

THE FORGIVENESS OF SINS.

– MARK 2:1-12. – FEBRUARY 25. –

Golden Text: – "The Son of man has power on earth to forgive sins."

IT was but a short time after the incidents of our last lesson and our Lord's subsequent preaching to other cities of Galilee that he returned to Capernaum, which was now his home city, for Matthew informs us that leaving Nazareth he came and dwelt in Capernaum. (Matt. 4:13.) The people heard that he was at home, and a crowd assembled at the house. The houses of the middle classes of that time are understood to have been usually of one room only, in size about 20 x 40 feet, with a flat roof formed by heavy timbers about two feet apart, on which were placed slabs of either wood or stone, the whole being covered with earth or sod closely rolled. The roof was usually accessible by an outside stairway and was often used as a summer sleeping place.

To the crowd of his fellow-citizens – who had but recently awakened to the fact that Jesus was a great prophet, endued with miraculous powers – the Lord was discoursing, doubtless respecting the Kingdom of God long promised, and which he proclaimed to be nigh, even at the door, if the people were willing to receive the message and its blessing. At this juncture four men, bearing on a litter a young man paralyzed and utterly helpless, approached the house with a view to having the sick one healed. His helpless condition probably hindered the ailing one from applying to Jesus on the day when so many of the sick at Capernaum were cured. Now he had found friends and helpers and had come within sound of the Master's voice, yet was unable to gain access to his presence because of the crowd who were unwilling to make way for him.

But the faith which had brought him thus far insisted [R3729 : page 61] that some way of presenting his case before Jesus would be found. Finally he was carried to the roof of the house the earthy covering was dug away from a portion, the slab lifted, and by improvised ropes he was let down into the very presence of Jesus. He must have had a strong faith not only in the Lord's power to heal but also in his gentleness and goodness, that so far from resenting the rude intrusion he would have patience and realize his deep necessity.

And so it was: instead of finding fault, threatening them with arrest, accusing them of rudeness, etc., our Lord was so pleased with the faith manifested that he overlooked the intrusion entirely and greeted his uninvited guest most graciously, saying, "Son, thy sins are forgiven thee." Perhaps the young man was thinking less of his sins and their forgiveness than of his hope for recovery, but in any event our Lord put the most important thing foremost. He was primarily the sin-bearer and teacher, his work of healing being a secondary one at the time, a mere exercise, so as to emphasize the lessons given.

WISE AND UNWISE ALERTNESS

The people present were alert to notice everything that Jesus did and said, and amongst them were some of the learned, the Scribes, who were well informed respecting the Law and looked up to as authorities by the masses. These with the others had been attracted by the wonderful miracles and teachings of Jesus and they were watching his words and deeds. Here they thought they had found a flaw – that Jesus was arrogating to himself a power and authority which could belong to God alone. Indeed we may suppose that it was partly to start this very line of reasoning that our Lord expressed himself as he did. Then, reading their hearts, he answered their queries, saying, "Which

is the easier for you to believe, that I am able to forgive sins or that I could heal this man of the result of his sins? But to prove my power to forgive the sin I will perform the cure, and its performance will testify that I have not blasphemed; that I have not arrogated to myself authority which is not properly in my control; that I am not misrepresenting the Father when I declare that I am his special agent and representative." Then Jesus said to the paralyzed man, "Arise, take up thy couch and go to thy home!"

When the man did arise and carried forth his stretcher on which he had lain the people were amazed and glorified God, saying, "We never saw anything of the like before." Luke adds that they said, "We have seen strange things today." They had heard the Messiah explain about his Kingdom and declare his power to forgive sins and demonstrate that power by a miracle. How could they help but wish that the Kingdom of God might immediately be established, that divine favor might reach the whole world and increase in restitution blessings until there should be no more sickness, no more pain, no more dying, no more crying, no more sin, no more death. However, a particular work must be accomplished before the Kingdom could be set up and begin its restitution work: first the elect of God, a little flock, the Bride of Christ, must be selected. Palestine and the favored nation did not supply a sufficient number to fulfil the divine arrangement, and hence after the selection of all the Israelites indeed the favor of God turned from natural Israel to the Gentiles, to gather out of them a sufficient number to complete the very elect.

