

THE CENTRAL PURPOSE OF GOD'S MESSAGE.

– JOHN 20:31. – MARCH 26. –

"But these are written that ye may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God; and that believing ye may have life through his name."

THE beautiful words of our text set forth clearly the entire object and purpose of all of God's messages during this Gospel age, and hence the object or purpose of all the preaching done in his name and by his authority. When we consider the unlimited power of God, we are at first inclined to wonder why so little of it is displayed during this Gospel age in connection with the proclamation of the great Gospel message – with the legions of angels who could communicate with mankind and instruct them respecting God and his character, who could communicate as in the olden times, as when Moses was taught from the burning bush and Abraham by the visit of strangers to his tent.

When we consider, too, how God could teach the world by signs and lessons and disciplines, without a word of instruction either from human lips or from angels – if he would punish their wrong doing and reward their right doing promptly and markedly, it would leave no question in the minds of any respecting right and wrong, respecting that which would be pleasing to the Lord and that which would be displeasing. How speedily this course would have brought in the reign of righteousness and have effected a world reformation. Again, the Lord could blazon out in letters of fire upon the sky, in every language under heaven, the messages respecting his pleasure and displeasure. No wonder that some have thought it strange that divine wisdom should adopt the plan which has been adopted and which has seemed to have been so ineffectual as respects the righting of the world of mankind – so ineffectual that now, after more than eighteen centuries of preaching, the great mass of the world are in absolute ignorance of

Christ and the Father, and almost none see clearly and distinctly the true significance of the message he has sent us.

However, as we begin to get the eyes of our understanding more and more widely open to the appreciation of the teachings of the Lord's Word, we see more and more clearly his plan and the wisdom of the course he has adopted, which is briefly expressed by the Apostle when he says, "It has pleased God through the foolishness of preaching to save them that believe." (1 Cor. 1:21) – preaching which seems to be so foolish, to be so weak, to be the [R3521 : page 78] poorest way the Lord could have possibly chosen to make known the riches of his grace – a way so open to hindrance through the weaknesses and imperfections of the human channels used!

IGNORANCE NOT A SAVIOR.

Nor will it do to answer, as some have done, that not merely those who hear the Gospel message are profited by it, but that "millions are saved who have never heard of the historic Christ." The words of the Apostle quite contradict this thought: "It pleased God through the foolishness of preaching to save them that believe," implies that those who do not believe are not saved, and implies also that not the belief of anything or everything is saving but merely the believing of that which is preached by divine authority – "The faith once delivered to the saints." – Jude 3.

How closely in line with this is our text in this lesson, "These things were written" – the Gospel narrative of the words and acts of our Lord, and also the words and acts of the apostles, in order that men might believe on Jesus as the Messiah, the Son of God, and that believing they might have life through them. No hope is here held out of life without believing, and no hope held out on a vague faith will be satisfactory. It was not sufficient to believe that Jesus was the God-Man and that he died on a cross at the hands of his enemies, a notable martyr for liberty and righteousness; – more than this must be believed.

It is not sufficient to believe anything less than that Jesus was the Son of God – not the son of Joseph; it is not sufficient to believe in him in any other way than as the Son of God, and that additionally he is the Messiah – the one long promised as the seed of Abraham, whose mission it shall yet be to bless all the families of the earth: "In thy seed shall all the families of the earth be blessed." All this seems to be the Gospel; to believe anything less seems to be lacking the faith here enjoined; to believe all of this seems to be essential to discipleship. We cannot help how many of the wise and learned and good have rejected this scriptural statement of the object of this Gospel age, and have determined that it must be otherwise and prefer their own opinions, [R3522 : page 78] their own reasoning, to the message of the Lord through his Son and his inspired apostles.

If such a statement as this were held in our minds alongside some false theory – such, for instance, as the one which declares that all who are not saved in the present time pass to an eternity of torture without hope of escape – then such a blending of the truth of God with the errors inspired by the Adversary would be sure to cause confusion in our minds; and the word of the Lord, to the effect that salvation could only be had through faith in Christ, would seem to leave the way to God too narrow and to practically destroy all hope for the world in general and to make the God of love to appear to be heartless, loveless, and evil-intentioned, since he knew the end from the beginning and had the power to have brought all to the knowledge of Jesus, or to have made some other arrangement than the preaching through imperfect vessels the way of access to faith and his favor and love and the life which he will give.

