory,
Shout your triumphs as you go.
Zion's gates will open for you,
You shall find an entrance through.”

Some day, perhaps to-day, as no man has a lease on his life, but if not to-day, then some other day, we will enter Paradise, if we are the children of God by faith, and we will see this redeemed malefactor. Aye, and we will see Patriarchs, and prophets, and apostles, and martyrs, and confessors, and better than all, the Christ who shall have redeemed us all, and we will join with them in the high music of the upper Temple. Thus is there a magnificent future before us. Let us struggle and pray to be worthy of it.

Why did Luke record the dying thief's conversion? One reason was that the despairing might be encouraged. Another reason was that the foolhardy might be warned. Let those of us, then, who may be putting off the day of salvation be warned, and accept the Saviour now, lest coming down to death unsaved, we have neither heart nor hope to pray, and so pass prayerless and hopeless into the great unknown.

Health Column.

THE VALUE OF PAIN.

Pain is not disease; it is a symptom calling attention to the fact that disease exists. We do not remove the disease by stopping the pain. When putting my hand against a hot stove the pain may be stopped in two ways. (1.) By making an injection of cocaine, morphine or some other nerve-paralysing drug into my arm, without removing the hand. (2.) By removing the hand. In the first place the pain would at once cease. Could the man be blind-folded, he would declare that he was out of all danger, although his hand would be dangerously injured by being allowed to remain against the stove. In the second case, although the pain would not cease at once, the member would be saved.

Headaches usually arise from disturbances in digestion, due to overeating, eating freely of soft foods, making bad combinations of foods, too much of a variety at meals, etc. Fermentation and decay of the foods with the formation of poisons and irritants result. The danger is reported at headquarters. The thing to do is to heed the voice of the faithful sentinel, assist Nature to get rid of the impurities generated either by washing out the stomach, drinking freely of water, fasting for a day, by vigorous exercise, or eliminative baths. Recognize in the pain the voice of a friend calling attention to the fact that we have done wrong, and resolve never again to violate the Laws of Health on this point. In a day or so the transgressor would feel well, and would be able to keep from getting into the same or a worse condition by avoiding the causes.

This is not the way these symptoms are usually treated. Pain is looked upon as an enemy not as the voice of a friend. The sick one goes to a physician and demands something that will stupefy or paralyse the nerves—the pain must stop at once. He is given an opiate, the pain stops; the food still keeps on decaying in the stomach, he imagines he is well. The disease still exists, the symptom alone has been removed. The faithful sentinel has been knocked down. The means of telegraphic communications to