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PROMISE

OUR REGULAR SUNDAY SERMON

A Brilliant Discourse By the Rev. A. H. C. Morris.

Brooklyn, N. Y.—Sunday morning, in Strong Place Baptist Church, the pastor, the Rev. A. H. C. Morris, had as his subject, "Powerful Promises." The text was from II Peter 1:4: "Whereby are given unto us exceeding great and precious promises: that by these we might be partakers of the divine nature, having escaped the corruption which is in the world through lust."

At any rate the Bible is frank. It says the plainest things about man's sin. But it also holds before him a wonderful hope. To-day he is mired in corruption. To-morrow he may have escaped from this and become like God. The whole gospel is found in these few words.

We have here a statement of the fact of sin and its origin. The fact is "corruption" and the origin "through lust." I know that there are worldly-wise men who sneer at the third chapter of Genesis. But this I have noticed, that they are unable to give to us a simpler solution of the mystery of evil. Somewhere and at some time the race must have sinned. The stream of life has been poisoned, and this must have taken place at its fountain head, for we cannot find any divisions which do not have the entire characteristics of the whole. The Bible says the event took place in the first man, before a single son was born, and he just after something which was forbidden to him, and that by his disobedience he fell from a primal innocency, and inhaled a fatal and contagious condition of corruption. And that we have aggravated this calamity by repeating sin and deepening the ruin.

But I am not so much concerned today about the origin of the condition. We can leave that with a single word. But there are certain facts that cannot be brushed aside. A man may question the story as it is written in Scripture, but he cannot deny it, for it does not come within the region of denial. Neither can he deny the story as it is repeated in life to-day. Have you never plucked a forbidden fruit? Have you never listened for pleasure which has been distinctly forbidden? And as a consequence of transgression, have you never experienced a repulsive sickness and an intolerable loathing, so that you have known what is the meaning of this phrase, "the corruption which is in the world through lust?" Do you not know anything at all of the lashings of remorse?

Let me ask you another question. How does it happen that the hearts do so constantly "remain down?" Why must it be repeatedly wound up and fastened with ratchets? Why do we have to make and renew resolves, and lash the will to the "sticking place?" Why is it that a man never backslides into holiness? Why cannot we take off the brakes and find ourselves gliding into the highest moral living? Everything we are told, tends to move in the line of least resistance. Do we find that we are drifting toward charity and holiness and love and virtue? Nay, but all of us these graces are the fruit of serious toil. They are magnificent possessions, more precious than gold and sparkling gems, but they are gotten only by struggle and privation and self-denial. And that word "self-denial" contains a fossil history of primal sin. It tells us of an evil self that must be constantly denied, because its desires are wrong. But whence this evil self, and whence these wrong desires?

But let us come a little closer to this subject. Let me hint at the things that we cannot speak of before the public, our secret thoughts and faults which are hidden. The thoughts that creep into the heart and nestle there. Can you tell me whence they come? Tell me, for instance, whence come the envy and jealousy and malice and evil desire, and the lust for gold that makes the thief, and the thirst for blood which crinkles the hand of murder? Do you not think these things arise in human life as malaria and pestilence from a death-dealing bog? Do they not bespeak what this Scripture calls a "corruption which is in the world through lust?" I suppose that the angels before the throne of God would shirk from having their thoughts proclaimed with the trumpet of Gabriel. I know that Jesus has torn open His heart and flung out a challenge which no man can accept. "Which of you conceiveth Me of sin?" said He. But we cannot do that. We hide our thoughts and cover our faults with a crimson blush, and walk among our nearest friends with a coward's step. But what has befallen man? If God made him innocent—and nobody questions this—something must have happened to corrupt his thoughts and make them so black that he stands in dread of the day for which all other days were made, when this hidden history shall be revealed.

There is something pathetic in his attempts to assert his worth. We speak, for instance, of the "Majesty of conscience" and the "Dignity of human nature," and of the "Fatherhood of God," and the "Brotherhood of man" as if these terms were true and meaningful. Take the first of these and see what comfort there is in it. "The Majesty of conscience." But do you not know that conscience almost always speaks in judgment? It seems to have lost its authority to command if it ever possessed that authority. It cannot insist upon obedience, but can only raise its voice in remonstrance. It can be easily overruled, and voted down, and then it can only record a minority vote, and lapse into silence. But there is more in this scripture than a statement of the fact of sin. Here are also "these great and precious promises whereby we may become partakers of the divine nature." That is men may become as God. And the warrant for this promise is found in the fact of correspondence between the divine and the human. The natural man cannot discern spiritual things, and it is no use to talk to him about them, for there is no correspondence, no basis of affinity, no ground of fellowship. But man was made in the image of God, and it was possible for God to take upon Himself man's nature; and it is within the power of every man, by the grace of God, to take on also the divine nature, to be made like God.

