

**SERMONS DELIVERED BY JOHN J.
CORNELL: AT FRIENDS'
MEETING HOUSE, PARK AVENUE,
BALTIMORE, MD., 1893-1894**

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JOHN J. CORNELL

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JOHN J. CORNELL

AT

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PARK AVENUE, BALTIMORE, MD., 1893.

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SALVATION : REDEMPTION.

SERMON AT PARK AVENUE MEETING, SECOND
MONTH 26, 1893.

[*Stenographic report.*]

IN my moments of meditation I have been brought to the conclusion that the world still stands in need of a religion which has in it more of Christianity and less of dogma ; and which is based more upon the practical application of the teachings of Jesus than of those of Peter and Paul ;—a religion that at once appeals to the conditions of the illiterate and poor, and which is not repulsive or repugnant to the most cultured mind.

No one who has given this subject any study, it seems to me, can fail to have perceived that there still remains, among all classes of professed Christians and religionists, too much of a disposition to rely upon theological doctrines, to contend earnestly about beliefs, to regard it as the more important element in a religious life that we should accept such interpretations of the Bible as have come down to us as the result of the thought of those who have lived before us ; and, in consequence, there is too little attention paid to the practical life that is required by the teachings of Jesus, the founder of the Christian religion.

Take, for instance, these two important parts of a religious life,—the subjects of Salvation and Restoration. We are largely called upon to accept doctrines which had their origin among the apostles in their reverence for Jesus as the great head who had called them into service, and we are also, if we examine closely, led to believe that the apostles did not even then fully understand the nature of those teachings, because of the tendency of their minds to dwell upon theories and doctrines.

The church, after the days of the apostles, dwelt more

largely upon their teachings, and claimed to base its ideas in relation to these two important subjects upon what is known as the Apostles' Creed. This tendency has led the minds of people away from the close examination of the requirements of the teachings of Jesus. His teachings were simple. He does not present anything to us for our acceptance that does not appeal to our best judgment, or that we cannot in our own lives verify to be rational and truthful. But the idea prevailing among mankind in relation to Salvation is largely turned toward the results following the crucifixion and death of Jesus,—that by thus laying down his life he evidenced the great love of God for man in sending him into the world to bear our sins, and to lay down his life for those sins, that he might through that medium be enabled to pacify the anger of God, or to appeal to him through the love that God bore him as his son, to pardon the transgressions of those who believed in him.

If you will examine a little closer and more analytically what all this implies, however much we may have placed our hopes of salvation upon a doctrine of this character, we will see at once, I think, how irrational it is to suppose that God is less loving in his nature than the son he sent; or that there was no other way by which God could manifest his love for man. This latter idea, man, if he thinks closely, would at once reject as being unloving and unkind, as well as unjust in its character.

Do the teachings of Jesus bear us out in anything of this character? It is time we thought closely along these lines; that we do not simply accept what the world has been teaching as true, without some investigation. We claim, as I said, to found our religion upon the teachings of Jesus. It is true that religion had its basis long before the time of Jesus, but the Christian religion makes the claim that he was its founder. If this be true, and we acknowledge this, ought not his teachings to be to us of paramount value to that which has followed in any age of the world since? Ought we not to look to him to expound the ideas that he designed in founding that religion, or in coming to the earth to inculcate, as the ideas upon which we are to base our thought, and as what he intended

should be that which man should enter into or accept as a means of salvation?

We nowhere find him bearing testimony that man was to be saved through his death, nor through any means except by those through which He was preserved. He tells us that if any man will come after him he must first deny himself, take up his cross daily, and follow Him. To me, in this lies the whole duty of man, and the whole means by which any man or any woman is to be accepted of God, or know of being saved. It is summed up in this terse manner. The first duty is to deny ourselves. Of course, that involves all of the actions of human life. It involves the control of every desire and passion and appetite of our nature,—everything which prompts man to any course of action. It does not mean that there shall be an entire refusal to follow out the cravings of desire, or other action prompted through appetite, but the denying of their having control over us.

