

[OUR CHRISTIAN DUTIES; A MASTERFUL SERMON IN WHICH LUTHER PUTS FORTH THE BIBLICAL TEACHING THAT CHRISTIANS ARE CITIZENS OF TWO KINGDOMS SIMULTANEOUSLY: THE KINGDOM OF THE WORLD AND THE KINGDOM OF CHRIST. ON THE BASIS OF THE TEXT HE DEMONSTRATES HOW CHRISTIANS ARE TO RELATE TO THE WORLD.]

Sermon for the Third Sunday after Easter; 1 Peter 2:11-20

A Sermon by Martin Luther; taken from his Church Postil.

OUR CHRISTIAN DUTIES.

I. This epistle selection, too, is an admonition to good works, or the fruits of faith. It touches upon nearly every condition of life, teaching how each individual should live and conduct himself. But first, Peter admonishes Christians in general that in their intercourse with gentiles, or the unbelieving world, they give no real occasion for censure or reproach concerning their conduct. The admonition seems to hinge upon the fact that Christians, as the apostle reminds them in the first and second chapters, have been called to a lively, a never-dying, hope of an imperishable inheritance in heaven, and of eternal joy and salvation; that they are now redeemed, having obtained remission of sins through the precious blood of Christ; and again, that they are become a holy nation and royal priesthood, to show forth and magnify the grace of God, they who in time past were not God's people and had not obtained grace. "But now," Peter would say, "you have obtained grace through the divine calling of Christ, through the suffering of your Lord. Live, then, as a holy people of God and citizens of heaven."

2. We have already heard that in the Christian life are two essential principles, two principles upon which Christian teachers may lay emphasis. First, faith in the fact that through Christ's blood we are released from sin and have forgiveness; second, being forgiven, our natures are to be changed and we are to walk in newness of life. In baptism, when we first believe, we obtain not only remission of sins whereby we are of grace made children of God, but also the power to purge out, to mortify, the remaining sins. Our transgressions are not forgiven, Paul says (Rom 6, 1), with the privilege of continuing in them, as the insolent rejecters of grace imagine. It is this way: Our sins being blotted out through the blood of Christ, we need not to make remuneration or render satisfaction for them; we are children of grace and enjoy forgiveness. Nevertheless, inherent sin is not entirely purged out, or mortified.

REMISSION AND MORTIFICATION DEFINED.

3. There is difference between remission of sins and mortification of them. The distinction should be made clear for the sake of combating those who confound and pervert the two principles by their false doctrines. In regard to remission, the Pope and many others have taught that forgiveness of sins is obtained through the foolishness of men's own self-elected works, the satisfactions of their own devising. This error has ever prevailed in the world. Cain was the first to make it, and it will continue to the end. And where this error is refuted, false teachers are found who, on the other hand, accept and boast of the doctrine of grace without enjoying its happy results. They proceed as if mere forgiveness were enough, and without further effect than averting punishment; as if it leaves us where we were before, not ameliorating in any wise our moral condition; and as if no more is to be known about Christ and the Gospel. Therefore, they who claim to be Christians must learn that, having obtained forgiveness without merit on their part, they should henceforth give no place to sins, but rather resist their former evil lusts and avoid and flee from the fruits and works thereof. Such is the substance of this lesson.

4. But note from the apostle's words how his view has changed since the time when, as a fisherman of Bethsaida, he went about with the Lord previous to the Lord's death and resurrection. At that time Peter and the other

apostles, in fact the entire Jewish nation, had no other conception of Christ's kingdom--or the kingdom of God--than as an earthly one wherein they should know only happiness, figuring as wealthy farmers, citizens, noblemen, counts and lords. The sum of the world's goods should be theirs, and all the gentiles their vassals. They were to be thenceforth undisturbed by enemies, wars, famine or misfortune, and to enjoy the extremity of peace, leisure and happiness under their supreme King, the Messiah. Such were their hopes, even their expectations. With these pleasing fancies were their minds filled. And just so today are the Jews full and drunken with their visionary dreams.

THE NATURE OF CHRIST'S KINGDOM.

