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THE THIEF ON THE CROSS.

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THE object of this tract is to call attention to the prayer of the penitent thief, and the Lord's gracious answer to it, viewed in relation to the Christian's hope, and the time of reward. Observe, then, first—

THE PRAYER. 1

Lord, remember me when thou comest into thy kingdom.—Luke xxiii. 42.

1. It expresses the belief that Jesus was *to come* to his kingdom. Though hands and feet were nailed fast to the cross, and death was inevitable to the King of Israel, yet this penitent malefactor believed that the Lord would come to his kingdom. He had confidence that God would raise Christ from the dead, and set him on his 'holy hill of Zion'—the 'throne of his father David,' where he would rule his people Israel.

Even so, the coming of Christ to his kingdom lies at the foundation of all genuine Christian hope. The Lord taught his disciples to pray, 'Thy kingdom come;' and *until* he come, that prayer shall never cease to be offered by his waiting disciples. Throughout the New Testament, the kingdom of Christ is spoken of as a future thing. The coming of Christ to his kingdom is borne witness to by all the apostolic writings. Now, the world is full of evil; oppression, injustice, war, crime, and misery are common in all lands; but when Christ comes in his kingdom, he will 'destroy them that destroy the earth;' and he himself shall rule the world in righteousness.

He comes to break oppression,
And set the captive free;
To take away transgression,
And rule in equity.

His throne is to be on 'the holy hill of Zion'—(Ps. ii. 6); but now there is no throne there; and the only sceptre which holds away in Jerusalem is that of the Sultan. When Christ comes to his kingdom, 'there will be one king over all the earth, and his name one'—(Zech. xiv. 9). The kingdoms of this world shall become 'the kingdom of our Lord and of his Christ, and he shall reign for ever and ever'—(Rev. xi. 15). All who have faith in

Jesus as the Christ—the Anointed for the throne of David, who is to effect deliverance for the inhabitants of the earth—look forward with joyful hope to the time when he shall ‘come in his glory,’ and ‘sit upon the throne of his glory.’ Hence they daily cry, ‘Come, Lord Jesus!’

How different is it with the mass of professing Christians! They think that his kingdom has already come; that his kingdom is the church, and that he reigns in the hearts of his people, and in heaven, and therefore, needs not to *come* to his kingdom. Reader, what say you? Did not the poor crucified penitent express the real hope of the Christian, and those who speak otherwise ‘err, not knowing the Scriptures?’

2. The request of the thief expresses the belief *that the coming of Christ to his kingdom* is the time when he confers his rewards on the subjects of his favours. ‘Lord, remember me **WHEN** thou comest into thy kingdom.’

So Jesus had taught his disciples. ‘When the Son of man shall come in his glory, *then* shall he sit upon the throne of his glory’—(Matt. xxv. 31). ‘Simon Peter said unto him, Behold, we have forsaken all and followed thee; what shall we have, therefore? And Jesus said unto them, Verily I say unto you, that ye who have followed me, *in the regeneration, when the Son of man shall sit in the throne of his glory*, ye shall also sit upon twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel’—(Matt. xix. 27, 28). Again he said: ‘I *go* to prepare a place for you; and if I *go* and prepare a place for you, I will *come again*, **THAT** where I am there you may be also’—(John xiv. 2, 3). So we find, from the New Testament writings, that the second appearing of the Lord was the earnest expectation and constant hope of the faithful in Christ Jesus; and that they had no hope of glory or reward till then. Speaking for himself, the apostle Paul, in the immediate prospect of death, writes: ‘Henceforth there is laid up for me a crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, shall give to me at that day, and not to me only, but unto all them also who love his appearing’—(2 Tim. iv. 8). And speaking of the common hope, to the saints and faithful brethren at Colosse, he writes: ‘*When* Christ, who is our life, shall appear, *then* shall ye also appear with him in glory’—(Col. iii. 4). And so throughout the whole of these epistles, and the visions of John, the coming of the Lord is alluded to as the time when he confers his honours and rewards on the subjects of his favour. ‘Behold I come quickly, and my reward is with me, to give every man according as his works shall

be.' And the believing response of 'the beloved disciple' is, 'Amen. Even so, come Lord Jesus!'—(Rev. xxii. 12-20).

