

What is Religion ?

Text For Prayer

Parables – Links in the Chain of Truth

I shall read from “Christ’s Object Lessons,” on page 17 ---

“In Christ’s parable-teaching the same principle is seen as in His own mission to the world. That we might become acquainted with His divine character and life. Christ took our nature, and dwelt among us.Men could learn of the unknown through the known ; heavenly things were revealed through the earthly; God was made manifest in the likeness of men. So it was in Christ’s teaching : the unknown was illustrated by the known; divine truths by earthly things with which the people were most familiar ... Natural things were the medium for the spiritual; the things of nature and the life-experience of His hearers were connected with the truths of the written word. Leading thus from the natural to the spiritual kingdom, Christ’s parable are links in the chain of truth that unites man with God, and earth with heaven.”

Let us pray that we might understand Christ’s teachings of the unknown through the known – the heavenly things as revealed through the earthly ; that we emulate Christ’s way of teaching, illustrating Divine truths by earthly objects; pray that we fully benefit by Christ’s parables – the outstanding links in the chain of Truth that unites earth with heaven.

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What is Religion ?

Does it profit both now and hereafter ?

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If humanity needs to know any one thing above another, it is the answer to these two questions : What is religion ? Does it profit now and hereafter ?

Many think that religion consists of going to church, of praying, of having good morals, not stealing, not killing, not playing games, not gambling, not attending shows, not eating certain things, of doing or of not doing this, that, and the other.

Others think religion is nothing more than some kind of a sociological order, and that the church is a place in which to get acquainted, etc., etc. Let us see :

Jesus was confronted by the rich young ruler, who said to Him, I have kept the commandments. What yet must I do to enter into the life eternal ? Here follows the answer :

Luke 18 : 22 --- *“Now when Jesus heard these things, He said unto him, Yet lackest thou one thing : sell all that thou hast, and distribute unto the poor, and thou shalt have treasure in heaven : and come, follow Me.”*

To understand this scripture, we must read another one along with it :

John 3 : 1 – 3 – *“There was a man of the Pharisees, named Nicodemus, a ruler of the Jews : The same came to Jesus by night, and said unto Him, Rabbi, we know that Thou art a teacher come from God : for no man can do these miracles that Thou doest, except God be with him. Jesus answered and said to him, Verily, verily, I say unto thee, Except a man be born again, he cannot see the Kingdom of God.”*

Both the rich young man and Nicodemus were rulers, and though Nicodemus might not have been as rich as was the young man, he nevertheless was not poor.

But why was the one asked to distribute his riches to the poor, and the other told to be born again ? Why should not both pay the same price for salvation ? Here are the reasons :

To avoid being seen in the company of Jesus, Nicodemus came to Him, not by day, but secretly by night, whereas the young ruler came to Jesus not only openly by day, but also while a multitude were with Jesus. The rich young ruler's basic hindrance, therefore, was his wealth, and Nicodemus' basic hindrance was his pride. Plainly, then, the one's ailment called for one kind of treatment, and the other's ailment called for another kind of treatment.

Jesus never asked anyone to take His religion, but He asked them to "follow" Him, to be one of His disciples. The rich young ruler could not follow the Lord because his heart was centered upon his own riches. And Nicodemus could not follow the Lord because he was too proud to be seen in the company of unpopular and hated Jesus followed by the humble fishermen. To remove the hindrances, the one had to get rid of his riches, and the other had to get rid of his pride. To eradicate pride, one must be born again, must become a new man. But to eradicate the love of money one must give his money to those who really need it.

The Scriptures bear record that Abraham was very rich. Yet he is called the "friend of God." Riches in themselves, therefore, can be a blessing, although they more often become a curse. Pride, however, is n e v e r good.

Remember that the Devil finds in every one of us at least one loop-hole. Whatever that loop-hole be, it must be done away with --- be it riches or be it pride. Of course not all are rich and tied to their wealth, but everyone can be tied to himself, the "old man." And not all need give up riches, but all need cut loose from the "old man" who gets them into everything but what they ought to be in.

Let us read again from **John three ----**

Verses 4 – 8 : *"Nicodemus saith unto Him, How can a man be born when he is old ? can he enter the second time into his mother's womb, and be born ? Jesus answered, Verily, verily, I say unto thee, Except a man be born of water and of the Spirit, he cannot enter into the Kingdom of God. That which is born of the flesh is flesh; and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit. Marvel not that I said unto thee, Ye must be born again. The wind bloweth where it listeth, and thou hearest the sound thereof, but canst not tell whence it cometh, and whither it goeth : so is every one that is born of the Spirit."*

Nicodemus' acknowledgment that Jesus was the Son of God made his case exceedingly bad. Knowing who Jesus was, he should not have been ashamed to be seen in His company, nor should have been afraid of His enemies. He should have

considered it a privilege to associate with the Son of God, with a Heavenly Being. But inasmuch as Nicodemus was ashamed to be seen with Him, and was proud to be with the Pharisees, he needed to bury the “old man”, and to arise in newness of life --- needed to be born again.