5. Observe here, however, Peter teaches that the lot of the sharer in Christ's kingdom is quite the reverse of what he once imagined. "O beloved Christians," he would say, "who are called and baptized into the royal and priestly kingdom of Christ, I have now to tell you things quite different from the ideas and dreams you and I used to entertain. We are, it is true, citizens, counts and lords in the kingdom where Christ reigns supreme over all earthly kings and lords, and where is only eternal riches, peace and happiness in every form; but the life of that kingdom is unlike that of earthly kings and dominions. You are not, be it known, lords and noblemen in a worldly sense; neither is Christ a king as the world regards kingliness, and the kingdom of the world is not in harmony with his. Know, then, you must regard yourselves strangers and pilgrims in the kingdom of the world.

"Therefore, I admonish you that, having now become Christians--brothers in the eternal heavenly kingdom--your manner of life should be such as becomes them who are no longer of a worldly kingdom. Regard this earthly life only as the traveler or pilgrim regards the country wherein he journeys, the inn where he procures a night's lodging. He does not expect to remain in the city, to be mayor or even a citizen. He finds there his food, but his thoughts are cast beyond its gates, to the place where home is. So, Peter says, must you look upon your earthly course. You did not become Christians with the prospect of reigning here on earth, as the Jews fancy they shall reign and be established. The dwelling-place, the citizenship and the authority of Christians are to be found in another direction, not in this world. Therefore, think of yourselves as pilgrims on earth, directing your attention toward other possessions and another country, wherein you shall be lords forever, and where no discord nor misfortune such as you must endure in this earthly harbour shall ever enter."

CHRISTIAN USE OF THIS LIFE.

6. But how is indifference to this life to be accomplished? Peter goes on to say: "Be subject to every ordinance of man . . . whether to the king . . . or unto governors"; again, "Servants, be in subjection to your masters . . . also to the froward." How is it consistent with royal citizenship in a celestial country to be a pilgrim on earth? How can we live here with wives and children, houses and lands, and being citizens under a temporal government, and yet not be at home? There is a distinction here which, as before said, was at first difficult for the beloved apostles themselves to understand. But to Christians, especially those of today, it should be clear. Christ and the apostles do not, in this teaching, design the rejection of external government and human authority--what Peter here terms ordinances of men. No, they permit these to remain as they are; moreover, they enjoin us to submit to and make use of them.

7. This is the difference to be kept in mind: We are to conduct ourselves in our earthly stations and occupations as not regarding this life our true kingdom and best good. And we are not to think the life beyond holds nothing more nor better than what we possess here, as do the Jews and the Turks. Although they believe in the resurrection of the dead, they carnally imagine the future life will be like the present except for its perfect peace and happiness, its freedom from misfortune, persecution and all ills. It is the prerogative of the Pope and his holy epicures to believe nothing in any respect. Every Christian, be he lord or servant, prince or subject, should conduct himself as befits his station, using in trust whatever God has given him--dominion and subjects, house and home, wife and children, money and property, meat and drink. He is to regard himself solely as a guest of earth, as one eating his morsel of bread or taking his lunch in an inn; he must conduct himself in this earthly harbour as a pious guest. Thus may he actually be a king reigning with fidelity, or a lord faithful to his office, and at the same time declare: "I count nothing on this life. I do not expect to remain here. This is but a strange country to me. True, I am seated

in the uppermost place at table in this inn; but the occupant of the lowest seat has just as much as I, here or yonder. For we are alike guests. But he who assigned my duty, whose command I execute, gave me orders to conduct myself piously and honourably in this inn, as becomes a guest."

8. So should Christians in all stations of life--lords and ladies, servants and maids--conduct themselves as guests of earth. Let them, in that capacity, eat and drink, make use of clothing and shoes, houses and lands, as long as God wills, yet be prepared to take up their journey when these things pass, and to move on out of life as the guest moves on out of the house or the city which is not his home. Let them conduct themselves as does the guest, with civility toward those with whom they come in contact, not infringing on the rights of any. For a visitor may not unrestrainedly follow his own pleasure and inclinations in the house of a stranger. The saying is: "If you would be a guest, you must behave civilly; otherwise you may promptly be shown the door or the dungeon."

9. Christians should be aware of their citizenship in a better country, that they may rightly adapt themselves to this world. Let them not occupy the present life as if in tending to remain in it; nor as do the monks, who flee responsibility, avoiding civil office and trying to run out of the world. For Peter says rather that we are not to escape our fellows and live each for himself, but to remain in our several conditions in life, united with other mortals as God has bound us, and serving one another. At the same time, we are to regard this life as a journey through a country where we have no citizenship--where we are not at home; to think of ourselves as travelers or pilgrims occupying for a night the same inn, eating and drinking there and then leaving the place.