Observe now—

THE LORD'S GRACIOUS REPLY.

Jesus said unto him, Verily I say unto thee to-day shalt thou be with me in Paradise.—Luke xxiii. 43.

Notwithstanding the explicit testimony of Scripture, that 'the resurrection of the just,' at the Lord's coming, is the time when the believer enters into the joy of his Lord, the common belief of professing Christians at the present day is that, at the day of his death, the accepted disciple is ushered into the presence of Christ, and pleasures for evermore; and the Lord's reply to the prayer of the penitent thief is continually pointed to in support of that belief—as if the Lord would make a promise at direct variance with his teaching at other times, and contrary to the apostolic deliverances already quoted in this tract.

In refutation of this use of the language, we request attention first to some considerations which forbid the common application of the words, and then submit what we think the true solution of its apparent disagreement with the general teaching of the Bible. And first—

The Lord's promise to the thief cannot mean that he was to be with him in *heaven*, on the same day on which the promise was made, *because our Lord himself did not enter heaven on that day*. There is, indeed, no good ground for believing that Jesus entered heaven till he ascended from Mount Olivet, forty days after his resurrection; but of this we are certain, that three days after this promise was given, he said to Mary Magdalen: 'Touch me'—rather, hold me, detain me—not, for I am not yet ascended to my Father'—(John xx. 17).

Again, *Jesus was not in paradise, but in the grave, till the third day after this promise was made*. His own words are: 'As Jonah was three days and three nights in the belly of the fish, so the Son of man shall be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth'—(Matt. xii. 40). But to this it will be objected that this is a mere quibble, inasmuch as it was *the body* of Jesus that lay in the grave, while his soul went to heaven. Was it indeed only the body of Jesus, and not Jesus *himself*, that was buried? Was it the body of Jonah, or Jonah himself, that was three days and three nights in the belly of the fish? If the entire Jonah was in the belly of the fish, and only the body of the Son of man was in the

grave for the time specified, where is the truth of the comparison, 'As *Jonah* was—so must the *Son of man* be?' But, reasoning aside, we have positive testimony from the apostle Peter that *the soul* of Jesus was in the state of the dead between his death and resurrection. Having applied to Jesus the language of the 16th Psalm—'Thou wilt not leave my soul in hell [*hades*], neither wilt Thou suffer Thine holy One to see corruption'—the apostle observes: 'Men and brethren, let me freely speak unto you of the patriarch David, that he is both dead and buried, and his sepulchre is with us unto this day.' Therefore being a prophet, and knowing that God had sworn with an oath to him that of the fruit of his loins, according to the flesh, He would raise up Christ to sit on his throne; he seeing this before, spoke of the resurrection of Christ, that his soul was not left in hell, neither did his flesh see corruption'—(Acts ii. 22-31). So far from the soul of our Lord being in heaven, or any place worthy of the name of 'paradise,' on that day on which he made the promise to the thief, it went to hell (Greek *hades*), and remained there till the morning of the third day. Remarking on the words, 'Thou wilt not leave my soul in hell,' Dr John Eadie observes:

The words, 'my soul,' mean merely 'myself.' It is obvious that the argument based upon the idea that Christ's soul went to Sheol, and his body to the grave, has no foundation. The Hebrew does not warrant this distinction. Christ's soul, in such an idiom, is his ENTIRE PERSON. Now, what is meant by *Sheol* [Greek *Hades*]? It is explained in the second clause. It is the place where corruption is to be seen, the region of the dead. So the apostles understood it. Though Messiah was to die, death's power was to be very limited; he was not to be abandoned to his dark dominion.*

Paradise! Imagine Messiah rejoicing that his soul was not to remain long in 'paradise'—the place where he graciously assured the penitent dying malefactor he would be with him! Comforting the dying believer with the assurance of being with him in a place from which he himself exulted in the hope of a speedy deliverance!