Our hope, our confidence is that this election is very nearly accomplished; that soon the second coming of Christ will bring forth his Church in the first resurrection to glory, honor and immortality and joint-heirship with him in the Kingdom, and that subsequently the restitution blessings of the Kingdom will

go forth to the natural seed of Abraham, yea, unto all the families of the earth.

Sin and its forgiveness may be considered the essence of this lesson: to this subject, therefore, we turn our attention.

Not only is sin generally common to the world of mankind, as the Scriptures abundantly declare and explain, but a consciousness of sin is general. The world in general recognizes what the Bible emphasizes, namely, that all unrighteousness is sin, all imperfection is sin. The Jews under the Law, realizing their inability to keep its requirements, would be bound in all honesty to admit that they were sinners, transgressors of its requirements. Christians, recognizing God's law on a still higher plane, realize still more fully their own blemishes and shortcomings of the perfect law which says, "Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy soul, with all thy mind, with all thy strength, and thy neighbor as thyself. But those who have not the Jewish Law nor the Christian law and instruction have nevertheless a sufficiency of conscience, a sufficiency of the original law written in man's constitution, though largely obliterated through the six thousand years of the fall: by this they realize that they have shortcomings, and, as the Apostle points out, they confess that they are sinners against their ideals of righteousness in that they sometimes attempt to excuse their conduct while at other times they clearly and plainly acknowledge wrong-doing.

The remarkable thing is that our consciousness of sin increases with our education in the school of Christ – increases in proportion as we cease to do evil and learn to do well. Accordingly, the most advanced saint has a clearer discernment of and a greater repugnance for sin than has the most degraded sinner. Thus it is, too, with God, who hates sin and cannot look upon it with allowance. He has placed his ban, his sentence, his

edict against it, and declares [R3729 : page 62] that it shall be utterly rooted out, and that all intelligently and wilfully in sympathy with it must be considered as part of it and be destroyed with it.

The more we see of sin, the more we realize its contaminating character and destructive tendencies, the more we appreciate the divine justice which on account of sin condemns sin in humanity. (Rom. 8:3.) The more advanced our conceptions of righteousness, truth, holiness, purity, the more we are enabled to appreciate the divine view of sin and to say of the Lord and his sentence against sin and sinners, "True and righteous are thy judgments, O Lord." – Rev. 15:3.

THE OPERATION OF DIVINE MERCY

But the more we come to appreciate divine justice and the righteousness of the sentence of death against our race, the more also we come to appreciate the love and mercy of God toward us, and to rejoice that he was not willing that any should perish, and hence made provision wide enough, high enough, deep enough, that all might turn unto him and live – have everlasting life. This provision of mercy cannot ignore the sin nor can it permit the sinner to ignore it. It is necessary that the redeemed should know, should appreciate, their fallen condition, the justice of their sentence of death, and that their recovery is wholly a matter of divine mercy. Unless they learn this lesson they could never appreciate the divine arrangements and the only terms upon which God could grant them everlasting life – terms of acceptance of God's grace and forgiveness and their obedience to him and his principles of righteousness.

"NONE OTHER NAME GIVEN"

It is to this end that the heavenly Father arranged his plan for the recovery of our race as he reveals it in his Word – a plan

by which he extends mercy to all, yet requires all to accept that mercy through Jesus, "through faith in his blood," or not at all. (Rom. 3:25.) This insures that every one coming to the Father must admit that he is a sinner, must admit that he cannot meet the penalty of his own sin and live, must admit that his salvation is purely of divine mercy through Christ; and it insures that the terms and conditions which Jesus the Redeemer will establish as the Mediator between God and sinners must be thoroughly understood and accepted and complied with. He proposes to help back to perfection and to full fellowship with the Father all who sincerely repent of sin and will use their best endeavors under his guidance, instruction and assistance to return to God. To such and to such alone will perfection be granted. Such alone will attain the everlasting life through the assistance as well as through the redemption of him who bought us with his precious blood.