10. Let not the occupants of the humbler stations--servants and subjects--grumble: "Why should I vex myself with unpleasant household tasks, with farm work or heavy labour? This life is not my home anyway, and I may as well have it better. Therefore, I will abandon my station and enjoy myself; the monks and priests have, in their stations, withdrawn themselves from the world and yet drunk deeply, satisfying fleshly lusts." No, this is not the right way. If you are unwilling to put up with your lot, as the guest in a tavern and among strangers must do, you also may not eat and drink. Similarly, they who are favoured with loftier positions in life may not, upon this authority, abandon themselves to the idea of living in the sheer idleness and lustful pleasure their more favoured station permits, as if they were to be here always. Let them reason thus: "This life, it is true, is transitory--a voyage, a pilgrimage, leading to our actual fatherland. But since it is God's will that everyone should serve his fellows here in his respective station, in the office committed to him, we will do whatever is enjoined upon us. We will serve our subjects, our neighbours, our wives and children so long as we can; we would not relax our service even if we knew we had to depart this very hour and leave all earthly things. For, God be praised, had we to die now we would know where we belong, where our home is. While we are here, however, on the way, it is ours to fulfill the obligations of our earthly citizenship. Therefore, we will live with our fellows in obedience to the law of our abiding place, even unto the hour wherein we must cross the threshold outward, that we may depart in honour, leaving no occasion for complaint.

11. Thus, mark you, should every Christian conduct himself here on earth, according to Peter. In the first place, he should know where is his real home, his fatherland. We learn this through faith in Christ, whereby we become children of God, heirs of eternal life, citizens of heaven. Accordingly, we sing: "Now we pray thee, Holy Spirit, for true faith," etc., when we depart home from this wretchedness. This sentiment accords beautifully with the text here where Peter calls us "sojourners and pilgrims"--wayfarers in earthly wretchedness, desiring home and casting our thoughts beyond the gates of our sojourning-place. Second, though we must suffer this wretched condition in a foreign land, we are under obligation to render every honour to the host and to respect the inn, making the best of whatever may befall us.

12. The prophet Jeremiah found it necessary to give admonition of this sort to his wretched Jewish countrymen in Babylon who longed unspeakably to be home again and almost despaired because of having so long to suffer misery among strangers when many of their brethren were at home. Other prophets had encouraged them with the promise of soon being returned. Consequently many of them ceased to till the land and neglected to provide for a livelihood. To these Jeremiah writes (ch. 29, 10): "Ye must have patience, for ye are not so soon to return--not till seventy years be accomplished." Meanwhile, though in wretchedness and captivity, they were to do as he bids in verses 5-7: "Build ye houses, and dwell in them; and plant gardens, and eat the fruit of them. Take ye wives, and

beget sons and daughters; and take wives for your sons, and give your daughters to husbands, that they may bear sons and daughters: and multiply ye there, and be not diminished. And seek the peace of the city whither I have caused you to be carried away captive, and pray unto Jehovah for it; for in the peace thereof shall ye have peace."

That there in their misery they should build houses and make themselves citizens of Babylon, should marry and rear children--yes, give their children in marriage--as if they were to remain there permanently--this injunction of the prophet was altogether disagreeable and annoying to them. And still more offensive was the command to pray for the city and kingdom wherein they were captives. Much rather would they have prayed for liberation; for, influenced by the other prophets, they hoped to return home the following year.

13. Now, how was it with them? The godly, faithful ones had reason to hope and trust in release and a return to their own kingdom. Surely there was no pleasure, no joy, for them in their present miserable condition, as in Psalm 137 they testify and complain by the rivers of Babylon. There they cried and wept and had not an hour of enjoyment when they thought of home. The long seventy years their hearts continually stood at the gate ready to depart, so that they had no inclination whatever to build houses, to cultivate farms, to make gardens, to take wives and rear children. Nevertheless, the prophet bids them meet all the requirements of citizens of that country; and more than that, to pray for their hosts in the same spirit in which they would pray for their neighbours and fellow-citizens, asking God for peace and prosperity upon the city.

