

O'Kelley, 1913

EQUALITY

Sermon preached before the Southern Baptist Convention at Saint Louis, Missouri, May 14, 1913, by Thomas W. O'Kelley, D. D.

Text: "That there may be equality" (2 Corinthians 8:14).

All men are not born free and equal. Some are born to wealth and live in luxury all their days; others are born to poverty, and go through life driven by the lash of necessity to unremitting toil. Some are born to the heritage of health, and thoroughly enjoy the good things of life; others are born to disease, and go limping all their days, dragging with them a body of death. Some have the advantages of the best schools which give every opportunity for the highest development of their powers; others must make the struggle without the help which the best education gives. Some are born in this country where more nearly than anywhere in the world, all have equal opportunity; others are born in India, where, through the centuries the curse of caste has blighted the hope of the masses and kept them out of the higher manhood. Some are born in a land where the Bible sheds its kindly light revealing the upward path that leads to God and freedom; others are born in lands where gross darkness covers the people, and the Light of the world is not seen.

The cruel inequalities among men are coming to be recognized by all classes. In every land today the spirit of awakened manhood is rising up to claim its birthright, and crying out so loudly that all the earth is listening. The trend of events is surely in the direction of universal freedom and recognition of the rights of man.

We sometimes think this doctrine of equality a discovery of modern times. In point of fact, it is the age-long truth of God, which is receiving new emphasis in our day as we come into the clearer light of the revelation of God, and more thoroughly under the dominion of the spirit of the Son of Man. This truth became incarnate in Jesus Christ and shone with unclouded splendor in his perfect life. "The Word was made flesh and dwelt among us, and we beheld his glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth." Jesus was the world's great Commoner. He was more than the Jew of Nazareth, or the man of Galilee; he was the universal man. He came that men might be made free and equal. He came to break down the walls of partition between people and classes, and reconcile all unto God in one body by his death on the cross.

I.

He makes equal all who accept him by lifting them to the plane of his own life. "He is not ashamed to call them brethren." "Whosoever doeth the will of my Father, which is in heaven, the same is my brother, and sister, and mother." There are no high and low in Christ. All are high because he has lifted them to the heights of his life; and all are equal in him, for none can be raised any higher than Christ. There is neither Jew nor Greek, Barbarian, Scythian, bond nor free, male nor female; all are one in Christ. We need no men of superior orders to stand between us and God; for by Christ we all have access into the grace wherein we stand and rejoice in the hope of the glory of God.

Equality in Christ is the clear, thrilling note of the glorious gospel of the blessed God. Sound it out till all the earth shall hear.

Live it till all men see its rich and only meaning. When we fail to apply this blessed doctrine in our daily lives, we do incalculable injury to the cause of our Lord. We must never for a minute admit, even to ourselves, that the rich and the poor, the learned and the ignorant, cannot worship, live, and work together in the same church. If the poor will not go to the church on the boulevard, then let the boulevard dweller go to the church of the poor. The life of a consecrated man of wealth in a church of the poor is worth ten times all the money he may give to the work of the church while a chasm yawns between his life and theirs.

As a people we have gloried in our championship of the doctrine of equality. The nations are at last listening to our message, and are standing on the tip toe of expectancy awaiting the blessings that it heralds. Today the cry from the ends of the earth is that our doctrine be put to the test. "We like your creed," they say; "now let it be translated in terms of practical life." Preaching is good, and must be continued; but just now one good action is worth many big sermons. The proclamation of our principles has caught the ear of the world, and set the nerves of the nations to tingling. This is our day, yea, it is one of the days of the Son of Man; and before God and the peoples of the earth we shall be guilty of criminal neglect, if we do not lift the banner of Christ over every nation and let it wave there until the glad shout shall ring out from the four quarters of the earth: "The Son has made us free; and we are free indeed."

II.

