

INVOCATION.

My Father, God, I turn away From all the world to cling to thee, And ask that thy protecting arm May be outstretched to strengthen me; For I am weak unless I stand So near that I can touch thy hand.

— Hannah W. Payson.

Visitor Pulpit.

THE NAZARENE AND THE SECT OF THE NAZARENES.

A SERMON BY REV. C. H. SPURGEON.

"And he came and dwelt in a city called Nazareth: that it might be fulfilled which was spoken by the prophets, He shall be called a Nazarene."—Matt. 2: 23.

We find the Jews when speaking of Paul, saying "We have found this man a pestilent fellow, and a mover of sedition among all the Jews throughout the world, and a ring-leader of the sect of the Nazarenes."

Our Saviour though actually born at Bethlehem, was commonly known as Jesus of Nazareth, because Nazareth was the place where he was brought up. There he remained with his reputed father in the carpenter's shop until the time of his showing to the people.

You will begin to understand why the Saviour is said to be called by the prophet a Netzar, or a Nazarene, and you will guess that Matthew refers to the passage in Isaiah in the eleventh chapter at the first verse, where it is said that a rod shall come out of the stem of Jesse, and "a Netzar, a Nazarene, a Branch shall grow out of his roots."

A late traveller tells us that he had a Mohanetan guide through Palestine, and whenever they came to a village that was very dirty, very poor, and inhabited by professed Christians, he always said, "These are not Moslems; they are netza," or "Nazarenes," throwing all the spite he could into the word, as if he could not have uttered a more contemptuous term.

Our Lord Jesus Christ was never ashamed of this name: in fact, He called Himself "Jesus of Nazareth" after he had risen from the dead. He told Paul when He smote him to the earth, "I am Jesus of Nazareth whom thou persecutest."

His disciples were not ashamed to call Him by that name; for as they walked to Emmaus, and He joined them, and asked them what they were speaking of, and they said they were talking of Jesus of Nazareth. This is a name at which devils tremble, for they besought Him, even Jesus of Nazareth, that they should not be sent into the deep when He cast them out.

But still this is the meaning of it—the meaning of Matthew when he says that the prophets declared that He should be called a Nazarene. He said that the prophets have described the Messiah as one that would be despised and rejected of men. They spoke of Him as a great prince and conqueror when they described His second coming; but they set forth His first coming when they spoke of Him as a root out of a dry ground without form or comeliness, who when He should be seen would have no beauty that men should desire Him.

1. First, then, OUR MASTER, THE NAZARENE, was despised, first, because in His person, His parentage, His state, His apparel, His language, His habits, there was nothing of grandeur, nothing of parade, nothing but what was simple, gentle, lowly.

He sought no dignity and no honor. As for His companionship, they were of the lowest, for it is said of Him, "This man receiveth sinners and eateth with them." Then drew near unto him all the publicans, and sinners for to hear him.

His followers, too, were another cause of the contempt poured upon Him; for His chosen friends were to those who knew them nothing but common fishermen. Indeed, that is all they were. Unlearned and ignorant men they are said to have been, though they baffled the pretended wisdom of the age in which they lived.

Well, then, when they came to listen to His doctrine they were not a bit more pleased, nor did they hold Him any higher in esteem. What do you think He taught them? Among other things it is reported that He said, "Except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God"; and would you believe it, he said this not to one of the lower order at all, but to a learned gentleman who was a ruler in Israel?

REFINED, ESTHETIC PEOPLE, that they must be born again, or else they cannot see the kingdom of God—to insist upon regeneration as a thing as necessary to a philosopher as to a prostitute, as necessary to a senator as to a jail-bird, as needful to the purest as to the most defiled.

And, then, what do you think He said besides that? On one occasion He had the audacity to say—and I am sure the Pharisees thought it was audacity indeed—"Except ye eat my flesh, and drink my blood, there is no life in you."

Dear friends, to-day Jesus is as much despised as ever by those ungodly and vainglorious men who understand what His gospel is. How frequently you will find in the public newspapers, and in the magazines of those who think themselves the cultivated class, remark against the doctrine of justification by faith.

