

Visitor Pulpit.

JESUS, THE SAVIOUR.

OUTLINE OF A SERMON BY REV. JOSHUA DE-NOVAN, ALEXANDER STREET BAPTIST CHURCH, TORONTO.

And she shall bring forth a son, and thou shalt call his name JESUS: for he shall save his people from their sins.—Matt. i. 21.

The importance of this verse appears in the fact that it was uttered by the angel Gabriel to Joseph the husband of Mary. It is itself the gospel counterpart of the promise in Eden, that the seed of the woman should bruise the serpent's head.

The text declares: I. What the gospel shall bring—Salvation from sins. The gospel is not a well-arranged system of ethics to enable man to gradually arise from sin. It comes not to us as a capitalist might come to one on the eve of bankruptcy to advance a sum of money, that would help him to bridge his difficulties and escape dishonor and ruin. It comes to us when we are already ruined, etc. It is certainly a system of moral training; but we are saved, not by the training. The training comes after the salvation is secured. Salvation is a free gift.

II. JESUS IS THE SAVIOUR AND HIS WORK CONSTITUTES OUR SALVATION—"Jesus," "He." I lay stress on these two words. The pious translators did wisely in putting the word Jesus here in capitals. No name like unto it, etc. Jesus is the Greek rendering of Joshua, and Joshua is a contraction of Jehoshua, which means, God shall save. 1. This word teaches us that salvation is divine. Because divine it is (a) sufficient, (b) unchangeable, (c) infinite. It is like the sea into which a fish plunges and can find no bottom, no shore. It is unlimited, as the air to the bird. 2. He who gives this salvation stands in solitary grandeur. "He shall save," etc. Jehoshua, Jehovah, Jesus, shall save. Saints, priests, the virgin, angels are good enough in their places, but had when they arrogate to themselves the power to save. Heart, you cannot help, etc. Nowhere than in Jesus can you find salvation. All the ends of the world are to look to him. 3. The name gives an immutable pledge that we shall be saved. Jesus shall save. Oh, it is glorious to hear that! Were it men or angels there might be a mistake—an insufficiency of strength, etc.

III. The text informs us of what this salvation consists—"from their sins." Forty-five people out of fifty think Jesus saves from the wrath of God. That is true, but that is not the way to put it. Who does not wish to be saved from hell, where the wrath of God beats and lashes evermore? The devils would like to escape hell and secure heaven. This is not the end of Christ's salvation. "I sit and sing my soul away to everlasting bliss." I think you would be willing to do so, but you will never get to everlasting bliss by sitting and singing. Jesus saves—1, from the guilt, the curse, the condemnation of sin. 2, from the love of sin, the practice of sin, the habit of sin. That is a salvation worth the having. This Jesus secures in a two-fold way: by doing everything for us, and by what He does in us. 3. Mark the text, it is not a salvation from sin or an abstraction—"their sins." All sin is composed of a two-fold nature: (a) selfishness, (b) self-will. Adam's self-will was manifested when God said that he should not and he said he would; his selfishness was manifested when he gratified self, no matter what were the consequences to others. Heaven is the natural outcome of the absence of self-will and selfishness, and hell is the natural outcome of their presence.

IV. The text tells us the character of the people of God. "His people" a peculiar people, a chosen people, a royal people. His people are those who do His work, which is the saving of the earth. He is master.

Are you saved from sins? If so, then is Christ your Saviour and Master. If not, your sins abide with you.

HONEST DOUBT.

BY HENRY M. KING.

Nicodemus was a timid, but evidently an honest inquirer after truth. He had not yet the courage which comes from conviction, yet his mind was in a healthy ferment. He was restless, dissatisfied with the old paths, longing for new light, yet not fully prepared to accept Christ's teachings and follow him, questioning where he could not understand, and failing to understand because of the blinding unbelief which still lingered in his heart. His whole conduct and manner disclose a mind troubled, perplexed, unwilling to believe, unless it can know the "how" and the "why," asking "how can a man be born when he is old?" and persistently inquiring, "how can these things be?" and yet candid and honest—honest with itself and desirous to be honest with the truth. The unbelief of Nicodemus was vastly different from that dishonest scepticism which is ever false to hidden conviction, and vastly different from that flippant unbelief which has never inquired after truth, and yet thinks it knows everything. Nicodemus was sincere in coming to Christ, and although he doubted before he came, and doubted after he came, yet he was serious and earnest and candid. He may be held up with Thomas as an illustration of honest doubt.

There is such a thing as honest doubt. We are wont to use the terms "sceptic" and "scepticism" always as terms of reproach, and sometimes, perhaps, speak of them in words of too severe condemnation.

All scepticism does not possess the same spirit. There is infidelity which is hostile, bitter, irreverent and unreasonable. It not only will not be convinced, but it will not listen and inquire calmly and candidly. It closes its ears with obstinate prejudices, and opens its mouth in conceited derision. Such infidelity can hardly be denounced too severely, for it is most unfair and unrighteous. But there is unbelief which is only one stage in the process of inquiry. While frankly confessing its doubts, it is willing to weigh and consider; it investigates reverently; it seeks for further evidence and additional light; it longs to know what is truth, and holds itself in readiness to accept it. It reveals the unrest of the heart, and is undoubtedly attended with danger, as everything short of full faith in Christ must be; and yet it may be a stepping stone to the saving faith of the gospel.