The method of realizing equality is that those who are able supply the needs of those who lack. This is the very heart of the gospel of Christ. It was to supply that which was lacking that Jesus came from

glory's heights to earth's valley of humiliation. Every need of man appealed to him and called forth his power to supply it.

The leper in his lonely isolation and creeping death, elicited from him a brother's pity, and the great Physician's power to heal. The deaf man drew from him a look toward heaven, accompanied by a brother's sigh, and the word of authoritative power: "Be opened!" The piteous cry of the blind beggar was a sufficient appeal for him to stop the ongoing multitudes until he could give the unfortunate man the coveted blessing of sight. The sight of the hungry multitudes moved him with compassion that led to the miracle of the loaves and fishes. The dying child over which parents' hearts were breaking was invitation enough for him to speak the word of power that turned back the death angel from the door.

When John sent to Jesus for answer to the question whether he was really the Messiah, he said, "Go your way and tell John what things ye have seen and heard; how the blind see, the lame walk, the lepers are cleansed, the deaf hear, the dead are raised, to the poor the gospel is preached." That was Jesus' way of making men equal.

We are not living up to our doctrine of equality until, as much as in us lies, we give every one in all classes equal opportunity with ourselves to live the best life. The poor should have enough of wholesome food, and decent, comfortable clothing. They should live in sanitary homes; and when sick they should have the blessing of the hospital and the trained nurse. "I was an hungered, and ye gave me meat; I was thirsty, and ye gave me drink; I was a stranger, and ye took me in; naked, and ye clothed me; I was sick and ye visited me; I was in prison, and ye came unto me." And let this blessed work be done in the name of Jesus and as members of the church which he purchased with

his own blood.

The spiritual needs of men are the most desperate of all and cry loudly for help. The inequality between the saved soul and the unsaved is like the difference between heaven and hell. Under the same roof one is living in the light of heaven, and another in the darkness which rises from the pit. Hence the gigantic task before us is to blot out this deadly inequality by preaching the gospel to every creature. This work of equalization cannot be done by sentimental brotherhoods which ignore the ugly fact of sin in setting forth the principles of their order, but by preaching the gospel of God's Son, in which there is an effective remedy for sin. This is our only hope of permanently improving conditions in this life, and certainly the only means by which men can be prepared for the life to come.

In this country there are hundreds of thousands that have not the Light of life. If we really believe in the doctrine of equality in the gospel sense, we must set ourselves with all seriousness to the task of bringing them into the liberty wherewith Christ has made us free; "that there may be equality." Are we supplying that which is lacking in the homeland?

In foreign fields we have scarcely touched the fringe of the borders of the tremendous task. We could multiply many times the amount expended, and then feel that we were inadequately supplied with the sinews of the holy war. The call of our leaders for increased contributions that more workers may be sent to the front, is not just a fad of the secretaries, it is the desperate wail of souls perishing for the bread of life. The Judson Centennial Movement is more than a pleasing sentiment; it is the expression of a need as solemnly urgent as the cry of a soul sinking to its doom.

There lack is to be supplied out of our abundance. Have we abundance of means to supply the need of the world? If any country ever did have abundance, that country is ours. Our fruitful fields, splendid homes, profitable investments, growing bank accounts, and a hundred luxuries on every hand tell a story of abundance such as the world has never known. We are asked to use so much of our abundance as is required to meet the necessities of the work. This we have not done, and are not now doing; therefore, we are lacking in this proof of the sincerity of our love. "Whoso hath this world's good, and seeth his brother have need and shutteth up his bowels of compassion from him, how dwelleth the love of God in him?" Some one has figured that we Southern Baptists give only one-half of a tenth of our income to the greater enterprise in which men are engaged -- the salvation of the whole world. Jesus Christ became poor that we through his poverty might be made rich; and shall we not give of our abundance that the world may come into the possession of the riches of grace in Christ Jesus?