To the question, “How can a man be born when he is old ?” Jesus answered, “Except a man be born of water and of the Spirit, he cannot enter the Kingdom of God.” Nicodemus had to be baptized, had to publicly acknowledge Jesus as the Son of God, and to receive the Spirit of Truth.

And the illustration, “the wind bloweth where it listeth, and thou hearest the sound thereof, but canst not tell whence it cometh, and whither it goeth: so is everyone that is born of the Spirit,” definitely points out that to really know what it is to be born of the Spirit is to have the experience of being one of His disciples, of being filled with the Holy Spirit, and of proclaiming His Truth. Jesus, comparing His followers, those who are born again, with the wind, makes this fact still clearer; for if His disciples are like the wind, if no one knows where they come from and where they go to, then the only way to find out is to become one with them.

For Jesus to become one with us He had to be born again; He had to become an earthly man. And for us to be one with Him, we have to be born again, born of the Spirit. The difference is that Jesus was first born a spiritual, a Divine Being, and second a human being; whereas we are first born human beings, and second spiritual beings. Prophetically speaking of Jesus’ birth, the prophet Isaiah wrote :

Isaiah 66 : 7 : *“Before she travailed, she brought forth ; before her pain came, she was delivered of a man child.”*

The Jewish church, the church into which and by which Jesus was born, Inspiration declares, neither travailed nor had pain; that is, she felt neither need of nor burden for a Saviour, and yet in spite of it, He was born.

But speaking of the children that are to make up the Kingdom, we read :

Isaiah 66 : 8 : *“Who hath heard such a thing ? who hath seen such things ? Shall the earth be made to bring forth in one day ? or shall a nation be born at once ? for as soon as Zion travailed, she brought forth her children. “*

Although the Jewish church in Jesus’ day travailed not, yet she brought forth the Son of God ! But when Zion travaileth she brings forth all her children at once, a whole nation ! A miracle in each instance.

How may Zion travail ? -- Let us turn to the natural realm : In nature, the mother carries a child, then travails and give birth to it. How else, then, in the spiritual realm can Zion travail without first carrying her children before they are born ? To be specific, when one joins the church, she is pregnant with him so to speak. When she is thus carrying her children, then they shall all be born at once, -- they shall all at once receive their second birth, the birth here mentioned. And as Inspiration makes it clear that they must be born again, they all at the outset must be in the same state of mind as was Nicodemus --- ashamed to be seen in the company of present Truth believers, ashamed to be associated with the believers of unpopular Truth.

Plainly, then, our efforts to reach the people with the message of a “second birth” shall not be in vain : Zion shall bring forth all her children, as it were, in one day. And that is why we cannot be driven to despair or to discouragement. We are assured that “revival and reformation” will take place among all God’s people, that His word will not return unto Him void.

Now, who could the children be ? – To be children of Zion, they must some day stand on Zion. They are therefore none other than the “first fruits” of whom the Revelator says : *“And I looked, and, lo, a Lamb stood on the Mount Zion, and with Him an hundred forty and four thousand, having His Father’s name written in their foreheads.”* **Revelation 14 : 1.**

From the Scriptures it is now clearly seen that in this instance when one joins the church, the church becomes pregnant with that member. Thus it is that from the time one becomes a member of the church to the time he is “born again” he is still to keep on growing until he becomes a full-grown, matured, spiritual being – a perfect man, unto the measure of the stature of Christ, without spot or wrinkle or any such thing. Accordingly, this state of being no one has as yet reached, but the time is now at hand when a multitude shall reach it, for says the Lord :

Isaiah 66 : 9 : *“Shall I bring to the birth, and not cause to bring forth ? saith the Lord : shall I cause to bring forth, and shut the womb ? saith thy God.”*

This scripture endeavors to remove all doubts. Let us believe the Lord and know for certain that the time for this particular new birth is here and that the Lord can and will make it possible regardless how it may appear to us.

From this study we see that religion is not made up of m u s t ’ s and d o n ‘ t ’ s ; that no one is to be tied to a man, but to God’s ever unfolding Truth; that religion means to be following the Lord, and to be doing those things which He leads one to do; that from the time one accepts the Lord as his Saviour, -- from that very time he is to begin to grow spiritually, first to be born again, then to become a full

grown spiritual being, not all at once, but to be growing daily. To reach such a high state of perfection, one must therefore be perfecting himself daily and be in keeping with the Truth of God, that each spark of Truth might add the amount of spiritual growth the season requires, or else one will fall behind in reaching spiritual maturity. Only thus can one be reaping all the benefits which religion affords.