Thomas is called doubting or unbelieving Thomas, not because he was bitterly opposed to the fact of Christ's resurrection, but because, it may be, by his very constitution of mind, he needed more evidence than others in order to be convinced. Some men seem to be constitutionally more incredulous and sceptical than others. Thomas said, "Except I shall see in his hands the print of the nails, and put my finger into the print of the nails, and thrust my hand into his side, I will not believe." Jesus did not denounce him for his unbelief, but condescendingly and lovingly accorded to him the very evidence which he demanded. The result proved the wisdom of Christ's course, and that Thomas was an honest sceptic, and wanted only to discover and be convinced of the truth. For when the evidence was presented in the pierced hands and side of the risen Christ, the disciple's unbelief was gone, and he gave his heart anew to Christ in loving and adoring faith, confessing, "My Lord and my God." We shall do well to learn the lesson, and treat honest doubt as gently and patiently as did Christ himself, that we may lead it on to a sincere and saving faith.

In like manner, Nicodemus may be regarded as thoroughly honest. His inquiry, "How can these things be?" was the deliberate, thoughtful inquiry of a mind that was not opposed to conviction, but longed to have a deeper insight into spiritual things, and to comprehend the philosophy of Christian truth. His unbelief was unreasonable, as Christ faithfully showed him; and yet, in due time, it passed over into the genuine faith of full discipleship. We find him subsequently defending Christ before the Pharisees, and at last showing his reverent attachment for him by bringing a hundred pound weight of myrrh and aloes, a costly offering for his dead body. In both instances the sacred writer is careful to tell us that it was the same Nicodemus who came to Jesus by night.

There are, undoubtedly, to-day honest doubters in our communities and congregations. They are familiar with the great truths of the Christian faith, but have never been brought to accept them. They do not obstinately refuse to listen to the claims of the Lord Jesus Christ; they do not intend to be unreasonable; in their better moments they wish they could know the truth and find rest in it, for the most unrestful thing in this world is unbelief.

There is but one remedy for honest doubt. There is but one place for it to carry its inquiries, viz., to Christ. All doubters should be followers of Nicodemus. His restless heart did not seek to find the answers to its inquiries within itself. Much less did he go to the Pharisees who were the enemies of Christ. But he went directly to him. He sought out him who alone could relieve his doubts and remove his difficulties. This was the only proper and reasonable thing for him to do. I am aware that many men, when they are troubled with religious doubts, think they can work out of them themselves by their own unaided wisdom; or, what is worse, they take counsel with those who are more sceptical than themselves, the avowed enemies of Christ, surrounding themselves with infidel books and publications to the neglect of Christ and his word. It takes no prophet to foretell the end of such a course, and no man can honestly say that that is being just to Christ or just to the soul.

Christ has some rights in this matter. He has a right to be heard, a right which every man has, innocent or guilty. It is too bad to be compelled to plead with men to grant to the Son of God, the divine Saviour of the world, that which they feel in honor bound to grant to the most debased criminal.

If you, my dear reader, have any doubts about Christ, his truth or his personal claims upon your faith as your only Saviour, the only just and honorable thing to be done is to go directly to him, as did Nicodemus. It is better to go to him in the dark than not at all, in secret, without the knowledge of any earthly friend, if you dare not go openly. But I beseech you, do not fail to go to him, and into his gentle, patient and loving ear pour all your doubts and perplexities, being assured that he will meet you in the fullness of his power and grace, and give you light for darkness, peace for unrest, certainty for doubt, and the blessed possession of a joyous hope for all your anxious fears.

Tholuck, the eminent interpreter and simple-hearted Christian, once said of his conversion: "The thought of salvation through Christ was at that time a strange one to me; it was poetical, that was my first thought; it was beautiful; at last I recognized it as divine; and my soul, torn by the struggles of philosophy, found peace in Jesus."

THE USES OF THE SACRAMENTS.

BY REV. GEO. DANA BOARDMAN, D.D., PHILADELPHIA.