The doctrine, that the soul of Jesus went to paradise that day on which he made this promise, and only his body to the grave, is, however, forbidden by a still more serious consideration. *It virtually denies the reality of Christ's death, and, by consequence, the atonement thereby effected.* For, as an able writer on the subject justly observes:

* *Biblical Cyclopaedia*, by John Eadie, D. D., p. 301.

If the soul of *man* be in itself immortal, then so must have been the soul of the Redeemer; in which case he could not have died, or laid down his life; for his personality being bound up, as is alleged, with his soul, and that being, according to this theory, immortal, how could he in that case have died at all? If he merely laid aside, at death, the outward *covering*—the body—and in his immortal essence, as is said, still continued to exist, that alleged immortal part constituting his personality, how, or in what sense, can he be said to have died?*

But the Scriptures assure us that the Christ really died. The Lamb of God was 'slain.' Yes, blessed be God, He made 'the soul' of His Son 'an offering for sin'—(Is. liii. 10). 'He poured out his soul unto death'—(verse 15). 'Christ loved the church, and gave *himself*—[not a mere part of himself]—for it'—(Eph. v. 25). Wonder, O Heavens, and be astonished, O Earth; the only begotten Son of the eternal God so loved the sinful sons of men, that he gave up his life—laid himself on the altar of God, a whole burnt offering, that they might become children of God, and heirs together with himself of the eternal kingdom and glory! Reader, are you prepared to receive a doctrine that takes the heart out of God's great sacrifice and the Redeemer's love?—that reduces the death of Jesus to the death of that which was not *him*, but only the house in which, in humiliation, he lived? Nay, let God be true, and every man a liar. 'As Jonah was three days and three nights in the belly of the fish, so was the Son of man three days and three nights in the heart of the earth.' 'He poured out his soul unto death;' therefore the idea that his soul, instead of dying, went to paradise, must be false.

How, then, are we to understand the language, 'Verily I say unto thee, to-day shalt thou be with me in paradise?' The translation of the American Bible Union has 'that day,' instead of 'to-day.' 'Verily I say unto thee, that day thou shalt be with me in paradise.' This rendering, if warrantable, would entirely agree with the sense of the passage, and the general teaching of Scripture, and remove all dubiety from the passage regarding the time when the promise to the thief would be realised. I have been at some pains to examine the trustworthiness of this rendering; and from an examination of the various occurrences of the Greek term (*semeron*) in the New Testament, I feel bound to reject the new translation, and abide by the authorised version. *Semeron* occurs 41 times in

* The Intermediate State, by J. C. M'Causland, M.A., Rector of Clonmore. Dublin: Hodges, Smith, & Co., 104 Grafton Street; pp. 82, 83. A most excellent treatise on the state of the dead.

the New Testament, including the passage under consideration, and in none of the other 40 instances will the sense admit of its being rendered 'that day.' 'To-day,' 'this day,' or 'the same day,' is the only sense admissible in these cases. Such also is its usage by the Seventy. In one case I find it used in the Septuagint where our English translators use 'that day'—(Deut. i. 39)—but there it refers to *past* time, and might have been rendered 'the same day.' On the other hand, the phrase, 'that day,' is uniformly represented in the Greek of the New Testament by the phrase, *en te hemera ekeine*. In sight of these facts, it seems unwarrantable to adopt the rendering, 'that day,' though it would, in this instance, agree with the sense.

Another way in which the phraseology is accounted for is, that 'the intermediate state, being one of utter, absolute, and positive unconsciousness,' 'it would necessarily be, to the thief's apprehension, an *immediate* passing out of the wretched predicament in which his crimes had involved him, into the blessedness and glory of the kingdom he sought.'*

The solution which most commends itself to the writer is that of placing the comma after 'to-day;' thus: 'Verily I say unto thee to-day, thou shalt be with me in paradise.' Possibly some readers may think that this is using undue liberty with the text of Scripture; but *the pointing* of the Scriptures, however useful in general, is a mere human invention. This is true of the Hebrew and Greek originals, as well as of the English or other translations. The Scriptures were originally written without points. Editors and transcribers have inserted the points according as they thought the sense required; and any reader is at liberty to try whether the sense, or nature of the context, warrants the punctuation in any instance. Well, suppose we remove the comma after 'thee,' and insert it after 'to-day,' we shall find the construction quite in harmony with the sense, with the context, and with the whole tenor of the Holy Scriptures. 'Verily I say unto thee to-day, thou shalt be with me in paradise;' or, 'To-day I say unto thee, thou shalt be with me in paradise.'