No, religion is not something extra, something optional. It is something which everyone must have. A true and up-to-date religion is something as essential as the eyes in your head.

For example let me take you through the stream of time, beginning with Noah. His religion not only saved him and his family from drowning in the terrible flood, but also made him become the progenitor of the world after the flood, -- yes, the progenitor of our world. The world in his day, though, perished because it felt no need of an up-to-date religion, no need of present Truth. What a shame ! What nonsense for one to try to get along without religion, without God's counsel, and without the message of the hour !

Let us take a look at another highlight in the Bible history. The mother of Moses believed in up-to-date religion. She believed that the time had come for the deliverance of the Hebrews race, and she did all she could to make it possible. When she saw that she could no longer hide her infant son from the hand of Pharaoh, she let her religion do the rest. The results were great, not only did she receive her son again in her arms for ever saved from being thrown into the Nile, but also a guarantee for his support, education, and all – the best Egypt could afford – were paid from Pharaoh's treasury ! The right kind of religion, you see, does great things.

Eighty years later Moses' religion led the whole Hebrews nation from the brick yards of Pharaoh to the Red Sea. The sea parted for their sake, and as soon as they passed through, it closed in on their task masters. What a deliverance ! What a victory !

Moreover, as those millions of men, women, and children, also their cattle, came into that forbidding desert place where there was neither food nor water, religion made the rock gush with streams, and the clouds drop down manna – not for a day, nor for a month, but for forty long years ! Then the miracle of the Red Sea was repeated at the river Jordan, and the emancipated brick-makers became prophets, kings, and priests !

Notwithstanding all these great happenings, when they became careless and indifferent, when they felt no need of prophets, no need of present Truth, no need

of meat in due season, they again became slaves and captives ! That is why we need the right kind of religion, and that is why we need to stick to religion and to grow with it.

The Jews were taken captives and carried into Babylon. Nevertheless, those who were faithful to their religion were well taken care of even in their captivity. Daniel, for instance, rather than serving as a slave, was instead treated as a lord, and was at last made a ruler by both the Chaldeans and the Medo-Persians. And when he was for spite thrown into the lion's den, he was spared, while his enemies were eaten up by the wild beasts

When the three Hebrews, for faithfulness to their religion, were thrown into the fiery furnace, the Son of God came and rescued them and not a hair of their heads perished. Their enemies, though, were burned to death, but the Hebrews were made rulers in the kingdom.

Gideon had to win a war. After recruiting 22,000 soldiers, he was told that they were too many ! Consequently the time-killers were removed, and finally there were but three hundred left to fight against a multitude that covered the plain! In spite of his small army, Gideon did win the war overnight, and without the loss of a man ! Religion, Brother, Sister, when lived up to, is a paying proposition.

All could have been Daniels and Gideons. Yes, even the Jews of today could have been something, but what are they ? --- A nation hated by all the people of the world, a nation without a king, without a flag, without a land, -- the only such nation on earth.

Now let me tell you of an experience that is strictly personal, and news to most of you. Several years ago while I was crossing one of the busy streets of Los Angeles, California, a woman from my left hand drove squarely into me. She then became so nervous that she could not stop her car but kept going for a half block. The car, though, did not tip me over; an unseen hand carried me ahead of it. And when the car stopped right at the alley which crossed the street, I stopped, too ! By the time hundreds of spectators including news reporters and three motor cops, had gathered around the car. As they found no one lying in the street, dead or wounded, they then decided the victim must have been pinned under the car. When I told them that it was I who had been hit, they wondered. As I told them that I was not hurt, and as I refused to be taken to the hospital, they made me raise up my hands and legs, and they asked dozens of questions. The pencil in my coat pocket had been crushed by the impact of the car into about a dozen pieces, but my ribs were untouched ! The one from among the crowd said, "He must be made of rubber."

Religion, you see, is better than an insurance policy.

From our study we perceive that God's power that protected life even in the fiery furnace and in the lion's den, is still at work; that God is still as much interested in His people today as He was in Daniel's or in any other day. We therefore need an up-to-date religion every day. We cannot afford to be without it, --- not even for a moment.

Timely Truth not only saves our souls for eternity, but It protects from day to day. It supplies our need today and gives us hope for hereafter. There is safety in nothing else, and faith in God is our only peace of mind, especially in this day and age.

Religion obviously is profitable not only for hereafter, but certainly for today as well. Do not play the fool by trying to get along without it.

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