SINS BLOTTED OUT.

It is well that we mark a wide distinction between the blotting out of sin, which the Scriptures assure us will be accomplished at the second coming of Christ, and the forgiveness of sins which may be enjoyed now by all who will exercise the necessary faith and obedience. The blotting out of sins at the second advent of Christ will be applied first of all to the Church: not a trace of sin in any sense or degree will remain upon these from the time that they share in the glorious blessings of the first resurrection. In the present time they are actually imperfect, blemished, marked and marred by sin, and continually need the covering of the robe of Christ's righteousness so freely granted to them; but with the resurrection change all the blemishes of sin will be gone. As described by the Apostle, that which was sown in weakness will be raised in power, that sown in dishonor will be raised in glory, that which was sown a natural body will be raised a spiritual

body. No longer will they need imputed righteousness, but each will individually be absolutely perfect, absolutely righteous. – 1 Cor. 15:42-44.

The blotting out of the world's sins will not be thus instantaneous, in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, but will progress throughout the Millennial age gradually. As **[R3730 : page 62]** each individual recognizes sin and falls in line with the rules of the Kingdom he will find himself growing stronger as a reward for his endeavors in the ways of righteousness, the highway of holiness. Day by day, year by year, he will increase in mental, moral and physical development, or failing so to do will, after the abundant opportunities of that time, be cut off in the Second Death as unworthy of any further opportunities for gaining life eternal through the Redeemer's Kingdom. Those who will may avail themselves of the privileges of that time and have their sins entirely blotted out – reach absolute perfection of mind and body by the close of the Millennial age, and then be tested as to their heart loyalty to the principles of righteousness as shown in Revelation 20:10. That final test will be general to the human family: it will correspond to the trial given to Adam in Eden, except that these will have had experience with sin and the fall, and with the recovery and with the reign of righteousness. They will, therefore, all be in a proper attitude to enable them to pass the examination satisfactorily, and any failure so to do will demonstrate that the heart had not come, under all the favorable conditions, into that harmony with God which would be indispensable to eternal life. Such the Scriptures show us will be destroyed with Satan as those who have some elements at least of his disposition.

FORGIVENESS OF SINS.

In our lesson the Scribes are represented as reasoning that the only one who could forgive a sin is the one against whom

the transgression is committed. If A commit a transgression against B it is not in the power of C to forgive it. B alone has the right to feel offended and he alone can forgive. The Scribes were reasoning along correct lines: while we do as individuals transgress the rights and liberties of each other at times and thus sin against one another and need to have one another's forgiveness, yet all sin is primarily against God, whose law of righteousness is infringed. All unrighteousness is sin – against God, against his laws. He alone sets the standard of right and wrong by which his creatures are to be measured or judged and he is the Judge. How, then,

COULD JESUS FORGIVE SINS?

We answer that our Creator had so fixed the matter of sin and its penalty that Jesus was the only one who could forgive sins – or the heavenly Father through him. The **[R3730 : page 63]** divine arrangement was so fixed that the Father had even put out of his own hands the power to forgive sins, because he had fixed a positive, absolute, unchangeable penalty against sin in the case of Adam and his posterity. He could have done differently: he could have dealt with mankind as he dealt with the angels that fell, and merely put them under some kind of restraints without imposing directly the death sentence. But once the death penalty had been imposed, nothing could alter or annul it. God himself could not change his unchangeable laws.

But that unchangeable sentence against mankind was made by the Creator with full knowledge of how he could, and in due time, would negative or nullify the sentence, not by withdrawing it but by meeting its requirements through a Redeemer. Thus it was that in the divine plan our Lord Jesus was the Lamb slain before the foundation of the world. In other words God had in mind the plan of redemption before he

imposed the death sentence which made necessary that redemption.

DIVINE FAVOR EARLY MANIFESTED.