CHRISTIANS SUBJECTS OF TWO KINGDOMS.

14. So, too, Christians are subjects of two kingdoms--they have experience of two kinds of life. Here on earth where the world has its home and its heavenly kingdom, we surely are not citizens. According to Paul (Phil 3, 20), "our conversation"--our citizenship--"is with Christ in heaven"; that is, in yonder life, the life we await. As the Jews hoped to be released from Babylon, we hope to be released from this present life and to go where we shall be lordly citizens forever. But being obliged to continue in this wretched state--our Babylon--so long as God wills, we should do as the Jews were commanded to do--mingle with other mortals, eat and drink, make homes, till the soil, fill civil offices and show good will toward our fellows, even praying for them, until the hour arrives for us to depart unto our home.

15. He who is guided by these facts, who comprehends the distinction between the kingdom of heaven and the kingdom of the world, will know how to resist successfully all classes of fanatics. For these latter paint this life in a terrible aspect. They want to run out of the world entirely, and are unwilling to associate with anyone; or they proceed to disturb civil regulations and to overthrow all order; or again, as with the Pope, they interfere in secular rule, desiring temporal authority, wholly under the name and colour of Christianity. Having as Christians forgiveness of sins, and being now people of God, children of his kingdom, citizens no longer of Babylon but of heaven, let us know that during the period of our sojourn here among strangers, it is ours to live righteously, honourably and chastely, to further civil and domestic peace and to lend counsel and aid to benefit even the wicked and ungrateful, meanwhile constantly striving after our inheritance and keeping in mind the kingdom whither we are bound.

16. In short, a Christian must be one who, as Paul says (I Cor 7, 29-31), uses this world as not abusing it, who buys and possesses as though he possessed not, who has wife and children as though he had them not and who builds as though not building. How is it possible to reconcile these seeming inconsistencies? By making the Christian faith distinct from the faith of the Jews and Turks--yes, of the Papists even: by accepting the fact that the Christian's attitude toward this earthly life is the attitude of the guest; that in such capacity is he to build, to buy, to have dealings and hold intercourse with his fellows, to join them in all temporal affairs--a guest who respects his host's wishes, the laws of the realm and of the city and the customs of the inn, but at the same time the Christian refrains from attesting his satisfaction with this life as if he intended to remain here and hoped for nothing better. Thus will the Christian pass through every temporal event in the right way--having every possession as though not having it, using and yet not cleaving to it; not so occupied with the temporal as to lose the eternal, but leaving behind--forgetting--the former while striving after the latter as the goal set before him.

17. Therefore, they who presume to run out of the world by going into the desert or the wilderness; who, unwilling to occupy the inn but finding it indispensable nevertheless, must become their own hosts--these are great and unreasonable fools. Surely they must eat and drink and have clothing and shelter. With these things they cannot dispense, even if they can withdraw from all society. Nor is their action forsaking and fleeing the world, as they imagine it to be. Whatever your station and condition, whatever your occupation in life, of necessity you must be somewhere on earth while mortal life is yours. Nor has God separated you from men; he has placed you in society. Each individual is created and born for the sake of other individuals. But observe, wherever you are and whatever your station, you are, I say, to flee the world.

HOW TO ESCAPE THE WORLD.

18. But how are we to flee the world? Not by donning caps and creeping into a corner or going into the wilderness. You cannot so escape the devil and sin. Satan will as easily find you in the wilderness in a grey cap as he will in the market in a red coat. It is the heart which must flee, and that by keeping itself "unspotted from the world," as James 1, 27 says. In other words, you must not cling to temporal things, but be guided by the doctrine of faith in Christ, and await the eternal, heavenly inheritance; and in that faith and that hope are you to execute the trust and work committed to you here, declaring the while: "That which I do here is not the chief good, the thing of real value, for which I live; though such is the case with the world, the Jews, the Turks and the Papists. I hold this temporal life as a tavern, valuing it no more than the guest values the inn where he enjoys food and lodging, while heart and mind turn ever to his own home."

What tolerance would there be for one foolish enough to declare: "I will not eat nor drink here. I will behave peculiarly, smashing windows and turning things upside down, for this is not my abiding-place"? For the very purpose of advancing himself on his journey, the traveler should make use of the inn, accepting whatever is offered.