Was not this exemplified in the life of Jesus? If we study closely that life do we not find him always maintaining control over all of the passions of the human, and do we not find it in our practical experience that in order to be preserved from the commission of anything wrong we must control the demands of appetite or desire that would prompt to that wrong? It is not simply being saved from the wrongs committed, that Jesus taught, but the commission of wrong. He did not come to save men in their sins, but from their sins, and here lies the practical work of salvation. It is that which each individual can understand if he will, and will find the work within himself; that he is not dependent upon anything outside of himself for that kind of salvation, although the instrumentalities that are employed, and which God in his mercy and goodness has given us, may assist us in this work. Yet the work is to be done within us. The struggle goes on there. It does not mean in the direction from which the promptings and our temptations come, nor the direction from which the temptation to do wrong comes, but that within himself he shall master the promptings of those appetites or demands of his physical or intellectual nature. He must not allow them to govern.

Anyone who will give the subject careful study, and follow out that line of thought, will find in his own practical experience, or in that of others with whom he is brought in contact, that all the disturbances, all the difficulties that tend to interfere with man's happiness, have their origin in the improper indulgence of something that is good, and hence the necessity of controlling it, and through which control we may be saved from the commission of wrong. Herein lies the first teaching of Jesus, to deny ourselves.

As soon as we become old enough, when we have attained sufficient growth to understand the teachings of the Divine Spirit revealed to us, and know from the impression made upon our inner life what is required of us to control, and where it is that we are to exercise the judgment, and over what passion or appetite we must obtain the mastery ; when we exercise that control under the impressions that are given us, we will be saved from the commission of sin in that particular. That must be evident to every thoughtful mind ; and if from one sin, why not from all ? It is not to be expected that in our earlier growth and earlier attainment we shall conquer every passion or every desire or everything that is wrong. It is a life-time work. Our Heavenly Father does not require of us entire control over everything we have to conquer all at once, any more than we require of a child that it shall control all its dispositions at once. We know that we have to give the child lesson after lesson. We know from our own experience that we had to learn lesson after lesson. Just so in the control of that which leads to wrong, as in the attainment of any other of our accomplishments. It is a gradual growth. Nevertheless, if we watch carefully over the uprising of every passion that comes up every day, we shall know how to meet it, and we can only attain this by a dependence upon that power which reveals to us what we ought to do.

It is in this sense that the Christ within, the true Son of God, becomes our Saviour. Not because Jesus was crucified and that body put to death upon Mount Calvary ; but because we listen to what Christ, the Spirit of God, and Light of God, and Wisdom of God, or what-

ever name we may give to the medium through which God reveals himself to us, teaches us to do. That appeals to the judgment of everyone. It can be understood by the most limited capacity, and it appeals to the most cultured capacity; so that we can understand that if we control that which leads to wrong, we are saved from the commission of wrong.

We know very well in our own experience, at least those of us somewhat advanced in years, that we cannot effect this simply by the willingness of the man to do it; that we cannot exercise this control over these powers without help. God so ordered it that man shall coöperate with him in the working out of his soul's salvation, as he ordered that man shall coöperate with him in providing sustenance for the physical body. He stands always ready. He is omnipresent and ready by his spirit to give us the instruction, and with the instruction the needed strength, in order that we may overcome every temptation when presented. All that is needed, then, upon our part, to obtain salvation, is to give our hearts to God, as we commonly express it. That is, that we must recognize our dependence and our needs, and be willing to do that which is right for us to do. There is no mystery about this. There is nothing supernatural about it. It is as God designed in the beginning in the creation of man, to be the means by which man shall be saved from the commission of wrong, and through which he might attain to the higher happiness that he is capable of realizing and enjoying.

When he breathed into man the breath of life he endowed him with a living soul. Whether that was after the years of this evolution or not is immaterial. There came into this world a frame into which God breathed the breath of life, and man became a living soul. He gave him then as now the power of choice either to control or regulate these passions, or to give latitude to them. He did not make man a mere machine that was to be controlled by arbitrary power. He did not make him that mere machine that he must always move in just such a rut or channel, as He in his superior power could have made him do, because by that means the man would not have been able