But we notice that our text says nothing about the lost receiving life eternal in torture. On the contrary, it implies that they are without life, declaring that only those who believe in the proper manner can have the life which he gives. And this reminds us of our Lord's own words to the same effect – "He that hath the Son hath life, he that hath not the Son hath not life."

"THAT THE WORLD MIGHT BELIEVE THROUGH HIM."

It is a fact beyond dispute that few come under the conditions of our text. Few believe in Jesus as the Messiah, the Son of God, whom he will use according to the prophecies for the blessing of all the families of the earth, and few thus believe to the extent necessary to enter into life with him. Few believe enough respecting our Lord to bring them to the point of full faith in his blood as their cleanser from sin, or to bring them to the further step of a full consecration then to his service, or to hold them in the narrow way to the end of the journey, when the crowns of life will be given at the appearing of the Life-Giver at his second advent. And if only a few, only a little flock, thus hear the message, the preaching, and if these things were merely written for the benefit of these, where comes in the world? – the world which, according to one view, is in eternal torture or going thither; or, according to a more moderate view, is in death, the Second Death, or going thither – on the broad road to destruction.

How can the Lord Jesus ever fulfil the prediction that he is to be the Light of the world to those who have never seen him and never heard his name, either with the natural or spiritual eyes or with the natural or spiritual ears? How can the declaration ever be fulfilled that the Lord tasted death for every man, and that all the families of the earth are to be blessed through him?

We answer that there is but the one way of understanding this entire matter and that is the Scriptural way, which takes in not merely the few isolated texts, but includes comprehensively all the teachings of the Scriptures from Genesis to Revelation. It is to the effect that during this Gospel age God's purpose is merely the selection of those who have an ear to hear – of those who, when the message is sounded, have heard and to some extent understood and appreciated it, and who will go on in the understanding and appreciation to a full and grander

grasp of the lengths and breadths and heights and depths of the love and mercy of God.

These "the love of God constraineth," the still small voice is heard by their hearts, they "walk by faith and not by sight," and need not to have the heavens emblazoned with the divine commands. To them day unto day uttereth speech and night unto night showeth knowledge, and the entire heavens are ablaze with messages of God's favors and blessings, which imply also his justice and his love. To these the message of salvation through the blood of Christ appeals; they are not wise above what is written; they accept divine wisdom as better than human wisdom and the divine Word as preferable to the traditions of men. These, under the guidance of the holy Spirit, are making increase not only in their numbers century after century, but also making increase of their character development individually; and when the age shall close it will be found that God's wisdom and love and power will have been exercised in such a manner that they shall have found and prepared the peculiar people of the Lord, the little flock, the Royal Priesthood, who, at the second coming of their Master, shall be received by him as a Bride company, to be his joint-heirs in the glorious kingdom for which we pray, [R3522 : page 79] "Thy Kingdom come, thy will be done in earth as it is done in heaven."

"THEN SHALL THE RIGHTEOUS SHINE."

With the completion of this elect class – chosen because they were found to be lovers of righteousness and haters of iniquity, and because they were willing to walk in the narrow way and to follow the Lamb through evil and through good report and to walk by faith and not by sight – shall ultimately come the blessing of the Lord in the First Resurrection, and they shall be made partakers of glory, honor and the divine nature. Then, the Scriptures assure us, they shall shine forth as the Sun in the Kingdom of their Father, – shine for the blessing of all the families of the earth, shine for the scattering of all

the ignorance and superstition and clouds and darkness which now enslave the race, shine that all the blind eyes may be opened and all the deaf ears unstopped, shine that the knowledge of the glory of God may fill the whole earth, shine out that the willing and obedient of the world may see the right way and be drawn by the light of grace and truth of God along the highway of holiness to the end thereof, life eternal, through the merit of him who loved the world and bought it with his own precious blood.