The Church is the world's light, first, in virtue of her doctrines and confessions of faith and sacraments. Ponder for a moment the lessons she teaches mankind through her administration of those enacted epitemes of the gospel—Baptism and Holy Communion. Recall how many and how cardinal are the truths compacted into the single rite of Baptism. It symbolizes, among other truths, the following fundamental points in the Christian theology: first our belief in the atoning death of a Deity incarnate; secondly, our belief in his accrediting resurrection; thirdly, our confession of our complete moral uncleanness; fourthly, our belief in the possibility of a complete moral purification and our desire for it; fifthly, our burial to a career of sin; sixthly, our resurrection to a life of holiness; seventhly, our belief in the coming resurrection of the body. Baptism thus shadows forth, as through in acted hieroglyph, the most momentous events in the history of Christ, and at the same time the most momentous events in the history of the Christian; all that Christ has suffered and done for us—all that we mean to do for Christ; all that we are by nature—all that we hope to be by grace. As a symbol or acted parable, Baptism is the gospel of the Nazarene crystallized into formula, or rather vitalized into a conscious, joyous incarnation. And every time the Church has duly administered this holy rite, the spectators have gazed on a resplendent pillar and all-comprehending summary of truth as it is in Jesus; for Baptism holds in exquisite symbol the concentrated essence of the glad tidings of the cross. In like manner the Holy Communion symbolizes the same truth, but in a higher, more fully developed, more intensely personal form. It symbolizes the final result of Christ's atoning work, so far as the believer himself is concerned; namely, the community of Christ's life and his own—the absorption and assimilation of Christ's character into his own moral structure, so that he becomes in very fact a partaker of the divine nature. Accordingly, in the Holy Communion, truth as it is in Jesus culminates. The Lord's Table is the keystone of that heaven-built column which is the pillar and ground of the truth. Moreover the Holy Communion is a standing proclamation to the world of that pivotal fact of the Evangel—the atoning death of the Son of God. "As often as ye eat this bread and drink the cup, ye do show the Lord's death till he come." Viewed in this light alone, the historic value of this ordinance, to say nothing of its moral import or personal benefits, is beyond computation. It repeats from age to age the crucifixion scene. Let every page of ecclesiastical history, save those which record the observance of this sacrament, be torn out of the world's chronicles; let it only be shown that in Jerusalem, in Antioch, in Corinth, in Rome, in Alexandria, in the villages of the Alps, in Geneva, in London, in Calcutta, in Boston, in San Francisco, in Philadelphia, this rite has been celebrated, and each celebration is a fresh witness to that ancient crucifixion. The Holy Communion immortalizes Calvary. From the very beginning, whenever it has been celebrated, it has stood like a buttress of the truth amid the foaming whirlpools of time, towering like a celestial monument above the seething surges of the centuries, inscribed with the hieroglyphs of our faith, emblazoned with the memorials of the finished redemption, augustly testifying from generation to generation that central fact and truth of all history—that God was in Christ reconciling the world unto himself through the victorious passion of the everlasting Son. Thus does the Church of the living God, by exhibiting in her own creed the worship and sacraments the truth as it is in Jesus, becoming the world's light.

CHURCH INTER-DEPENDENCE.

Baptist churches are not a rope of sand. They are not a mere "fortuitous concurrence of atoms," that came together nobody knows how, and remain together nobody knows why. They are an organism, an entity, a fraternity, a denomination. While each one is free to manage its own internal affairs, it is bound not to do a thing that will injure any sister church. It is bound to recognize the official acts of Associations and Councils as possessing denominational authority, though not local jurisdiction. While guarding jealously its own rights, it should as jealously guard the rights of all the sisterhood of churches. This polity, which recognizes alike the independence and the interdependence of the churches, has a double advantage. It secures the freedom of the church, which stands precisely where the individual Christian does, as its own court of last resort, responsible alone to Christ, and under no obligation to others but a moral obligation of the strongest force. It also secures the peace of the churches and promotes their fellowship in every good word and work, by making possible such mutual confidence that the acts of one are cheerfully accepted as the acts of all. And, finally, no other polity is possible for Baptist churches, for this is the polity of the New Testament. To deny the mutual dependence of the independent churches on each other is to throw to the winds all Scriptural precedent, to undermine denominational unity, and to introduce in place of a peaceful fraternity a seething anarchy, or to pave the way for a despotic hierarchy.—Ec.

HOW TO BREAK A CHURCH DOWN.

A skeleton; text, Micah ii. 13: "The breaker is come." To go this effectually, you must I. Discourage the pastor. II. Discourage your fellow members. III. Destroy the confidence of the community. I. To discourage the pastor. 1. Absent yourself from service every Sabbath, or miss at least one in three; if he is not very strong, once in four times may answer. 2. Neglect the prayer meetings. 3. Criticise your minister freely—pray for him little or none. 4. Give yourself no concern whether his salary is paid or not. 5. Never allow him to think that his comfort or that of his family is a matter of any importance in your eyes. II. To discourage your fellow-members. 1. Observe the directions given above. 2. Complain about every thing they do and don't do. 3. Contrive to make yourself the head of a clique, and by their assistance and your own industry keep the church in hot water generally. 4. While doing this, lose no opportunity to complain of the bad treatment you are receiving. 5. Be as much like Diotrephes and as little like Paul as you can. 6. Discard charity and candor, take distrust to your bosom, and make scheming your speciality. III. To destroy the confidence of the community. 1. Observe the following directions: 2. Tell the people that you are in the church by the force of circumstances, but have no respect for the way in which business is conducted. 3. Publish the faults of your brethren, taking care to magnify them. 4. Make no effort to induce people to attend the church. 5. Take no part in the labors of the Sunday school. 6. Publish it on all occasions that you have no confidence in the concern—predict that it must fail—go down—blow up—never can succeed—and then—"skedaddle."

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