It may be urged that God manifested his favor to Abraham and others before our Lord Jesus came into the world and presented man's ransom price. We reply that this is so, that divine favor was manifested, but that its manifestation was based upon the divine intention that in due time the ransom for sinners would be paid. But even then the favor granted was not the blotting out of sins. No! that could not have been done prior to the ransom, and is to be done by God through the Redeemer glorified. All the ancient worthies could possibly have had such measure of divine favor as their faith in God would justify, and the only favors which God could grant to them would be such as his intentions through the Redeemer would make reasonable.

SIN UNDER MOSES' LAW.

Under the Law Covenant God arranged with the nation of Israel a certain kind and degree of forgiveness and reconciliation through Moses, the mediator of that Covenant. Under these arrangements the sin offerings year by year made a picture, a type, an illustration of the coming blessings under the New Covenant and its Mediator, the Christ. Israel as a nation enjoyed God's favor to a limited extent through faith, as did the patriarchs, but neither did they have a blotting out of sins. On the contrary, the Apostle points out that it is evident that Israel's sacrifices and sin offerings never really took away sin, but were merely typical of better sacrifices through which sin will actually be cancelled and ultimately blotted out. – Heb. 10:1-4; Acts 3:19.

THE MEASURE OF JESUS' FORGIVENESS.

If the heavenly Father were bound by his own law and could not blot out sins without the payment of the ransom price, could our Lord Jesus do so? Had he greater power in this respect than the Father? We answer, No! His words to the paralyzed man in this lesson did not refer to a blotting out of man's sins, but merely to such a forgiveness of sins as the Father had already extended to Abraham and others in the past. When the Lord had uttered the words, "Thy sins be forgiven thee," the man still lay helpless, his sins not blotted out though forgiven; he was still a picture, an illustration of the terrible effects of sin. And our Lord's later words, "Arise, take up thy bed and walk," although in the nature of restitution, were not a blotting out of the man's sins. To have blotted out his sins completely would have meant the lifting of him completely out of all the imperfections of the fall up to the full perfection of a perfect man mentally, morally and physically. Jesus did not do this for him; he merely healed him of a measure of his special difficulty.

Besides, in these words our Lord did not refer to original sin and its death penalty. He was speaking of sins in the plural, the man's own sins additional to his share in father Adam's sin and father Adam's penalty. The man was a Jew, under the Mosaic Covenant. His share in original sin, in common with that of all Jews, was atoned for every year, and on the basis of this atonement he as a Jew had a standing with the Lord, and the Lord's engagement with that people was that under their Covenant they should be free from sickness, etc., so long as they were obedient to the Lord. To every Jew, therefore, sickness meant, implied, personal guilt, personal transgression, because the Lord had so covenanted with them, as he had not done with other peoples and nations.

OUR LORD ALREADY SACRIFICED.

But even as respects Adamic sin and its penalty our Lord would have had the right to have spoken peace and forgiveness and to have given an assurance of an ultimate blotting out of sins, because although he had not yet finished the work which he came to do, although he had not yet finished the ransom sacrifice, he had begun it. At his baptism he had consecrated his life, had laid down his life, presented it to the Father in sacrifice, and the Father had in a measure accepted it and had signified his acceptance of the contract by giving to our Lord the holy Spirit, the first-fruits of the glorious blessing which he received at his resurrection.

It was by virtue of his already having made this sacrifice, which he fully intended to carry out to the very end, that our Lord was authorized in saying to his believers, "He that hath the Son hath life, he that hath not the Son shall not see life." "He that believeth on me hath everlasting life, and I will raise him up at the last day" (John 3:36; 6:54) – that is, he who believes in me and becomes my true, faithful follower may reckon that he has already begotten in him the new life, and that I will assist him and carry him through, so that in the very dawning of the Millennial morning he may have a share in the first resurrection and thus obtain the eternal life under its perfect conditions.

The entire operation of this Gospel age so far as the Church is concerned is one of faith – "We walk by faith not by sight." By faith we realize our sins forgiven, by faith we look into the future and believe that in the first resurrection we shall share our Master's glory, honor and immortality. And by faith we are satisfied and rest in hope – yea, actually, we shall be satisfied when we awake in his likeness. – Psalm 17:15.