Some Greek manuscripts have the text so pointed. Mr Henry Constable, in his work on 'Hades,' though he adopts a different explanation, says: 'We know of no law in the Greek language which would *prevent* our placing the comma after "to-day," and reading our Lord as saying, "Verily, I say unto thee to-day, thou

* Intermediate State, by J. C. M'Causland, already referred to.

shalt be with me in paradise." If it were required to avoid a contradiction of God's Word, we should adopt it without a moment's hesitation.' This deliverance from one so well acquainted with the Greek language is a sufficient reply to those who affirm that such a construction is inadmissible.

Another solution of the apparent contradictions of this passage to the general teaching of Scripture, is given by Mr Constable in his work on Hades, already quoted from—a work the ablest and most exhaustive on the whole question of the state of the dead, and to which we must refer the reader for a full statement of that writer's remarks on this interesting passage. Mr Constable renders the phrase thus: 'Verily, I say unto thee, on this day thou shalt be with me in paradise,' and inquires:

Have we any clue to discover what day our Lord meant by 'this day?' Most assuredly it might signify the very Jewish day on which he was speaking; but most assuredly also it might signify some other day, if some other day were then spoken of between him and his disciple. Now, the penitent in his prayer was speaking of another day. He was speaking of the day of Christ's appearing, when he said, 'Lord, remember me when thou comest into thy kingdom.' And it is only most natural, most proper, most suitable to the occasion, that our Lord should refer, in his reply, to the day which his disciple spoke of in his prayer. Thus, naturally interpreted, 'on this day thou shalt be with me in paradise,' means, 'on this day of which you speak, when I come in my kingdom, thou shalt be with me, as now thou art side by side.' And so vanishes this text from the few that are objected to with any show of plausibility against us.*

Whichever of these solutions is the most correct, they all agree in this—that the meaning of our Lord's words is to be found in the request which elicited them—'Lord, remember me when thou comest into,' or rather *in*, 'thy kingdom.' Why should we doubt that the *paradise* of the reply is synonymous with the *kingdom* of the request? If it be not so, it was not granted—at least not promised.

And that kingdom may well be called Paradise. The Septuagint translation of the Old Testament uses this word, 'paradise,' for the Garden of Eden—(Gen. ii.) Primarily it means a *garden*; and in Hebrew usage is applied to gardens of pleasure—(Eccl. ii. 5; Song of Solomon iv. 13). The primal state of man in innocence and bliss in the paradise of Eden is but a shadow and specimen of the

* Hades, or the Intermediate State of Man, by Henry Constable, A.M. London: Kelloway & Co., 10 Warwick Lane, Paternoster Row.

happiness to be enjoyed in the everlasting kingdom of our Lord and of his Christ ; and the word paradise, which has become associated, in all minds familiar with the Bible, with the Garden of Eden, and is the symbol, in our common literature, of the state of purest and highest enjoyment, is a most happy term by which to designate the kingdom of Messiah. A reign of righteousness, and untroubled peace, goodness, and the fear of Jehovah, ultimating in a glorious, eternal, and perfect state of bliss, when 'the tabernacle of God shall be with men, and He will dwell with them, and they shall be His people, and God Himself shall be with them, and be their God. And God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes ; and there shall be no more death, neither sorrow, nor crying, neither shall there be any more pain, for the former things are passed away'—(Rev. xxi. 2, 4).

Well may we each fervently cry, 'Lord, remember *me* when thou comest to thy kingdom !' His gracious answer, to all who have such aspirations, and have entered the way of life, is, 'Behold, I come quickly, and my reward is with me, to give to every man as his work shall be.' 'To him that overcometh will I give to eat of the tree of life, which is in the midst of the paradise of God.'

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