Jesus, because God has told us so, and we sing, "Nothing in my hands I bring, Simply to the cross I cling," and they tell us that this is inconsistent with public morality, that the masses ought to be told that unless they behave themselves they cannot possibly go to heaven, and so on—which thing they have been told times without number, and they have grown worse the more they have been told it.

But if you want to see the ungodly world foam at its mouth—or if you want to see rage get to its worst, and wish to see pretended learned men upon their wicket, preach the doctrine of atonement by blood! Tell them that remission of sin is by substitution—that Christ stood in the sinner's stead, and took the sinner's sin, and that without shedding of blood there is no remission of sin.

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JUST THE OLD STORY which your Puritan fathers used to tell; that is the old Methodist doctrine; that is your Presbyterianism, and as James the First said, "Presbyterianism is no religion for a gentleman."

I will not dwell longer upon it, however because you that know the Lord need not be told that he is to this day despised and rejected of men. Call yourself a Christian, and forget what Christianity is, and you will have easy times of it.

Go through the world as a respectable professor of religion, and never let fall a single distinctive truth from your lips, never perform one single distinctive action of Christianity, but just do as others do, and live as others do, and I will warrant you you shall be in a whole skin from the first of January to the end of December; but be a Christian, and live your Christianity and speak it out, and see how long you will be before they of your own house are at war with you.

II. But now secondly, our text informs us that Christ's followers have been known as

THE SECT OF THE NAZARENES, that is to say, they must expect to bear a measure of the indignities poured upon their leader.

If you follow Christ fully you will be called by some ill name or other. For, first, they will say how singular you are. "Mine inheritance," says God, "is unto Me as a speckled bird. The birds round about her are against her." If you become a true Christian you will soon be a marked man.

Mothers have brought that charge against daughters who have been faithful to Christ because they would not go into gayety, or indulge in vain apparel; and many a working-man has said it to his fellow man by way of accusation, "You must be different from anybody else."

Then, again, they will say to the genuine Christian, "Why, you are so old-fashioned! Look at you now! You believe the same old things that they used to believe in Oliver Crom-

well's day—those old Puritanical doctrines. Do you not know that the world has made a great progress since those times, and we have entered upon the nineteenth century? a wonderful century, never was century like it. There was only one Solomon centuries ago, but we are all Solomons now, the very least of us, while the greater ones far excel a thousand Solomons rolled into one.

When that form of criticism does not take effect they laugh at our faith. They say, "You simple-minded people have great capacity for believing! Look at us; we are far too sensible to believe anything. We do not feel sure about anything. What we think we know to-day we are not certain of; we are so receptive that we may learn the reverse to-morrow. We get our faith out of our own moral consciousness, and compel even the Scriptures to plead at the bar of our inward conceptions. We do not want to have things revealed to us and to have a book, and bind ourselves down to a revelation; we are our own teachers—judges and infallible guides, and the very idea of absolutely certain truth is abhorred by us.

Time was when Christianity was apposed by men of real ability, masters in learning, but in the present age its antagonists are men of much smaller calibre, whose lack of argument is scantily concealed by the outrageous absurdities which they invent. Instead of attempting to overwhelm us by the weight of their learning, they endeavor to surprise us with unexpected hypotheses, which we are more inclined to ridicule than to refute; and then, with mock sobriety, they assert that our bewilderment is defeat.

Another arrow of contempt is the assertion that Christian people have not their liberty. "Look at you; you dare not go to the theatre; you dare not drink." "Why," says one man, "I like a jolly drink sometimes; and if I were a Christian, I could not enjoy that great privilege." No, friend, you certainly would lose that booze of yours. As far as we are concerned, we have no ambition in that direction. Some of us know a little of what the amusements of the ungodly are, and we are astonished that you should be able to find content in them, for they do not suit our taste at all.

YOU DARE NOT ENJOY YOURSELVES." We live daily so as to give this taunt the lie, for we are a happy people, a free people, even we who are of the sect of the Nazarenes.