That is what is said in the word before us. And this is done by a single act. Man fell, we are told, by reaching after the divine attributes. "Ye shall be as God" was the lying promise of the tempter, and by listening to that we were cast to the level of beasts. But now God returns to us with the promise that after all we shall be as Himself, sharers in His nature and conformed to His image. It seems strange to you that for a single sin so serious consequences should be entailed. This could only be because the stream was poisoned at its source, and the green collar of his tunic rubbed against the cut and he died of blood poisoning.

Hisself a new creation. He has begun it in one new man, who kept His life without spot or blemish. And in His life and federal headship we share by a single act of faith. The consequences of faith are quite as great as the consequences of disobedience. "He that believeth on Him hath everlasting life." And that does not mean that his life is prolonged in endless time, but that it is endowed with an immortal nature. It is received the instant he believes, as by a new birth, and has passed from death unto life. He hath been already delivered from the bondage and corruption of the kingdom of darkness and has been colonized in the kingdom of His Son. He is born of God, a son of the Most High, a citizen of heaven. A single sin has stained the race. We laid hold on death and spite of tears and cries and struggle, we have not been able to loose the hand. One single act of faith takes hold on eternal life, and in spite of sins and falls and failure that prize can never be wrested from our grasp. And this is all by faith.

Men have said to me that the scheme of salvation is arbitrary. It is vain, they say, to shut the world up to faith. But, my friend, do you not know that this entire universe is arbitrary? That there is nothing more arbitrary than the laws of mathematics, or of health or of gravitation. It is not strange that every son of Adam is shut up to the multiplication table? Is it not strange that if a man wants to compute numbers in China he must use the identical system that we use? That three and two make five there as they do here? No, there is but one law for light or heat or electricity or numbers, or gravitation in all the earth. And there is but one way of salvation for all the earth. Here it is said "through these promises," which only means that a man believes in Christ. A promise is nothing except for the value of the person who makes it. Some men may make their promises, and no man gives them heed. But if one promises whose character you know, then you count on them as you count upon the shining of the sun.

We hear a good deal in these days about education into the kingdom of God, about the natural development of righteousness. But development is only unfolding, and that the race has been doing in all the centuries, and each age surpasses the last in the comeliness of sin. Education is drawing out, but how can you draw holiness from a heart that is "deceitful above all things and desperately wicked?" Education can never do the work. It is like putting a new handle on the pump and leaving the dog in the well.

You may wonder at the fancy of bringing in a new and supernatural life by belief in precious promises. But all questions are answered by the experiences of history. Great men have been regenerated by single words of Scripture. This was true of Augustine and Luther and Spurgeon and scores of others whom time fails me to mention. They were not only new men, but mighty sons of God. Wonderful was this? As great as the wonder of all forms of life. Look into the acorn and tear its halves apart, and tell me if you can see therein the stalwart oak. Analyze the seed of wheat and tell me if you can see therein the waving fields of grain. Nay, but all of us these words which I speak unto you they are spirit and they are life. You cannot see the spirit, you cannot see the life, but can you say they are not there? I hold up to you these great and precious promises, and there are saints and missionaries and noble lives and giant charities and mighty revolutions there. There are heaven and an eternal weight of glory wrapped up in that. And our growth in process of maturity and improvement. But it is a new creation by which we become like God.

And now I have finished. I know I have borne down hard on sin. I wish I did not have to do so. I wish with you that the word were not in the language because it was not in the heart. If one of those phantom friends of the astronomers should come to this earth and say to me, "I understand this as a beautiful place, but for one thing, I understand it is filled with sin and rebellion against the rule of God." I wish I could say to him, "My friend, you have been misinformed. There is no sin." But I tell you frankly, I could not say that to him. I would have to say to him: "Alas! 'tis true, 'tis pity, and pity 'tis, 'tis true." But I could also say to him that sin cannot be torn out of his heart. I would point him yonder, and say, "Do you see that golden splendor? That is the gospel of Jesus. It is filled with sweetness, and by that we are restored and have become partakers of the divine nature." And isn't that more than the fact of sin?

God's promises are ever on the ascending scale. One leads up to another fuller and more blessed than itself. In Mesopotamia God said: "I will show thee the land." In Canaan: "I will give thee all the land, and children innumerable as the grains of sand." It is thus that God allures us to saintliness. Not giving us anything till we have dared to act, that He may test us. Not giving us anything at first, but always keeping in hand an infinite reserve of blessing. Oh, the unexplored remainders of God! Who ever saw His last star?—Rev. F. B. Meyer.

What Christianity Is.

Christianity is that historic religion founded by Jesus of Nazareth, and that its bond and its life in this redemption mediated by Him, in which the true relation between God and man has for the first time found complete and adequate expression, and which throughout all the changes of intellectual and social environment which the centuries have brought, still continues to maintain itself as the religion best worthy of the allegiance of thoughtful and worthy men.—Schliermacher.

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