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THE SAVIOR'S BROOKLYN TABERNACLE BIBLE STUDIES

MISIMPROVED OPPORTUNITIES TAKEN AWAY.

Matthew 21:23-46.—

"Therefore say I unto you, The Kingdom of God shall be taken from you."

IN this Study the Great Teacher in two parables portrays the mistake made by the religionists of his day. The understanding of these parables gives a clearer insight into the cause which led to the rejection of Israel for a time from Divine favor. Incidentally, too, we are to remember that nominal fleshly Israel was a prototype of nominal Christendom. Hence we may look for somewhat similar conditions and dealings now in the "harvest" time of this Christian Age.

To get the force of the Lord's teachings here and everywhere it is necessary to remember that the Jewish people had been promised the Kingdom of God, of which David's Kingdom was a type on a small scale. For centuries they had been expecting a great King, Messiah, whose coming would exalt them and bring them into prominence as God's Kingdom. John the Baptist, when he came to introduce Messiah, told the Jews that unless they would repent and come back, to the extent of their ability, into harmony with God and the Law they need not expect to share in the Messianic Kingdom. Jesus told the people that unless their righteousness should exceed the righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees, they should in no wise enter into or become members of the long-waited-for Kingdom. (Matthew 5:20.) The two parables of this Study illustrate what stood in the way of the majority.

The Jewish people professed to be God's people, willing to do him service. They were treated, not as mere slaves, but, rather, like sons. All were told to go and work in God's vineyard; but they divided into two classes, represented by the two sons, in our first parable. One of these sons represented the outwardly religious, pious, who said, Yes, we will serve God. However, they did not really seek the Divine service, but rather the service of their sects and parties and their own personal aims, honor, influence and preferment. The other class of Israelites, represented by the other son of the parable, made no pretense of serving God, and were branded as publicans, sinners, harlots. Nevertheless, when Jesus appeared, when John's message went forth, and afterwards the teachings of Jesus and the Apostles, these same publicans, sinners, harlots, were the ones ready to receive him, while the religious, finding that his message was in conflict with their teachings, repudiated him. Thus one of the charges against Jesus was, "He receiveth publicans and sinners and eateth with them."

The second parable represents God as the owner of a great Vineyard, in all respects well appointed and furnished for his purpose. This Vineyard represents the Jewish nation and the Divine promises made to that people—the Law and all the arrangements of the Law Covenant, for their development. This Vineyard the owner let out to husbandmen, whose duty it was to care for the vines and the fruitage and to render to the owner the results, except a portion which they might keep for themselves. These husbandmen were the prominent religionists, of whom Jesus said, "The scribes and Pharisees sit in Moses' seat. All, therefore, whatsoever they bid you observe, that observe and do." (Matt. 23:2, 3.) The owner properly required returns on his property and sent servants to receive his share of the fruitage. But the husbandmen, instead of giving them what was due their Master, abused them by beating, killing and stoning them.

These servants were the prophets of old, sent to Israel. They should have received the kindest treatment and an abundance of fruits of meekness, gentleness, patience, etc., but, instead, they were treated as intruders by the leaders of Israel. Some of them were stoned, some beaten, some murdered, some sawn asunder. Some wandered about in sheepskins and goatskins and dwelt in dens and caves of the earth, because not appreciated. They were not treated as representatives of the owner of the vineyard. Finally the owner sent his Son, saying, "They will reverence my Son." But these same husbandmen, the religionists of our Lord's day, took counsel to kill him and to seize his inheritance. They somehow got the impression that they could lord it over God's heritage and that anybody reproving them or showing up their hypocrisies or liberating the people from subservience to them, whoever he might be—even the heir—they were at liberty to kill. They crucified him.

What may we presume the owner of that vineyard would do to those wicked husbandmen who, forgetting the ownership of the vineyard, were using it as their own, mistreating his servants and crucifying his Son? The Great Teacher put the question to his hearers, and the answer promptly came that the owner would destroy those wicked men and let out his Vineyard to others who would render him its fruitage.

This is just what happened. The scribes and Pharisees and Doctors of the Law who were using God's promises and blessings and their opportunities selfishly and in disregard of the Almighty—these were dispossessed. Their government was destroyed and Divine favor and privileges as God's mouthpieces, which they once enjoyed, were taken from them and given to others—to the Apostles and their associates, during this Gospel Age.

However, as fleshly Israel was a type or picture of nominal Spiritual Israel, we may not have to look far to find a very similar condition of things today. Today also we see some high in official position as representatives of God and his Word using their positions to entrench themselves, to hold power over the people, to carry out their own schemes. These are inclined to speak harshly, yea, to "murder" any who come amongst them meekly, humbly, in the name of the Lord. They do not literally kill them nor "shoot them full of arrows," but they do behead them in the sense of ostracism. And they do send out at them the arrows of bitter words, slanders, etc.

What will the Heir-Lord do with such servants? The answer is again that the opportunities which they have enjoyed will be taken away from them. Things God will do in the near future will be that the King's son and all of the unused servants in relation with him will constitute the new "Kingdom of God's dear Son" under the whole heavens." Matters will be [illegible]

[illegible] "pillar in the temple of my God" and "go no more out" of the great Temple of God, which is Christ Jesus, the Head, and the Church, his Body. Whosoever shall overcome and keep his garments clean, shall not be hurt of the second death. Rev. 2:11; 3:12; 21:4; 20:6.

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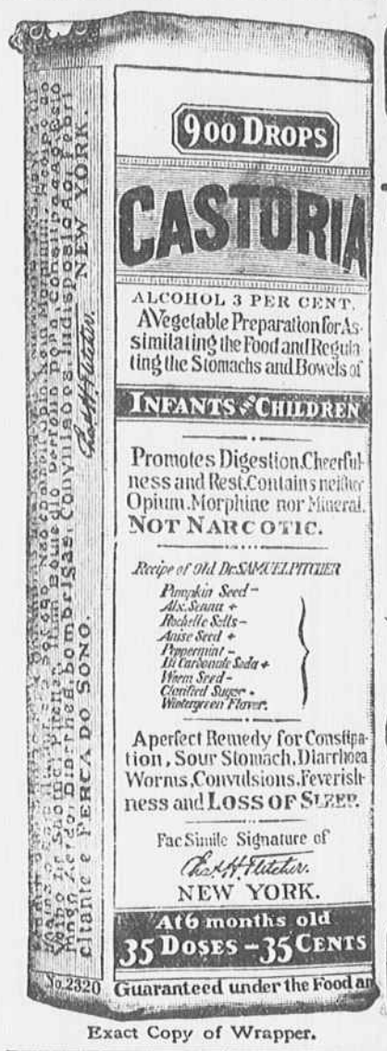
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