We are unable to supply what is lacking voluntarily. Our Master will not coerce. He leaves it to the purpose of each heart in which his love has been shed abroad by the Holy Ghost. He does not hold us up and demand our means for his work; but he does give us the ability and does remind us that in this way we will prove the sincerity of our love. "If ye love me, keep my commandments." The great apostle said that he could wish himself accursed from Christ for his brethren, his kinsmen according to the flesh; and when we realize the full meaning of his great salvation, surely there is no price we would refuse to pay that the lost might be saved; and it is utterly unthinkable that we should not be willing to supply their lack out of our abundance! "That there may be equality."

We are to give others equal opportunities with ourselves as an investment against the day of our want. It is not an unheard of thing that one who has abundance today may be in the depths of poverty tomorrow. That we are rich in material resources now is no guarantee that our abundance shall continue forever. "For riches certainly make themselves wings; they fly away as an eagle toward heaven." Croesus may die in the poor house, and his children become beggars on the streets. We do not control the great deep. Its fountains may be broken up, and the raging floods sweep away all our hoarded treasures in a night. We do not hold the winds in our fists. God may let them loose from their hidings to the destruction of our abundance.

We do not direct the course of events. "It is he that sitteth on the circle of the earth, and the inhabitants thereof are as grasshoppers." "He bringeth the princes to nothing; he maketh the judges of the earth vanity." If we do not hear and heed the cry of the nations in this our day of overflowing plenty, there will come a day when we shall cry to them for help, and they will laugh at our calamity. Cast your bread upon the waters if you would have any for your necessity in the coming years. "There is that scattereth, and yet increaseth; and there is that withholdeth more than is meet, but it tendeth to poverty." "Make to yourselves friends of the mammon of unrighteousness; that when ye fail, they may receive you into everlasting habitations." The time may come when we shall need the merciful ministry of the peoples that now stretch out their hands to us for help. That there may be equality now, and also in the day of our want, let us at this time supply their lack with our

abundance. The health of the whole city is in jeopardy so long as there is a single infected district, and our civilization will not be safe while so large a part of the earth is without the knowledge of God.

Every ship that sails the seas from the East to the West will bring us some deadly germ of heathenism until we have carried the saving truth of God into every province of the countries on the other side of the world.

We are to equalize in order to be in line with God's evident purpose in the bestowal of his blessings. He has not given us an embarrassing surplus that we might consume it on our own lusts; but that we might use it in ministering to the needs of others who have not enough. He has given us more than we need, but not more than we can use in supplying that which is lacking in his work in order that all may have equal opportunity to know his great love in Christ. The very abundance of means which he has bestowed upon us is prima facie evidence that he has made us the distributors of his bounty; and in the well known needs of the work we surely hear his voice saying that the hour has struck for us to be up and about the holy business of the King. "He that had gathered much had nothing over; and he that had gathered little had no lack." The manna fell in the desert to meet the necessity of all the people day by day, not to be gathered and hoarded against the day when it should cease to fall. That which was kept ever was unfit for use the next day. So will it be with the surplus that God has committed to your keeping, if you do not employ it in supplying the necessities of his work.

Hoarded money that ought to be used in the Lord's work, will not only have to be left behind when you enter the invisible world, but will become a curse to your children. It will present to them with all but irresistible power, the temptation to a life of idleness, which is a life

of sin whose end is eternal death. It is putting a mill stone around their necks to sink them to the bottom of the sea. To bequeath to children the idea that life means trust in God, honest work, and service for others, is infinitely more valuable than to leave them blocks of gilded palaces, and millions of glittering gold. Oh, the tragedy of the rich who forget God, and banish from their hearts all trust in the Most High.

In view of that rapidly approaching hour when death shall bring us to the common level of the grave, let us consecrate every dollar of our wealth, every ounce of our strength, every drop of our blood to the procuring of the only equality worthy of the name -- equality as sons of God in the heavenly family by faith in Jesus Christ.