19. Likewise should Christians use the world, constantly casting their thoughts beyond this life, notwithstanding they have here house and home, wife and children. These are for the present life only, yet the Christian owes them due consideration, the while he asserts: "Today we are here, tomorrow elsewhere. Now we avail ourselves of this inn, the next day of another. We do not expect to remain here." Relative to this subject, Peter in his beautiful Pentecostal sermon says concerning David, who nevertheless was a holy king, that he did not ascend into the heavens, but, having fulfilled the will of God, fell asleep. Peter, so far from being willing to disparage David's office and rule, to criticize him therein for wrong-doing, rather magnifies it in glowing terms. David was a king, and cast not aside his crown; no, he retained his royal glory. He held his office as a God-entrusted one, in the execution whereof he served God. Similarly should the righteous ruler do- in fact, all men in their respective offices and stations. Let them remember they are not placed where they are to choose their own pleasure, but solely for the service of God. Such is their duty so long as they are here--transients, like the stranger at the inn with other guests, who conducts himself with respect to the needs and the pleasure of his fellows, doing as they do, and in case of danger and necessity uniting with them in the effort to help and protect.

20. King David did not regard his kingdom and his God-bestowed blessings as his real glory, but as his office, his opportunities for service in this earthly pilgrimage. In it all he remains a guest, expecting to leave this tarrying--place for a certain abode. Hence he says (Ps 39, 12): "I am a stranger with thee, a sojourner, as all my fathers were." How is that? Has a king of David's glorious rank occasion to speak thus? Is he a guest who occupies a royal throne, who is lord of landed estate and of more than twelve hundred thousand people according to his own calculation? This is David's meaning: In his kingdom he serves God as a transient here on earth, and set apart by God for that purpose; but at the same time as a citizen of God's kingdom in another life, another existence, which he regards more glorious than earthly glory, and as affording something better than a temporal crown.

REASONS TO ABSTAIN FROM CARNAL LUST.

21. Such is Peter's teaching. He admonishes Christians to Christ-like lives and works in view of the fact that they are called to great glory, having become through Christ a royal priesthood, a people of God and citizens of heaven. He would have them occupy this temporal world as guests, striving after another and eternal kingdom; that is, to abstain from all carnal lusts and maintain a blameless walk, a life of good works. The apostle assigns two reasons for such self-denial: First, that we may not, through carnal, lustful habits, lose the spiritual and eternal; second, that God's name and the glory we have in Christ may not be slandered among our heathen adversaries, but rather, because of our good works, honoured. These are the chief reasons for doing good works. They ought most forcibly to urge us to the performance of our duties.

22. Peter admonishes, first, to "abstain from fleshly lusts, which war against the soul." He implies that if we do not resist carnal inclinations, but rather follow them, we shall lose our priceless eternal inheritance. To be a stranger on earth, striving after another and better life, is inconsistent with living in fleshly lusts as if one's sole intent was to remain in the world forever. If you would have the things of one life, Peter says, you must forsake the things of the other. If you forget your fatherland and lie drunken with this carnal life, as does the heathen world in living in unbelief and without hope of eternal life, you will never reach yonder existence; for so you reject it. We must strive if we are to withstand the lusts of the flesh; for these, Peter says, war against the soul--against faith and the good conscience in man. If lust triumphs, our hold on the Spirit and on faith is lost. Now, if you would not be defeated, you must valiantly contend against carnal inclinations, being careful to overcome them and to maintain your spiritual, eternal good. In this instance, our own welfare demands the conquest.

23. In the second place, God's honour calls for it. God's honour here on earth is affected by our manner of life. We are to avoid giving occasion for our enemies to open their mouths in calumny of God's name and his Word. Rather must we magnify the name of God by our confession and general conduct, and thus win others, who shall with us confess and honour him. Christ commands (Mt 5, 16): "Even so let your light shine before men; that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father who is in heaven."

24. Peter proceeds to enumerate certain good works appropriate to Christians in all stations of life, particularly those Christians under authority, or in a state of servitude--men-servants and maid-servants. In the apostle's day, Christians had to submit to heathen authority--to serve unbelieving masters. Peter admonishes Christians to glorify God by their conduct, patiently bearing the violence and injustice offered, and forbearing to return evil; as we heard in the epistle lesson for the preceding Sunday which follows today's text. But to take up all the good works Peter enumerates here would require too much time at present.

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