We have liberty to serve God and do good, and this is the freedom which we covet. We have liberty to do as we like, for we like to do what God would have us do, and we pray that our likes may every day be more and more conformed to the liking of God. There is not much after all in the taunt, "You God-fearing people are cowardly!"

Again, some turn round upon true Christians for their not being very choice in their company. If we associated only with the rich and great, whose society, as far as I know of it, is about the poorest thing out, we should be then acting properly. Keep to "society," and society will smile upon you; but if you attend meetings where you call a eastermonger your brother, where the washerwoman is your sister, where so long as people love Christ you count them the best of company, then you are low and vulgar, a Philistine, or a Nazarene.

This is the very genius of Christianity. To the poor the Gospel is preached: as soon as men enter into the church of Christ, all outward distinctions are forgotten, and they are one in the gracious family of God their Father. This, however, is the subject of contempt even among those

who profess and call themselves Christians. Many of your fine ladies and gentlemen would not own Jesus himself if He were now upon earth, and as for His disciples, I am sure they would get the cold shoulder on all sides. I, for one, never expect to see saints fashionable, nor holiness popular; let us be content to be low and vulgar in men's esteem for the Lord's sake.

III. Now, listen to me as I close. There is, after all,

NOTHING DESPICABLE in either Christ or His people. I feel ashamed to say such a thing, or that it should ever be necessary to be said that there is nothing to despise in Jesus. What is there to be ashamed of in Him? What if he did preach the gospel to sinners? Who wanted the gospel but sinners? What if He did not flatter the pride of those who thought themselves good? Is it not true that "the whole have no need of a physician, but they that are sick?" For my part, I bless my Master that He has given us a commonplace Gospel. Sublime it is beyond sublimity, but plain it is so that a little child may understand it. A man with slender wit may find his way to heaven guided by the light of the Holy Spirit, and this is one of the grandest proofs of the profound wisdom of God.

Glory be to Jesus Christ that He did not come here to tantalize the multitude by a gospel only suitable to the elite; that he did not come here to proclaim doctrines that could only be learned in the universities, and could never be understood except by such men as Isaac Newton, or Robert Boyle. I bless the name of Jesus that He came to give a Gospel to the poor and needy, to the simple and the childlike; and while I do it I feel that I hear Him saying again, "I thank thee, O, Father, Lord of heaven and of earth, that thou hast hid these things from the wise and prudent, and has revealed them unto babes."

The practical point is this: there are nothing to be ashamed of in being a Christian. I am afraid that there is some Christians that we have need to be ashamed of, and that we ourselves do many unworthy things. Christians ought to be reflections of Christ, but I fear they often cast

REFLECTIONS UPON CHRIST.

Oh ye that despise Christ, when you find out your faults, and speak against us for them, you treat us justly, and we cannot complain; but why lay our crimes at our Saviour's door? If you find us false to our profession, if we are not like our Master, if we are not true to Him, you may well ridicule us, and we cannot answer you. We must be beaten as with whips of scorpions when we are untrue to our Leader; but why blame Him?

Shall I be ashamed because I try to do what is right, and have a conscience before God, and cannot enjoy loose pleasures, or listen to lascivious song? Shall I be ashamed of chastity and truth? Why then let angels be ashamed of purity; let the stars be ashamed of light; let the sun be ashamed of day. There is nothing to be ashamed of in things honorable and of good repute. What are some of you at—you who are, I trust, Christians, that you never come out and own your religion? What will your Master say to you in the day of His appearing? What honor can you expect to share with Him if you will not share His shame?

JESUS IS COMING.

He is on His way! He may come to-night. He may come before another Sabbath's bells shall ring; and oh if I have never confessed Him, if I have been ashamed of Him? Hear this, ye cowards! What will you say when he appeareth! Be wise and confess him betimes. Confess your Lord and Master. "He that with his heart believeth, and with his mouth maketh confession of him, shall be saved." "He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved. He that believeth not shall be damned." God help us from being ashamed of the Nazarene. Amen.

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